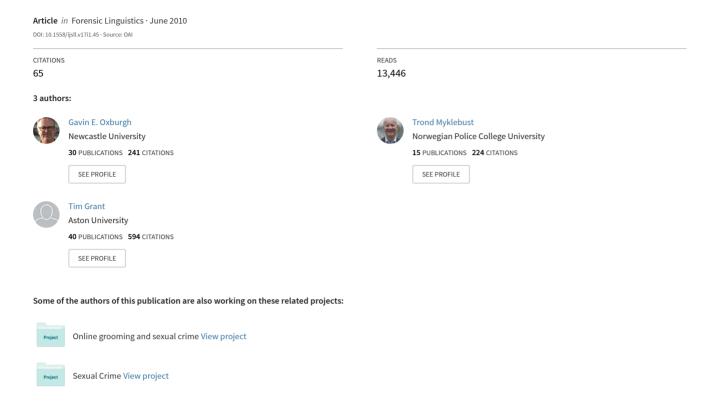# The question of question types in police interviews: A review of the literature from a psychological and linguistic perspective

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The question of question types in police interviews:
a review of the literature from a psychological and linguistic perspective

Gavin E. Oxburgh, Trond Myklebust and Tim Grant

Abstract

The past two decades has seen a plethora of papers and academic research conducted on investigative interviews with victims, witnesses and suspected offenders, with a particular focus on questioning techniques and typologies. However, despite this research, there still remain significant discrepancies amongst academic researchers and practitioners over how best to describe types of questions. This article considers the available literature relating to interviews with children and adults from both a psychological and linguistic perspective. In particular, we examine how different types of questions are described, and explore the discrepancies between competing definitions.

KEYWORDS   INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS; QUESTION TYPOLOGIES; LEGAL LANGUAGE

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Introduction

The investigative interview is a central and significant aspect of the criminal justice process and the information collected must be accurate and relevant to the investigation (Walsh & Oxburgh, 2008). The investigation must also ascertain what happened, who did what, together with where and when the crime occurred (Milne & Bull, 2006). To this end, during the past two decades, there has been a plethora of papers and academic research conducted on the use of police questioning techniques and effectiveness of investigative interviews with victims, witnesses and suspected offenders (Baldwin, 1992, 1993; Cherryman, 2000; Dent & Stephenson, 1979; Kebbell, Hurren & Mazerolle, 2006; Lamb, et al., 1996a; Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Esplin & Mitchell, 2002; McGurk, Carr & McGurk, 1993; Milne & Bull, 1999; Oxburgh, Ost & Cherryman, in press).

A number of these studies have found that interviews characterised by the predominant use of *open* questions have yielded longer, more detailed and more accurate responses than those containing *closed* questions. However, despite this general consensus, there still remain significant discrepancies amongst academic researchers and practitioners over how best to describe types of question. This makes it very difficult to interpret findings and produce training manuals which are consistent. As a consequence, this article considers the available literature relating to interviews with witnesses and offenders from both a psychological and linguistic perspective. In particular, we examine how different types of questions are described, and explore the discrepancies between competing definitions. We propose that further research is conducted, which evaluates both the *phrasing* and *function* of question types during police interviews.

Research on questioning techniques during investigative interviews

Numerous research articles, instructions and guidance documents have been produced by academic researchers (e.g. Clarke & Milne, 2001; Lamb, Hershkowitz, Sternberg, Boat and Everson, 1996b; Milne & Bull, 1999; Powell & Snow, 2007; Shepherd, 2007), police training departments (Centrex, 2004; Central Planning & Training Unit (CPTU), 1992; Ord & Shaw, 1999), and government departments (e.g. Justisdepartementet [Norway], 1998; Home Office, 1992; 2002; 2007). All have been designed and written with the ultimate aim of assisting professional interviewers enhance their effectiveness during investigative interviews of children and adults. There are also many other interview models and guidance documents currently used by practitioners

across the world including the Cognitive Interview (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992); Interviewing Children and Recording Evidence (Queensland Family Services, 1992); The Step-Wise Interview (Yuille, Hunter, Joffe & Zaparnuik, 1993); the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) protocol (Orbach et al., 2000); and the P.E.A.C.E. model[1] (Central Planning and Training Unit [CPTU], 1992; Milne & Bull, 1999). Contained within each of the above models and guidance documents is the assertion that interviewers need to gain as much detailed information as possible from the interviewee using effective, non-coercive, questioning techniques.

Fisher, Geiselman and Raymond (1987) conducted one of the first critical analyses of police interview techniques and found that interviewing officers frequently interrupted the interviewees, used an excessive question-answer format, and used *inappropriate* sequencing of questions. Other research studies involving investigative interviews with witnesses and suspected offenders have shown similar findings to Fisher et al., in that many interviews contain mainly *closed*, *direct*, *leading* and *suggestible* utterances, with infrequent use of *open* questions. The use of *inappropriate* questioning techniques is not specific to one country. This occurs internationally including Australia, England and Wales, Estonia, Israel, Norway, Sweden, Finland and the USA; across different interviewee groups (children and adults), and for different professional interviewers (Cederborg, Orbach, Sternberg and Lamb, 2000; Clarke & Milne, 2001; Kask, 2008; Korkman, Santtila, Westeråker and Sandnabba, 2008a; Mildren, 1997; Moston, Stephenson and Williamson, 1993; Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2006).

A large body of research on investigative interviewing of children and adults has been conducted in the laboratory (Faller, 1996; Goodman, Quas, Batterman-Faunce, Riddlesberger and Kuhn, 1994; Lamb & Thierry, 2005; Saywitz, Goodman and Lyon, 2002) while other researchers have conducted studies using real-life interviews (Davies, Westcott and Horan, 2000; Fisher, et al., 1987; Garven, Wood, Malpass and Shaw, 1998; Korkman, et al., 2008a; Myklebust, 2009; Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2006; Oxburgh, et al., in press; Powell, 2002; Thoresen, Lønnum, Melinder, Stridbeck & Magnusson, 2006). What has emerged from these studies is a remarkable degree of consensus regarding the factors which affect the outcome of investigative interviews. This is so whether the interview is of a child or an adult and whether they are a witness or a suspect. These factors, which can influence what is said or omitted during an interview, include the interviewees' willingness to disclose information and the interviewers' ability to elicit the information. Regarding the latter, the questions asked by the interviewer are viewed by many as being one of the most important variables.

'Open' versus 'closed' question styles

Early research by Stern (1903/04) and Varendonck (1911) argued that the quality of a child's response was very much dependent on how the questions were phrased by the interviewer. Consequently, Stern divided question types between Bericht (*open*) and Verhör (*closed*), and observed that *open* questions generated free narratives and longer responses from witnesses compared with *closed* questions. The distinction between Bericht and Verhör enabled the classification of interviewers' utterances, and there have been two different approaches to this type of analysis (Richardson, Dohrenwend & Klein, 1965). The first approach used broad categories to describe the overall style of the interviewer in terms of 'active' and 'passive' (DuBois, 1937), 'guided' and 'free' (Kluckhohn, 1945), or 'directive' and 'non-directive' (Maccoby & Maccoby, 1954; Rogers, 1945; Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1946). The second approach was to identify characteristics of the question types to consider the effect of each question asked.

Stern's (1903/04) historic insights have been generally supported, particularly for investigative interviews of children. Studies conducted in Israel (Lamb, et al*.,* 1996a); the United States of America (Sternberg, et al*.,* 1996); Finland (Korkman, Santtila and Sandnabba, 2006; Korkman, Santtila, Blomqvist and Sandnabba, 2008b); and Norway (Myklebust & Bjørklund, 2009; in press), all indicate that, as loosely defined, *open* questions are the most effective form of question to ask in investigative interviews of children and result in longer and more detailed responses. Because of this, many police forces across the world receive training to increase the number of *open* questions used during interviews for both children and adult interviews. Nevertheless, evaluations of practice indicate, in general, that the proportion of *open* questions to *closed* questions is too low (Fisher, et al*.,* 1987; Davies, et al*.,* 2000; Myklebust & Bjørklund; 2006; Oxburgh, et al*.,* in press). However, despite the widespread consensus that the use of *open* questions will provide longer and more detailed responses, this does not guarantee that investigators who are confident their interview practice closely follows best-practice guidelines, will indeed comply with recommendations (Lamb, Hershkowitz, Orbach & Esplin, 2008). The reasons for this are not yet known, however, at present, training and levels of competence by interviewers dominate theoretical arguments (Powell, Fisher and Wright, 2005).

Linguistic development of children and adults

Thus far the discussion appears to assume that interviews and question types are homogenous irrespective of the nature of the interviewee. Clearly this is not the case. One essential and clear distinction in the interviewing research is between interviews conducted with adults and those with children. Although this distinction is not the primary focus of this review the difference between child and adult interviews is well discussed and is recognised in the psychological and linguistic literature. In England and Wales the distinction was recognised in policy and training through the *Memorandum of Good Practice* (Home Office, 1992) with the advice on interviewing children being extended to include vulnerable adults in the Achieving Best Evidence (ABE)[2] documents (Home Office, 2002; 2007). Linguistic theory clearly recognises the development of children as multi-dimensional and non-uniform (Foster-Cohen, 1990; Harley, 2009). That is to say, different aspects of communicative ability progress at different rates for different children. Nevertheless, a linguistic progression can be described as children move from more direct, literal understandings and use of language, to a less direct, less immediate usage.

As an example of a developmental issue, one aspect of child-adult interaction, which might impact on interviews with children, is the naturally and often unconsciously provided support (or scaffolding) to a child's narrative production by an adult (see Reynolds & Evans, 2009). Young children in their normal interaction with adults rely on degrees of scaffolding to provide narratives and it can be argued that at some stages of their development, the youngest child may be unable to produce a narrative without appropriate scaffolding. The danger of adult scaffolding in interview situations is, of course, contamination of memory. Thus, understanding the needs of a child interviewee in this single aspect of language development will impact substantially on the conduct of the interview, the nature of questions asked, and on the ability of a child to provide useful testimony. The developmental curve of a child's language competences (or the varying competences of a vulnerable adult) can thus be seen as important in considering the appropriateness of question types for different interviewees.

Question typology definitions

Despite the general consensus that *open* questions are a good, although sometimes difficult to achieve, objective for interviewers, there appears to be discrepancies over definitions of question types, specifically *open* and *closed* questions. For example, in England and Wales, the ABE interview document (Home Office, 2007) defines *open* questions as ones which are framed in such

a way that the interviewee is able to give an unrestricted answer, with *specific closed* questions defined as those which commence with 'wh' ('what?', 'why?', 'when?', 'where?', 'who?') and 'how'. These latter question types are commonly known in the literature as 5WH questions, however, it has to be acknowledged that the 5WH category is sometimes seen to comprise six, not five questions, when 'how' is incorporated with 'what?', 'why?', 'when?', 'where?', 'who'? The document upon which interviewer training in England and Wales is currently based (Centrex, 2004),[3] initially states that interviewing officers should begin all interviews with *open* questions (e.g. those starting with 'Tell' or 'Describe'), followed by more specific questions (e.g. 5WH questions). Conversely, in a later section, this guide advises officers that 5WH questions are in fact classified as *open* questions. The guide also advises officers that 5WH questions are the best types to ask as they usually invite an explanation from the interviewee.

Unfortunately, the categorisation of question types also differs substantially across academic researchers, which makes it very difficult to interpret findings. If researchers are unable to use the same terminology, it makes it difficult to produce training protocols and manuals which are consistent at the local and international level. For example, Richardson, et al*.,* (1965) categorised interviewers' questions as either *open* or *closed*. The *closed* questions were further divided into three sub-categories: (i) *identification*; (ii) *selection*; or (iii) *yes-no*. More recently however, Fisher, et al*.,* (1987) have also utilised this *open–closed* distinction in their classifications of police interviews, whereas Aldridge and Cameron (1999) defined five types of questions as: (i) *free reports*; (ii) *open*; (iii) *specific*; (iv) *leading*; and (v) *non-leading*. In a similar vein, Davies, et al*.,* (2000) analysed interviews according to four question characteristics: (i) *open ended*; (ii) *closed*; (iii) *specific, yet not leading*; and (iv) *leading*. Cederborg, et al*.,* (2000) described four question types: (i) *invitation*; (ii) *directive*; (iii) *option-posing*; and (iv) *suggestive*.

Even more categories of questions are possible. Lamb, et al*.,* (1996a) introduced various categories denoted: (i) *invitational*; (ii) *facilitative*; (iii) *directive*; (iv) *leading*; and (v) *suggestive* (Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin Orbach and Hershkowitz, 2002). Korkman, et al*.,* (2006) introduced various categories for analysing interviewee utterances, with specific categories of questions, broadly defined as: (i) *facilitators*; (ii) *clarifications;* (iii) *invitation*; (iv) *directive utterances*; (v) *option posing*; and (vi) *suggestive* (*specific & un-specific*). Loftus (1982) argues that 5WH questions should be classified as *closed-specific*. *Open* questions are defined by Milne and Bull (1999) as 'tell' and 'describe' questions (e.g. 'Tell me what happened' and 'Describe him for me'), whilst *closed-specific* questions are defined as those starting with 'wh'.

In contrast to the primary *open-closed* question dichotomy, Griffiths and Milne (2006) argue for a more functional definition of what they term *produc-*

tive and *un-productive* question types beneath which a variety of *open* and *closed* question types are subsumed. They argue that the *productive* category should be used to obtain an initial account from a suspected offender and includes: (i) *open* questions, defined as those starting with 'Tell' and 'Describe'; (ii) 5WH questions (referred to as *probing* questions); and (iii) *appropriate closed* questions (defined as *yes/no* questions, used at the conclusion of a particular point in an interview where *open* and *probing* questions have been exhausted). Griffiths and Milne (2006) argue that the *un-productive* question category is associated with poor questioning and includes: (i) *inappropriate closed* questions (defined as identical to *appropriate closed* questions, but used at the wrong point in the interview); (ii) *leading* questions (defined as those which suggest an answer to the interviewee); (iii) *multiple* questions (defined as those which constitute a number of sub-questions asked at once); (iv) *forced-choice* questions (defined as those which only offer the interviewee a limited number of possible responses); and (v) *opinion or statement* (defined as putting statements or personal opinions to an interviewee instead of asking a specific question).

In their Norwegian study, Myklebust and Bjørklund (2006) analysed interviews with child witnesses, which they conducted using the criteria first developed by Richardson, et al., (1965) and they too identified two types of questions – *open* and *closed*. Myklebust and Bjørklund (2006) define an *open* question as one that requires more than a few words for an adequate response (e.g. 'Tell me…'), whereas a *closed* question is defined as one which could be answered adequately in a few words and is categorised as either: (i) *identification* (known by some researchers as 5WH questions); (ii) *selection: fixed-alternative* questions (similar to 'forced choice' as described by Griffiths & Milne, 2006); or (iii) *yes/no* type questions.

Shepherd (2007) argues that there are three forms of questions that can be utilised during investigative interviews of suspected offenders: (i) *productive*; (ii) *risky*; and (iii) *counter-productive*. He argues that *productive* questions are *crème de la crème* questions, which include *open* questions (sub-defined as):

i)   those commencing with 'Tell', Explain', 'Describe' (e.g. TED questions);

ii) *request* questions (could you….[say/tell/explain/describe] & [who/ what/ where/ when/which]….?);

iii) *probing, narrative/explanation seeking* (e.g. 'Why?', 'How?', 'What?');

iv) *parameter* (e.g. What…between [point x]…and [point y]?); and

v)   *closed identificatory* (e.g. 'who?', 'what?', 'where?', 'when?', 'which?', 'whose?').

Shepherd (2007) defines *risky* questions as: (i) closed *yes/no*; and (ii) *open con-firmatory* ('Could you…if/whether'). His *counter-productive* category includes: (i) *leading* questions; (ii) *option* questions; (iii) *filling the pause* (not waiting for a response); (iv) *marathon* questions; (v) *hypothetical* questions; and (vi) *parroting* (replicating every answer).

Powell and Snow (2007) provide a detailed explanation of varying question types, arguing that although *open* questions, usually defined by academic researchers and in training protocols as those which elicit an elaborate response (e.g. TED questions), are of paramount importance, not all *open* questions are necessarily effective in eliciting elaborate responses (especially from child witnesses). As a result, they sub-define *open* questions as *open-ended breadth* and *open-ended depth*. The former is used to expand a list of broad activities, but does not dictate what specific information is required (e.g. 'What happened then?'). The *depth* question is used to encourage more elaborate detail, but again does not dictate what specific information is required (see Powell & Snow, 2007 for a full explanation). Powell and Snow argue that the principles needed for an effective interview of a child should be considered from the mnemonic **SAFE** (**S**imple language; **A**bsence of specific details (not previously raised) or coercive techniques; **F**lexibility on the part of the interviewee to choose what details will be reported; and **E**ncouragement of an elaborate response). Powell and Snow argue that the narrative should commence with *open* questions (e.g. TED questions). There are many more authors who provide additional explanations and definitions with regards to question type (e.g. Hargie & Dickson, 2004; Dickson & Hargie, 2006; Fiengo, 2007).

Given the substantial variations and amount of different question type definitions, Table 1 provides an example of the main types of questions identified from the literature. It details the most commonly used names with alternative descriptors that are used to describe broadly similar groupings of question types. The question types, alternative descriptors and authors listed are not exhaustive and are only examples taken from the available literature to highlight particular typology overlapping and discrepancies. It is also accepted that other definitions and explanations exist.

One indication of the discrepancy between researchers in defining question types can be seen in Table 1 by the appearance of the 5WH question in two places (*open* and *probing*). Problematically, these two definitions appear in a single document (Centrex, 2004) intended to advise practitioners.

Table 1: Descriptors of question type identified from the literature

Productive or Appropriate		Unproductive, Risky or Inappropriate	
Main description	**Alternative descriptions**	**Main description**	**Alternative descriptions**
Open 1, 3, 4, 14, 15, 17	TED (Tell/Explain/Describe) 3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 18 Open ended 4 Free Report 1 Open-ended breadth 16 Open-ended depth 16 Invitation (or invitational) 2, 9, 10 5WH (What/Where/When/Why/Who/How) 3	Closed 4, 13, 16	Yes/No 14, 15, 17, 18 Inappropriate closed 5 Specific 1
		Echo 3, 5, 12, 15	Parroting 18 Paraphrasing 19
		Leading 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 18	Suggestive 2
		Suggestive 2, 10	Suggested specific & unspecific 9
Probing 6, 13, 15, 18	5WH (What/Where/When/Why/Who/How) 3 Closed identification 14, 17, 18 Directive 2, 9, 10 Specific (incl. closed specific or specific closed) 1, 4, 8, 11, 12 Parameter 18 Clarifications 9	Multiple 6, 15	Marathon 18
		Forced Choice 5, 14	Specific 1 Selection: Fixed alternative 14, 17 Option (or option posing) 2, 9, 18
Facilitative 9, 10	Encouragers/ Acknowledgements 8	Opinion/statement 6, 15	
Appropriate closed 6		Hypothetical questions 18	

Key to footnotes (in alphabetical order)

1	Aldridge & Cameron (1999)	10	Lamb et al., (1996a)
2	Cederborg et al., (2000)	11	Loftus (1982)
3	Centrex (2004)	12	Milne & Bull (1999)
4	Davies et al., (2000)	13	Milne, Shaw & Bull (2007)
5	Fiengo (2007)	14	Myklebust et al (2006; in press)
6	Griffiths & Milne (2006)	15	Oxburgh et al., (in press)
7	Home Office (2002)	16	Powell & Snow (2007)
8	Home Office (2007)	17	Richardson et al., (1965)
9	Korkman et al., (2006)	18	Shepherd (2007)
		19	St-Yves (2006)

Summary of question typology definitions

As can be seen, there are varying definitions of question typologies put forward by academic researchers, government departments and police training departments. Most of these explanations and categorisation schemes, however, are proposed by those with mostly psychological interests in interviewing. In other words, the overwhelming body of research into strategies for investigative interviewing is largely driven by a concern for non-contamination of memory (Milne & Bull, 1999), the avoidance of false confessions (Gudjonsson, 2003) and perhaps, to a lesser degree, an interest in the detection of deception (Hartwig, Granhag, Strömwall & Kronkvist, 2006; Vrij, 2008). These concerns are clearly of operational importance to the police and other professional interviewers, however, this has meant that relatively little attention has been paid to the description of the interview as a specific speech event (Hymes, 1962), or linguistic activity type (Levinson, 1983) in and of itself. Approaching the interview as a speech event and paying attention to the *function* of questions in an interview may help navigate this maze of alternative question categorisation schemes and conflicting definitions.

Question typologies and linguistics

Linguists have been interested in describing the sociolinguistic context of an interaction and how this affects the pragmatic strategies, together with the lexical choices of participants. Hymes (1962) suggested that speech events can be understood by attending to eight aspects of the situation using the mnemonic **SPEAKING** (**S**ituation, **P**articipants, **E**nds, **A**ct sequences, **K**ey, **I**nstrumentalities, **N**orms and **G**enres) all of which impact upon, and constrain the nature of, the linguistic event. This framework can be useful in helping to explain some of the peculiarities of the language used in interview situations. These include cautioning, asking questions where everyone in the room knows the answer, and using statements as questions. A useful brief discussion of Hymes' work and competing theories, together with their applications to more and less formal non-interview situations is provided by Thomas (1995).

Applying Hymes' work to the investigative interview provides a focus of interest in the *Situation,* for example. This would include interest in the physical setting, which is variously determined by law, policy and practical considerations and predicts that the layout of the interview room will affect the subsequent interaction (including the linguistic interaction). This fact is recognised by some countries (e.g. the UK) by the provision of specific interviews being conducted in vulnerable witness suites, which invariably contrast sharply (physically, interactionally and linguistically) with those conducted

in a 'standard' police suspect interview room.[4] Another aspect of *Situation* concerns the 'props' used in the interaction. Some 'props' are legally required and in the UK these would include audio recorders and/or video cameras, and it can be demonstrated that these affect the nature of the interaction. Stokoe and Edwards' (2008) work examines silly questions like, 'Did you have permission to smash your neighbour's door?' and the existence of recording devices provides some explanation for the occurrence of such questions. Because such devices create an unassailable record of the interview, which will be used in court, the interaction is changed from that which might have occurred if the recording device was not present. The recorded interview is not just a conversation between two persons and the presence of the recording device affects the questions asked.

Consideration of the *Ends* aspect of Hymes' description of a linguistic event can be very useful in the discussion of question types. By *Ends,* Hymes means the purposes or outcomes. For example, during an interview with a witness, the intended outcome might be the acquisition of relevant information for an investigation, whereas in interviews with suspected offenders, the objective may be a more formal outcome of charge, caution, or release. Recognising the specific *Ends* of a specific interaction can assist in focusing on the function of particular question-response sequences. A functional approach such as this may, in turn, help prevent some of the confusion in the categorisation of question types defined as either *open* or *closed*. Concentrating on the purpose of a question (or on a sequence of questions and responses) moves the focus from the phrasing of questions to the pragmatics of what the interviewer is trying to do by asking a particular type of question at a particular time in the interview. Understanding that the *function* may be more important than the phrasing of a question is reinforced by the observation that 'wh' questions, as a broad category, can function as *open* or *closed* depending on how they are used. Thus, defining question types by concentrating on the phrasing may not always be useful. The writers of guidance manuals, however, such as the ABE documents (Home Office, 2002; 2007), may find it useful to give examples of certain phrasings when training interviewers. It is, therefore, pedagogically reasonable and good practice to suggest in training that questions which begin 'Tell', 'Explain' or 'Describe' are most likely to function as *open* questions and thus elicit longer responses. The problem remains, however, with the presumption that questions can be assigned to a category by the words used to formulate that question. It is a trivial linguistic truth that lexical choices under-determine meaning and that the meaning of an utterance is mostly determined by contextual influences.

An example of this point is provided by Haworth (2006: 741) who discusses an exchange between a police interviewer and Dr Harold Shipman who was

later convicted of killing 15 of his elderly patients in England (although he was suspected of having committed more than 200 killings) :

Interviewer: Can I put it directly to you doctor that you forged, you have produced the letters and this will on your typewriter in the hope of benefiting from Mrs Grundy's estate?

Shipman: *Is that a question or a statement?*

The words and function of this exchange clearly illustrate the difficulties of providing a clear typology for questions in police interviews. Considering the phrasing alone, the most literal sense of the question is functionally meaningless. Understood literally, and thus uncooperatively, one possible response to this utterance might be 'Yes, you can put [that assertion] to me'. Such a response is non-cooperative because to any competent listener, the phrase, 'Can I put it to you…', is in no way functioning as a request. Shipman's particular uncooperative response is of a slightly different form in that he feigns the utterance may not be a question at all, which requires clarifying. Arguably, Shipman's response here is slightly less literal. He is choosing however, to side-step the question by ignoring its primary pragmatic function.

A more cooperative, contextually informed, pragmatic analysis allows us to understand the intent of the question as an invitation to talk about a situation described in the assertion, and also an invitation to provide an alternative exculpatory explanation. Given the social context of the police interview of a suspected offender, it is clear that the interviewer (in the Shipman interview above), in asking the question, both believes he has evidence to support the assertions contained within his utterance and that there is no other credible alternative explanation that Shipman could provide. The function of the interview is determined by the legal context and this means that the interviewer must put his evidence to Shipman to allow him the possibility of response. By putting the evidence in this phrasing, as an assertion with the prefix which uses language similar to that used by cross-examining barristers, the interviewer reveals a further intent which is to intensify the pressure on Shipman. Shipman's response makes use of the complexity of the question form to escape this incoming pressure. The analysis of all the direct and indirect functions in this one exchange above could be developed at further length, but what becomes clear is that categorising this question using only the words it contains, provides a somewhat incomplete understanding of how it is functioning.

Functional categorisation schemes for questions are used by some of the researchers discussed previously. The descriptions *productive, unproductive* and *probing* are all examples of functional descriptions of questions. The linguistics literature provides more precise functional descriptions of question

type. Drawing on the work of Gibbons (2003) and Maley (1994), Newbury and Johnson (2006) developed a taxonomy of *information-seeking* and *confirmation-seeking* questions and show how different forms of questions or phrasings, within these categories can become increasingly constraining (if seeking information) or coercive (if seeking confirmation). In their analysis, 'wh' questions tend to be viewed as *information-seeking*, however, part of their function can be to constrain the topic. For example, 'When were you there?' is tightly constrained in terms of the information sought. In an alternative example, a bare declarative, 'You were there', would be a coercive *confirmation-seeking* question but where a declarative is used with a tagged-on request for agreement, as in; 'You were there, would you accept that?' this would still be *confirmation-seeking* but is less coercive (2006: 218). Under Newbury and Johnson's categorisation scheme, the question put to Shipman above would be *confirmation-seeking* with the, 'Can I put it to you' prefix adding coercive pressure.

During initial police interview training, it may be necessary to train officers in particular phrasing of questions, so as to demonstrate typical forms for functionally *open, information-seeking* questions. In their most direct form, such questions are most easily framed by prefixing them with TED words (e.g. 'Tell', 'Explain', 'Describe'). Interviewers can be trained, however, to acquire additional strategies for achieving the same *functional* goal. That is to say, it is possible to ask other *appropriate* questions using a 'wh' form (e.g. '*What did you see?')* or by using a *facilitator*, or perhaps even an *echo* question. One good example of the latter from a recent UK statement is this:

```
Witness:      I went into the house.
Interviewer:  … went into the house?
Witness:      [Long description of what the witness saw and did]
```

The use of *echoes* or *facilitators* as *open* questions can, in some contexts (such as this one), be effective and can be used as a *productive* questioning strategy, but in other contexts, *echo* questions might function more as *closed* questions:

```
Witness:      I went there.
Interviewer:  You went there?
Witness:      Yes.
```

Thus, the use of *echo* questions relies more heavily upon the experience and skill of the interviewer. One consequence of this observation is that it may be good training policy to initially stick with TED questions, but in advanced or refresher training, the issue of how alternative question forms can *function* should be acknowledged, addressed and practiced, with regular supervision by equally trained and experienced colleagues. That said, it is imperative that

interviewers are both confident and competent at using TED and 5WH questions before progressing onto using other forms of questions.

Newbury and Johnson (2006) restrict their analysis of question typologies to the information content of interview exchanges, but a wider functional perspective can also be useful. If one asks, '*What are the functions of the investigative interview?*', there are at least two further primary functions in the asking of questions. The first of these is to simply invite or stimulate the interviewee into talking. Where a jurisdiction gives even a partial right of silence to a suspected offender, their best defensive strategy will often be to say nothing. Therefore, one function of all interview questions put to suspected offenders is simply to elicit a response. For co-operative witnesses and offenders, the current question-type literature provides strong evidence that using *open* questions produces longer answers than *closed* questions and, this in turn, may provide more items of Investigation Relevant Information (see Oxburgh, et al*.,* submitted, for a review of this area). However, the question is rarely addressed as to what question types might be used to move a suspect from silence to talking at all. In various countries (e.g. Europe, Australia, New Zealand), where police officers cannot lie to suspected offenders about evidence they hold against them, one strategy would be for the police to provide some evidence against the suspected offender at the start of an interview. In this type of situation, such evidence, for example evidence which places a suspect at a crime scene, might function well as part of a question requiring a response and thus get the person to respond. This might be particularly effective in England and Wales at least, as in these jurisdictions the Courts are empowered to draw adverse inferences from a suspected offender's silence in response to such evidence.

A second, wider, function for interview questions, which is often unacknowledged, is that of providing an evidential text for use in the prosecutorial process. The function of Stokoe and Edwards' (2008) 'silly' questions is to provide a record, a transcript, which will be useful to the Judge and lawyers in the courtroom. These 'silly' questions may, in a functional sense, be *information-confirming*, but the most important audience for any response is not necessarily those present in the interview room, but the Court, whose secondary presence is provided through a transcriber, tape recorder or video camera. This evidential function for questions is sometimes explicitly acknowledged by the interviewer with the question preface, '*for the record',* or *'for the purpose of the tape'.* The effectiveness of questioning techniques in providing a sound evidential product is understudied in the literature. Haworth (2006) does examine how the questions to Shipman in his interview are then represented in the courtroom, but beyond the concerns about contamination of memory, interviewing manuals rarely consider the process of the interview as the construction of an evidential text in this sense.

Evaluation of question typologies

One reasonable academic question is, 'How effective are police interview questions?' A reasonable strategy for analysing/scoring interviews using different question typologies may seem to be how well interviewers' practice matches up to the training manual. This raises a difficulty observable in the current literature, which is that the phrasing of questions used in training manual examples, are in turn used to operationalise the scoring of interview questions. Such scoring may be used either for end of training assessment or for more general academic research into effectiveness or overall interview quality (with regards to questioning techniques). Thus, as previously stated it is perfectly acceptable to initially train interviewers to use stereotypical TED questions, followed by more *probing* (5WH) questions. As we have seen, TED questions are likely to function as *open* and *appropriate* questions. However, as an officer gains in skill and experience, we have also seen it is likely that they will find alternative, fully effective phrasings (e.g. *facilitators*) for asking such questions. Given this situation, a researcher or professional evaluating an individual interview might mark the interviewer down for not asking TED or 5WH questions, whereas, in fact the utterance may be successful in performing its *function* in that specific interview of seeking information that may be relevant to that particular investigation. Current methods of evaluative scoring of interview questions, therefore, also perhaps need to include the question *function*. Naturally, this raises issues of the reliability of scoring schemes. Scoring *function* is likely to be more vulnerable to inter-rater variation than scoring phrasings, and higher rates of reliability may involve detailed analysis of audio/DVD recordings of the interviews. However, given the highly sensitive nature of some police interviews, gaining access to such data may, in itself, prove problematic. This is an area that academic researchers and practitioners can work effectively together to resolve.

Conclusions and future directions

As has been shown in this paper, there has been a plethora of research conducted on the meaning and definition of different question types and the usefulness (or otherwise) of these when used in a police interview context. Much of this research has been from a psychological perspective, but what has become clear is that all police interviews, regardless of whether they involve a child or adult, witness or suspected offender, need to be conducted ethically (with no use of coercive techniques), with the ultimate *function* of gaining detailed responses from the interviewee that may be relevant to the investigation. To this end, it is widely agreed by academic researchers and police practitioners that regardless of the many definitions of question types, *open,*

information-seeking questions (which can be exemplified by TED phrasings) are the most productive, and thus can be described as *appropriate* questions for interviews. These questions may then be appropriately followed by more probing *information-seeking* and *information-confirming* questions, using 5WH question forms.

Questions that should be avoided and can be described as generally *inappropriate* include: (i) *leading questions* (e.g. questions which function to produce a response desired by an interviewer); (ii) *multiple questions* (which comprise a number of sub-questions asked all at once and function to confuse); (iii) *forced-choice* (questions that only offer the interviewee a limited number of possible responses none of which may be the interviewee's preferred answer); and *opinion/statements* (where an interviewer just reads a statement or provides their own opinion and expects the interviewee to answer). In addition to this acknowledged distinction between *appropriate* and *inappropriate*, it must also be acknowledged that there are a 'hard to define set of question phrasings' which may constitute *open* questions in the hands of an expert or skilled interviewer, but this is very much dependent upon the context. These include questions which may involve *facilitators* and *echo* questions.

In addition, interviewers should learn an appreciation of how questions *function* in the very specific speech event of an investigative interview. As such, linguists would argue that approaching interviews in a training situation using a linguistic structure such as Hymes' (1962) theory of speech events, encourages attention to the *function* of questions rather than their *phrasing* alone. This is not to argue that police interview training should not pay attention to the *phrasing* of questions, or that TED questions are not highly effective, but some recognition needs to be given to the linguistic argument that the *phrasing* of a question does not by itself determine its *function*, and that alternative phrasings may be available.

Building a typology of interview questions is clearly very useful and much research has already been conducted using this approach, however, academic researchers require valid and reliable methods for classifying question types. The discipline of linguistics provides pointers as to how the validity of an analysis can be improved by incorporating more contextual and pragmatic information whilst still recognising the need for reliable coding schemes. Further research is required which evaluates both the *phrasing* and *function* of question types during police interviews. Academic researchers also have a valuable role in enhancing the working relationship with practitioners to achieve research-based practice and practice-based research. One part of this role is to ensure a strong theoretical foundation is achieved at all levels of training, with effective on-going evaluation of professional interviewers throughout their respective careers.

Poole and Lamb (1998) believe that an interviewer's ability to maintain the use of *open-ended* questions is the best predictor of a good investigative interview and the most defining characteristic of an expert interviewer. However, despite the widespread consensus about the desirable quality of a good interview, we know this does not guarantee that interviewers will comply with asking *appropriate* questions, even by investigators who are confident that their interviews closely follow best-practice guidelines (Lamb, et al., 2008). Training and levels of competence by interviewers dominate theoretical arguments regarding this phenomenon (Powell, et al., 2005), however, it is imperative that practitioners are confident and competent at using both TED and 5WH questions before progressing onto using *facilitator* or *echo* questions. Both psychology and linguistics have a fundamental role to play in such training and evaluation.

Notes

1   PEACE is a mnemonic for the recommended phases of the interview process in England and Wales (Preparation and planning, Engage and explain, Account, Clarify and challenge, and Evaluation of the interview).

2   ABE training is specialist training provided in England and Wales for the interviewing of vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, including children.

3   Now known as the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA).

4   It is accepted that not all countries have such distinctions.

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