

Helping respondents to format their answers: a question wording experiment in a telephone survey

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- Let me tell you a story
 - You won't believe what happened
 - Guess what happened
-
- > Projecting a Discourse Unit (Houtkoop & Mazeland 1985)
 - > Conversation analysis

Interaction in a survey interview

I: Would you say your health is excellent, good, fair or poor?

R: It's pretty well

I: And which comes closest: excellent, good, fair or poor?

R: It is fair.

How mismatch answers also can be “solved”

I: Would you say your health is excellent, good, fair or poor?

R: It's pretty well

I: OK

(interviewer enters 'good')

Cause of mismatch answers: Question structure?

Component name:	Example:
Question Delivery	How often do you do X?
Action projection	I will now ask some questions...
Question Specificationby X we mean...
Response alternatives	Always, sometimes or never?

(adapted from Houtkoop-Steenstra 2002)

Problematic Question structure (1)

*Question delivery
component*

Would you say your health is excellent, good, fair or
poor?



Problematic Question structure (2)

*Question delivery
component*

How much of a problem do you consider pain in your bones or joints; a big problem, some problem, or no problem at all.

‘Seemingly open-ended question’ (Holbrook et al. 2007)

→ Question delivery should be last utterance

Putting alternatives *before/within* the QDC

Question delivery component

Please tell me whether you consider each of the following to be a big problem, some problem, or no problem at all: pain in your bones or joints

The diagram illustrates the placement of alternatives within the question delivery component. A bracket above the text 'Please tell me whether you consider each of the following to be' and another bracket below the text 'a big problem, some problem, or no problem at all' both point to the label 'Question delivery component'.

Question delivery component

‘Projecting’ alternatives after the QDC

*Question delivery
component*

Which of the **following categories** best describes how much of a problem you consider pain in your bones or joints; **a big problem, some problem, or no problem at all**

‘Delayed processing question’ (Holbrook et al. 2007)

Question wording as a cause of mismatch answers

Hypothesis 1:

Delayed Processing Questions will yield fewer mismatch answers than **Seemingly Open-ended Questions**.

Response alternatives as a cause of mismatch answers

- What words do people use in ordinary conversations?
- Experiment Dutch Health Survey (Ongena & Dijkstra, 2010)
 - 6% mismatch answers when colloquial alternatives (Yes/No),
 - 27% when formal alternatives (Agree/Disagree)

Response alternatives as a cause of mismatch answers

Hypothesis 2:

Colloquial alternatives will yield fewer mismatch answers than Formal alternatives.

Split ballot experiment in existing survey

- NASIS 2006 (CATI, $n = 1800$)
- Manipulated set of questions in second half of interview
- 300 recorded interviews
- Data coded in Sequence Viewer ($\kappa = 0.92$)

Manipulation of question wording

DPQ	SOEQ
Which of the following categories would best describe Alzheimer's disease?	What would be the best way to describe Alzheimer's disease?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">1.Mental illness2. Neurological disorder3. Natural effect of aging4.Viral infection	

Effects of question wording

DPQ	SOEQ
Which of the following categories would best describe Alzheimer's disease?	What would be the best way to describe Alzheimer's disease?
26% mismatch answers (n = 161)	30% mismatch answers (n = 136)
χ^2 (df=1)= .60, p = n.s.	

Manipulation of Response alternatives

Colloquial alternatives	Formal alternatives
<i>For each of the following statements you can answer with:</i>	
Yes Maybe No	Agree Neutral Disagree
1. I worry that I personally develop Alzheimer's 2. I worry that a family member might develop Alzheimer's 3. Alzheimer's is a disease that concerns everyone	

Effects of Response alternatives

Colloquial alternatives	Formal alternatives
Yes Maybe No	Agree Neutral Disagree
3% mismatch answers (n= 582 QA sequences)	16% mismatch answers (n = 315 QA sequences)
χ^2 (df=1) 48.091, $p < .001$	

Effects of Response alternatives and respondent characteristics

	B	Exp (B)
Alternatives (Formal)	1.83 **	6.23
Education (years)	-0.23 **	0.79
Age (years)	-0.01	1.00
Sex (male)	-0.09	0.91
Constant	-0.08	
	n = 878 QA sequences	

** p < 0.01

Conclusions

- No clear effects of DPQs versus SOEQs
- Difficulty of using existing survey
- Effects of alternatives replicated; **yes/no** better than **agree/disagree**
- Conversation analysis: a research field that should not be neglected
 - Turn-taking, epistemics, sequential organization, preference organization, repair, action formation, etc.

Thank you!

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