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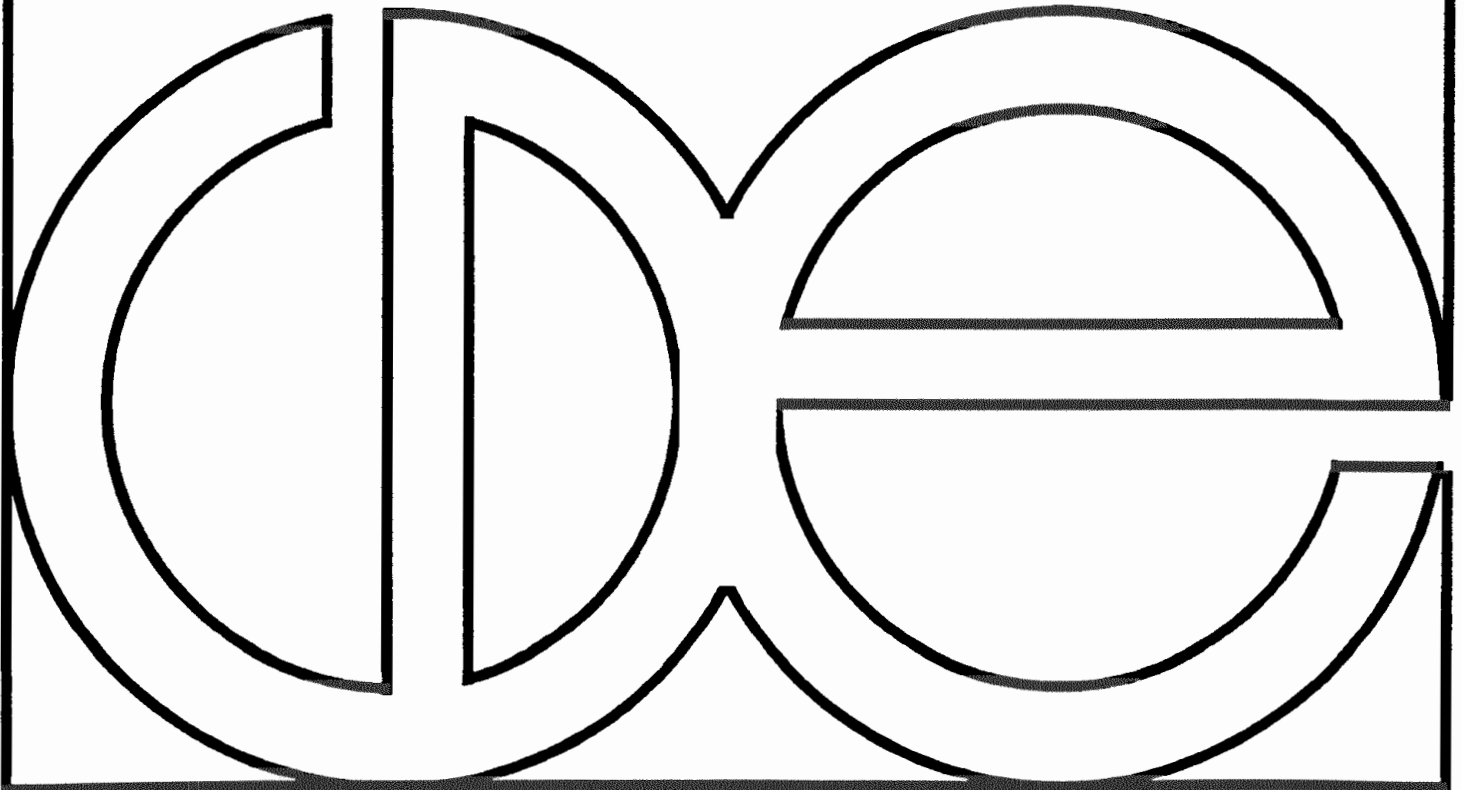
**RE-OPENING CLOSED QUESTIONS:
RESPONDENTS' ELABORATIONS ON CATEGORICAL ANSWERS
IN STANDARDIZED INTERVIEWS**

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CDE Working Paper 93-24



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August, 1993

A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the annual meetings of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, St. Charles, Illinois, May, 1993. The research reported here is in progress. Please contact the first author for further results.

This research was supported by a Joint Statistical Agreement (90-45) with the U. S. Bureau of the Census. Supplementary support was provided by the Research Committee of the Graduate School of the University of Wisconsin, Madison and by the Ameritech Foundation Fellowship Program. Computational support was provided by the Center for Demography and Ecology, which receives core support for population research from the National Center for Child Health and Human Development (Grant P30-HD05876). The views expressed in this paper are the authors' and not those of the funding agencies.

We thank the U. S. Bureau of the Census for permission to analyze the Current Population Survey pretest interviews. In the excerpts from the interviews, all names of persons, businesses, and locations are fictitious.

Standardized survey interviews frequently use closed, fixed-choice, questions to measure respondent characteristics and attitudes. The advantage of closed questions is said to be their greater specificity because they spell out the response alternatives (Converse and Presser, 1986). These questions require that the respondents produce an answer fitting one of the designated categories. If the respondent does not, then interviewers are required to probe non-directively for a codable response. The production and recording of each data point is a collaborative accomplishment by both the interviewer and the respondent. Researchers from many different perspectives have considered the interview as an interactional event, including those using role-behavior approaches (Brenner, 1982), anthropological perspectives (Briggs, 1986), and conversation analytic techniques (Suchman and Jordan, 1990). This paper continues a conversation analytic line of research on the interactional accomplishment of questions and answers by examining respondents' productions of fixed-choice answers on which they subsequently elaborate.

The participants in a survey interview draw on an interactional substrate of conversational skills and practices to achieve each answer, much as other pairs of interactants involved in standardized, formatted question-and-answer activities (Maynard and Marlaire, 1992). In most cases this process occurs smoothly, in a familiar sequence of "question-answer-(receipt)-entry of answer", or, if necessary, "question-answer-probe-answer-(receipt)-entry". The participants reach an accountable answer, the interviewer records it, and they move on to the next question. Arriving at an answer to one question is required for proceeding to the next one.

The focus of this study is a phenomenon occurring at a particular point in that

sequence. The cases presented here are examples of a respondent producing talk that is one of the offered answer choices for the question at hand, and then proceeding to engage in further talk after that answer. What kinds of actions are these, and more importantly, what consequences do they have for the collection of the data in the interview?

Data and Methods

The data on which this analysis is based come from audiotapes of random-digit-dial telephone interviews. These interviews come from two sources. Twenty-four are pretests of the labor force participation questions in the Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Fifteen are interviews from a public opinion conducted by the University of Wisconsin Letters and Science Survey Center.

Both surveys used a national sample of respondents. Calls became part of the corpus through processes that attempted to eliminate selection biases. Respondents' consent to taping was obtained after the initial household roster and respondent selection questions. Census interviewers were routinely taped as part of the pretesting, with a monitor switching from call to call and beginning to tape if he or she found an interview that had reached the consent question and to which the respondent had consented. When that interview finished, the monitor began scanning for another interview at an appropriate stage. Two Census Bureau respondents refused permission for taping, while twenty-four agreed. In the other corpus, Survey Center interviewers who agreed to participate in the study taped all interviews on a given shift. Of those Survey Center respondents who reached the taping consent statement, fifteen agreed, two agreed to the interview but not to be taped, and four refused the interview completely at that point.

Tables 1 and 2 describe the makeup of the calls.

Table 1: Participation in Taping

	<u>CPS</u>	<u>SC</u>
Consent to tape	24	15
Interviewed, but not taped	2	2
Refused interview	0	4

Table 2: Gender of Interview Participants

	<u>CPS</u>		<u>SC</u>	
	<u>M.Resp</u>	<u>F.Resp</u>	<u>M.Resp</u>	<u>F.Resp</u>
M lvwr	0	1	7	4
F lvwr	10	13	3	1

The early portions of each interview were examined for occurrences of post-answer elaborations. In the CPS tapes, the interviewer asks the respondent the same set of labor force questions about each adult member of the household. We examined the first such series of questions in each CPS interview. The LSSC interviews are divided into a number of different topics (taxes, government, economic expectations, etc.), and within each topic a particular question form is repeated for several items. We chose the first three sets of questions in the Survey Center interview, for which the content remains the same for all respondents. After that point, respondents in different states receive questions about their particular United States senators, and the questions vary. (Figure 1 shows the selected portions of each interview.)

In addition to reducing the number of excerpts to a more manageable amount, there were two more reasons for selecting these sections. First, the time required to ask one CPS labor force series and to ask the first three LSSC sections as roughly the same

(five to seven minutes). Secondly, once the CPS interviewer turns to the second adult in the household as the topic of the labor force questions, the respondent receives questions he or she has already heard once before. In order to capture that "first-time-through" nature in the LSSC interviews, we chose the initial substantive questions of each call. This decision was motivated by the hypothesis that respondents would elaborate more when they were unfamiliar with the format of the interview.

The selection of the excerpts as post-answer elaborations occurred through the following guidelines. Any question-answer sequence in which a respondent produced an answer that matched one of the answer categories ("answer-equivalent talk") was a possible site for the occurrence of an elaboration. Once that answer appeared, further talk by the respondent, before any talk relevant to the next question, was considered an elaboration on the previous answer. Several different kinds of actions can fill this post-answer slot. There may be expressions of uncertainty, about either the question task or about the answer given (Schaeffer, Maynard, and Cradock 1992). The respondent may solicit the interviewer's opinion or acknowledgement of the answer. Or the respondent might elaborate on the answer, providing more information than the initial answer turn contained. It is this last type of occurrence on which we will focus here. Brenner (1982) has termed this "irrelevant" behavior in his coding scheme for interview interaction. We prefer to simply treat them as elaborations on the preceding answer-talk, and to observe the participants' treatment of the actions as relevant or not. In searching for instances of this activity, we let the participants' observable actions guide our selection of what was or was not an example of elaboration. Relevance was determined not according to the objectives of the interview, but by whether the conversationalists themselves treated the occurrence as relevant, and did so in an

observable manner. Houtkoup-Steenstra (1991) has examined interviewers' management of this "extra" information when it must be asked about later in the interview. In the present study, we consider only the local context, focusing on the immediate actions of the participants.

The excerpts presented here show respondents who have produced a codable answer continuing to speak, without prompting by the interviewer, about the question's topic. In effect, they are keeping the answering activity going after the point when it is complete for the purposes of the question task. The resolution of these elaborations is itself an interactional task involving both the interviewer and respondent contributions. These occurrences can create problems of measurement (if the later talk conflicts with the chosen response), or of the interactional trajectory of the interview (if the interviewer loses control of the interaction, or if the extra information is scheduled to be asked about in a later question). This paper examines respondents' elaborations after codable answers and interviewers' responses to those elaborations.

How do the interviewers and respondents manage these elaborations? What do interviewers do in response to them, and what effects are there on the practical activity of recording an answer and moving through the interview?

Analysis

The task of the interviewer regarding the answer is to record the respondent's answer using one of the categories provided (including non-answers of "don't know" or "refused"). A respondent's turn of talk, though, may contain other elements along with an answer that is codable. Interviewers are often prepared to take any part of a respondent's utterance which matches one of the offered categories as evidence that the

respondent has chosen that category. In an observational study of this type, it is not possible (or intended) to determine whether that readiness might be motivated by concerns of time, respondent understanding, or respondent resistance. However, the fact that interviewers treat that part of the utterance which corresponds to standardized category as a complete-enough answer is observable, and so it appears that for interviewers there is a difference between answer-talk and that which comes after it. Excerpt 1 shows how an interviewer treats an in-process utterance as containing a codable answer and later material. For this interviewer, what follows the answer is not relevant to the interview.

Excerpt 1
211L1306

170 IV: (U-) ((tch)) okay and do you think that during the
171 next twelve months it will be larger or smaller than
172 during the past twelve months:? or about the same
173 R: Oh bout the s::[ame] I guess
174 IV: [#]
175 IV: Okay .hh an: what about interest rates: (.) uh do you
176 think that during the next twelve months interest
177 rates will: go up? (.) come down or: stay about the
178 same as [they are now] {q88}
179 R: [.hhhhh]hhhhh hhhhhh °well: let's see
180 they've gone down° they'll probly stay[:] bout what-
181 IV: [#]
182 R: -they are now
183 IV: Okay (0.2) ((tch)) .hh and in what state do you live {q100}

As soon as R produces, in line 173, an utterance that can be recognized as matched to one of the answer categories, IV enters it on the keyboard. IV waits until R finishes saying "I guess" before providing the "Okay" receipt and reading the next question, but she treats the activity of answering the question as projectably complete as soon as she hears "bout the s: ". This kind of projectability also arises at the end of IV's next turn, as R anticipates the end of the question and begins an answer turn before the

list of answer categories is complete (179). Again, IV enters an answer as soon as R says something which is recognizable as one of the offered answers. This focus on the occurrence of an utterance which matches one of the scripted answers (or which the interviewer treats as equivalent to one of them) as the signal that this answering activity is complete is very common in these interviews. As soon as an answer can be recorded, it is. However, not everything that follows a codable answer in a respondent's turn is "chaff", or is treated as such by the interviewer. What a respondent says after providing a potential answer can have effects on the subsequent course of the interview. It can also affect the answers the interviewer actually records, either in the current question or in future ones.

The following excerpts demonstrate how these elaborations can shape the interaction, and the data collection, in the interview.

Excerpt 2
015C0403

36 IV: Did you do any work at all last week not counting work
37 around the house {q20}
38 (0.4)
39 R: No: I run back and forth to the hospital
40 IV: .h Alright (.) then is it correct that you did not have a
41 job or business from which you were tempraly absent or
42 layoff last week {q21}

Here R begins his turn in line 39 with a "No", which gives an answer to the direct question about work last week. Then he goes on to explain the reason for that answer with an elaboration that details what he does instead of work. After receiving this extra information, the interviewer alters the wording of the next question. As scripted, it would be "Did you have a job or business from which ...". However, she changes it to ask for confirmation of a statement that R did not have a job. This is a

violation of the standardization rule about asking questions as written, and of the prohibition against asking questions in a "leading" way that indicates she expects one answer over another. Even though she may be departing from "good interviewing practice" , this interviewer is drawing on conversational resources to shape her talk (Houtkoup-Steenstra, 1991). Whether the utterance departs from the script, and whether or not the inference is correct (about R not having a job), the turn displays attention to the foregoing talk, and fits within the local context of the interaction. The elaborated response by R provides for an alternative means of collecting the information in the following question.

Excerpt 3
022C0505

24 IV: Las week
25 (0.4)
26 IV: did you do any work at all include work for pay or other
27 types of compensation {q19A}
28 (0.4)
29 R: Nope
30 (1.8)
31 IV: Last. week.- {q21}
32 R: -I'm on full disability for [Sosh] Security disability=
33 IV: [uh-]
34 R: =[cause] I've got asbestos my lungs
35 IV: [uh-]
36 IV: Okay last week you're (a d-) okay you are disabled
37 R: [Yes]
38 IV: [Oka]:y .hhh and
39 (0.3)
40 IV: will your disability prevent you from accepting...{q20A-1}

In the previous cases, the respondent's continuation past the production of a codable answer occurred within the same turn as the answer which the interviewer recorded. In Excerpt 3 the pattern is slightly different. R, in line 29, provides a minimal answer (though complete for the purposes of the question), after which there is

a pause. When the interviewer assumes speakership in line 31, she starts to ask the question which would usually follow a simple answer of "no" to question 19A. (That question, as in Excerpt 2, "did you have a job from which you were absent...?") R's interruption of her with an elaboration on his answer about not working affects the sequence of the questions.

In question 19A, there are answer categories besides "Yes" and "No". One of these is "No, disabled". This is a "blind" category, not used by the interviewer unless the respondent volunteers the information. If that answer is entered, the interview program skips to a different set of questions than those that appear after a simple entry of "No". Once R mentions the disability, the interviewer acknowledges this additional information with "uh", and apparently backs up in the program to change the previous answer to "No, disabled". She checks the disabled answer with the respondent (36), and after receiving confirmation begins asking the new followup question which appears, concerning R being prevented from working for six months by the disability. As in excerpt 2, an elaboration by the respondent occasions a change in the interviewer's subsequent questioning. In this example, though, the elaboration occurs after the corresponding answer has already been recorded and the next answer-seeking activity has begun. This leads to the interviewer's retracing her steps to the prior answer and changing it, then asking a different question as it is written. In Excerpt 2, the interviewer altered the wording of the following question on her own. In either case, the elaboration on an answer changes the questioning that follows.

Excerpt 4
112L0203

147 IV: O:kay ## .hh an: how would you rate the job the military
148 is doing {q49f}
149 (2.8)
150 R: Oh I think the military is doing very well hh probably::
151 (.) well let's go with an eight
152 IV: Oka:y=
153 R: =There's always room for improvement right?=
154 IV: =Yeah ehh heh [heh .hh hh YEAH heh .hh O:kay .hh]=
155 R: [heh heh ehh heh heh heh .hh]
156 IV: =generally speaking do you usually think of yourself as:
157 a Republican? a Democrat an independent or: what. {q56}

This exchange demonstrates another respondent's elaboration on an answer after the interviewer has given a receipt of the answer. R's turn in lines 150-151 is an extended one, displaying some of the process of arriving at the answer. She first gives a vague evaluation ("very well", 150), then after a number of delaying actions (inbreath, "probably", a pause, "well") she produces a number for the scale. IV acknowledges this answer in line with "Okay", and immediately following the receipt token, R replies with a question-type utterance of her own (153). "There's always room for improvement right?" addresses the adequacy of the answer, or of its formulation. The tag-question "right?" indicates that an affirmative response from the interviewer is preferred. IV provides that response and begins to laugh after agreeing with R's assessment of the answer. Once IV has initiated laughter, R joins in. This affiliative response (Jefferson, 1987) continues for several laughter particles, but then IV interjects into her laughter "Okay", which is a common transitional marker between questions. R's laughter stops after the "Okay" appears, and IV begins the next question. The effect of the elaboration here is not to change the ordering or the wording of subsequent questions as in Excerpts 2 and 3, but to bring about a confirmation of the respondent's answer by the interviewer and an episode of laughing together which the

interviewer both initiates and terminates. The basic question-and-answer framework of the questionnaire occurs according to the standardized rules, but the additional affiliative activity does not. This kind of elaboration raises subtler standardization issues of neutrality and rapport.

Excerpt 5

182L1004

247 IV: M~~k~~ay .hh .hh and then during the next twelve months do you
248 think prices in general will go up? go down? or stay where
249 they are now? {q84}
250 (2.1)
251 R: They'll hold their: s:pot but they .hh they should be going
252 down
253 (0.4)
254 IV: N~~k~~ay?
255 (0.6)
256 IV: So:: do you wanta say they'll stay the same then?:
257 (0.6)
258 IV: What you're saying?=
259 R: -n::Well they'll [stay the same]
260 IV: [Or do you think they'll be going] down
261 (0.6)
262 IV: Okay # .hhhh and then how bout interest rates ...

Here the respondent's elaboration causes potential problems with the recording of the answer, raising concerns about the category he has chosen. The offered answer categories IV reads are "go up", "go down", and "stay where they are now". R begins his turn with an utterance that might be taken as equivalent to one of the codable categories ("hold their: spot" , 251), but then continues with another utterance that has similarities to another answer category ("should be going down"). This sets up a potential ambiguity: does R's "should be going down" indicate R's opinion of what will happen or what ought to happen? The interviewer's actions indicate that he does treat this turn as ambiguous. He lets a 0.4 second silence pass, then responds with a question-intoned marker of receipt ("N~~k~~ay?", 254). Another pause follows, and then IV

then begins a candidate reformulation of the answer. This paraphrasing of a respondent's talk is incorrect under a strict reading of the rules for interviewing procedure (a directive probe), but is a common conversational device which speakers use to clarify and demonstrate their understanding of others' talk. In ordinary conversation, a listener's tentative paraphrase serves as a display of interactional competence.

Still though, R does not speak right away. IV probes again, in a more neutral manner this time. As IV reaches the question intonation of his utterance, R begins speaking immediately (258-9). R begins to respond to the probe with an unambiguous answer ("stay the same"). This is not the original wording of the question, but the wording that the interviewer offered in line 256 ("stay the same"). However, R delays his answer with "n:: Well", and before R can speak the disambiguating part of his turn, IV overlaps him by offering an alternative candidate answer. Having received no apparent response to his suggestion of "stay the same", IV turns to the other interpretation of R's initial elaborated answer. He continues this second formulation while R completes his answer to the first prompt. After both parties finish speaking, IV acknowledges that they have achieved an answer with the receipt "Okay", and enters the response on the keyboard as he proceeds to the next question. The immediate elaboration on the answer has resulted in confusion as to whether that answer is what the respondent means. The consequence of that ambiguity is that the participants must do additional work to resolve one specific answer as a codable representation of the respondent's opinion, and to record that one answer.

Interviewers do treat talk after an answer as relevant to the activity of collecting and recording data in an interview. In the most immediate context, the elaborations are relevant as talk to which some response (as opposed to none) is a

preferred action. As Excerpt 4 showed, the respondent's talk may elicit some affiliative comment or action by the interviewer. This may violate rules of neutrality, even if no immediate effect on the data for that item is observable. Broadening the context from the sphere of interaction to that of measurement, other consequences of post-answer elaborations appear. Those added bits of talk can shape interviewers' answer-recording activity, either for the present item (Excerpt 5), past items (Excerpt 3), or future ones (Excerpt 2). The ways that we see interviewers (and respondents) managing these occurrences seem to conflict with the goals of standardization. However, as participants in these interactional processes of data collection, they bring the skills and practices of ordinary conversation to bear on the task of achieving an answer to the question at hand. The number of potential situations that could arise in a question-and-answer sequence is too large for each to be covered by a standardized procedure. Interviewers do manage to record answers to each item, and do so even when the answer is complicated by elaborations.

It is not possible to determine whether or how these elaborations and their consequences affect the reliability or validity of the data collected in the interviews. The audiotapes do not provide any criteria for judging whether the respondents's answers are accurate. However, the details of the interactional structure by which the participants in these interviews accomplish their tasks are available and can suggest topics for interviewer training and questionnaire design. Examining the way interviewers and respondents collaboratively and interactionally arrive at the determination that a particular answer is the answer to a question can be helpful for understanding the origins of the data collected in surveys.

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