Answers to standardized questions: Recognizing “codable” answers and maintaining standardization and rapport

Nora Cate Schaeffer
Jennifer Dykema
Dana Garbarski

July 2016

Chicago, IL
Standardized interviewing aims to make interviewers interchangeable – ideally all standardized interviewers will behave the same way in a given situation – to increase the reliability of measurement. Key to the implementation of standardization is the concept of a “codable answer.” If the respondent provides a codable answer, the interviewer moves on to the next question. If the respondent does not, the interviewer must follow-up. Central though this concept is, the field lacks widely accepted conceptual and operational definitions. To develop such guidelines, we need an analysis of how respondents answer different forms of survey questions (that is, formatted for different types of responses), how respondents use conversational elements to supplement or embellish codable answers, and instructions for interviewers faced with these answers. The challenges of understanding the structure of answers are more complex in a cross-cultural setting, although some features of turn construction are shared across many cultures and languages (Stivers et al. 2009).

We describe the relationship between question form and respondents’ answers in several US studies to identify some of the components of answers that a broader cross-cultural analysis might explore. For example, respondents may provide “reports” of various types (Schaeffer & Maynard 1996, 2008) if their candidate answer does not fit the assumptions of the question or response categories. Respondents also use other common conversational practices that are not considered in interviewer training. For instance, instead of directly stating “yes” or “no” to a yes-no question form, respondents may repeat part of the question (e.g., “I did”) or provide a synonym that has not been explicitly defined as codable or not (e.g., “yep” or “probably”). Respondents may also add modifiers (e.g., “about”) and other elaborations to a codable answer. These conversational practices pose challenges to interviewers who must balance the needs of standardization – which might require following up an answer of “probably” with “Would you say ‘yes’ or ‘no’?” – and those of rapport – which recommend not following up because “probably” likely means “probably yes” in ordinary conversation (Garbarski, Schaeffer, & Dykema forthcoming). In this presentation we 1) describe the relationship between question form and the way respondents answer, 2) provide an operational definition of a codable answer, 3) catalogue varieties of conversational elements respondents add to or treat as synonyms for codable answers, and 4) offer guidelines for when interviewers should follow-up versus display their understanding of the respondent’s answer by proceeding to the next question.
Interviewer as Coder
And do the police and the FBI use the census to keep track of trouble makers?

I doubt it

And how about to locate illegal aliens. Is the census used for that?

Not that I know of
Two components to answer, two paths for interviewer

- Respondent communicates
  - Uncertainty
  - Direction or polarity of candidate answer
- Interviewer can focus on
  - Uncertainty – follow-up – “Would you say yes or no?”
  - Candidate answer – immediate coding
  - Combination – immediate coding with confirmation
    - Directive follow-up, “Would you say no?”
- Tension affecting interviewer’s next action
  - Rapport as responsive behaviors: Display that respondent was heard
  - Rapport as responsive behaviors: Display interactional competence
  - Role behaviors: Engage only in neutral actions
Immediate coding of answers to “yes-no” questions by interviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents’ Phrase</th>
<th>Interviewers’ Immediate Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Um-hmm, mm hmm, uh-hunh</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d say so</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s what’s supposed to be for</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I suppose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think so</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I doubt it</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not that I know of</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I have) no idea</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interactional Model of Question-Answer Sequence (Dykema, Schaeffer, & Garbarski)

- Interviewer's role characteristics
- Interviewer's cognitive processing
- Interviewer's behavior
- Interational processing
- True value
- Engaged Behaviors
- Responsive Behaviors
- Respondent's characteristics
- Respondent's cognitive processing
- Respondent's behavior
- Interviewing practices:
  - Standardization
- Conversational practices
- Question's characteristics
- Response Validity Reliability
- Responsive Behaviors
- Engaged Behaviors
Interactional Model of Question-Answer Sequence (Dykema, Schaeffer, & Garbarski)

- **Interviewer's role characteristics**
- **Interviewer's cognitive processing**
- **Interviewer's behavior**
- **Question's characteristics**
- **Interviewing practices: Standardization**
- **Conversation practices**
- **Responsive Behaviors**
- **Response Validity Reliability**
- **Interational processing**
- **Respondent's behavior**
- **Respondent's characteristics**
- **Respondent's cognitive processing**
- **True value**
- **Engaged Behaviors**
Conversational practices and measurement

- Conversational practices
  - Of respondents
  - Of interviewers
- Conversational practices pose challenges for measurement and standardization
  - Standardized interview has the goal of measurement
  - Questions are predetermined
  - Interviewer’s actions are constrained
- Variation across languages and cultures in
  - Conversational practices of respondents
  - Implications of interviewer’s next actions – for rapport and motivation
Study Goals and Design
Describing answers

- To understand how to train interviewers so that we can improve measurement we describe
  - Codable and uncodable answers
  - Conversational elements respondents include
  - Implications of respondent’s conversational elements for measurement
    - What can be ignored
    - What is required for an answer to be codable
    - What makes an answer uncodable
  - Implications of interviewer’s next actions for rapport and motivation

- Otherwise, we leave interviewers on their own to decide when to act as coders – and the result may be an increase in interviewer variance.
Data - Transcripts of telephone interviews

- Wisconsin Longitudinal Study 2004 – Health Section
  - Approximately 355 interviews, 24-77 questions
  - Opening section about health
- Wisconsin Longitudinal Study 2004 – End-of-Life Planning Section
  - Approximately 210 interviews, 29 questions
- Continuous National Survey – entire interview - Knowledge, evaluation items, social characteristics
  - Approximately 20 interviews, 40 questions
- Badger Poll -- Political efficacy section
  - Approximately 452 interviews, 6 questions (2 versions)
  - Evaluation items
First, some conceptual infrastructure
Concepts

• Response format or question form
• Codable answer
• Task and state uncertainty
Interactional Model of Question-Answer Sequence (Dykema, Schaeffer, & Garbarski)

- Interviewer’s role characteristics
- Interviewer’s cognitive processing
- Interviewer’s behavior
- Interactional processing
- Response Validity
- Reliability
- True value
- Respondent’s behavior
- Respondent’s cognitive processing
- Respondent’s characteristics
- Question’s characteristics
- Conversational practices
- Interviewing practices: Standardization
Now I'd like to ask about your employment status. Did you do any work for pay last week?

<1> YES
<2> NO
A codable answer

- Occurs after respondent has heard the question
- Answers the survey question
- Matches the response format of the question
  - Unique portion of one of the response categories
  - The format on the screen

Kernel of a Codable Answer
People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

<1> STRONGLY AGREE
<2> AGREE
<3> NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
<4> DISAGREE
<5> STRONGLY DISAGREE

Hmm, I guess neither
People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

- <1> STRONGLY AGREE
- <2> AGREE
- <3> NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
- <4> DISAGREE
- <5> STRONGLY DISAGREE

Strongly
Uncertainty: State and task (Schaeffer & Thomson 1992)

• State uncertainty
  • “don’t know” or “not sure” about true value
  • Source usually faulty memory or lack of knowledge

• Task uncertainty
  • Respondent does not understand question
  • Respondent knows their true value, but not sure how to express it in available categories
    • Respondent may “report” information that displays lack of fit
  • “It depends”
  • Distinction analytically useful, but source of uncertainty may be ambiguous in an answer

THE DISCOVERY OF GROUNDED UNCERTAINTY: DEVELOPING STANDARDIZED QUESTIONS ABOUT STRENGTH OF FERTILITY MOTIVATION

Nora Cate Schaeffer*
Elizabeth Thomson*

In survey interviews, expressions of uncertainty about subjective phenomena result from the interaction between the respondent’s “true” answer and the structure of the survey task. The first kind of uncertainty, state uncertainty, is important in conceptualizing the theoretical construct under study. Task uncertainty raises operational issues, such as whether to use filter questions and which response alternatives to offer respondents.
How Respondents Answer
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational Element</th>
<th>Response Format/Question Form</th>
<th>Selection</th>
<th>Ordered Categories</th>
<th>Choice List</th>
<th>Discrete Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[None]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes-No</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of exact match (or synonym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Certainty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Element</td>
<td>Yes-No</td>
<td>Ordered Categories</td>
<td>Choice List</td>
<td>Discrete Value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[None]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of exact match (or synonym)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Certainty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Element</td>
<td>Yes-No</td>
<td>Selection Ordered Categories</td>
<td>Selection Choice List</td>
<td>Discrete Value</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[None]</td>
<td>&quot;yes&quot; or &quot;no&quot; [19, 36]</td>
<td>&quot;not very willing&quot; [59]. &quot;stop&quot; [12]</td>
<td>&quot;hospital&quot; [159]</td>
<td>&quot;four&quot; [58]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
<td>&quot;um no&quot; [26.1] &quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42]</td>
<td>&quot;oh I would favor it somewhat&quot; [35]</td>
<td>&quot;well at home&quot; [130], &quot;huh home&quot; [11.1], &quot;er at home&quot;[149]</td>
<td>&quot;oh, none at all&quot; [61], &quot;oh (mumble) oh just let's say fifty thousand dollars&quot; [81]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td>&quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
<td>&quot;right I agree&quot; [160]</td>
<td>&quot;uh if there's no chance of recovery just no stop&quot; [153], &quot;no stop&quot; [154]</td>
<td>&quot;um yes, just probably about twice this week&quot; [76]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td>&quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42], &quot;no, i haven't had that problem, no&quot; [54], &quot;yes I did&quot; [43], &quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
<td>&quot;oh I would favor it somewhat&quot; [35]</td>
<td>&quot;this is my first marriage, my only marriage.&quot; [63], &quot;hopefully at home&quot; [131], &quot;in my home I hope&quot; [132]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of exact match (or synonym)</td>
<td>&quot;yes yes i would say yes&quot; [55], &quot;no no&quot; [56], &quot;yeah yeah&quot; [160]</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;hos home home&quot; [152]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Certainty</td>
<td>&quot;oh yes definitely&quot; [161]</td>
<td>&quot;absolutely stop&quot; [162]</td>
<td>&quot;well I certainly would like to be at home which&quot; [142]</td>
<td>&quot;oh, none at all&quot; [61]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have people who do not know you understood you completely when you speak?

<1> YES
<2> NO

INT Have people who do not know you understand you completely when you speak?
R They understand me.

INT I should put yes then, is that correct?
R Yes
Answers to yes-no questions:
Codable Answer Kernel + Neutral Conversational Elements

"uh [no] I haven't

"no, I haven't had that problem, no"

• Kernel of codable answer
• Particle or token
• Repetition of answer kernel
• Repetition or paraphrase of part of question
Answers to yes-no questions:
Codable Answer Kernel + Neutral Conversational Elements

"uh no I haven't"

"no, I haven't had that problem, no"

- Kernel of codable answer
- Particle or token
- Repetition of answer kernel
- Repetition or paraphrase of part of question
Answers to yes-no questions:
Codable Answer Kernel + Neutral Conversational Elements

"uh no I haven't"

"no, I haven't had that problem, no"

- Kernel of codable answer
- Particle or token
- Repetition of answer kernel
- Repetition or paraphrase of part of question
Answers to yes-no questions:
Codable Answer Kernel + Neutral Conversational Elements

"uh no I haven't"

"no, I haven't had that problem, no"

- Kernel of codable answer
- Particle or token
- Repetition of answer kernel
- Repetition or paraphrase of part of question
Answers to yes-no questions: Simple synonyms for “yes and “no”

“uh {yeah} I think so”

“nah”

“mm-hmm”

• Beginning with “y” or “n”
  • Yeah
  • Yep
  • Nah
  • Nope

• Tokens in answer position
  • Mm-hmm
  • Uh-huh
  • Uh-uh
  • Mm-mm
Answers to yes-no questions: Simple synonyms for “yes and “no”

“uh yeah I think so”

“nah”

“mm-hmm”

• Beginning with “y” or “n”
  • Yeah
  • Yep
  • Nah
  • Nope

• Tokens in answer position
  • Mm-hmm
  • Uh-huh
  • Uh-uh
  • Mm-mm
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"

"I suppose yes"

“uh yeah I think so”

"I don't believe so, no"

“um, no, not really”

"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”

"oh yes definitely“

• Probably

• Suppose

• State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”

• State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”

• Certainty
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"

"I suppose yes"

“uh yeah I think so”

"I don't believe so, no"

“um, no, not really”

"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”

"oh yes definitely“

- "Probably"
- "Suppose"
- "State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”"
- "State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”"
- "Certainty"
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"

"I suppose yes"

“uh yeah I think so”

"I don't believe so, no"

“um, no, not really”

"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”

"oh yes definitely"

- Probably
- Suppose
- State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”
- State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”
- Certainty
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"
"I suppose yes"
“uh yeah I think so”
"I don't believe so, no"
“um, no, not really”
"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”
"oh yes definitely"

• Probably
• Suppose
• State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”
• State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”
• Certainty
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"
"I suppose yes"
“uh yeah I think so”
"I don't believe so, no"
“um, no, not really”
"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”

"oh yes definitely“

- Probably
- Suppose
- State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”
- State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”
- Certainty
Answers to “yes-no” questions:
Modifiers – uncertainty/certainty markers

"Probably, yes"

"I suppose yes"

“uh yeah I think so”

"I don't believe so, no"

“um, no, not really”

"I guess yes cause somewhat"

“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no”

"oh yes definitely"

- Probably
- Suppose
- State (?) uncertainty – “don’t know” or “not sure”
- State (?) uncertainty – other than “don’t know” or “not sure”
- Certainty
Answers to yes-no questions: Modifiers - Other

“oh gee yeah put down yes”

“no, I have no feeling in the left hand”

• Distancing/Approximation

• Elaborations
Answers to yes-no questions: Modifiers - Other

“oh gee yeah put down yes”

“no, I have no feeling in the left hand”

• Distancing/Approximation
• Elaborations
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel:
Uncertainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes” and “no”

“Probably”
“ah probably not”

“I don't think so“

“not that I know of”

• Probably [so/not]
• [Don’t] suppose [so/not]

• I (don’t) think so
• I (don’t) believe so

• I guess [so/not]

• Not that I know of
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Uncertainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes” and “no”

“Probably”
“ah probably not”

“I don't think so“

“not that I know of”

• Probably [so/not]
• [Don’t] suppose [so/not]

• I (don’t) think so
• I (don’t) believe so

• I guess [so/not]

• Not that I know of
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Uncertainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes” and “no”

“Probably”
“ah probably not”

"I don't think so“

“not that I know of”

• Probably [so/not]
• [Don’t] suppose [so/not]

• I (don’t) think so
• I (don’t) believe so

• I guess [so/not]
• Not that I know of
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel:
Uncertainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes” and “no”

“Probably”
“ah probably not”

“I don't think so“

“not that I know of”

• Probably [so/not]
• [Don’t] suppose [so/not]

• I (don’t) think so
• I (don’t) believe so

• I guess [so/not]

• Not that I know of
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel:
Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

"sure"

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

"sure"

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

"sure"

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

"sure"

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

“sure“

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
Answers to “yes-no” questions without kernel: Certainty markers alone as synonyms for “yes”

"sure“

"uh they already conspire together, so sure"

"oh are you kidding absolutely"

“certainly”

“of course everyone does”
I sure do

I’m sure at some point I did

I had open heart I had bypass surgery
Summary: Codable answer + conversational elements

- Kernel of a Codable Answer
- Synonym of Kernel: Simple Synonym
- Synonym of Kernel: Uncertainty/Certainty Marker Alone
- Synonym of Kernel: Repetition of Part of Question

Particles and Tokens “uh” “um”
- Repetition of Kernel
- Repetition of Part of Question
- Modifiers Certainty or Uncertainty Distancing Approximation
- Elaborations
Thinking through options respondents make relevant for interviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent: Three ways to say “yes:”</th>
<th>Interviewer: Three actions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Probably I did, yes</em></td>
<td>• Immediate coding of “yes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Probably I did</em></td>
<td>• Responsive follow-up (confirmation):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Probably</em></td>
<td><em>Would you say “yes”?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Balanced follow-up:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Would you say “yes” or “no”?</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Consequences for respondent
  - Burden and lengthening of interview
  - Training in standardization
  - Engagement
  - Motivation

- Consequences for interviewer and measurement
  - Responsiveness
  - Role conflict
  - Interviewer variance
  - Bias
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Yes”</th>
<th>“No”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I suppose so</td>
<td>I suppose not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably so</td>
<td>Probably not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I guess so</td>
<td>I guess not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think so</td>
<td>I don’t think so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe so</td>
<td>I don’t believe so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did</td>
<td>I did not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have</td>
<td>I have not</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Uncodable Answers and Reports
Reports (Schaeffer & Maynard 1996, 2008)

• Reports are answers that do not match the response format
  • Don’t know
  • Threshold problems
  • Goal problems
  • Terminology problems
INT And do the police and the FBI use the census to keep track of trouble makers?

R I doubt it

INT And how about to locate illegal aliens. Is the census used for that?

R Not that I know of
I 1 now I am going to ask you some qua or ask some questions about the later years in life have you made plans about the types of medical treatment you want or don't want if you become seriously ill in the future?

R 2 um briefly

I 3 ok so would you like me to put yes or no for that?

R 4 um I guess yes cause somewhat
Task uncertainty: “I don’t know how to answer that question,” uncertainty about the goal of the question

INT: do you have a signed and witnessed will?

R: I have an estate planned

INT: ok um

R: I don't know if that I don't know how to answer that question I don't have a will per se but I do have

INT: ok but ok so you do not have a signed and witnessed will but you do have ah

R: yeah uh everything's in the estate
Task uncertainty: “I don’t know what that means,” uncertainty about terms

INT  do you have assets or property that will go to someone through a joint ownership or beneficiary designation?

R    I don't know what that means either
Summary: Some types of uncodable answers

- Report: State Uncertainty - Lack of Memory or Knowledge
- Report: Task Uncertainty about Goal of the Question
- Report: Task Uncertainty about Terms in the Question
- Report: Task Uncertainty about Threshold
- Codable Answer + Elaboration that Contradicts Codable Answer
Cross-language and cross-cultural issues in interviewing

- Definition of codable answer
- Treatment of conversational elements
  - Elements that are neutral
  - Elements that are acceptable synonyms
- Uncodable answers and reports
Transformative answers to yes-no questions (Stivers & Hayashi 2010)

- Specification – targets a specific component of the questions to narrow the scope of what is being confirmed or disconfirmed
- Agenda – answer transforms the focus, bias, or presupposition of the question
  - Focus
  - Bias
  - Presupposition
- Balance alignment and affiliation

Transformative answers: One way to resist a question’s constraints

TANYA STIVERS
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics
Wundtlaan 1
6525 XD Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Tanya.Stivers@mpi.nl

MAKOTO HAYASHI
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
2090 Foreign Languages Building
707 S. Mathews Ave., Urbana, IL 61821 USA
mhayashi@illinois.edu

Universals and cultural variation in turn-taking in conversation
Implications

• Training needs to provide guidance about

1. When the respondent’s candidate answer
   • Can be accepted with immediate coding or with confirmation
   • Requires a balanced or other probe

2. How to interpret reports and uncodable answer
   • What problems are implicated by different types of reports
   • What actions are appropriate for supporting respondents
Acknowledgments

• General Interviewer Training Working Group (UWSC & UM-SRC)
  • UM-SRC: Lisa Holland, Margaret Hudson, Jody Dougherty
  • UWSC: Nora Cate Schaeffer, Jennifer Dykema, Steve Coombs, Rob Schultz
• Projects coding interviewer-respondent interaction
  • Wisconsin Longitudinal Study
  • Letters and Sciences Survey Center Continuous National Survey
  • Badger Poll
Thank You!

For questions about this presentation or more information, contact:

Nora Cate Schaeffer

schaeffe@ssc.wisc.edu

Please visit us at:

www.uwsc.wisc.edu
Discussion

- Respondents’ answers commonly offer
  - A candidate answer or report
  - Information about uncertainty or certainty
    - Task
    - State
- Interviewers must instantaneously decide how to balance
  - Standardization
  - Communicating that respondent has been heard
  - Displaying interactional competence
  - If the answer is a report, whether a tailored response is needed
Immediate coding of answers to “yes-no” questions by interviewers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents’ Phrase</th>
<th>Interviewers’ Immediate Code</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Um-hmm, mm hmm, uh’hunh</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d say so</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That’s what’s supposed to be for</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probably</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I suppose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t think so</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I doubt it</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not that I know of</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(I have) no idea</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Now I'd like to ask about your employment status. Did you do any work for pay last week?

<1> YES
<2> NO
And now I am going to ask two questions about your end of life treatment preferences. Suppose you had a serious illness today with very low chances of survival. First, what if you were mentally intact but severely and constantly in pain: would you want to continue all medical treatments or stop all life-prolonging treatments?

1. Continue All Medical Treatments  
2. Stop All Life Prolonging Treatments

How willing would you be to give your social security number to the census bureau if this would increase the accuracy of the data in your file? Would you be very willing, somewhat willing, not very willing, or not willing at all?

1. VERY WILLING  
2. SOMEWHAT WILLING  
3. NOT VERY WILLING  
4. NOT WILLING AT ALL
When you think about the last few days or weeks of your life, do you hope to spend these days in your home, at the hospital, with hospice care, or in a nursing home?

- <1> HOME
- <2> HOSPITAL
- <3> HOSPICE
- <4> AT HOME HOSPICE CARE
- <5> NURSING HOME OR ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY
- <6> SOMEWHERE ELSE

Selection: Ordered
@Response format

First, how many persons live in your household counting all adults and children and including yourself?

___ NUMBER OF PERSONS
Discrete Value

72
Codable answers and conversational practices: Selection questions

People like me don't have any say about what the government does. Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree?

<1> STRONGLY AGREE
<2> AGREE
<3> NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE
<4> DISAGREE
<5> STRONGLY DISAGREE
Task uncertainty: “I don’t know what that means”

INT do you have assets or property that will go to someone through a joint ownership or beneficiary designation?

R I don't know what that means either
INT um now I am going to ask two questions about your end of life treatment preferences suppose you had a serious illness today with very low chances of survival uh first what if you were mentally intact but in severe and constant physical pain? would you want to continue all medical treatments or stop all life prolonging treatments?

R well if I didn't have no chance I wanna stop everything yeah
INT have you been able to bend lift jump and run without difficulty and without help or equipment of any kind?

R: ah not too much jumping
and when you think about the last few days or weeks of your life do you hope to spend these days in your home at the hospital with hospice care or in a nursing home?

haha that's a good question I I depends on the situation I think

ah where where that would be

I would have to say just plain um don't know

ok
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational Element</th>
<th>Yes-No Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[None]</td>
<td>&quot;yes&quot; or &quot;no&quot; [19, 36]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delay or other particles or tokens</td>
<td>&quot;um no&quot; [26.1] &quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of exact match (or synonym)</td>
<td>&quot;yes yes i would say yes&quot; [55], &quot;no no&quot; [56], &quot;yeah yeah&quot; [160]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirming or negating token</td>
<td>&quot;for pay no uh-uh&quot; [84]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition of part of question</td>
<td>&quot;uh no I haven't&quot; [42], &quot;no, i haven't had that problem, no&quot; [54], &quot;yes I did&quot; [43]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Emphatic</td>
<td>&quot;oh yes definitely&quot; [161]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversational Elements</td>
<td>Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Distancing</td>
<td>I (would [not]/will [not]/could [not]) (say/go/go with), (put [down]/say/go/go with/it's/the answer is)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Just</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Probably</td>
<td>Probably [so/not]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Suppose</td>
<td>I suppose [so/not]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifiers - Approximation</td>
<td>About, almost, around, borderline, close to, like... ...or whatever, roughly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier – Task uncertainty</td>
<td>It depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier – State uncertainty</td>
<td>I guess [so/not], maybe [so/not], I think [so/not], I [don't] (believe/think) [so], not really (for Y/N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier – State uncertainty</td>
<td>&quot;don't know&quot;, not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elaboration that does not contradict</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yes: yeah, yah</td>
<td>Y: yeah, yep, yup, ya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no: nah, nope,</td>
<td>N: nah, nope</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| yes: mmhm | Y: mhmm, uh-huh | &quot;mhmm&quot; [38] [confirmation for follow-up, 6.2] [see also 26,26.1 for other uses of mhmm] |
| no: uhuh | N: uh-uh, mm-mm |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Uncertainty marker - state uncertainty - &quot;don't know&quot; &quot;not sure&quot;</th>
<th>not sure, don't know</th>
<th>&quot;uh you know i'm not sure&quot; [44] &quot;I never thought of that I don't know&quot; [53]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty marker - state uncertainty - other than &quot;don't know, &quot;not sure:&quot;</td>
<td>I guess (so/not), maybe (so/not), I think (so/not), I (don't) (believe/think) (so), not that I know of</td>
<td>“not that I know of&quot; [134], &quot;I don't think so&quot; [101]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task uncertainty</td>
<td>It depends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphatic</td>
<td>Y: yes, agree, favor: absolutely, positively, definitely, sure, correct, right, of course N: no, disagree, oppose: absolutely not</td>
<td>&quot;sure&quot; [32] [73] [107], &quot;uh they already conspire together, so sure&quot; [69], &quot;oh are you kidding absolutely&quot; [66], &quot;absolutely&quot; [67], &quot;of course everyone does&quot; [116], &quot;absolutely&quot; [155], “certainly” for “yes” [158] [162]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier - State uncertainty - &quot;don't know,&quot; &quot;not sure&quot;</td>
<td>not sure, don't know</td>
<td>“mmm that’s iffy I don’t know I’m a little bit near sighted if I I would say uh put down no” [129]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier - State uncertainty - other than &quot;don't know&quot;</td>
<td>I guess (so/not), maybe (so/not), I think (so/not), I (don't) (believe/think) (so), not that I know of</td>
<td>&quot;I guess yes cause somewhat&quot; [8.1], &quot;I don't believe so no&quot; [37], &quot;um, no, not really&quot; [61]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifier - state uncertainty - &quot;probably,&quot; &quot;suppose&quot;</td>
<td>Y: Suppose (so), Probably (so/do/is) N: Suppose not, probably not</td>
<td>probably [13], [48], &quot;ah probably not&quot; [89], &quot;probably not&quot; [89.11]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphatic</td>
<td>Y: yes, agree, favor: absolutely, positively, definitely, sure, correct, right, of course N: no, disagree, oppose: absolutely not</td>
<td>&quot;sure&quot; [32] [73] [107], &quot;uh they already conspire together, so sure&quot; [69], &quot;oh are you kidding absolutely&quot; [66], &quot;absolutely&quot; [67], &quot;of course everyone does&quot; [116], &quot;absolutely&quot; [155], “certainly” for “yes” [158] [162]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influences on the Respondent’s Behavior
Why describe conversational practices?

• Three views of the respondent’s answer
  • The respondent – good enough
  • Measurement – true value
  • Standardization - codable
• Respondents are not standardized
• Interviewer must manage respondent’s answers
• Training must prepare interviewer to recognize
  • Codable answers
    • Complete
    • Sufficient
    • Unambiguous
  • When and how to follow-up
• Answers are relevant for all styles of interviews, not just standardized interviews
"uh let me think here I dunno fifty hours maybe"
Survey researchers’ interest in how conversational practices intersect with the practices of standardization often focuses on the behavior of interviewers and how they meet the requirements of standardization (e.g., Cannell et al. 1981) or implement different styles of interviewing (e.g., Schober and Conrad 1997; Belli et al. 2001). In addition, the ways that respondents answer questions has been recognized as potentially informative about the measurement process (e.g., Schaeffer and Maynard 2008; Garbarski et al. 2011). However, the ways that respondents answer questions have additional implications for the design of survey questions and interviewing practices. A question form (e.g., yes-no, selection, discrete value, or open) projects a format for the answer, and the components with which respondents construct their answers vary with question form. Once the answer is given, the interviewer must decide whether an answer is adequate or requires follow-up. Our qualitative study draws on a corpus of thousands of transcribed question-answer sequences from several sources (e.g., Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, a national omnibus survey, a state poll, and several federal surveys). We identify and analyze the components with which answers are constructed for different question forms. Our preliminary analysis finds, for example, a particularly complex range of answers to yes-no questions. Even when a question clearly projects “yes” or “no” as an answer, a respondent may provide a range of uncertainty components (e.g., “probably,” “I guess,” “maybe”) singly or in combination, and the interviewer must decide immediately whether such components are an adequate synonym for “yes” when the goal is standardized measurement rather than another genre of talk. An understanding of the influence of question form on answers and the components with which respondents construct answers is important not only for designing and improving traditional standardized interviewing and for training interviewers, but for designing any interviewing...