Review of: Jan P. de Ruiter (ed.): Questions – Formal, Functional and Interactional Perspectives. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012

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1. Introduction

The view of questions as vehicles to acquire information the speaker lacks turns out to be too simple when language use is considered. In this regard, this edited volume by Jan P. de Ruiter is an important contribution to the ongoing investigation of the phenomenon of questions and interrogatives. In particular, the collected essays look not only at the form and function of questions, but also analyze them from an interactional perspective and even show how embodied actions can have functions that are similar to the function of verbal questions.

The volume is part of the series *Language, Culture and Cognition*, which investigates the role language plays in human cognition. Generally, publications from this series are based on research from the *Language and Cognition Group* at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen, Netherlands. This volume originated from the workshop *Questions and their Responses*, which was hosted by the *Multimodal Interaction Project* at the Max Planck Institute in March 2006. The focus of this volume, which includes cross-cultural and multidisciplinary research, is on illuminating what questions do, and how they shape their corresponding answers. A diverse range of scholars working in areas such as Linguistics, Anthropology, Psychology and Conversation Analysis contributed essays to the volume.

The book is divided into three parts that follow a general introduction by the editor. The first part, which consists of four different chapters, examines how the form and function of questions are interdependent. The second part consists of three contributions and looks at the prosodic features of questions. Finally, the third part, consisting of four chapters, analyzes social aspects of questions.

In the introduction, chapter one, de Ruiter opens up the discussion by asking what a question actually is. In response to this issue he begins by introducing the *folk-model* (FM) of questionhood (1). This model presumes that language users ask questions so that their recipients share the relevant information. In the context of questions and their possible answers, however, issues emerge that suggest the inadequacy of the FM. In particular, how does one ultimately define questions? Questions can be defined formally or functionally, however, formal and functional questionhood can vary. So, for example, there are formal statements like *You're married.* which request information and formal questions like *Are you kidding?* that do not (2). In this context, the contributors of this book chose to avoid providing a narrow definition of questions, in order to analyze "questions from an interactional, a functional and a formal perspective, focusing on what questions do, and how they do it", thereby focusing mostly on naturally occurring language (3). De Ruiter then continues by giving a short preview of the following contributions.

2. The Different Contributions

Chapters two, three, four, and five focus on the interconnectedness of form and function of questions. The second chapter, by *Stephen C. Levinson*, focuses on the issue of whether or not there is a structured social economy of information transfer. Here the author focuses on the social and informational economics of questions. For an economic model of information in conversation, two kinds of currency are necessary. As Levinson claims, the first one measures the value of the exchanged information, meaning the more information one provides the greater the value one accumulates. The second one is a social measure; such social costs, like losing one's face because of lacking knowledge, explain why people are often reluctant to ask questions. In terms of questions, they are thus evaluated based on the requested and exchanged information and also based on the social consequences of the exchange. Here, Levinson proposes to combine these claims with the *Dynamic Semantics models of successively incremented common ground* (van Eijck/Visser 2010), using a hydraulic analogy for its representation (21-22, Figure 2.3). Using this analogy, Levinson suggests that in the event of asking a question, the questioner causes the respondent's greater knowledge to flow into, and thus become part of, the common ground. It follows that the questioner accepts social costs and, simultaneously, gains informational value. This model, however, can be complicated in order to separate participants' individual accounts. Here, only in the case of the questioner not doubting or disagreeing with the respondent's answer, does it flow into the common ground. This model then, generally, predicts that questioners should be economical with asking questions, while languages will provide a variety of question types, which vary in their informational strength. Thus it can be assumed that every language has conventional ways of constructing, for example, Wh-questions and polar questions. Furthermore, Wh-questions entail the corresponding polar questions, because they ask for more information. It follows that questioners avoid asking Wh-questions where polar questions are sufficient, since the more information is requested the greater is the cost. In this context, Levinson has developed a functional space for different question types, which represents how social costs increase with greater questionhood (25, Figure 2.5). The author then applies the concept of an economy of information to the distribution of questions in another culture and language, which is Yélî Dnye, spoken by the people of Rossel Island, Papua New Guinea. The aim is here not only to show that the above ideas equally apply there, as it is the case with English, but also that such patterns can further illuminate the study of language use.

Jerry R. Hobbs focuses in the third chapter on the role of questions during group decisions. Hobbs' aim is to analyze how group members are able to construct a decision for the group as a whole, which is based on their individual contributions, thereby providing a computational account of the process. The research is based on the data of five organized meetings each including three people. After having illustrated how group members progress from incomplete utterances to a shared plan, which is required by the joint action of a group of people, the focus is now on the roles questions play in such a construction. Questions are classified by their syntactic structure and pragmatic function. Hobbs has identified seven types of syntactic question in the data: *Standard Wh-questions*, *In-place Wh-questions*, *Yes-no questions*, *Elliptical yes-no questions*, *Elliptical alternative questions*,

Syntactically declarative sentences, and *Elliptical declaratives* (48). Hobbs suggests that questions can be indicated syntactically (standard Wh-questions, yes-no questions), lexically (in-place Wh-questions), intonationally (declaratives, elliptical yes-no questions), as well as by their content as informational statements (49). In this context it needs to be mentioned that the syntactic form of questions, however, cannot always be taken to indicate its pragmatic function. The ninety-nine questions that were identified in the data have been categorized into the following six different pragmatic functions, which are added to the *Conversational Record* (49). A Conversational Record, according to Hobbs, is based on the set of participants' mutual beliefs that are relevant to the conversation (49-50):

- Wh-question: A request to add a property or relation.

- Yes-no question: A request to add a binary judgment.

- Alternative question: A request to add either P or Q.

- Suggestion: A request to add an action to the shared plan for the task or some step in the decision-making process.

- Requests for confirmation: A request that others agree to one's own contribution.

- Check: A request to delay agreement on someone else's contribution until further discussion

Overall, constructing a shared plan consists of several processes, starting with individual words that are produced by speakers and understood by their recipients to the group as a whole that implements a joint plan of action. This emergent plan is vital for the Conversational Record, which gets constructed by the group members during conversation. In this context, Hobbs notes that there are several ways, syntactically, lexically, intonationally and by content, to indicate that an utterance is a question. Pragmatic functions of questions can also be identified, however, it is difficult to clearly map their syntactic form to their pragmatic function. It follows that for a computational approach, in order to be sure to know what counts as a question and what its pragmatic functions are, all available information needs to be taken into account.

In the following chapter, *Tanya Stivers* and *Federico Rossano* focus on the issue of how speakers elicit responses from recipients in social interaction. The authors claim that deconstructing the concept of question shows the importance of turn design in eliciting a response, combined with the employed social action and its sequential position. Here, then, questions are regarded as a collection of different features and not as a standardized category of action or form. The data corpus on which this research is based consists of fifty hours of videotaped conversation in English and Italian. In general, as Schegloff (1968) argues, particular social actions make adequate responses relevant, such as invitations, offers and requests. These first pair parts show that in sequentially initial position, speakers elicit a response from their recipients by the action they perform. Turn design features, furthermore, like *interrogative morpho-syntax, interrogative intonation, recipient epistemic expertise on the topic relative to the speaker, and speaker gaze to the recipient*, increase the responsibility for the recipient to provide a response and are usually present in such actions (61). The question to be analyzed now is if it is

only the action or the combined presence of these features that elicits responses from recipients. In order to address this issue, the authors analyze assessments, evaluative utterances, as first pair parts in ordinary conversation. Then, they argue that in terms of assessments, the presence of these turn design features elicit responses from their recipients. This is the case, since by including these features the recipient is held more responsible for providing a responsive action. The authors claim, furthermore, that each of these features has the ability to mobilize a response. It follows that if multiple turn design features are present, recipients' accountability to respond is heightened. Stivers and Rossano have found that these features are a resource that speakers make use of to mobilize a response in contexts where a recipient's response is absent. Then, the research study focuses on instances where a less coercive turn design is preferred, like with potentially face-threatening actions, in order not to constrain the recipient's response. Finally, the authors return to the concept of questions and propose that it "is in fact an omnibus term that expresses the institutionalisation of response mobilization" (79). As soon as the notion of question is deconstructed it can be seen how the above features elicit a response from the recipient. The authors claim, then, that speakers across different languages use the same features to mobilize a response, however, probably to different degrees (e.g., Rossano, Brown/Levinson 2009). Moreover, even though the authors have focused on sequentially initial actions, there is early evidence that the above features heighten the significance of responding in different sequential positions and across different action types (e.g., Rossano 2005; Sacks/Schegloff 1979).

The fifth chapter by *Herbert H. Clark* proposes that pairs of questions and answers can be considered as *projective pairs*, meaning that one or both parts can be produced without spoken language (82). According to Clark (2004), projective pairs (82)

> consist of two communicative acts in sequence from different people, with the first part projecting the second. […] [E]ither part may be *any* type of communicative act – spoken, gestural or otherwise.

Before the author provides empirical evidence for his claim, he starts by analyzing how questions and answers can be identified in general. He suggests that form cannot be the sole indicator, since questions, for example, do not necessarily need to be produced in interrogative form. In terms of answers to questions, speakers, by responding, presuppose their interpretation of the prior question. Commonly, the recipient's understanding of the speaker's question confirms the intended meaning, however, there are cases in which the interpretations determine what the speaker meant to express. Clark, then, differentiates between a *primary line* and a *collateral line* of communication (88). The primary line, he argues, deals with the joint activity in which the speakers are engaged during that moment, for example complaining or discussing politics. The collateral line is about the primary line; it manages the talk about the official activity. He claims, moreover, that questions and answers can be employed in both lines of communication. Turning now to responses in primary communication, it can be seen that they can be produced completely by gesturing. Recipients, for instance, often respond to Wh-questions about identity or location of an object by pointing at it. It follows that the gesture is sufficient as an answer and spoken language is not necessarily required as in the following constructed example (89):

(15) ADAM: ((in parking lot with Bess)) Which car is yours?

     BESS: **((points at a nearby car))**

The same holds true for yes-no questions, which can be responded to, for example, with head nods, as in the following example taken from a play by Charles Dickens, *The Strange Gentleman* (90):

(25) OVERTON: This is your letter? ((Shows it))

     GENTLEMAN: **((nods assent solemnly))**

In regard to questions, so-called *wordless questions*, which have no linguistic form, are generally established retrospectively (90). An example would be here a ringing phone, which functions as a summons for the respondents who then usually answer the phone with *yes*. This means they retrospectively interpret the ringing as a signal to either talk now or not to talk. It follows that in the *primary line* of communication speakers can ask questions and respond to them without expressing them in words. The author then turns his attention to questions and answers in collateral communication. He starts by introducing *side sequences*, in which issues of hearing and understanding are resolved (Jefferson 1972) (94). Such side sequences can be produced by using gestures that function as questions and not only by using actual spoken questions. Furthermore, questions and answers can also be produced within utterances, which are then specified as *bound sequences* (96). The difference between side sequences and bound sequences is that the latter is initiated with a wordless question. The wordless question is here constructed by adding rising intonation to a non-question phrase and thus is bound to this phrase. Consequently, they require fewer turns and are also less disruptive than side sequences. However, bound questions, which together with the recipient's response form a bound sequence, are not explicit and thus rely on the interpretation of the recipient.

Chapters six, seven, and eight focus on the prosodic structure of questions. *Jerry Sadock*, chapter six, investigates the connection between the formal and functional dimensions of questions. On this issue, Sadock/Zwicky (1985) identified a number of formal and functional connections for the English language. Questions that are formally distinct are, for example, Wh-questions, Polar Questions and Rhetorical Questions (103). After a brief discussion about *the interrogative sentence type* (104), the author now focuses on whether or not intonation can be considered a grammatical feature and what role it plays in marking questions. The data on which this study is based consists of a large amount of transcribed sound files of the TV show *The Simpsons*, which have been acquired from the internet. The pitch trace of the following examples is illustrated right after the respective instance. Starting with alternative questions, a sub-category of polar questions, the pitch pattern reveals that the contrastive element of the first part carries the highest pitch and then the pitch gradually falls with a slight rise on the second contrastive element: *Is poo-poo one word, or two?* (107). It has to be mentioned here that there can be a difference in the accentuation of alternative questions depending on how they are expressed, for example with exasperation. In

such cases, there is only a very slight lowering of pitch, compared to a much bigger one as in neutral alternative questions, between the two disjuncts. Polar disjunctive questions, in contrast, carry the highest pitch on the last word. In other words, it steadily rises throughout the expressed disjuncts: *Has science ever kissed a woman or won the Super bowl or put a man on the moon?* (107). The author then proceeds by focusing on how the connection between intonation and interrogativity can be best explained. There are two opposing positions on this issue, the *naturalist* and the *conventionalist* one respectively (111-112). Proponents of the naturalist position argue that intonation can be considered as part of human nature, such as laughter. This means that the question of which intonation pattern is linked to which effect is universally determined and not a matter of grammar. Proponents of the conventionalist position, however, claim that intonation patterns are arbitrarily linked to certain aspects of communication. It follows that intonation is part of the grammatical structure of a language. More weight seems to be given to the naturalist position, since in a great variety of different languages polar questions are expressed with rising pitch (e.g., Ohala 1983). However, the fact that the pattern is not universal across languages, for example in a number of African languages polar questions are expressed with falling pitch (Rialland 2004), points to the importance of the conventionalist position. Returning to English here, Sadock's examples showed a direct association between a certain intonation pattern and a specific interpretation. The finding that pitch can express different nuances of meaning, like exasperation, however, is highly unlikely a part of grammar. This is the case, since then there would be innumerable (and confusing) classes of questions, which could only be differentiated based on slight prosodic differences. Overall, the author concludes that the role intonation plays in the event of determining interrogative function is still left to be explained.

Chapter seven, by *Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen*, has its focus on the issue of locating recurrent intonational patterns in conversational questions. The data for this study is taken from recordings of the radio program *Brain Teaser*, which was broadcast several years ago in the UK. The corpus of questions, 231 items, was categorized as polar questions, Wh-questions, declarative questions, and tag or repeat questions. The author then analyzed what action each question instigated, starting with *Topic proffers* (125), which can be described as interrogative turns that suggest a new conversational topic. *Topic follow-ups and pursuits* (126), then, are interrogative turns that expand on a previously introduced topic. Next are *News receipts and Newsmarks* (127) that are short turn-constructional units, following an informative turn that is considered as news. Lastly, *Next-turn repair initiators* (128) are short turn-constructional units that mark the previously expressed turn, or parts of it, as problematic and invite the speaker to provide some clarification. The author then calculates the frequency of final falling and rising intonation of the interrogative turns that instigated one of the above actions. Based on the final quantitative results, the author makes the following claims about the distribution of pitch rises and pitch falls in informal questions:

(a) *There is an overall numerical preference for falls over rises in conversational questions* (129). Falling intonation outnumbers rising intonation by 55% to 45%.

(b) *Numerical preferences for falls and rises vary according to conversational activity* (130). Independent of the specific type of syntactic question, Topic prof-

fers (63%:37%) and Next-turn repair initiations (62%:38%) display a preference for rises, however, more falls were noted with Topic follow-ups and pursuits (55%:45%) as well as with News receipts and Newsmarks (65%:35%).

(c) *Within single conversational activities, numerical preferences for falls and rises vary according to syntactic question type* (130). With Topic proffers rises are preferred on polar questions (81%:19%), whereas Wh-questions exhibited more falls. A similar pattern is displayed by Topic follow-ups and pursuits. This preference for rises on polar questions is reversed for News receipts and Newsmarks. In other words, here falling pitch is predominant on polar questions (57%:43%).

(d) *Numerical preferences for falls vs. rises vary across syntactic question type* (130). Couper-Kuhlen's findings emphasize that it is impossible to automatically link rising intonation to polar questions and falling intonation to Wh-questions. In terms of declarative questions, which seem to be expressed with rising intonation, it can be noted that only when they are combined with tags, do rises predominate (65%:35%).

(e) *For single syntactic question types, numerical preferences for falls and rises vary across conversational activities* (p.131). Rising intonation in polar questions, for example, varies with activity. It is predominant on Topic proffers (81%), then on Topic follow-ups and pursuits (55%) and lastly on Newsmarks (43%). Similarly, with Wh-questions, falling intonation is predominant on Topic proffers (100%), followed by Topic follow-ups and pursuits (79%).

(f) *Numerical preferences for particular syntactic question types vary according to conversational activity* (132). Here it could be noted that speakers, for example, made use of polar questions and Wh-questions for Topic proffers and Topic follow-ups. For News receipts and Newsmarks, however, declaratives and repeats occurred more frequently.

In general, it follows from these quantitative results that it is important to first focus on the expressed action and only then on its syntactic and prosodic form. Couper-Kuhlen then proceeds to a qualitative view of the data. Again, beginning with Topic proffers, which can be expressed by polar questions, are occasionally produced with falling pitch, instead of the prevalent final rising pitch. As can be seen in example (10) (133), a topic-proffering question expressed with rising intonation has not received a response from the recipient, so a second try is made with falling intonation. The author claims that this fall indicates a higher degree of epistemic certainty that what is being proposed is also likely to be the case. Topic follow-ups and pursuits, furthermore, are also frequently expressed by polar questions in the data corpus. Similar to Topic proffers, when expressing Topic follow-up questions with falling pitch, the speaker displays a high degree of epistemic certainty about the issue under discussion. This claim gets supported in cases in which recipients do not affirm what the questioner has assumed to be the case. Here, the questioner then justifies his/her incorrect beliefs. Turning to News receipts and Newsmarks, News receipts imply that the news is registered by the recipients, but they do not promote further talk about it. This is the case, since polar News receipt questions do not express doubt about the truth of what has been stated previously, which is signaled by their falling intonation. Polar questions that function as Newsmarks, however, promote further talk and are expressed with rising pitch. This rise indicates that the truth about the news still needs to be de-

termined. Thus the prior speaker is invited by the current speaker to verify the delivered information. Finally, Next-turn repair initiations that are produced with falling intonation, then again, signal an increase in the speaker's epistemic certainty. Overall, it can be argued "that all these factors – conversational activity, syntactic type and epistemic stance – must be appealed to in order to make sense of falling and rising intonation in conversational questions" (145).

Aoju Chen, chapter eight, investigates the issue of how accent placement is determined in Dutch Wh-questions. More specifically, she addresses the question of whether accentuation necessarily encodes the focal status of the Wh-word. The study is based on ninety naturally occurring Dutch Wh-questions, which are taken from the *Spoken Dutch Corpus*. The questions were then annotated in terms of intonation and information structure. Subsequently, two different approaches on the issue of how accent placement in Wh-questions is governed by information structure, Lambrecht/Michaelis (1998) and Haan (2001), are introduced. According to Lambrecht/Michaelis (1998), whose research focuses on examples taken from English, the accent is placed on the sequence following the Wh-word. In contrast, Haan (2001), who analyzed examples in Dutch, argues that the Wh-word receives the prominent accent. It follows that constituents following the Wh-word can also get accented, however only with reduced pitch. Furthermore, in order to obtain more reliable results, Chen includes the variable of type of Wh-questions in her study, to see if it plays a role in accent placement on the Wh-word. The three types of Wh-questions that have been selected for the study's purposes were *wat* ('what'), *wanneer* ('when') and *waarom* ('why'). Turning now to the author's analysis, which also includes a discussion of the differences between the two above mentioned approaches in light of her own results, it can be seen that the Wh-word is frequently accented (74.4%). This finding suggests, however, that it is not obligatory that its focal status is realized by accentuation. In terms of the variable of question type, moreover, the main effect was that there was a greater possibility the Wh-word was accented with *waarom* ('why') questions (14.63 times more likely) than with *wat* ('what') questions. Additionally, there was no significant difference between *wanneer* ('when') and *wat* ('what') questions. Here it can be assumed that the more frequently accented Wh-word in *waarom* ('why') questions signals speakers' strong interest to obtain the information requested by the Wh-word, independent of the status of the propositions included in the sequence following the Wh-word. This claim is in contrast to the often accepted view in the literature that accent placement on the Wh-word seems to be linked to the information structure of the sequence following the Wh-word. These findings suggest that there are more determining factors in accent placement in Wh-questions than only information structure.

Chapters nine, ten, eleven, and twelve focus on the connection between questions and their social functions. In the following chapter, chapter nine, *Stanka A. Fitneva* examines children's use of questions. In psychology, the dominant view is that by asking questions, children acquire knowledge and thereby make sense of their environment (e.g., Tizard/Hughes 1984). Children's question asking, however, is not always epistemically driven, but can also serve a social function (e.g., Sinclair/van Gessel 1990). The author argues that (168)

> [a]ttention-seeking, capturing and maintaining engagement and conversation filling concern the initiation, regulation and maintenance of the relationship and interactions between speakers. They all could be seen as constituting the social function of questions.

The question that arises now is how epistemic and social questions are related. Instead of looking at questions and their respective responses as a means of advancing children's knowledge, the focus is shifted to speakers' building of shared knowledge to support their interactions with others. In this case, the notion of *common ground* is important, which describes "the totality of beliefs speakers believe they share" (Clark 1996; Clark/Marshall 1981; Lewis 1979/1991) (171). Fitneva then provides evidence from a developmental perspective that emphasizes the view that supporting interaction and building common ground are the main functions of questions. Already, before being able to provide meaningful answers, children try to participate in conversations, which enables them to maintain interaction. Therefore, it seems that they connect talk to the regulation of behavior. In general, it can be concluded that acknowledging the relationship between social and epistemic uses of questions is central to understand how children learn through communication. As the author puts it, "their use and understanding of questions is determined by the interrelated problems of managing their relations with others and building shared understanding" (178).

John Heritage and *Geoffrey Raymond*, chapter ten, analyze responses to polar questions in English. The authors begin by re-introducing Sacks' (1987) claims that polar questions invite agreeing responses and that such responses are usually produced without, or with only little, silence between the question and answer pair. In this context, the concept of an *epistemic gradient* is established (180). In general, by asking a question, the speaker positions himself/herself as lacking certain knowledge. This is referred to by the authors as a *'K-' position*. Simultaneously, it implies that the addressee possesses the required information. It follows that the addressee is knowledgeable, which is referred to as a *'K+' position*. Questioning thus brings into play this epistemic gradient between interlocutors, which then makes a response to the question relevant. The speaker, then, after having received and accepted an answer, moves from a 'K-' to a 'K+' position, which he/she should indicate with an acknowledging response. Here it is important to mention, however, that dependent on the specific question design, different degrees of lacking information can be displayed. Heritage and Raymond give the following example questions (180):

(1) *Who did you talk to?*

(2) *Did you talk to John?*

(3) *You talked to John, didn't you?*

(4) *You talked to John?*

These questions express differing claims to pre-existing knowledge by the speaker. Whereas the first question does not claim any knowledge, the fourth one conveys a possible answer, thereby claiming some degree of certainty on the issue. Turning to polar questions, they require recipients to either affirm or reject the question's proposition. In other words, they acknowledge the epistemic rights of recipients, but they also, simultaneously, restrict these rights. Respondents,

then, can either comply with or resist these constraints. Following, the authors continue by comparing affirmative yes-no and repetitional responses to polar questions, whereby yes-no responses occur most frequently (Raymond 2003; Stivers 2011). According to Raymond (2003), such yes-no responses are called *type-conforming*, since they are predominantly produced as answers to polar questions and that departures from this pattern are done for certain interactional purposes. In addition, he noted that such departures have different sequential consequences. Generally, type-conforming yes-no responses can stand alone or they can occur in turn-initial position with further components added (compare *Ye:s* to *Yes I've got them*, 182). Heritage and Raymond, however, then present an example, in which a speaker provides an elaborate *non-conforming response* to a polar question, instead of responding with yes or no, which elicits a response (line 3) and further acknowledgement (line 5) from the recipient, before she continues with her questions (183):

(5) (5A1:9) [abbreviated]

HV: Has he got plenty of wo:rk on,

M: He works for a university college.

HV: O::::h.

M: So: (.) he's in full-time work all the ti:me.

HV: Yeh.

Repetitional responses, in contrast, confirm rather than affirm the proposition, which is raised by the questioner. Consequently, the respondent claims greater epistemic rights over the required information than are actually granted by polar questions (e.g., Schegloff 1996; Raymond 2003). This is the case, since repetitional responses are less indexically dependent on the respective questions than are yes-no responses. It follows that, overall, type-conforming yes-no and repetitional responses differ in the extent to which they exert agency in relation to the terms of the original polar questions.

In chapter eleven, by *N. J. Enfield, Penelope Brown* and *Jan P. de Ruiter*, the authors comparatively investigate sentence-final particles (SFP) in polar questions. The three languages and cultures in focus here are Dutch, Lao, and Tzeltal Mayan. In general, by producing a polar question, a speaker refers to a proposition and, simultaneously, exhibits a lack of knowledge about the truth of the proposition. An example would be *Is it still snowing outside?*, which includes the proposition *It's still snowing outside* (195). A common communicative function of a question, then, is to ask the recipient to express whether the proposition is true or false. To return to the focus of the chapter, polar questions can be marked, for example, by SFPs. Such particles are attached to the end of a proposition as in *You take cream in your coffee, do you?* (196). Since the question marker is expressed after a complete assertion, one could propose that the function of SFPs is to change a statement into a question. However, statements can function as questions without any explicit marking, thus the issue arises of how exactly their role can be explained. The authors begin their comparative analysis by looking at two SFPs in Dutch, spoken in the Netherlands, Surinam and in parts of Belgium, which are *hè*

('wouldn't you say?') and *toch* ('isn't that right?'). The data consists of a corpus of naturally occurring Dutch telephone conversations between friends, living-room conversations between student housemates, and face-to-face conversations between hairstylists and their clients. It could be observed that *hè* ('wouldn't you say?') functions to solicit agreement and thus favors a confirming response. In cases in which a non-confirming response follows this SFP, the response either includes an account or is delayed. The SFP *toch* ('isn't that right?') also solicits agreement and prefers a confirming response. The agreement, however, is here more about facts rather than about stances or opinions. A rejection of a statement to which this SFP is attached indicates a lack of shared understanding or *common ground* (Clark/Marshall 1981) (201). What follows is a brief discussion about four SFPs in Lao, spoken in Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia (Enfield 2007). The four interrogative particles in question are (204):

- bòò3 (meaning: I want to know if p is the case),

- vaa3 (meaning: I want to know if p is the case; I'd say it is, based on current evidence),

- tii4 (meaning: Maybe NOT-p is the case, I don't know; I'd say p is the case, based on independent evidence)

- nòq1 (meaning: I'm saying p is the case; I think you'd say this as well).

The data for the study is based on videotaped everyday interactions between men and women, which were recorded in village and home settings around Vientiane, Laos. Beginning with *bòò3* (meaning: *I want to know if p is the case*), it could be seen that by using this SFP it transforms a statement into a polar question. The other three interrogative particles, in contrast, add further semantic content to the interrogative meaning. The particle *vaa3* (meaning: *I want to know if p is the case; I'd say it is, based on current evidence*), for example, enables a speaker to communicate that the proposition of the polar question is inferred and that conformation is needed. In addition, 'yes' is here the expected recipient's answer. The SFP *tii4* (meaning: *Maybe NOT-p is the case, I don't know; I'd say p is the case, based on independent evidence*) is not as frequently used. It conveys that the speaker has the expectation that a certain presupposition is true, but requires confirmation. It specifies, furthermore, that this expectation is based on independent information. Finally, the SFP *nòq1* (meaning: *I'm saying p is the case; I think you'd say this as well*) is used for requesting agreement that a previously expressed assessment is shared. Another function this particle has is to mobilize a response (Stivers/Rossano 2010). In cases in which a speaker does not get a response from the recipient, *nòq1* can be incremented to secure agreement. The subsequent section deals with five SFPs in the Mayan language Tzeltal, which is spoken in southern Mexico. The data for the following analysis is drawn from a corpus of videotaped naturally occurring conversations between men and women in Chiapas, Mexico. The five particles this study is based on are *bi* ('what?, is it?'), *ma(k)* ('maybe'), *ch'e* ('oh!?'), *xkal* ('I wonder'), *xa'wal* ('you'd say') (211). The SFP *bi* ('what?, is it?') is roughly equivalent to an English tag question marker. A confirming response to polar questions including this particle is preferred. Generally, such utterances check that the prior speaker really meant what he/she had previously expressed. Turning now to *ma(k)* ('maybe'), the use of this SFP hedges

the speaker's commitment to the veracity of a proposition. A confirming answer is again the preferred responsive action to an utterance that is marked by this particle. The SFP *ch'e* ('oh!?') signals that the expressed proposition is news to the speaker and the recipient is in the position to confirm its accuracy. Confirmation is the preferred response. The function of the SFP *xkal* ('I wonder') is to suggest or propose about some event, about which the speaker is unsure, whereby he/she does not expect that the addressee knows more either. The preferred response is here for the addressee to convey his/her stance concerning the expressed proposition. *Xa'wal* ('you'd say'), ultimately, is a SFP that, like *xkal* ('I wonder'), asks for confirmation, however more forcefully, from the addressee about an expressed event. It is expected that the addressee should have an opinion on the issue, since it is within the addressee's domain of knowledge. In conclusion, each marker has its own specified semantic content. This meaning, however, can be modified by the respective pragmatic context, which enhances the difference of the speaker's and addressee's commitment to the expressed proposition.

Chapter twelve, by *Mia Halonen* and *Marja-Leena Sorjonen*, serves as a contribution to the general issue on the functions of Wh-questions in Finnish interactions. These interrogatives are employed as responses to reports about non-present persons. They include the question word *miten* ('how'), which requires an account for what the recipient has just talked about. Additionally, they contain a phrase modified by the intensifier *nii(n)* ('so', 'that' or 'as'), which includes a scalar presupposition that is perceived as reporting and foregrounding an exaggerated scalar property. By requesting an account for the reported events, this interrogative, simultaneously, conveys its speaker's evaluation of the information. Thus the interrogative makes an aligning response relevant that affiliates with the speaker's stance, as well as inviting the recipient to provide a reason for the expressed action. Such interrogatives can also occur in reported speech. Here, the *miten* interrogative can be produced as part of a report about what somebody else has said. In such cases, it is rhetorically used to emphasize a moral stance. In general, while producing their responses, recipients orient to the multi-functional properties of Wh-interrogatives, which enable speakers to steer away from the main conversational topic.

3. Critical Evaluation

This edited volume is an impressive contribution to the research on questions. The individual chapters are in principal clearly written and argued based on thorough research. The individual authors, editor, and publisher deserve a note of thanks, in particular, for the addition of interspersed figures and tables summarizing the important findings in most of the chapters. Such illustrations undoubtedly serve as a helpful guide for the reader. A limitation in some chapters, however, is that for a reader unfamiliar with quantitative analysis, some of the analytical models used are not clearly enough explained for the benefit of non-specialists (this is especially the case with Chen's chapter). Those engaged in more qualitative research may find some chapters difficult to digest.

One of the virtues of the book is its multidisciplinary approach. These original studies from linguistics, anthropology, psychology, and conversation analysis offer a wide variety of different perspectives on the issue of questions. The contri-

butions focusing on different cultures and languages (for example chapters by Enfield, Brown and de Ruiter; and Halonen and Sorjonen) add to the variety of the research presented in this book, suggesting interesting points of comparison. A further asset is the incorporation of embodied uses of information-seeking functions (see chapters by Stivers and Rossano; and Clark), which exhibit remarkable similarities to the function of linguistically expressed questions. Moreover the division of the twelve chapters into thematic groups focusing on form and functional aspects of questions, prosodic aspects of questions, and social aspects of questioning structures the different contributions also in terms of their common theme, thereby, again, suggesting the richness of research across the disciplines on this important issue. In addition, the focus, as much as possible, on data corpora that draw primarily from naturally occurring language is beneficial to the understanding of what questions do, and how they do what they do.

In light of these evaluations, it would have been valuable had the editor included studies on different kinds of questions, such as ironical or rhetorical questions, which do not express a request for information, in order to illustrate the variety of the functions of questions. Furthermore, the addition of studies that focus on questioning in different environments, such as in classrooms, courtrooms or bureaucratic settings, would have contributed to the variety of research, especially from the institutional standpoint. Even though embodied signals, which can serve information-seeking functions, are addressed, a more elaborate analysis of what role such embodied actions can play would have been constructive. The functions of such actions, such as facial expressions, gestures, and body alignment, can accompany the verbal expressions of questions and thus add further meaningful action. What also would have benefitted the volume, in addition to Fitneva's chapter on *questions and children's learning*, is some attention to questions in different populations, such as victims of aphasia and strokes or non-native speakers of certain languages (some brief insights about Dutch speakers in terms of second languages are addressed in Enfield, Brown and de Ruiter's chapter).

In spite of these critical remarks, this volume presents a rigorously researched and insightful collection on the issue of formal, functional, and interactional perspectives on questions, which will be of great use across a number of disciplines and will surely become indispensable reading for those working on the issue.

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