

**“I didn’t write the questions!”:
Telephone interviewers as mediators
between survey designers and
respondents**

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Where most households have telephones, knowledge of population issues is increasingly gathered through telephone surveys. Through structured interviews, respondents are asked questions designed by researchers and delivered by trained interviewers. Conducting structured interviews in a standardised way is the basis for the measurement and statistical analysis of survey data (Fowler and Mangione 1990:14). The assumption of survey researchers has been that fully scripted identical questions, delivered exactly as worded by well-trained interviewers, will result in reliable and valid responses. Survey methodologists have always acknowledged that standardisation is tricky (Maynard and Schaeffer 2002). However, recent work on interaction in interviews casts further doubt on standardized interviews as a means of measurement in the social sciences (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000; Maynard, Houtkoop-Steenstra *et al.* 2002; Suchman and Jordan 1990). Despite the importance of surveys in demographic data collection, demographers have largely ignored both the role of interaction in their data collection—quantitative and qualitative—and the effect of interactional factors on the data outcome.¹

This chapter examines how demographic interview data are collected. It examines the way in which one interviewer, Annie,² and 25 respondents in Australia's *Negotiating the Life Course* (NLC) survey negotiated responses to questions about having children. The NLC survey, originating from the Research School of Social Sciences of the Australian National University, is a longitudinal telephone survey collecting information on how Australians manage their work and family lives. The first two waves of the NLC survey were conducted in 1996–7 and 2000. A third wave is projected for mid-2003. For the purposes of this study, a smaller telephone survey was conducted, using a small number of the questions about children asked in the NLC survey. The smaller survey is referred to here as the *Women on Children* (WOC) survey. In addition, face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with some respondents. The telephone interviews have been transcribed using the conventions of Conversation Analysis (CA) (Gardner 1994; Jefferson 1984; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) outlined in the Appendix.. The

¹ The work of Schaeffer (1991), Schaeffer and Maynard (1996), Schaeffer, Maynard and Cradock (1993), and Schaeffer and Thompson (1992) is an important exception.

² Annie is a pseudonym. Similarly, all respondents, their partners and children have been given pseudonyms.

detailed transcription system used by conversation analysts provides a ‘powerful lens’ (Moerman 1988) through which to view the interaction between interview participants.

This chapter first addresses the issue of interviews as a mediated interaction, discussing the concepts of frame, footing and participant roles in survey interviews. The CA concept of ‘trouble’ in interaction is introduced and applied to NLC interview data in an examination of the way in which the responses to one survey question are negotiated. Responses for both NLC and WOC are available, but interaction was only recorded for the WOC survey.

Interviews as a mediated three-way interaction

Telephone surveys involve three parties: the interviewer, the respondent and the often absent researcher whose interests are reflected in the questions asked (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000).³ The interview as a three-way interaction between three elements—interviewer, respondent and the questionnaire—is discussed by Schaeffer (1991). The questionnaire, pre-determined and scripted by the researcher, is not a neutral force (Goody 1978; Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000); rather, it is an active force to be taken into account in the interaction. The interviewer and respondents at times refer to the question or the writer of the question as a third participant in the interviews. This is clear, for example, in the following excerpt from the WOC interview between Annie and Jess, where Annie distances herself from the question when problems arise:

Excerpt 1 Jess

199. Jess: mm it's couched in such- it's- it's very- i mean i hate- i
200. don't mean to be rude but the .hh [the w-
201. Int: [i didn't write the questions

[MMPH#9:199–201]

³ Maynard *et al.* (2002) summarise the discussion of this issue.

Frames, footing and participant roles in survey interviews

Discussion of the way in which interviewers mediate between researchers who design questions and respondents who answer them necessitates discussion of the notion of frame. Various terms and concepts related to ‘frames’ are used by scholars from a range of disciplines. Fisher (1997) argues that the term is used to refer to a variety of disjointed and incompatible concepts. In Fisher’s view, frames should be defined as semi-structured elements of discourse which people use to make sense of the information they encounter.

Goffman’s (1974, 1981) work develops the notion of interpretive ‘frame’ in the sense of the ‘alignments’ that people adopt in face-to-face interaction. That is, people use interpretive frames to interpret what they are *doing* when they talk to each other. Are they joking, lecturing, or arguing? Is it a fight or is it play? Tannen (1993:15–16) notes that the term ‘frame’ is used also in the sense of ‘schema’ or ‘structures of expectation’ associated with situations, objects and people. She uses an interactive notion of frame that refers to ‘a sense of what activity is being engaged in, how speakers mean what they say’ in interaction (Tannen 1993:60). Related to ‘frame’ is ‘footing’, a term introduced by Goffman (1981) to refer to a change in our frame for events. Goffman (1981:157) notes that ‘linguistics provides us with the cues and markers through which such footings become manifest, helping us to find our way to a structural basis for analyzing them’. Goffman (1981:137) also introduces the concept of ‘participation frameworks’, whereby ‘participants have a ‘participation status’ relative to the words spoken, and ‘all participants...are part of the participation framework for that moment of speech’.

Yet another concept involving frames is the concept of ‘frame of reference’. This concept is the one usually used in relation to questions (Foddy 1993:76–89; Kahn and Cannell 1957:113ff). Kahn and Cannell note that survey researchers want to control the frame of reference in an interview; that is, they want to be sure that the frame of reference of the question coincides with the personal frame of reference that the respondent uses to answer it. It is also considered very important to ensure that all respondents are answering the question using the same frame of reference so that their responses are comparable. Techniques for controlling the frame of reference include learning the

respondent's frame, indicating a specific frame and selecting a common frame (Kahn and Cannell 1957:113ff). Foddy (1993:76) notes the term 'response frameworks', defining the decisions respondents make in answering questions, as being similar to the idea of 'perspective'. The underlying insight is that it is possible for respondents to respond to topics in very many different ways. Thus, it is quite possible for the frame of the respondent to differ from the frame of the survey researcher.

Beike and Sherman (1998) examined framing of comparisons in questions. They found that several factors affected the way in which a question item was interpreted: order of items; context in which an item appeared; language used to express the question; type of response scale; and manner in which respondent is asked to consider the question (Beike and Sherman 1998:161).

Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:58–60) refers to the survey interview as a 'complex interactive frame' where a multiplicity of types of interaction can occur: interviewer–respondent, interviewer–questionnaire (representing the researcher), interviewer–computer monitor, and interviewer–keyboard. Survey interaction consists of

a number of embedded or alternative interactive frames. This holds especially true for the interviewer. While in most cases the respondent interacts with the interviewer only, the interviewer interacts with more parties than just the respondent (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:58).

In this sense the concept of frame is related to the notion of participant roles (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:60–1), where the interviewer and respondent play a number of roles in the survey interview. These roles are sometimes interchangeable, and include asking and answering questions, relaying the information from the researcher about the meaning of a question, and being responsible for keeping a respondent in the survey for a future interview. Ensuring the respondents' participation in future waves of the NLC survey was an important consideration in the WOC interviews. This chapter uses the term 'frame' in the sense mentioned by Kahn and Cannell (1957:113ff) in relation to question frames of reference and also in the broader sense of a 'complex interactive frame', as explicated by Houtkoop-Steenstra.

Frames are explicated in the type of talk that occurs in survey interviews. The frame of the survey designer is represented in the questions asked by the interviewer. NLC and WOC survey questions were designed to be asked in a standardised way so that numerical outcomes could be analysed using statistical techniques that assumed standardised input. When a question is asked, the researcher implicitly expects the respondent to frame her response in a way that is congruent with the frame used in the question. The important underlying issue for researchers is whether they can be certain that respondents have understood the question in the way that was intended.

Trouble in interaction and its measurement

This section explores the CA concept of troubled and untroubled interaction, and the use of the number of turns taken to negotiate a response to a question as a possible indicator of trouble in negotiating a response. Following Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:109), the term ‘response’ refers to the level of the written interview schedule. Thus, a ‘response’ matches predetermined response options or response categories provided on the interview schedule. ‘Answer’, on the other hand, refers to what respondents said in responding to the question, that is, at the verbal interaction level. It may take considerable negotiation to move from an ‘answer’ to a ‘response’.

For conversation analysts, the concept of ‘trouble’ in interaction is fundamental. Where interaction proceeds smoothly, without ‘trouble’, turns between speakers occur with no gap and no overlap (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974), and work does not have to be done by the participants to repair problems in the interaction. In ‘troubled’ interaction, however, repair work is evident. Participants repair problems so that interaction can proceed; or, if they do not, the problems can result in a more serious breakdown. Sometimes, although interaction is extended, for example by clarification or requests for repetition, this does not jeopardise the agreement on a numerical outcome, and interviewer and respondent are clearly satisfied with the outcome of their negotiation.

The existence of ‘trouble’ in interaction can sometimes indicate that the frames of respondent and interviewer are different. Detailed transcription of the interaction can reveal the nature of the trouble and whether it is resolved or not. However, it is important

to note that even when interaction is untroubled or unproblematic, it is possible that the frames of the interviewer and the respondent may differ. In that case, the trouble is simply not transparent and survey analysts then assume that the interpretation of the respondent mirrors that of the designer of the question, whether this is in fact the case or not.

Rather than ignoring ‘trouble’, researchers could examine troubled interaction to learn more about the way in which a question is interpreted by different respondents. The interaction with so-called ‘difficult’ respondents—those whose interviews are troublesome—can be very useful in providing clues to differences in interpretation. Where the interaction is not transparent through transcription, or where the respondent does not seek clarification or repetition or enter into dialogue with the interviewer before giving a response, it is unclear whether the way the respondent interprets the question is the way that the researcher intended. Without detailed transcription, differences in interpretation are not visible because researchers have available to them only the numerical outcome or achieved response option, without access to the interaction. The response option is assumed to represent the respondent’s answer.

When examining interaction in survey interviews, the way in which these sequences are played out reveals a great deal about the extent to which numerical responses are negotiated and agreed between the participants. This chapter examines trouble in interaction. The following analysis categorises interaction as follows: minimal and trouble-free, non-minimal (or extended) but trouble-free; and non-minimal and troubled.

A series of question–answer sequences or ‘adjacency pairs’ forms the basis of interviews (Maynard and Schaeffer 2002:19; Schegloff and Sacks 1973:295). In theory, the most basic interaction sequence in an interview is a paired question–answer sequence, with the interviewer’s question being answered directly by the respondent, with no gap. The number of turns that it takes to negotiate a response is an indicator of whether an interaction is extended or minimal. The following example shows how a minimal and ‘trouble-free’ question–answer sequence proceeds:

Excerpt 2

42. Interviewer: a:nd are you currently pregnant?
43. Annegret: no.

[MMPH#1:42–43]

Often, the interviewer follows up the respondent's answer in one of several ways: with an 'acknowledgement token' such as 'okay' or 'yeah' (Jefferson 1984; Schegloff 1982), repetition of the answer, or an assessment of the answer, such as 'good'. This third interviewer-turn thus extends the basic two-part sequence to a three-part sequence. The following excerpt demonstrates the interviewer's use of a sequence-closing third (SCT), 'oh', to complete the question–answer sequence:

Excerpt 3

47. Int: and why is it unlikely that you will have
48. a child.
49. Beverly: because i'm fifty?
50. Int: oh.

[MMPH#25:47–50]

Here, the interaction is clearly not troubled and the frame of the researcher appears to pose no problem for the respondent. Annie's 'oh' (line 50) completes the question–answer sequence and allows the interviewer to move on to the next question. Survey researchers refer to such turns as feedback (Maynard and Schaeffer 2002:17). Frequently, however, interaction is extended by many turns before the question can be resolved by a response. Later in the chapter instances of extended and troubled interaction will be explored in more detail.

The following section analyses interviewer–respondent interaction on one question, focusing in particular on troubled interaction with so-called 'difficult' respondents in order to shed more light on the way in which interviewers mediate between respondent and survey researcher to obtain responses.

Interview data

The analysis in this chapter focuses on the interaction between respondents and the interviewer on Question 167 in the WOC survey. This question asks about the factors that determined the respondent's first birth. If the respondent was pregnant with her first child, the question asked about the factors determining the pregnancy. If the respondent had not had a child, the question asked a hypothetical question about the factors that would determine when or if she might have a child. The question and allowed response options are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Question 167, *Negotiating the Life Course* and *Women on Children* surveys

Q167: (If Q154=0 and Q164=not 1):	What will determine when or if you have your first child?
(If Q154=0 and Q164=1):	What determined the timing of this pregnancy?
(If Q154=not 0):	What determined the timing of your first child?
Prompt for two reasons (Any other reasons?)	
I have to get a partner first	01
Convincing my partner that it's a good idea	02
It will happen when it happens	03
Unplanned, it just happened	04
Failure of contraception/family planning method	05
Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage	06
Being established in my career	07
My partner being established in their career	08
Having enough money to buy a house	09
Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child	10
My relationship with my partner being well-established	11
After having time to enjoy myself before settling down	12
When I/we feel/felt right about it	13
Feeling financially secure	14
Other (specify)	15

Source: NLC 1997 interview schedule

Question 167 is a field-coded question (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:4–5, 107–127), sometimes known as a semi-open question (Smit 1995:117). To respondents, a field-coded question appears to be an open question that they can answer in their own way. The question does not suggest a frame for the answer because response options are

hidden from the respondent. The interviewer, on the other hand, has in front of her a list of allowable response options; in effect, for the interviewer it is a closed question, with ‘forced choice’ responses (de Vaus 1995:86; Foddy 1993:135; Oppenheim 1966:44–45). Sudman and Bradburn (1982:294) warn against using field-coded questions:

Field coding should be avoided unless the interviewer records the verbatim response as well, so that the field coding can be checked when the questionnaire is processed.

The respondent’s answer, then, has to be translated and formatted (coded) by the interviewer into one of the allowable response options (Fowler and Mangione 1990:88). Thus, the field-coded design of Q167 adds a task for the interviewer: matching the response options provided by the researcher with the respondent’s answer. This is more difficult when the respondent does not have the clues provided by the response options to guide her expectation of how she should answer. De Vaus (1995:95) notes the limits placed on providing complete information on response options in questions:

The reliance on [the] respondent’s retaining all the spoken information in the question places real limits on how much information can be packed into one question. If *too many response categories* are included in the question, there is a danger that the respondent will arbitrarily select one.

It is common for field-coded questions to have a category ‘Other’, perhaps partly because of this disjuncture between respondent and interviewer awareness of allowed responses.

Research has confirmed that using field-coded questions has some pitfalls (Foddy 1993; Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000; Oppenheim 1966; Smit 1995; Smit, Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1997; Sudman and Bradburn 1982). Fowler and Mangione (1990:88–9) and Oppenheim (1966:44–6) warn against using field-coded questions because they cause ‘considerable bias and loss of information’. Oppenheim (1966:45–6) observes: ‘The question is not how we can avoid loss of information, but rather at what point we can best afford to lose information’. Without recording and analysing the interaction on any question, including field-coded questions, it is difficult to determine how well interviewers succeed in obtaining the information intended by the survey designer and where information might be lost. It seems that in the case of field-coded questions in particular interviewers are very frequently required to take a mediating role (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:Ch. 6; Smit 1995; Smit, Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1997).

Despite their pitfalls, field-coded questions are very common in surveys. It may be that field-coded questions are used in telephone surveys when the list of possible responses makes the question too long to be easily read out over the telephone. In one important source of demographic data, the Demographic and Health Surveys, conducted worldwide from the 1980s, field-coded questions are frequently used. Since data problems are frequently reported with these surveys, examination of interaction on the questions used might provide some insights.

Troubled interaction in the *Women on Children (WOC)* interviews

In Question 167, the researcher has established a clear frame for categorising responses, based on earlier experience of surveys asking about this issue (Australian Family Project 1986; Australian Family Survey 1971; Melbourne Survey Group 1979). This frame is reflected in the response options for the question, available to the interviewer but not the respondent. In theory, then, the interviewer should be able to obtain quick answers from respondents. In many of the WOC interviews, however, the interaction over Question 167 was considerably extended. Some kind of trouble had to be resolved before the respondent could answer the question. The theoretical minimum is two turns: the interviewer asks the question; the respondent gives an answer in terms of a response option. Because the interviewer is expected to show two reasons, the interaction is usually longer than the minimum. Table 1 shows the distribution of numbers of turns to complete Question 167 for the WOC respondents.

Table 1: Interaction between interviewer and WOC respondents over Question 167

Estimated no. of turns	Respondent
4	Nadia
5	Andrea
6	Ricky
9	Coral, Lyn
10	Karen, Melinda
11	Jess, Tina
12	Carol, Debra
13	Annegret, Edith
14	Jenny
15	Kerry, Lindy, Noelle
16	Liz, Merilyn, Tonia, Sonya
17	Helen
18	Kristen
21	Joanne
22	Dale

Source: WOC 1998 interview transcripts

The interaction for all 25 was extended. All 25 interviews experienced some trouble in the interaction. No interactions were minimal and none was trouble free. The main source of trouble was that the respondent's first answer did not fit any response option. To resolve this difficulty and negotiate an answer in the form of a response option took between four and 22 turns for Q167.

Table 2 shows the response options and outcomes for this question for the 25 WOC respondents.

When Edith queries ‘what determined?’ (line 126), the interviewer abandons the scripted question in favour of a yes–no question based on one of the response options. Two other respondents, Kristen and Noelle, asked for repetition of the question. It may be that the concept of determining timing caused them some difficulty; in addition, the wording is rather more formal than the language likely to be used by most women in daily conversation. ‘Determine’ is a word favoured by social scientists in their quest for ascertaining cause and effect. In daily conversation women would be less likely to use a formal term such as ‘determine’ and more likely to ask something like: ‘Why did you have your first baby when you did?’ or ‘What made you have children?’ The interviewer takes on a mediating role, translating the more academic term into an example using one of the response options. This kind of interviewer rephrasing is evident also in other WOC questions.

The interview with Nadia was the most straightforward of all the WOC interviews, taking the minimum number of turns (four turns) to complete the question:

Excerpt 5 Nadia (04; 04)⁴

81. Interviewer: ↑UM (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
82. (2.0)
83. Nadia: accident.
84. Int: ^oaccident.^o (1.0) was it a failure of contraceptives?
85. (3.0)
86. Nadia: no. not really. just (carelessness) huh huh
87. Interviewer: and (.) um (.) i’m going to read out some
88. statements about children

[MMPH#21:81–88]

Although two rather long pauses of two and three seconds occur after Annie’s direct questions, Nadia then gives her answers directly, with no hesitation, false starts, or indications of problems. The pauses may indicate that the answer is problematic—in a social sense—rather than the question. Annie probes using the wording of response option (05) *Failure of contraception, family planning method* and receives a clear

⁴ The responses given by each respondent for the Wave 1 NLC and the WOC survey are shown in parentheses after the respondent’s name for each interview excerpt. Thus, Nadia gave the response (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* for both surveys.

negative answer followed by laughter: ‘no. not really. just (carelessness) huh huh’. Nadia’s answer ‘accident.’ seems to make it redundant for Annie to probe for further reasons apart from the (05) option. All response options other than (05) involve planning or pre-meditation of some kind and appear to be contradictory to the concept of ‘accident’, or do not apply to those respondents, like Nadia, who are asked variant (c) of the question. On the interview schedule Annie circled (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. She did not probe further. In other interviews, however, Annie probed for further reasons when she obtained only one response. Not seeking further determining factors, then, is the main reason for the shortness of this interaction.

Only one respondent of the 25, Annegret, gave an answer that used one of the topic words of a response option—‘career’:

Excerpt 6 Annegret (07, 11; 02, 07, 13)

63. Int: and what determined the timing of your first child?
64. (2.3)
65. Annegret: ↑u::mhhh (2.0) i- hh my um (.) career had >sort’ve<
66. reached a point where i felt (.) i could- (.) take a-
67. (.) break, i guess,
68. Int: ↓sure, so you felt established.
69. Annegret: a- an- and um (.) my husband was (.) finally ready.
70. huh huh huh huh [·hhh so, um yes (°sort of°),
71. Int: [oi:: see::,
72. Int: (so let’s just see) (0.6) ·hh there is one here which
73. says- i’ve got a whole list of (.) um possible (.) um
74. reasons, and one of them is °convincing my partner it was
75. a good idea(h).°
76. Annegret: \$yeah hh yeah that’s one of them\$ huh huh huh
77. [huh hhh
78. Int: [\$o(h)k(h)ay uhm i don’t want to put words in your
79. mouth,\$
80. Annegret: huh huh [·hhh hhh]
81. Int: [oka:y] and was it also that your
82. relationship was established and (.) you felt like
83. (.)°it was (.)it was time° to (just),
84. Annegret: ↑um ·hhhh (1.0) o::h no:: >i mean< we- we’ve had a
85. (.) very long relationship, so i don’t think that
86. sort of really came into [it=
87. Int: [right.
88. Annegret: =it was just a matter of (.) that we were both ready.
89. Int: ·hhh
90. (4.0)

91. Int: a::nd how many children ((next question))

[MMPH#1:63–91]

The interaction with Annegret is one of the least troublesome for Annie. The interaction yields two responses quite quickly and with little probing. Although the question takes 14 turns to complete, this is mainly because Annie goes on to probe, unnecessarily, for a third reason (line 81ff). On the interview schedule Annie circled three response options: (02) *Convincing my partner that it's a good idea*, (07) *Being established in my career*, and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*.

Annie formulates Annegret's answer using the words of response option (07): '↓sure, so you felt established.' Annegret signals tacit agreement by moving on with no pause to provide a second reason: 'a- an- and um (.) my husband was (.) finally ready. huh huh huh hhh so, um yes (°sort of°),' The mention of her husband allows Annie the possibility of linking Annegret's answer with response option (2) *Convincing my partner that it's a good idea*. Annie then explicitly acknowledges that she has a list of response options and mentions this option. Annegret laughingly agrees. Annie checks again and makes the point explicitly that she does not want to put words into Annegret's mouth. Using the words of a response option as a probe has proved a successful strategy for Annie; it has resulted in a speedy outcome by providing an alternative to the respondent's own words. In the interaction to this point (line 81) the negotiation of two reasons has been relatively smooth. The negotiation of the third reason—not required for the survey—causes more trouble in Annegret's interview. In NLC Wave 1 the two response options recorded for Annegret were (07) *Being established in my career* and (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established*. Annie rejects response option (11) here (lines 84–6). Her answer in line 88 appears to be translated into response option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. This is not confirmed or rejected by Annegret but is entered by Annie as a response on the interview schedule. The researcher analysing the responses would not have access to information on the order in which responses were achieved or recorded. The two responses chosen for analysis would not necessarily be those given first.

In the face-to-face in-depth interview with Annegret on the day following the WOC survey interview, I asked Annegret about this question. Her reaction to the question was as follows:⁵

Annegret: o yeah it probably was- it was just the way it was written. I mean the way the questions were posed were really leading questions in many ways anyway so then you ask a question that it's very hard to pick the answer and then you have to prompt the answers and then you know...

Marian: and the way you prompt can then-⁶

Annegret: yeah well that was that actually happened last night with the- or whenever it was that the girl rang me yesterday uhm why I chose to have a child and you know I just said something like uhm you know well basically we were ready for it so she was trying to prompt me to get- she obviously had some other things so she said 'oh was it- was it that you were you know- you were happy with your relationship?' and I thought why is she asking that? I said 'no actually as a matter of fact it had nothing to do with it' but you know you could just see that people- people would grab at that and say oh yeah that probably was the- you know- and you- if you were in a hurry or you didn't particularly want to be asked the questions or whatever you could easily end up with not quite the right answers to some of those things...I mean it's harder to do the analysis if you just have a- you know a blank- a blank line and say you just write what someone said but I think you actually end up with lots more valid results when you're codifying something like that... you get more

Later...

Marian: so like there was that question about having a first child and like how did that come about what determined it and you were saying before that you- that you'd decided like you were going to have your family very soon straight away

Annegret: yeah well we- we- i mean- we'd been married for a long time and uhm i mean- we'd always intended to have children it was like just a question of sort of being ready to have children uhm and we sort of said oh yeah but one day you know

Marian: yeah

Annegret: anyway eventually we agreed that it was about the right time and uhm i'd been off the pill about six months and so then practically the first thing i actually got pregnant so it was it was sort of uhm it was just a good time in in my career to uhm take the time and Brian was- knew it'd be a lot of hard work and we

⁵ For reasons of space and transcription time and because the in-depth interviews are a secondary source of data, the in-depth interviews have been 'roughly' transcribed; that is, CA symbols have not been used but the transcription is of the detail that would normally be included in qualitative research in any discipline (Briggs 1986). The focus is not on the interaction, though it is acknowledged that this is just as important in in-depth or unstructured interviews (Briggs 1986; Cicourel 1974; Mazeland and ten Have 1998); the purpose is to compare what the respondent says on two occasions. This transcription is limited compared with the detail revealed in a CA transcription.

⁶ The type of probe also affects interaction in in-depth interviews. However, this topic is not pursued here.

91. Int: [o:::h.
 92. Int: so you'd actually got to the point where you
 93. felt right about it=>(sort of/things) you know< like-
 94. you were established in your relationship and
 95. [()
 96. Karen: [yeah. o::h definitely. [definitely.
 97. Int: [yeah? well we'll put that down
 98. too then. (0.6) u:m (1.3) t! (1.0) yep (.) ·hh ↑and ↑a:h

[MMP#19:78-98]

Karen's 'accident.' is eventually reframed and recorded as (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*, the only response option circled for this question. Annie probes, giving Karen a choice of three options, the first two of which did not apply: 'was it actuall(h)y- hh was it a failure? of contraception? or family planning method? or just unplanned.' (lines 83-5). The word 'unplanned' is used first by Annie and then confirmed by Karen. Karen's answer implies that the timing was unplanned but the birth itself was planned. Because it is asked as a yes-no question, this probe is directive and suggestive to the respondent of how she should answer. For Annie it is a pragmatic solution to her difficulty of obtaining a response option that fits the frame of the question.

Karen's story suggests far more detail and complexity than can possibly be captured by response option (04). Annie puts up a candidate answer (lines 92-5): 'so you'd actually got to the point where you felt right about it=>(sort of/things) you know< like- you were established in your relationship and ()'. This answer is formulated in terms of two response options, (11) and (13), and presented together as one yes-no question. Again, Annie has infringed the interviewer's rule of probing only in a neutral way. This seems to have led to her circling options (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. Both these options give the impression that this was what 'determined' timing, but neither comes spontaneously from Karen. Karen signals definite agreement, however. The interaction here raises the question of what constitutes 'planning' when it comes to the timing of a birth. Is it 'unplanned' when Karen becomes pregnant at this stage, having wanted to become pregnant in the past? The ambiguity of the phrase 'timing of your first child' means that sometimes the question could be interpreted as referring to the timing of the conception

of the child and sometimes to the timing of ‘having’ a child or continuing the pregnancy.⁷ It is hard to see what conclusions could be drawn from these responses without the benefit of Karen’s story.

For Sonya, with four children in 1998, options (04) and (05) were circled:

Excerpt 8 Sonya (04; 04, 05)

103. a:nd (.) a:h ↑what determined the timing of your first
 104. child.
 105. (1.6)
 106. Sonya: ↑u:m fatež
 107. Int: (° °)
 108. Sonya: hah hhh [yeah]
 109. Int: [u:m] was it er- a failure of contraception.
 110. or)
 111. Sonya: ↑u:m (2.0) ↑no:: ↑it ↑wasn't. ↑no.
 112. Int: (°just unplanned °)
 113. Sonya: yep- i- ↑yeah. i- i've- ↓yeah.=i've had lots of
 114. problems=i've fallen pregnant on the pill and they've
 115. (.) given me stronger ones and it doesn't work for me.
 116. yeah. oh well.=
 117. Int: =but this time it was just unplanned (°it was just-°
 118. Sonya: yeah it was unplanned. i was on contraception. (but) it
 119. failed.
 120. Int: (°right°)
 121. Sonya: yep
 122. Int: (° 8.0 °)
 123. Sonya: we only planned one child.
 124. Int: °right.° (one child)
 125. Sonya: yep
 126. Int: ↑now i'm going to read out ((next question))

[MMPH#7:103–26]

If, like Sonya, a respondent gives a first answer that implies no control or external control of timing, Annie records (04) on the interview schedule. She usually then follows up with a yes–no question, based on (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*,

⁷ This assumes that termination was an option for these women. Young and Ware (1987:8–9), reporting results from the 1977 Melbourne Survey, note that ‘4 per cent of women in the follow-up and recently married groups have had an abortion, and another one-third of the follow-up sample and one-quarter of the recently married sample would possibly consider it—for reasons largely related to not wanting any more children. An additional one-third from each sample could imagine having an abortion in extreme circumstances—generally for reasons such as medical indications in the mother or the baby’.

asking directly whether it was a failure of contraception or family planning method, rather than using the instruction on the interview schedule *Any other reasons?* as a prompt. Without a directive probe, would Sonya have come up with response option (05) herself? At one point in the interview (line 111) Sonya says repeatedly, after some thought, that it was not a failure of contraception: ‘↑u:m (2.0) ↑no:: ↑it ↑wasn’t. ↑no.’ After further checking from Annie, however, Sonya says emphatically, ‘yeah it was unplanned. i was on contraception. (but) it failed.’ The impression is that there is more to this story than meets the eye; perhaps if the interaction had proceeded differently different response options could have been recorded. Options (04) and (05) are logically related and may reflect what occurs during this interaction, but how accurately do they represent Sonya’s situation?

Annie recorded (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* for the interview with Jess:

Excerpt 9 Jess (01, 14; 04)

63. Int: u:::m (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
64. (0.6)
65. Jess: ·hh fate. ahHAH HAH HAH nHAH HUH HUH HUH ·hh hold on a
66. moment until we see if he’s quiet or see if he
67. squeals=no=totally unexpected.
68. Int: and was it actually a failure of contraception or family
69. planning method?
70. (1.0)
71. Jess: o:::hhh let’s see::, let’s see: ubwa wa wa wa (.)·hh i
72. guess: yeah¿ hhh[hh](h)
73. Int: []
74. Jess: well actually no:: no::[] not- no:: not at all. just=-
75. Int: [no.]
76. Int: =it was just unplanned
77. Jess: °ye:ss. it was unplanned.°
78. Int: (° °)
79. Jess: MM HM yars
80. Int: ↑a::h ↑no::w ↑how many children ((next question))

[MMPH#9:63–80]

Jess was asked a different variant of this question in the Wave 1 NLC interview, as she had not yet had her child at that time. Her responses, then, might be expected to differ between the two surveys. The earlier responses for Jess were recorded as (01) *I have to*

104. Carol: mm hm
 105. Int: and financial considerations as well? [or you were=
 106. Carol: [↑um
 107. Int: =feeling right about [it ()?
 108. Carol: [·hh ↑well- financial
 109. considerations hh ·hh were a concern,=like- i wouldn't
 110. have done it before i had ·hh ah- we both had regular
 111. permanent jobs.
 112. Int: oh. i see. (° you were established in
 113. your career [and=
 114. Carol: [y-
 115. Int: =your partner was estab[lished] in his career °)
 116. Carol: [yeah]
 117. (2.3)
 118. Int: ↑u::m (.) ↑a:nd (.) i'm going to read ((next question))

[MMPH#15:93–118]

Annie recorded five responses for Carol, although only two were required. In her first answer (lines 95–101) after a series of false starts, discourse markers and cues that indicate difficulty in answering immediately, Carol tells a story, summarising it herself with a formulation: ‘so- it- we sort of seemed fairly settled, ·hh.’ The frame of Carol’s answer is in terms of the duration of their relationship and, together with the concept of ‘settled’, might be interpreted in terms of option (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established*. Carol’s response, however, is not framed exactly in terms of any response option, and Annie checks the appropriateness of her interpretation using a directive yes–no probe based on response option (11). If she does not use the words of the response option in her probe, there is no certainty that Carol will herself produce the exact wording of the option. Carol responds with an acknowledgment, ‘mm hm’. Without using a formulation it is hard to see how Annie could control the flow of the interview in the direction of negotiating a response. Without the suggestion of a frame for her answer in such a formulation Carol’s response could take even longer.

In lines 105–7, Annie proposes two more candidate responses, using some of topic words of options (14) *Feeling financially secure* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. The choice of these options seems arbitrary as nothing in the previous interaction seems to suggest them. Carol responds positively to (14) but does not address (13). The response (09) *Having enough money to buy a house* is circled on the basis of what Carol says in

her first answer. Whether having enough money to buy a house determined the timing of her first child of itself is not clear from this interaction. The causal relationship is not transparent. Yes, they had enough money to buy a house, but whether this was a reason for the timing of the first child is unclear.

Options (07) *Being established in my career*, (08) *My partner being established in their career*, and (14) *Feeling financially secure* seem to be derived from lines 108–11, although what Carol says about financial considerations does not necessarily amount to feeling financially secure. Again, Annie is in the position of having to decide on options unknown to the respondent, supposedly without probing in a directive manner. Why did Annie choose (14) and (15) as probes? She could equally have used different response options as probes—(02), (10) or (12) for example—with different response options perhaps being circled on the interview schedule as a result.

Although five response options were recorded for Carol in the WOC Survey, NLC Wave 1 allowed for only two. Options (11) and (07) were recorded. This raises the question as to whether information was given but not recorded for this question in NLC Wave 1, thus resulting in unnecessary loss or distortion of information, or whether the interaction proceeded differently. The interaction between Carol and Annie also raises the issue of the order in which response options are mentioned and recorded. From the interaction between Carol and Annie in the WOC interview, several possibilities arise for ordering the responses eventually recorded. Option (09) could have been recorded first, as ‘house’ is the first topic word mentioned that coincides with the topic word of a response option. Jenny’s interview raises this question also (Excerpt 12). It is clear that response options were not necessarily produced in discrete parts of the interaction, but often formulated from fragments of talk throughout the interaction over the question.

The first answers of Andrea, Melinda, Lyn, Edith, Jenny, Noelle, and Kristen all resulted in the interviewer and respondent doing much more interactional work to negotiate the response options. Andrea gave age as an answer, an option not included in the list and not interpretable in terms of any other option. Kristen gave being on fertility drugs as an

answer. Noelle's and Lyn's answers (Excerpts 11 and 16 below) caused difficulty because they answered in terms of wanting a child:

Excerpt 11 Noelle (13, 10; 11, 13)

106. Int: what determined the timing of your first child.
 107. Noelle: what did i- sorry?
 108. Int: >sorry< what determined the timing of your first child.
 109. (0.3)
 110. Noelle: u:m (1.3) because (.) i wanted to.
 111. Int: because you wanted to. ↑um so, was it that you felt it
 112. was (0.3) the right time, (1.0) you felt right about
 113. it,=
 114. Noelle: =well, i planned to, (.) so,=
 115. Int: =yes (°it was planned°)
 116. Noelle: °yes°
 117. Int: was it a:h to do with - >you know< you felt like a
 118. change, or-
 119. Noelle: ·hh o:::h. no:::, i think probably just because (.) i was
 120. getting a bit ↑o(h)(h)lder. hh
 121. Int: ↑oh ↑i see,
 122. Noelle: ↑yeah. a:nd (.) just- (.) simply because ↑yeah.=we (.)
 123. decided that that was what we both wanted, and (.)
 124. didn't want to wait any longer¿ so¿
 125. (7.0) ((interviewer's voice also very quiet here))
 126. Int: (relationship well
 127. established
 128. Noelle: ()
 129. Int: ↑and ↑a::h ↑now i'm going to read ((next question))

[MMPH#14:105-28]

Noelle answers the question with her reason: 'u:m (1.3) because (.) i wanted to.' As with many of the other interviews, the frame of her answer does not help Annie circle a response option. Annie formulates a candidate answer using '↑um so, was it that you felt it was (0.3) the right time, (1.0) you felt right about it,' some of the words of option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. This does not bring forth an allowable response, and Noelle comes up with another reason not on the list: 'well, i planned to, (.) so,'.⁸ Annie

⁸ Schiffrin (1987:107) notes: 'When respondents do not take the ideational options offered by the form of a prior question...*well* is frequently used to mark the answer.' Pomerantz (1984) notes that *well* prefaces disagreement, acting in the same way as *yes but* and silence, signalling responses that are in some way dispreferred. Lakoff (1973 cited in Schiffrin 1987:102) observes that *well* prefaces responses that are insufficient answers to questions. *Well* occurs more frequently after wh- questions (questions prefixed by a wh- word such as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when* and *why*) than after yes-no questions (Schiffrin 1987).

tries again with a yes–no question using material that does not appear to be based on any listed response option: ‘was it a:h to do with - >you know< you felt like a change, or-’. This does not produce a listed response option either; instead, Noelle gives the reason of her age: ‘hh o::h. no::, i think probably just because (.) i was getting a bit ↑o(h)(h)lder. hh.’ Then in lines 121–3 she tells Annie again her initial reason: ‘a:nd (.) just- (.) simply because ↑yeah.=we (.) decided that that was what we both wanted, and (.) didn’t want to wait any longer; so;’. Although the next two turns are not clear on the tape because of the noise of children, Annie uses the words ‘relationship well established’, words that appear in option (11). Noelle’s answer is not audible, but (11) is circled on the interview schedule.

Noelle’s interview is particularly interesting in the way that none of the reasons she produces match the frame of the researcher represented by the available response options. She persists in telling her own reasons in her own way. Neither of the recorded responses was initiated by Noelle. Annie wrote underneath the list of options: ‘was getting a bit older.’ For NLC Wave 1 Noelle’s response were (13) and (10).

Jenny’s first answer was as follows:

Excerpt 12 Jenny (13; 08, 10, 11, 13, 14)

93. Int: () what determined the timing of your first
 94. child.
 95. Jenny: a::h (2.0) an agreement that we would start a f- start a
 96. family.
 97. Int: so was it that you ()
 98. Jenny: ↑um (0.3) ↑well=we had married=i hadn’t worked
 99. °fulltime° for about four years, and i decided i ()
 100. but (0.3) (my husband/like i) was twenty six then, so
 101. yea::h.= (it seemed the time was right) (1.3) time was
 102. getting on? (um wait any longer.)
 103. Int: (there are) a whole lot of options
 104. (here)=one of them is (relationship)
 105. Jenny: ↑yeah.

[MMPH#23:93–105]

Jenny and Annie took 25 turns to complete the question, with five reasons being circled. Only the first part of the interaction is reproduced here. Jenny’s first answer is not

acceptable to Annie, who then asks her a yes–no question. Like Noelle, Jenny prefaces her next answer with ‘↑well’, indicating a dispreferred response that does not sufficiently answer the question (inaudible) (line 97). Annie reverts to being open about the list of options in front of her on the interview schedule and outlines ‘one of them’. This achieves a result in terms of the option that Annie suggests—(11) *My relationship with my partner being well established*.

The way Annie deals with Edith’s first answer is different again:

Excerpt 13 Edith (05; 04, 05, 13)

124. Int: °okay.° ↑now ↑what detim- what determined (.) the timing
 125. of your first child.
 126. Edith: a::h (1.3) what determined?
 127. Int: mm. what- was it- you know- you- you were just newly
 128. married and wanted to have a child as soon as possible
 129. ()
 130. Edith: no no not at all.
 131. Int: (°it was unplanned°)
 132. Edith: ↑yea:h. it was.=[i was on the pill.
 133. Int: [hah hah
 134. Int: oh. ri::ght.
 135. Edith: ↑yeah. (1.0) and the second one i had an IUD.
 136. Int: oh. right.
 137. Edith: °°yeah°°
 138. Int: AND AH- SO (.) but obviously you were (.) in a
 139. relationship where (you would [have] received a lot=
 140. Edith: [°yeah.]
 141. Int: =of support.)
 142. Edith: °yeah. yeah.°
 143. (1.3)
 144. Int: ↑now ↑a::h- i’m going to read you ((next question))

[MMPH#17:124–44]

When Edith indicates trouble with the question, instead of repeating what was written on the interview schedule, Annie abandons the question. This breaches rules for interviewer behaviour.⁹ She asks instead a yes–no question, formatted in terms of response option (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage*. When this is rejected, Annie puts up an apparently arbitrary candidate answer based on response option (4): ‘(°it was

unplanned°). Her laughter when this was emphatically accepted by Edith was a laugh of surprise, perhaps because she had guessed correctly. Edith equates ‘unplanned’ with ‘failure of contraception’ here. Later (line 138) Annie’s use of ‘obviously’ and her directive probing statement make it very difficult for Edith to decline Annie’s formulation of her situation.¹⁰ Annie circles option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* for this interview, when there appears to be no evidence for this in what Edith says; in fact, (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established* might have been a closer interpretation, based on the participants’ interaction.

Does yeah (particularly °yeah°) always mean ‘yes’? Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:121–7) gives many examples of respondent acquiescence, noting: ‘The standardized survey interview is typically a social interaction in which the respondents readily agree with the interviewers’ statements, even though they may not be (quite) correct.’ Molenaar and Smit (1996) show that respondents usually give agreeing answers to ‘one-sided positive yes–no questions’, a strategy in ‘normal’ conversation’. In her study of the interactional function of soft talk in research interviews Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997b:3,5) notes that the use of low volume is associated with passivity: ‘Conversationalists use low volume to indicate that they are not ready to take the turn, or to indicate their preparedness to give up the turn’. It appears that often the respondent, like Edith, is going along with what the interviewer is saying as a response to a formulation. To say ‘no’, a respondent must do more interactional work, particularly when her decision is to reject the interviewer’s formulation. It is much harder to disagree than to agree with a formulation. This is particularly so if the formulation is partially accurate. However, without knowing the response options, the respondent is not in a position to agree to the ‘best fit’ among all response options. Here, Edith seems to assent to Annie’s understanding.

A respondent puts an interaction in jeopardy by ‘disconfirming’ an interviewer’s formulation (Heritage and Watson 1979:136–53), hence putting the sense of the

⁹ See, for example, Suchman and Jordan (1990:233ff). Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997a:613) and Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki (1997:285–313) note that this is frequent interviewer behaviour.

interaction so far back to ‘square one’.¹¹ Molenaar and Smit (1996:133–4) found that, since ‘both the interviewer and the respondent care about their relationship,’ some contributions may reflect ‘an act of politeness rather than a sincere opinion’. Houtkoop-Steenstra (1996:216-9) notes, on the basis of Dutch interviews, that ‘yes’ (*ja*) often may not mean ‘yes’, but, rather, be acquiescence in the face of difficulties in addressing the frame of the question.

Kristen’s WOC interview produced none of the listed response options. Annie wrote on the interview schedule: ‘trying c. fertility drugs.’ This segment is an example of what happens when Annie does not use formulation based on the response options to obtain a response:

Excerpt 14 Kristen (06, 13; –)

131. Int: ↑u:m and what determined the timing of your first child.
 132. Kristen: pardon?
 133. Int: what determined the timing of your first child.
 134. Kristen: well i was on a fertility drug with my first one,
 135. Int: right. [were you- eventually-]
 136. Kristen: [because they said i couldn’t-] yeah. cos they
 137. said i couldn’t get pregnant.
 138. Int: ri:ght. (0.3) ↑so you were actually trying.
 139. Kristen: yeah. i was actually trying. yeah. but there was
 140. something wrong with him too=he had a low sperm count.
 141. ·hh
 142. Int: ^ori:ght^o.
 143. Kristen: so:: i think there was a bit of a problem with both of
 144. us, and (.)·hh then i fell pregnant with Ben and then
 145. (.) Patricia:, hh it was just automatic,
 146. [it was really ↑good,]
 147. Int: [oh r i: g h t] right=
 148. Kristen: =so it was good. i m- wasn’t on the fertility drug with
 149. her,
 150. Int: ^ori:ght^o=
 151. Kristen: =so that was good.
 152. Int: (^oright^o) ↑u:m [and when-
 153. Kristen: [a bit of a surPRISE \$actually\$
 154. [hh HA HA HA] ·hh \$yea::h\$.

¹⁰ Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki (1997:299) found that declarative questions such as this have the same effect as leading or directive questions. They are used when speakers have good reason to believe the proposition to be a fact; that is, when they already believe that they have the answer.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion see Heritage and Watson (1979), Pomerantz (1984) and Sacks (1987).

155. Int: [əyea::hheh hehə]
 156. Int: so the next question is, ((next question))

[MMPH#6:131–56]

Kristen’s interview is by far the longest of the WOC survey interviews. Kristen’s strategies for keeping her turn are well developed and, as the interview progresses, Annie yields more and more to Kristen’s strategies. Kristen is able to keep her turn in this interaction (lines 136, 148, 151) and keeps talking, preventing Annie from taking a turn. Annie misses a chance in line 138, where she takes the opportunity to formulate a probe; however, because the probe is not framed in terms of one of the listed response options, Kristen’s agreement does not yield an allowable response. She has another opportunity to take a turn at line 142, and produces a sequence-closing third, indicating a possible close to the sequence. Annie’s use of ‘right’ here (lines 142, 147, 150, 152) acknowledges Kristen’s answers, but since she still has not obtained an allowable response, it might indicate that she is still trying to put the information together to fit a response option.¹² Kristen continues talking about her pregnancies. Annie makes a final attempt in line 152 to ask a question, but Kristen keeps talking and Annie gives way. After 18 turns no response options are forthcoming from Kristen, and Annie ends the interaction on this question.

What Annie says during Melinda’s interview is unclear in parts. However, the interaction translated into two response options, (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*:

Excerpt 15 Melinda (13, 06; 10, 13)

79. Int: now (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
 80. (1.6)
 81. Melinda: t! u:m (.) just ready,
 82. Int: əjus[t readyə
 83. Melinda: [i- i was ready, and my () husband was
 84. ready and (we were) both keen and-

¹² In interviews the response token, ‘right,’ seems to have a sense of ‘putting the bits together’, a recognition of something mentioned before, and then moving on (Gardner 1999). The entire interview with Kristen demonstrates the difficulty of making connections between what Kristen says and the demands of the questions.

85. (3.0)
 86. Int: well ()
 87. Melinda: sorry,
 88. Int: >sorry< (it- it just
 89. the whole)
 90. Melinda: oh i see
 91. Int: (one of them is
 92. feeling able to cope with the demands of a child)
 93. Melinda: yes. yes.
 94. (1.3)
 95. Int: ↑u:m (.) ↑now i'm going to read you ((next question))

[MMPH#16:79-95]

Melinda's answer 't! u:m (.) just ready,' also does not exactly correspond with any response option. Annie has interpreted it as corresponding in meaning to option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. As with most of the interaction over this question in other interviews, Annie has no option but to use her judgment to interpret the answer of the respondent and reframe it in terms of a response option in order to obtain a response. What respondents say and the way these answers are formatted into response options is not often equivalent. Perhaps it a reasonable interpretation in Melinda's case; nevertheless, Melinda is not given an opportunity to confirm Annie's interpretation.

The second option circled for Melinda was (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child*. Annie suggests this option to Melinda, referring to 'one of them'. Annie seems to be referring to the list of response options and using the options themselves to probe for further reasons. As shown by other interviews, probing with the words of a response option in a formulation is an effective and economical way for the interviewer to encourage the respondent to format the answer so that the option can be circled without delay (Heritage and Watson 1979). Melinda's interview is another example of the way in which this probing is arbitrary and suggestive, however. Not all response options are offered equally. The tendency of respondents to acquiesce also cannot be discounted (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:121-127; Molenaar and Smit 1996).

It is already obvious from segments of interviews cited so far in this chapter that, although the question is asked in a fairly similar way for each respondent, the way in which probing occurs is not standard. The validity of the research instrument is called

into question, as, according to guidelines for standardised interviewing, interviewers should present all respondents with the same stimuli and probe in a neutral way (de Vaus 1995:115–6; Fowler and Mangione 1990:138; Frey and Oishi 1995:2; Gorden 1969:214–20; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1995:91–2; Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:2; Keats 2000:64ff; Macro International Inc. 1997:14; Stewart and Cash 1991:Ch. 6).

Lyn’s response is not framed in the terms of any of the response options on the questionnaire. The interaction between Lyn and Annie is shown below:

Excerpt 16 Lyn(04; 04, 05, 13)

96. Int: ·hh now what determined the timing of your first child.
 97. (7.0)
 98. Lyn: a:h i thi:nk (.) i just >wanted to have a child.<
 99. Int: so you just decided that you felt (.) right about it (.) at the
 100. ti:me, like ([^{oo} ^{oo})=
 101. Lyn: [well hhh
 102. Int: =(^{oo} ^{oo})
 103. Lyn: the pregnancy was accidental, but ^{um} but yeah (.) (ⁱ wanted
 104. to have a child^o)
 105. Int: (^{okay}) ↑um now do you mind me asking was it a failure of
 106. contraceptive (behaviour?) (^{3.0} ^{oo})
 107. Lyn: um hhh i wouldn’t say it was a failure of- of contraceptives! i
 108. (2.5) <i-i hhhad a (.) miscarriage> before i had Lewis. and
 109. that pregnancy was completely (.) unplanned.
 110. Int: ri:ght.
 111. Lyn: a:nd (.) in the period after the miscarriage, (1.0)
 112. >immediately after the miscarriage< (0.3) >^{you know}<
 113. contraception was interrupted. a:nd (.) i- i sh- i should have
 114. wai:ted longer than i did, but (.) for some reason i just fell
 115. pregnant very easily ^{afterwards}.
 116. Int: (^{right}) (3.0) ^{okay} ↑u::m now i’m going to read out
 117. ((next question))

[MMPH#2:96–117]

Annie first reformulates Lyn’s answer as a yes–no question using the words of response option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*: ‘so you just decided that you felt (.) right about it (.) at the ti:me, like ...’ Lyn’s answer to this formulation was not ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but ‘well’, an indication that she does not readily agree with Annie’s formulation, but is

actively considering, deliberating or sizing up the question.¹³ Lyn goes on to say that although the pregnancy was accidental, she wanted to have a child, repeating her first answer to the question. This highlights a difficulty with the ambiguity of concepts contained in the question; a respondent might not feel ‘right’ at first about becoming pregnant but might feel ‘right’ about continuing the pregnancy to term. Again, timing can be unplanned even if a birth is planned. This subtlety is not reflected in the response options.

Lyn’s concession to Annie’s formulation—‘so you just decided that you felt (.) right about it (.) at the ti:me, like (°° °°).’—is in line with research showing that respondents are reluctant to disagree with interviewers and will often acquiesce or compromise on their responses in the interests of maintaining a harmonious relationship (Brown and Levinson 1987; Heritage and Watson 1979; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1996; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki 1997; Molenaar and Smit 1996). Lyn’s answer poses a problem for Annie because it still does not fit any of the responses on the interview schedule.

Much of the detail and complexity of Lyn’s answer is lost in the coded responses for this question. Annie circled (04), (05), (13) and (14),¹⁴ and wrote in the margin, ‘had a miscarriage & then in the next ~~period~~ cycle had a failed contraceptive method & got pregnant c. L.’ The way in which Lyn talks about her experience is clumsily formatted into these response options. She explicitly states: ‘um hhh i wouldn’t say it was a failure of- of contraceptives;’ (one of the options recorded by Annie). The way in which she talks about her experience does not fit the way the responses are conceptualised and categorised on the interview schedule. Annie does not prolong the interaction by asking further questions. Her responses are minimal, ‘right.’ with falling intonation (lines 110, 116); this seems to indicate that she is making connections with what Lyn said earlier (Gardner 1999). The impression Annie’s response gives is that this is too difficult to deal

¹³ This is Schourup’s (2001) interpretation of ‘well’.

¹⁴ (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*; (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*; (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*; (14) *Feeling financially secure*.

with further and that she has enough information without responding to the complexity of Lyn's reasons.

The most complex interaction in terms of the numbers of turns Annie and the respondent take to negotiate an answer occurs in the interview with Dale (Excerpt 17). This interview brings together many of the interactional features occurring for this question illustrated in the examples above (Excerpts 4–16):

Excerpt 17 Dale (10, 08; 10, 13, 14)

77. Int: °oka:y° so ↑what will determine when or if you have um t! (0.6)
78. °a child° >oh hold on no< [what determined the timing of your=
79. Dale: [no
80. Int: = first child=°that's the first question°
81. Dale: ↑u::m (1.3) o:h. (1.0) probly:: age factor i'd say¿
82. Int: your- your age? [(you mean)] so u:m (.) was that a:h=
83. Dale: [yeah yeah]
84. Int: =that you felt (.) that you were getting (.) to the point at
85. which you wanted to make a decision before you got too old?
86. Dale: yes. you know, like i didn't want to be too old to enjoy her
87. hah hah hah
88. Int: yeah.
89. Dale: ↑yeah.
90. Int: (so °° °°) ((baby noises)) and (.)
91. were there also considerations about u:m wanting a child as
92. soon as possible after you were married? ()
93. Dale: ↑a::h ↑oh ↑no not really, we <sort of> (.) u:m (1.3) oh i guess
94. probly a few friends (.) 'n family and that started having
95. them, and we thought oh we: ·h we liked being around them so
96. maybe it's about time we(h)e(h): [(.) ·hh] thought about=
97. Int: [right]
98. Dale: =having one of our own¿
99. Int: °okay° so felt able to (.) cope with the demands of a chi[ld?
100. Dale: [yeah.
101. yes i think so,
102. Int: and also:: u:m felt right about it=[that-] these are just=
103. Dale: [mm hm]
104. Int: =different options that (° °°) °°
105. (u:m) ↑were finances a consideration at all? ()
106. Dale: ↑u:m (1.3) ↑o:h (2.0) ↑no ↑not really, we're like um t! (0.6)
107. well (.) i mean i'm- i'm on- (.) on maternity leave for twelve
108. mo:nths, so we had to sort of make sure that we could afford
109. tha:t¿ u::m
110. Int: before you deci[ded].
111. Dale: [before we decided¿ so
112. Int: so financial security was [(a consideration)

113. Dale: [yeah i'd say financial security
114. yeah.
115. (2.0)
116. Int: ↑u:m (.) a:nd ↑how many children ((next question))

[MMP#8:77-116]

Annie circled three response options as a result of this interaction: (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child*, (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*, and (14) *Feeling financially secure*. Underneath the response options she wrote: 'age was a factor didn't want to be too old. Friends had kids & we liked hanging around them so we decided to have one too'. In the NLC interview less than two years before, the responses recorded for Dale were (10) and (8) as first and second reasons, respectively.

Annie's first task is to ascertain which variant of the question to ask. As mentioned before, this was made more difficult without the prompts provided by the CATI system. Dale's 'no' (line 79) mirrors Annie's and seems to indicate that Dale, too, hears this as an inappropriate question for her. She thinks for some time before coming out with her answer: '↑u:::m (1.3) o:h. (1.0) probly:: age factor i'd say;'. This answer is not one of the responses that Annie has before her.¹⁵ She reformulates Dale's answer but in different terms again from any of the response options. Thus, she is no closer to a response after two attempts, but her reformulation is met with approval from Dale, followed by laughter: 'yes. you know, like i didn't want to be too old to enjoy her hah hah.'

No material from Dale's previous response on age suggests a logical next topic or question to ask as far as the allowable response options are concerned (lines 86-7). Annie asks a yes-no question framed in terms of response option (06), providing Dale with a candidate answer: 'and (.) were there also considerations about u:m wanting a child as soon as possible after you were married?' (line 90). She converts the response option material into a yes-no question that can be asked as a seemingly natural part of the conversation, rather than sounding like one of a list of possible responses in front of

¹⁵ The fact that 'age' comes up quite frequently as a first answer suggests that it could usefully be included in the list of response options. However, its appearance as a first answer may not be transparent to the survey designer if the interviewer then goes on to record two allowable responses.

her.¹⁶ Looking at the list of response options, the choice of (06) as the first candidate answer seems arbitrary. If Annie were looking for a new topic to provide a second reason, having not succeeded with ‘age’ as a reason allowed on the questionnaire, she could have asked about any of a number of others on the list: (02), (07)–(09), or (11)–(14). If she were working systematically down the list, she might have been expected to ask about response option (02) in this way.

The WOC interviewer is given wording for prompting for a second reason (*Any other reason?*), and in a standardised survey interview it might be expected that she would use this wording. However, this arbitrary use of specific response options reframed as yes–no questions is noted in previous research as being a very common strategy for interviewers faced with field-coded questions (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:Ch.6; Smit 1995; Smit, Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1997). Interviewers are caught between the demands of maintaining a normal conversation, not revealing to the respondent that the options for answering this question are limited in any way, and yet obtaining allowable responses to the question to record on the questionnaire. If the respondent were to be allowed to continue to choose her own topic throughout the interaction on a field-coded question such as this, the interaction might proceed for a very long time before an allowable response came up naturally in the conversation. Asking a yes–no question is a pragmatic way for the interviewer to deal with these irreconcilable demands, but, as noted by Fowler and Mangione (1990:40–1), a probe that can be answered by ‘yes’ or ‘no’ is directive.

In any case, Dale rejects Annie’s candidate answer as a possible reason (line 93). She then gives her own reason: ‘we <sort of> (.) u:m (1.3) oh i guess probly a few friends (.) ’n family and that started having them, and we thought oh we: ·h we liked being around them so maybe it’s about time we(h)e(h): (.) ·hh thought about having one of our own?’ Annie uses a formulation here, phrased as a yes–no question in the words of response

¹⁶ Heritage and Watson (1979:152), Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:Ch.4), and Molenaar and Smit (1996) note this phenomenon. It seems that interviewers often abandon the rules of standardised survey interviewing and follow the principles of ordinary conversation to manage the interaction. Respondents sometimes become confused when interviewers adhere strictly to standardised interviewing procedures and appear to be incompetent conversationalists (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:69–85).

option (10): ‘°okay° so felt able to (.) cope with the demands of a child?’ The omission of ‘you’, as would be expected in addressing someone in conversational interaction underlines that this comes from the response option. Dale’s answer ‘yeah. yes i think so,’ is not convincing agreement; the final rising intonation leaves it unfinished. Annie moves on without a pause to give another formulation candidate answer using some of the words of response option (13) (line 102). This time she openly acknowledges that there are options for the responses, but the use of ‘just’ minimises what follows:¹⁷

Excerpt 18 Dale (10, 08; 10, 13, 14)

102. Int: and also:: u:m felt right about it=[that- these are just=
 103. Dale: [mm hm
 104. Int: =different options that (° °)
 105. (u:m) ↑were finances a consideration at all? ()

[MMPH#8:102-5]

Dale responds to Annie’s statement (no longer a question) with an acknowledgement token, ‘mm hm’. Annie seems to have taken this as agreement, as she circled (13) on the questionnaire. Even though she already seems to have two reasons, she asks another yes–no question, this time using ‘finances’ as a topic, also the topic of response option (14). The way Annie asks this question sounds very much like the kind of question someone would casually ask in conversation (Molenaar and Smit 1996). Dale replies that finances were not really a consideration, but comes around to agreeing that financial security was a consideration (lines 113): ‘yeah i’d say financial security yeah.’ This agreement is convincing because ‘yeah’ is repeated with falling (final) intonation. What prompted Dale to see ‘finances’ and ‘financial security’ as different would not be evident without further information. Had Annie not reformulated the question from ‘finances’ to ‘financial security’, she might not have circled (14) *Feeling financially secure* as a response option.

It is unclear what would have happened had Annie asked instead about another of the response options not already covered, such as (2) *Convincing my partner that it’s a good*

¹⁷ ‘Just’ is a contextualisation cue, providing an interpretive framework for what follows (Gumperz 1982; Schiffrin 1987). It appears to downgrade or minimise the following talk.

idea, (7) Being established in my career, (09) Having enough money to buy a house, (11) My relationship with my partner being well established, or (12) After having enjoyed myself before settling down? Maybe one of these options would have been circled instead. Again, the onlooker is left with the feeling that the process of confirming that particular response option was a result of the interactional processes occurring between Annie and Dale rather than a direct response to the question. This may go some way to explaining the response option (08) *My partner being established in their career* recorded for Dale's second response in the NLC Wave 1 interview. A different interviewer may also have probed differently.

Throughout this interaction Annie is clearly suggestive in her approach to probing and putting up candidate answers. Left to her own devices, would Dale have come up with the same reasons, and would she have circled the same response options? Would she have used the same words as the response options to describe her experience? If Dale told her experience in her own words and her own way, it may be that none of the options recorded for the two survey interviews would figure in her story.

The interaction between Dale and Annie is the longest for this question; however, the issues raised about how the response options are negotiated are common to most of the interviews.

Conclusion

The telephone-interview excerpts shown above illustrate some of the ways in which interviewers act as mediators between designers of survey questions and individual respondents in negotiating responses to a question. Transcription of interview data using the conventions of conversation analysis (CA) shows that, as well as interacting with the respondent, the interviewer plays a vital mediating role in interpreting the question to the respondent and interpreting the respondent's answer in terms of the response codes provided by the researcher. Turn-by-turn analysis of interviewer–respondent interaction provides a rich source of data for researchers: whether questions work as intended, whether response categories are useful, how bias occurs, how respondents might interpret

the question, and what kinds of factors make interactions longer, more complex and, thus, more costly.

In the case of Q167, the minimal interaction that could be expected to complete the question and answer was two or three turns; however, in all 25 interviews the process of negotiating a response was more complex and frequently the interaction was extended. The difficulty of the question wording was further complicated by use of a field-coded question format. The analysis of interview transcripts confirms previous studies showing that, faced with field-coded questions, interviewers have little alternative but to engage in non-standard and directive behaviour to achieve a response that matches an available response option provided by the researcher. This behaviour includes the use of formulation, yes–no questions phrased in terms of response options, arbitrary selection of particular response options as candidate answers, and apparently arbitrary interpretation of the respondents' answers in terms of the allowable response options for this question.

A further problem raised by examination of these transcripts is that the responses recorded by the interviewer often distort the respondents' stories about the timing of their first child. This sets up a tension between the interviewer's purpose of obtaining an allowable response and the respondent's purpose of telling her story as accurately as she can, assuming that the researcher wants to know what really happened in her case. The detail of the stories, then, is often manipulated, in fact unintentionally censored, in the interests of obtaining a response. Those respondents who persist in holding to their story are sometimes excluded from the analysis because they insist on accuracy and resist the interviewer's attempts to put them into a category they see as inappropriate.

The participants in this research were all first-language English speakers. Yet, even in this situation, analysis of interaction data shows that a mismatch frequently occurred between what the researcher intended by the question and the way in which the interviewer and respondents interpreted it. The implications for second language surveys are considerable. Factors that influence interaction in an Australian English setting may be very different from those operating in other cultural and linguistic settings; even more complex are likely to be cross-cultural and cross-linguistic interactions. The findings

raise questions about surveys such as the World Fertility Survey, the Demographic and Health Surveys, and the International Social Survey.

It is also clear from the transcribed excerpts above that standardisation is at stake. It would be a misleading over-simplification to say that these interviews were standardised. Responses are negotiated locally, turn by turn, by interviewer and respondent, making use of everyday conversational practices to maintain a social relationship that enables the interviews to be completed without serious breakdown. If interviewers and respondents did not adhere to these social conventions, the possibility of breakdown in interaction would be increased, thus endangering respondents' participation in future waves of the survey. Survey manuals implicitly attribute the blame for lack of standardisation to interviewers; however, the excerpts above show just how impossible a demand standardisation is, particularly when complicated by the field-coded question format.

If interviewers were allowed to deviate, responses might be more valid. However, the statistical methods used to analyse surveys presuppose standardised interviews. The standard stimuli required for such analysis would be absent. It might be that qualitative research would yield more valid responses to this question, but then capacity to generalise would be lost. We have no alternative but to question the validity and reliability of surveys carried out without an examination of interaction between interviewers, respondents and the questions of researchers.

Appendix: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS¹⁸

.	falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	low rising/continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences
?	rising inflection, not necessarily a question
¿	rising intonation, weaker than indicated by a question mark
-	cut-off
=	connecting talk
> <	talk is faster than surrounding talk
< >	talk is slower than surrounding talk
◦ ◦	talk is quieter than surrounding talk
◦ ◦	(subscript) unvoiced/whispered talk
YES	talk louder than surrounding talk
* *	creaky voice
# #	sympathetic talk
\$ \$	talk while laughing/smiling
↑↓	marked rising and falling shifts in pitch
(h)	plosive quality
:::	extension of a sound or syllable
()	transcription doubt
(())	analyst's comments
(1.0)	timed intervals
(.)	short untimed pause
hh	audible aspirations
·hh	audible inhalations
<u>so</u>	emphasis
[]	overlapping utterances or actions
→	marker to indicate something of importance

¹⁸ Abbreviated from Gardner (1994), Jefferson (1984), and Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974).

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