

Defying the Q&A format in interviews? Exploring interrogatives in learner interviewee speech

The Louvain International Database of Spoken English Interlanguage (LINDSEI) contains informal interviews with intermediate to advanced level learners of English as a foreign language from various mother tongue backgrounds. However informal these interviews may be, they do not share two of Clark's (1996) typical features of face-to-face conversation, namely self-determination and self-expression. While the free exchange of turns is a fundamental organising factor of conversations, in interviews the participants do not determine for themselves what actions to take when. Instead of being 'locally managed' as in conversations (Lazaraton 1992), the turn-taking system is pre-specified: interviews are organised according to a question-answer format. Besides taking actions as themselves (Clarke's self-expression) the participants in an interview also take actions as 'interviewer' or 'interviewee'. As Fiksdal (1990) points out, the participants have rights and obligations as interviewer or interviewee: the interviewer has the right and obligation to ask questions and the interviewee has the obligation to answer these questions.

This paper reports on research into the use of interrogative clauses, and more specifically *Wh*-questions and *yes/no*-questions (Biber et al 1999), by the learner interviewees in four of the subcorpora included on the LINDSEI CD-ROM (Gilquin et al. 2010), namely LINDSEI_Chinese, LINDSEI_Dutch, LINDSEI_French and LINDSEI_Polish. The following research questions are addressed: (1) to what extent do the learner interviewees use interrogatives in a context which arguably does not encourage the use of these structures, and (2) why do the learner interviewees appear to defy the question-answer format of the interviews? The paper focuses more particularly on the discourse/pragmatic functions of the interrogatives uncovered in the data such as direct speech/thought reporting, speech management (Allwood et al. 1990, Rühlemann 2006), elicitation of information from the interviewer (for example to assess or establish common ground) or interview/task-oriented metadiscursive function. The pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

The paper also explores the use of interrogatives by learner interviewees in the Conversation and Discussion subset of the Trinity Lancaster Corpus. The Trinity Lancaster Corpus (henceforth TLC, Gablasova et al 2019) includes spoken data produced by learners of English from over ten different mother tongue backgrounds within the framework of the Graded Examinations of Spoken English (developed and organised by Trinity College London). The Conversation and Discussion subset features data produced by learners taking the spoken English exam in the context of speaking tasks which have been characterised as both dialogic and jointly-led (Gablasova et al 2019). The main focus is on a qualitative functional analysis of the interrogatives used by the learners in the subset of the TLC under study (compared with the LINDSEI data) and on the possible impact of differences in the formality of the setting ('semi-formal' in the TLC vs. more informal in LINDSEI, Gablasova et al 2019), in speaker roles (candidate and examiner in the TLC vs. interviewee and interviewer only in LINDSEI) and in turn-taking format.

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