DISPREFERENCE FOR INTERVIEWEE-INITIATED
’QUESTIONS’ IN CERTAIN INTERACTIONAL CONTEXTS:
THE CASE OF POLICE INTERROGATIONS

DISPREFERENCA KA „PITANJIMA” KOJA INICIRAJU INTERVJUISAN: SLUČAJ
POLICIJSKOG ISPITIVANJA

APSTRAKT Ovaj rad razmatra različite tipove interakcije u kojima je pravo postavljanja pitanja rezervisano za jednog učesnika, dok je uloga drugog učesnika da odgovara. Takav diskurs je intervjuisanje koje podrazumijeva sudskе i televizijske intervjue i komunikaciju sa medicinskim osobljem. Rad dalje proučava kakva je distribucija pitanja i odgovora između inspektora i osumnjičenih u policijskom ispitivanju. Razmatranjem konkretnih primjera iz naše baze podataka, ukazujemo da time što traže dozvolu da odgovore ili da postave pitanje, ispitivani se konstantno orijentiraju ka nepisanom pravilu da su inspektori ti koji imaju monopol nad postavljanjem pitanja.

Ključne riječi: institucionalni diskurs, policijsko ispitivanje, dispreferenca, pitanja koja iniciraju ispitivani.

ABSTRACT This work examines a number of interactional environments in which the right to ask questions is restricted to one participant whereas the other participant’s role is to answer. Such environments are interviewing, including court and news interviews and medical interaction. We further explore how the question asking is distributed between detectives and suspects in police interrogations. Studying the concrete examples from our data set, we show that by asking permission to answer or asking a permission to ask interviewees constantly orient to the unwritten rule that the detectives are the ones who hold the monopoly over question asking.

Key words: institutional discourse, police-interrogations, dispreferenca, interviewee-initiated questions.

Dispreference for interviewee-initiated questions

Interrogations are a speech exchange system, which restricts questioning and answering to the different parties. The detectives do the asking and the suspects/witnesses do the answering. In this respect, interrogations resemble other speech exchange systems which are mainly composed of questions and answers: interviewing, including court and news interviews, medical interaction. A number of studies looking at these types of interaction (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Frankel, 1990; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Komter, 2005; Naka- mur, 2010) indicate that in such interactional environments the right to ask questions is also restricted to one participant whereas the other participant’s role is to answer.
Studying courtroom examinations, Atkinson and Drew (1979) note that in this type of interaction, as opposed to normal interaction, only one party, generally the council, is given the right to ask ‘questions’. The examined party’s utterances are produced in sequential positions of ‘post-questions’ and are therefore answers to ‘questions’. This rigid type of turn taking is achieved by court procedures which do not allow witnesses to tell stories in their own words and which control the information on which a court’s decision is to be made, the professional hierarchy in court (the judge being the top of the hierarchy and the one with the utmost right to speak) and various rules about what should or should not be said and what form the interaction should take. Additionally, as Atkinson and Drew point out, councils can exert some control over the length of the witness’s answer, for example, by designing a question which expects an answer of a certain length, for example ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or by objecting to the answer for which the question was not designed.

Interviews in general are composed mostly of question-answer pairs. Nakamura (2010) in his study on Japanese students’ English speaking skills, the results of which are aimed at improving second language acquisition methodology, recorded teacher-student interviews. In order to make the students ask more questions, he reversed the interviewing roles: students were given a task to interview their teacher. The reversal of the roles points to the normativity of this type of interaction: it is composed of question-answer pairs. It also highlights who normally conducts interviews when it comes to the teacher-student relation: the teacher is the one holding interviews and he/she owns the rights of asking questions, whereas the students are the ones who are normally providing answers.

Frankel (1990) compared casual conversation and medical interviews interaction, and he found that medical encounters are also highly constrained in terms of utterance and speaker type. Doctors are the ones asking questions, whereas the patients’ role is restricted to answering. The doctors are also determining when patients are going to answer or when they are going to give them an opportunity to ask something. Frankel phrases these restrictions as dispreference for patient initiated questions and patient initiated utterances in general. Frankel’s findings indicate that less than 1% of all utterances by patients occurred in first position. The majority of physician initiated utterances were questions, and patient responses were usually followed by another question. There were no free-standing patient initiated questions. If patients initiated utterances, they were: sequentially modified questions, occurring in non-initial position; occurring in response to what Frankel terms solicits from doctors, such as ‘OKay?’ and ‘Aright’?; following announcements, which signal a completed action after which the patient has a chance to enter into the conversation some new information; and patient initiations at boundaries marked by interruption, additional turn components appended to an answer turn. Frankel notes that on certain occasions, patients even phrased their questions as if the doctor has previously enquired about the matter, although as Frankel...
notes, on searching the transcripts it was obvious that the doctor had never inquired about it.

Clayman and Heritage (2002) found that, news interviews, as opposed to conversational framework in which topics emerge freely, are a more constrained type of interaction in which interviewers question and interviewees answer. Interviewees are not expected to ask questions or make unsolicited comments on previous remarks, initiate changes of topics or divert the discussion into criticism of the interviewer. Illustrating the dispreference for interviewees asking question in news interviews Clayman and Heritage (2002) give examples of interviewees asking permission to answer or asking a permission to ask. Frankel (1990), studying medical encounters, found a similar phenomenon, patients asking for permission to ask a question.

**Police interviews cases**

As I have previously pointed out, certain speech exchange systems restrict questioning and answering to the different parties. Such question-answer normativity is also found in police interrogations. In her work on understanding problems in an interpreter-mediated police interrogation, Komter (2005) states that 'a characteristic feature of police interrogations is the question-answer format, where the police officer typically asks the questions and the suspect or witness typically provides the answers'. Furthermore, there is dispreference for questions by the questioned party and there is evidence that this dispreference is jointly produced by both the police officers and those being questioned. The preference in communication is not an explicit wish, but in technical sense, preference is the conversational path of least resistance: the one least marked by requests for clarification or repair from subsequent speakers (Levinson, 1983). This structure of preference and dispreference is one of the key analytical tools in CA: because so much of what is relevant and available to conversational participants is only observable in the delays, pauses, softenings and deferrals that characterize the production of a dispreferred response. In examples (1) and (2) below the dispreference towards suspect-initiated questions is displayed both by the detectives and the suspects.

I have mentioned that in such interactional environments as news interviews or medical interaction there are instances of interviewees asking permission to answer or asking a permission to ask (see Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Frankel, 1990 etc.). Similar ‘permission asking’ examples can be found in my police interviews data set. The fact that interviewees ask a permission to ask is the first evidence that their questions are not welcome. In the following example (extract 1) one can note that in line 01 the suspect drops an initiated interrogative and corrects himself by asking for permission to ask ’something’. After getting the permission from Dt2, in line 02, the suspect makes the

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1 Examples (1) and (2) are also quoted in Cerović (2014)
previously dropped inquiry in lines 05-06. West (1993) found that in medical discourse patients often stammer when asking questions, and we can see that the same happens in this example: in line 01 the suspect stammers and there are several starts and cut-offs before he manages to formulate his turn.

(1)

| 01 Sus: | .hhh Kako LJudi s= sau- > mogu l JA pita< što.= |
| 02 Dt2: | =mọş \(\left( \right) \) da pitaş. ( ) |
| 03 | \(\left(\left( \right) \right)\) |
| 04 | (. ) |
| 05 Sus: | Kako me probraste, \(0.6\) PR: some aux. of SVIje, \(0.7\) |
| 06 | DA hah DOhuhđem ja a a:mo. |
| 07 | (. ) |
| 08 Dt2: | ne[ko je mora- > ne] ko je morao bit\([prvi. ]\) |
| 09 | \(\left(\left( \right) \right)\) |

This example indicates that the suspect recognises the unwritten rule of interrogation that he is only supposed to ask questions if permitted to. This item also occurs towards the end of the interview which indicates that the suspect has waited for the detectives to complete their institutional business, following which the suspect is able to launch the inquiry.

The second evidence of dispreference for suspect initiated questions is the fact that detectives sometimes warn the suspect not to ask questions. See extract (2) below, in which the detectives orient to the unwritten rule that suspects are not supposed to ask questions. The detectives are inquiring into the suspect’s debts which could potentially have led him to participate in a theft.

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01 Dt2: >šta je bilo s tim kreditom<, and >what aux. was with this credit<, 
And what happened to this loan?

02 (0.1)

03 Sus: >ništa< (.). potrošio i sad vremem. 
>nothing< (.). spent and now (I) returned.
I spent it and now I am paying it off

04 (0.2)

05 Dt2: ad >NA Šta ti ga potROŠio<, and >ON What aux.(you)him spent<, 
And what did you spend it on?

06 (.)

07 Sus: hh pa h to: hh potrebbe,(.).kuće:. hh well that: hh needs ,(.)of house:.of shop

[ prod[-avnice] ]
Well that, the house needs, the shop

08 Dt2: [šta : ]
[what: ]
What

09 SI, prodavnica kuće, >reci nam sad< aux.(you), shop house, >tell us now< 
do you mean shop, house, tell us now

10 (.)

11 Sus: p[*eto* ]
wl[*there* ]
Well

12 Dt2: [>mi smo čuli drugu< InforMACiju. ]
[>we aux.heard other< Information. ]
We have heard something else.

13 (0.3)

14 Sus: m: kojuć
m: which<
What?

15 (0.2)
In line 12 Dt2 produces a b-event (Labov & Fanshel, 1977), possibly fishing for more information from the suspect. However, in line 14 the suspect makes what seems to be an inquiry about the information the detectives have. Following a (0.2) pause in line 15, Dt2 produces a dental click in order to indicate his annoyance by the suspect’s inquiry and then states that that they (detectives) did not bring the suspect to the station so he could question them, but so they could question him. The detective openly states that it is not suspect’s role to question the detectives. Interestingly enough, the statement is produced partly by Dt2 (lines 16 and 17) and partly by Dt1 (line 19), which shows orientation of both detectives to the fact that the suspects’ role is strictly ‘answering questions’.

**Conclusion**

The examples included in this work, although limited in number, indicate that police interrogations show an institutionally produced asymmetry in speaker-listener participation. Obviously, this is another type of discourse which shows dispreference for interviewee-initiated questions. Furthermore, there is some evidence that this dispreference is jointly produced by both the detectives and the suspects: example (1) shows the suspect asking permission to ask and example (2) shows the detectives telling off the suspect for asking questions. This sort of convention can bear various implications for the interviewees as well as for the nature of information collection during these interviews. First of all, such interviews are detective centred; the detectives choose the topics of conversation and what they would ask about. This lack of participation by the interviewee inevitably contributes to the lack of information received, or limits the sort of information that the interviewee might potentially provide. Secondly, power relations come to prominence in this sort of interactional environment. The asymmetric communication becomes an effective tool for intimidating and exerting power over the interviewees. This may even lead to coercing interlocutors to producing a certain sort of response. In sum, apart from wrongful incrimination of interviewees, this communicational asymmetry can obviously
lead to a less effective accomplishment of institutional tasks set before the interrogators.

**Literatura**


**Transcription Key**

[ ] square brackets overlapping talk

= equals sign no discernible interval between turns (also used to show that the same person continues speaking across an intervening line displaying overlapping talk

< „greater than“ sign „jump started“ talk with loud onset

(0.5) time in parentheses intervals within or between talk (measured in tenths of a second)

(.) period in parentheses discernable pause or gap, too short to measure

**Characteristics of speech delivery:**

. period closing intonation

, comma slightly upward „continuing“ intonation

? question mark rising intonation question

¿ inverted question mark rising intonation weaker than that indicated by a question mark

! exclamation mark animated tone

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- **hyphen/dash** abrupt cut off of sound

: **colon** extension of preceding sound – the more colons the greater the extension

↑↓ **up or down arrow** marked rise or fall in intonation immediately following the arrow

__here__ **underlining** emphasized relative to surrounding talk

**HERE** **upper case** louder relative to surrounding talk

*here* **degree signs** softer relative to surrounding talk

>**this**< speeded up or compressed relative to surrounding talk

<**this**> slower or elongated relative to surrounding talk

**hhh** audible outbreath (no. of „h“’s indicates length)

.hhh audible inbreath (no. of „h“’s indicates length)

**(h)** audible aspirations in speech (e.g., laughter particles)

hah/heh/hih/hoh/huh all variants of laughter

( ) **empty single parentheses** transcriber unable to hear word

(bring) **word(s) in single parentheses** transcriber uncertain of hearing

((coughs)) **word(s) in double parentheses** transcriber’s comments on, or description of, sound: other audible sounds are represented as closely as possible in standard orthography, e.g., „tcht“ for tongue click; „mcht“ for a lip parting sound