

Cognitive Grammar Matters: Revisiting Linguists' Use of Question Types in Attitude Research

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In this paper we present recent experimental work in the field of cognitive sociolinguistics. Specifically, the aim of this research is to test the effects of the question types which linguists traditionally use to elicit attitudes towards linguistic varieties or corresponding speech communities. Most linguists take it for granted that some question types (those making no reference to linguistic varieties and/or psychological attributes) trigger 'deep' attitudes in implicit manners. Other question types supposedly elicit attitudes explicitly by directly mentioning linguistic varieties/accents and/or factors on the scales of status, solidarity or dynamism. Hence, the examples in (a)-(f) supposedly "do the same basic job", but encode different degrees of explicitness-implicitness in term of elicitation techniques:

- (a) This person can be relied on: she will not let you down
- (b) I would lend this person my mobile and some money
- (c) This person is trustworthy
- (d) This accent is used by people who will not let you down
- (e) This accent denotes trustworthiness
- (f) This accent denotes trustworthiness. I would lend this person my mobile phone and some money

In 6 controlled experiments we first aimed to test the extent to which such question types actually operate as an independent variable and yield different results. Each of the 6 groups of respondents consisted of an average of 28 first-year undergraduate students of English philology. Ethics statements were explained and distributed. All variables were held constant, except for the variation in the instruments (6 different questionnaires composed of different question types). The 6 panels all listened to the same speech fragment (thus holding topic and potential lexical priming constant) read by the same individual (holding factors such as speed, intonation, dynamism, voice quality and gender effects constant as well). The dimensions on which all 6 groups of respondents evaluated the speech fragment on a 5-level Likert scale were: social status, education, intelligence, trustworthiness, sense of humor, social attractiveness. Results show no significant statistical differences across question types when the results for the 6 dimensions are calculated in *global* terms. However, when correlations are made for individual dimensions across the questionnaires, significant differences do appear. Dimension 4 (trustworthiness) is for instance significant for question type 2 (p-value: 0.0001): respondents systematically agreed that they would *not* act in accordance with the statement expressed for dimension 4 (*I would lend this person my mobile and some money*). We interpret these results by analyzing the various question types in terms of different grammatical construals, and show that from the point of view of Cognitive Grammar these questions types are *not* just implicit-explicit counterparts of the same basic dimensions. Rather, some types evoke a speaker-oriented epistemic schema and others a listener-oriented possession or transfer schema, which may have an influence on the results. In this paper we also compare the results for a standard L1 accent with a non-standard L2 accent.

References

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