

‘How to do things with questions’: interactional power and stance taking.

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QQQ

‘How to do things with questions’: interactional power and stance taking.

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This paper presents a pragmatic analysis of interrogative utterances (what is said) and ‘questions’ (what is done) in 32 spontaneous task-oriented conversations of 96 Dutch 15-year old girls and boys in same-sex triads (henceforth: ‘the corpus’). A detailed study of this corpus reveals that the girls strategically exploit the poly-pragmatic functions of questions, interrogatives and final rise or high pitch, to a considerably higher extent than the boys. The results contradict the current interpretation given to the preference of women to use questions or final rise or high pitch which suggests that this would be the result of ‘submissiveness’ or ‘dependence’ on the hearer (Gussenhoven 2002, Haan 2002; see for an overview Šafářová 2004) because the questioner would be dependent on the information given by the hearer. The results challenge this interpretation of the data in two different ways: 1. not all questions are designed to request information and 2. not all women use questions out of submissiveness and/or dependency. The conclusion of the paper is that the interpretation of questions in terms of epistemicity is necessary but insufficient and should be widened up to that of discourse stances.

1. Introduction: women and questioning

For over more than a century scholars of all sorts are searching for gender differences in speech. During this time many myths have been falsified: men do not always interrupt (James and Clarke 1993), women do not always speak less (James and Drakich 1993), girls are not always indirect (van Alphen 1999), to name but a few. Nevertheless it is conspicuous that, regardless of theoretical background or scientific paradigm, asking questions, use of interrogative form and/or high pitch is persistently considered to be a ‘feature’ of feminine speech. Whether ‘questioning’ is an outcome of psychological insecurity (Lakoff 1973), a form of doing the ‘household’ of a conversation (Fishman 1983), an expression of cooperation and other-orientation (Maltz & Borker 1982, Sheldon 1990) or a biologically based predisposition of showing submissiveness and dependency towards the hearer (Haan & van Heuven 1999, Haan 2002, following Ohala 1984, Šafářová 2004) it is supposed to be ‘feminine’ to ask questions and ‘masculine’ to give orders.

In this paper I will investigate ‘questioning’ and its functions in adolescent same gender interactions. My aim is particularly driven by the current interpretation that questioning or use of high rise is used by women because of ‘submissiveness’ and that female speakers do not hesitate to show *dependency* on the hearer because high rise “can be seen as a powerful tool for giving expression to the speakers dependence on the listener’s goodwill.” (Haan 2002:214)

2. The corpus

For this paper I reanalyse my corpus of Dutch adolescent same-gender conversations (Van Alphen 1999). For this project, 96 fifteen year olds girls and boys same sex triads (peers) were asked to negotiate a joint ‘wish’ to be fulfilled for a well-known Dutch television program, ‘Geef Nooit Op’ (‘Never Give Up’; BBC: ‘Jim will fix it’). These conversations show the same basic interactional pattern: someone formulates a desire or wish (e.g. ‘let’s go bungee jumping’) which could be modified, elaborated, refused or agreed upon. The interaction is organized (*shut up!*), there is wit and humour (‘*what about some growth hormones?*’), laughter, and questions are being asked: ‘*where shall we go bungee jumping?*’, ‘*do you like that too?*’ The corpus consists of 6308 utterances, divided into four main interactional types: Turns (60%), Back Channels (8%), Laughter (17%), and a remaining category Varied (15%). The conversations last approximately 7 minutes and are fully transcribed and coded by means of CHILDES. For every utterance the turn taking type is established: initiation or reaction. The turns (interactional moves on the topic of negotiating a wish, n=3947, girls 2252 boys 1695) are further analyzed according to the type of speech act (‘what is done’, e.g. questions), and lexical-grammatical form (‘what is said’, e.g. interrogatives and tag questions.) The data are analyzed with SPSSPC, mainly with the T-test (*p<.05). The unit of analysis is the interactional move, here called ‘turn’. The data are collected in two regions in the Netherlands (Texel and Gouda), with an equal amount of female and male speakers from every region. All speakers are native Dutch.

3. Questioning and Question design

3.1. Quantifications on Questioning

In order to verify generalisations about women and ‘questionhood’ (is it about the use of interrogative form and/or the speech act ‘question?’) I will first give some – general - quantitative facts.

As was shown in van Alphen (2003), quantitative analyses of the corpus give no evidence that supports generalizations about females using more utterances with an *interrogative form* (y/n questions, wh-questions, declarative or alternative questions, *regardless of speech act type*). Out of the 2252 turns of the girls 14% have an interrogative form, out of the 1695 turns of the boys, 12%. Since the *tag question* has played a central role in the discussion about women using more questions or final rise than men, this interrogative form is separately coded but there is no significant gender difference in the use of tag questions either: a mean of 2% of the female and of the male turns (*regardless of speech act type*) end with a post clausal interrogative tag such as *hè?*, *toch?*, *niet?* ‘isn’t it?’¹

There is also no significant gender difference in the amount of *Questions (as a speech act)*, defined as a request for information or confirmation, *regardless of interrogative form*²: 5% (n=113) of the female turns is a question, for the males this is 3% (n=51).

In general, quantitative generalisations about ‘questioning’ and ‘women’ do not hold for these conversations: there is no significant gender difference in the total amount of questions, interrogatives and tag questions. But there is one exception to this: girls do ask significantly more initiating questions (7% of 493 initiating turns) than the boys (3% of 582 initiating turns) (p=.026). An initiating question is a question which is not a reaction to an utterance of a conversation partner; it is an independent question, as in ‘*Let’s go bungee jumping*’ (speech act: proposal), ‘*don’t you think that’s fun?*’ (speech act: question). In section (4.1) I will discuss the nature and cause of this ‘female’ preference in the use of questions.

3.2. Biased questions

In the above we have seen that a quantitative generalization across the whole corpus gives little reason to associate female speakers more than male speakers with interrogatives, tag questions or questions. So now it could be interesting to focus on the linguistic design of the Questions and analyse whether there is a gender difference in the use of *traditional* interrogative forms (wh, y/n, decl. etcetera). From a pragmatic point of view, however, in order to establish what questions ‘do’ in conversations, this is less relevant as can be seen in the following examples. In the a- and b-versions of the questions 1-4, the interrogative form remains the same, but the interactional function of the question changes considerably [b-versions are from the corpus].

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. y/n Q: a. ‘heb je dat gezien?’
did you see that? | b. ‘heb je dat <i>niet</i> gezien?’
<i>didn’t</i> you see that? |
| 2. decl. Q: a. ‘jij wou iets met kinderen?’
you wanted something with children? | b. ‘jij wou <i>toch</i> iets met kinderen?’
you <i>did</i> want something with children? |
| 3. tag Q: a. ‘is tof, <i>hè?</i> ’
is cool, <i>isn’t it?</i> | b. ‘is <i>toch</i> tof, <i>hè?</i> ’
is cool <i>indeed</i> , <i>isn’t it?</i> |
| 4. wh-Q: a. ‘wat vind je daar aan?’
what do you like about it? | b. ‘wat vind je daar <i>dan</i> aan?’
what do you like about it <i>then?</i> |

The b-versions of these questions are more conducive or leading than the a-versions: unstressed ‘*niet*’ (not) or negative polar questions, and discourse particles as *toch* (indeed) and *dan* (then) signal a stronger answer preference to the hearer than the a-versions. And it is particularly this type of questions that is used more by the girls than the boys. Out of the 101 questions of the girls (with a proposition!, see section 4.2) 63% are **biased questions**. They either are a tag question or they contain one (or more) discourse particles (or both, see example 3 b.). Out of the 49 questions (with a proposition) of the boys, 42% are biased questions. This difference is significant (p=.002). Half of the biased female questions are ‘build’ by using a *tag question* (*toch*, *hè?*) or the intra clausal *toch* ‘indeed, surely’. The Dutch modal particle *toch* has many meanings (‘after all, surely, all the same, anyway, anyhow, still, indeed, even so, rather, actually’) and therefore many functions. *Toch* in post clausal position is the Dutch version of *isn’t it* as a tag question as in 5a. intraclausal *toch*, even more signals the attitude - more certain - of the speaker as in 5b:

- | | |
|---|---|
| (5) a. dat kunnen ze niet menen, <i>toch?</i> | they can’t be serious, <i>can they?</i> |
| b. dat kunnen ze <i>toch</i> niet menen? | <i>surely</i> they can’t be serious? |

¹ The interactional counterpart of *tag questions*, the so-called *tag enforcers*, post clausal elements as ‘hoor’, or ‘zeg’, which stress the propositions in the sentence, also has no significant gender difference: girls 2%, boys 3%.

² Excluding specific Requests for Clarification/repetition (Bungeewhat?) and Problemizing Acts (also no gender differences).

Both versions signal that the speaker expects a confirmative answer, but the b-version of this question is more biased than the a-version. In 5a. the speaker believes that p, but in the b-version (as well as the b-version in examples 1-4) the speaker not only believes that p, but believes that p is more likely.

The second device that is almost exclusively used in the female conversations is the Dutch modal/discourse particle *dan* 'then' as in (4b). *Dan* expresses affective stances such as impatience or displeasure and expresses doubt to the truth of a statement, especially when used in elliptical questions used by the speaker to challenge a statement about a person or a state of affairs: '*nobody knows that I'm here and your brother then?*' as well as in the male question '*are you allowed to bungee jump then?*' ('*mag jij dan wel bungee jumpen?*') with the implication 'you're not allowed'. And see fragment 10, line 15 in section 4.3 for a very impatient and irritable female 'then'.

The male speakers use these discourse or stance markers only a few times (6%) in their biased questions. The remaining male biased questions are polar questions such as: '*you do want to go to Iceland?*', '*why not?*', '*don't you think so?*'

The aforementioned particles *toch* or *ook* and *dan* are discourse markers which specify certain relations between the utterance and context parameters such as *topic* and *common ground*. These have to be reconstructed by the hearer (Zeevat 2004). The girls regulate not only more than the boys the exact interpretation of their questions, but since it is obligatory to answer a question (and preferably the answer which is suggested in the particle!), the girls also regulate more than the boys the exact content of the answer. In the mean time their questions are 'designed' in such a way that the female speakers express their attitudes or affective stance (displeasure, feelings, impatience, persistence) towards the proposition contained within the question.

This leads to the conclusion that if the meaning of a question is its possible set of answers (Groenendijk & Stokhof 1996) then the meaning of a question for these girls seems to be *preferably* a very strictly defined subset of all possible answers, because the female question-design is more tailored to reach the goal of the questioner: a preferred answer. At least in first instance, as is illustrated in fragment (1) Beverley Hills, in which TAN and BRE both wish to play a role in the Beverley Hills series. INA agrees (line 3) with 'yes' but stops after '*that*'. So TAN asks again for agreement (line 4 '*yes?*') BRE complies in line 5, and/but INA acts out an evasive manoeuvre: she pretends the microphone to talk (line 6), this is followed by laughter but BRE insists for a positive answer from INA by negative polar questions (line 8, 10), helped by TAN with an elliptical question [*isn't it fun*] *playing Beverley Hills together?* INA first gives in (line 12) '*yeah sure, but*' and then - finally - is brave enough to say '*no*' (line 13), although '*not yet*'.

FRAGMENT (1) BEVERLEY HILLS

- | | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|
| 1. | TAN: yes, sure go play in Beverley Hills! | | ja, echt wel in Beverley Hills spelen! |
| 2. | BRE: ok we send this in. | | ok we sturen 'm op |
| 3. | INA: yes that+... | | ja dat+... |
| 4. | TAN: yes? | ← | ja? |
| 5. | BRE: yes that's seems fun to me : | | ja dat lijkt me wel leuk |
| 6. | INA: shut up! ☹ [joke to microphone] | | houd je kop! ☹ |
| 7. | TAN: hehehehe | | hahahaha |
| 8. | BRE: doesn't it seem fun to you? | ← | lijkt het je niet leuk ? |
| 9. | TAN & INA: hehehehe | | hahahaha |
| 10. | BRE: yes, isn't it? | ← | ja, hè ? |
| 11. | TAN: playing Beverley Hills together? | ← | Beverley Hills spelen met z'n allen? |
| 12. | INA: yeah sure, but. | | ja wel, maar. |
| 13. | INA: no not yet | | nee nog niet. |
| 14. | All three laugh & say okay, yes. | | Alledrie lachen en beamen. |

The power of the questioner over the hearer is evident, as the last fragment shows, were it takes INA several turns (and one evasive action) to finally escape the agreement forcing questions of the two other girls: she does *not* think it is fun to play Beverley Hills together, at least, not yet.

In this section I have demonstrated that the girls use significantly more **biased questions** than the boys. In the case of a tag question even a whole statement is presented to be confirmed, and needs to be disputed if the hearer 'accidentally' doesn't agree. In this respect the interesting tendency should be noted that the female speakers predominantly use their tag questions in the speech act Question (40% out of 45 *tag*

questions). The male speakers use only 10% of their *tag questions* (100%=34) in Questions. They use most of their tag questions (28%) in jocular and humorous speech acts, as in: ‘*well, everybody does feel lonely sometimes, isn’t it?*’ or ‘*our inventor, isn’t it?*’ as funny answer to the serious question ‘*who can think of something?*’ In the distribution of interrogatives in non serious speech acts, we also find a similar tendency: 17% for boys, 12% for girls. Boys reframe the conversation from serious to non serious, by ‘countering’ serious proposals by means of high rise ‘*a beauty salon?*’ followed by ‘*what about some growth hormones?*’ (to an apparently small size boy) . Here we get insight in the function of humour as ‘*male bonding*’: the elicitation of confirmation of the presuppositions in the (*tag questions* reinforces their *common funny ground*. A second explanation of the salient use of interrogatives and question contour in non-serious sequences in the male conversations could lie in another important function of humour for males: to attract an audience. (Hay 2000). So what could be better attracting an audience and forcing a reply than interrogatives and tag questions? A third explanation is that humour can be a powerful interactional device because the speaker re-frames a serious conversation into a non-serious one. Witty contributions change or stop the ongoing topic and make an unmarked topic marked. By using interrogatives and tag questions the boys also exploit their interactional power because it makes the listeners dependent on the speaker.

This analysis of the linguistic design of the questions shows that the girls ‘do’ more with their questions: they reinforce the *common ground, the shared opinions of the participants*. The answers are strongly dependent on the preference structure which is ‘given’ along by the female questioner. The hearer is therefore dependent on the words of the questioner (in stead of the reverse, as Haan 2002 states).

To conclude and illustrate this section, I present two comparable questions, (6a) and (6b), from the corpus. Both speakers are ‘questioning’ if a particular wish should be send in, the locution is the same, the illocutionary force too, but the interactional force of the a-version is less powerful than the b-version because of its modal verb ‘should’ and two hesitant markers ‘eh’ around ‘like that’.

- (6) a. *would* you send that eh in like eh that? *zou je dat eh nou zo eh insturen?*
 b. you’re *surely not* going to send (this) in, are you? *ga je toch niet insturen?*

In view of what has been said earlier it will come as no surprise that the a-version is spoken by a male, the b-version by a female. Actually, both get the expected answer ‘no’.

4. Interactional functions of questions

Here I present three types of questions which are predominantly used by the female speakers and which are very hard to categorize into existing taxonomies: 1. Opinion Questions (labelled in terms of content: ‘*don’t you think that’s fun?*’), 2. Floorgetting Questions (labelled in terms of interactional function: ‘*you know what’s fun too?*’). 3. False Questions (labelled in terms of tone and questionable question-status: as in ‘*well so what are we going to do?*’

4.1. Opinion questions. Almost half of the initiating questions (see section 3.1) of the girls elicit opinions, judgements from the others. When giving a proposal such as ‘*let’s go bungee jumping*’ this is often followed by a question ‘*don’t you think that’s cool?*’ or after a positive judgement is given ‘*don’t you think so too?*’ is added. These – mostly – negative polar questions reinforce confirmative responses such as ‘*yes that’s fun*’. And indeed: 13% of the female turns is a positive judgement against 7% of the male turns ($p=.000$). However, before reinforcing another myth, the female speakers also pass significantly more *negative* judgements on someone’s proposals (‘*no not that, man!*’, ‘*that’s rubbish, hey!*’ ‘*yuk I hate that*’) than the male speakers: 6% versus 2% ($p=.000$). So the sharing of mutual opinions seems to be a fundamental interactional norm in these female negotiations: on average 1 in 5 turns is a judgement (positive or negative). In the male conversations this is 1 in 10 turns. A consequence (or cause) of this interactional norm is therefore that opinions are not only elicited by questions, but also reinforced, as was shown in fragment 1. Ergo: these female speakers do ask each other more initiating questions, because they want to know/share/reinforce each others opinion. It is not unknown in sociolinguistics that sub cultural differences exist in asking particular questions. In some cultures or circumstances, for instance, it is obligatory to ask questions about someone’s well-being or family. In other cultures these questions are taboo. My point is that in generalizations about types of people using ‘more’ or ‘less’ questions, these sort of sociolinguistic factors and local contexts should be taken into account (see also Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 1992).

4.2. Floorgetting Questions. The second type of questions – also known as pre-requests - are almost solely used by the female speakers – and can hardly be put into existing taxonomies - are questions as the following: (7) ‘*do you know what we can do too?*’ (8) ‘*do you know what I hate too?*’ (9) ‘*do you know were I want to go?*’ I discuss two more examples from the corpus in detail:

FRAGMENT (2) BANANA

1. ILS: do you know what's fun too?
2. JIR: no
3. ILS: on a banana
4. JUD: what?
5. ILS: in France

FRAGMENT (3) SKI JUMP

1. RIE: do you know what seems cool?
2. ANK: yes?
3. EVA: err what?
4. RIE: skiing from a ski jump!
5. ANK: no stupid, act normal!

Theoretically the first sentences in both fragments are yes/no questions, and as we can see in lines 2 they do receive a 'no' and a 'yes' answer, but *de facto* it is impossible to answer these questions because only the questioner knows the answer. A semantic analysis in terms of truth value of the proposition or presupposition is not possible here. These are neither requests for information nor requests for confirmation. These questions seem to have 'only' a function at discourse level: a. they (re)organize the turn taking: the speaker 'requests' for the floor, and b. they (re)organize the topic development, since they announce a new topic or subtopic: 'I would like to talk about a p which I like/hate/want to do, can I have your attention? if yes, I tell you what p is' The empirical fact that these questions can be answered by 'no' (*I do not know the new p*, line 2 in 2) as well as 'yes' (*-tell us p*, line 2 in 3) or even 'what' (*is a cool p?* line 3 in 3) proves the polypragmatic function of these questions. The factive 'know' gives the suggestion that the speaker herself is already aware of p and in the case of a question this makes the hearer (if interested) epistemic dependent on the questioner. Even more eroded or bleached in meaning is the empirical finding in natural conversations of the semantically empty, by rising intonation nevertheless floor holding '*whatsit?*' or '*howsitcalled?*' ('hoeheettut') often at the beginning of a new topic, as in (13) in which the female adult speaker changes from 'doubts' to a completely new topic 'marriage', with 'by the way' (trouwens) as *topic shift marker* and '*whatsitcalled?*' as floor holder:

(10) I doubt that too. *whatsitcalled?* Joan married John by the way.

While it is somehow possible to retrieve some presupposition in examples 7-9 and 2-1 & 3-1 (the speaker has a plan or an opinion), in (10) this is not the case, except – at the discourse level - **that** someone wants to tell something. In these examples the speaker exploits apparently two basic properties of questions:

1. the attention getting high pitch of questions and 2. the conversational routine that a question demands an answer, or at least a non-verbal response (attention, vision) or a minimal form *yes* or *no* or *what*. In all these cases the questioner may/must – because of lack of information by the addressees – answer the question themselves, by which the 'questioner' holds or gains the floor. I call these questions Floor Getting questions, which rather should be classified as metalinguistic or discourse managing speech acts, since the conversational implicature is actually: 'listen, I want to say something'³.

As shown above, the female speakers in my corpus (and other data) make - in a very ingenious way – use of the interactional power of questions. There is only one boy (out of 48!) who uses this type of question: '*do you know what's cool for me?*' (no answer) and '*do you know what I do want?*' (funny answer: '*drink a lot!*' 'veel zuipen'). Because of the vague semantic content of these floor getting questions many of the responses are themselves interrogative: '*no?*', '*yes?*', '*what?*' These sequences seem characteristic a 'female' 'questioning' speech style. But as shown in fragment 2 (BANANA) it is not the questioner who is dependent on the goodwill of the listener, but the reverse: the initial questioner ILS gives away scantily her information about her wish: a trip to France and then play on a big plastic banana in the sea.

4.3 False Questions (Orders for Confirmation).

The last finding I will present here is that not only is a female questioner interested in some possible *worlds*, she is also interested in some possible *words*. As will be shown below, the girls use False Questions by prompting the hearer – in falsetto - to give precise and definite answers. This question type plays a major role in my current quest into the interactional functions of questions, and my objections against a 'dependent' interpretation of female use of questions and high rise. I therefore discuss in detail fragment (4) 'ACT NÓRMAL' in which one girl tells - not asks - the others what to do and this is taken as a very blunt order⁴, but nevertheless leads to a sequence of more blunt orders, followed and accompanied by a more than salient use of 'feminine' questions, interrogatives, tag questions and high rise

³ In Greenwood (1996:89) an eleven year old girl asks two times '*you know what?*' '*you know what?*' but get no response. Then she utters the above postulated central meaning of this question and calls out: '*listen!*'

⁴ This is a fine illustration of Goodwin's (1980:169) observations that "though boys seldom discuss the form of their commands, girls, when wanting to characterize someone as having been particularly bold, *cite instances of the usage of direct commands*"

The fragment starts when ANS ‘tells’ FEM to summarize their negotiations about their wish (canoeing on the Amazon river) ‘you give a summary’ The two other girls inflame with anger about the fact that ANS is ‘just prescribing them’ (line 9). In line 3 and 11 ANS’ ‘order’ is cited with a high and false tone of voice ‘yeah WHAT NOW “SUMMARY”? (peak 480Hz) and ‘yes wait a minute hey, I’m gonna summarize, hey’ After that, they pursue ANS with a sequence of (socializing) prescriptions themselves (lines 4,7,8). In line 19 FEM tries to release the tension with a metalinguistic speech act ‘are we fighting here over a summary’ ended with a little laugh to express the humorous side of it. ANS immediately joins in and tries to correct her mistake by the little joke ‘let’s rewind’ (line 20). This, nevertheless, makes everything worse: ‘no don’t bullshit!’ is the imperative response (line 21)

In the meantime, besides bald statements or imperative utterances, the girls exploit the use of ‘feminine’ interrogatives, tag questions stressed by duration of the vowel in HÈ::? (8,10), and high rise questions such as ‘why thén must that (be) thén?’ or ‘well so what are we going to do:?’ (15,18,22)

[Overlap not coded for clearness; +...=speaker stops voluntarily; # =1 sec silence; i:, a::= lengthened vowel; CAP = loud; é á,= stress on vowel]

FRAGMENT (4) ‘ACT NÓRMAL’

GEWÓÓN DOEN’

- | | | | |
|----------|--|---|---|
| 1. ANS: | you give a summary | | jij geeft een samenvatting. |
| 2. FEM: | <i>why me?</i> | ← | <i>waarom ik?</i> |
| 3. MAI: | <i>yeah WHAT NOW “SUMMARY”? #</i> | ← | <i>ja WAT NOU “SAMENVATTING”? #</i> |
| 4. MAI: | hey we’re not in Dutch class here, héé ! | | we zitten niet bij Nederlands hoor hier héé! |
| 5. ANS: | well! [=please stop] | | nou! [=toe nou] |
| 6. FEM: | no we sit here eh+... | | nee we zitten hier eh+... |
| 7. MAI: | well you must not act so pósh! | | nou je moet niet zo déftig doen. |
| 8. MAI: | you must act nórma
<i>they always say, I:SNT’I:T?</i> | ← | je moet gewóón doen
<i>zeggen ze altijd, HÈ::?</i> |
| 9. FEM: | you just prescribe it to us! | | je schrijft ‘t ons gewoon voor! |
| 10. FEM: | <i>yes, I:SN’I:T?</i> | ← | <i>ja HÈ::?</i> [HÈ as MAI in 9] |
| 11. MAI: | well then you just go “yes wait a minute
hey, I’m gonna summarize, hey” [false voice] | | nou loop jij dan gewoon “ja wacht effe
hoor, ik ga effe samenvatten hoor”. |
| 12. ANS: | hihihu [nervous giggle] | | hihihu [zenuwachtig gegiechel] |
| 13. FEM: | well yóu do it than! | | nou doe jij dat dan! |
| 14. ANS: | no I+... | | nee ik+... |
| 15. MAI: | <i>why thén must that (be) thén?</i> | ← | <i>waarom dán moet dat dán?</i> |
| 16. ANS: | you (one) can surely just+... | | je kunt toch gewoon +... |
| 17. FEM: | no ok. | | nee oké. |
| 18. MAI: | <i>well so whát are we going to do:?</i> # | ← | <i>nou wát gaan we dus doe:n?#</i> |
| 19. FEM: | are we fighting over a summary hehe | | zitten we hier ruzie te maken over een
samenvatting hihi . |
| 20. ANS: | let’s rewind! [moaning] | | effe terugspoelen! [kreunend] |
| 21. MAI: | don’t bullshit! | | nee lul niet! |
| 22. MAI: | <i>so whát are we going to do:?</i> | ← | <i>wát gaan we dus doe:n?</i> |
| 23. ANS: | well. | | nou. |
| 24. FEM: | well that is. | | nou dat heb. |
| 25. FEM: | that is: said+it+yet ok | | dat wordt: zei+ik+al ok. |
| 26. MAI: | yeah well CANOEING simply! | | ja nou KANOVAREN gewoon! |
| 27. ANS: | okay | | oké. |

Two interactional norms show up in this fragment. First, that it is ‘not normal’ to give orders among the girls, not even in a bald statement as ‘you give a summary’. Secondly it is apparently ‘not abnormal’ that MAI prescribes the others - by using interrogatives, high rise and vowel duration - that what ‘we’ are going to do is ‘simply canoeing’ (line 26). MAI is ‘prompting’ (Schiffrin 1994) the other girls to say what she wants (compare the motherly ‘so what are you saying then?’ to children receiving gifts). Following Goodwin et al (2002) the prominence and duration of the tag question Hè::? (line 8 en 10), the intonation contour (LH*L 195Hz - 650Hz) and extreme high rise in (15) ‘why thén must that (be) thén?’ accompanied by persistent ‘thén’, the extreme final rise in (18) ‘well so whát are we going to do:?’ (LH* 590Hz, and a range from 120Hz -590Hz) is used to *highlight* the opposition in this fragment. As Goodwin et al (2002) show for Latina

and Afro American girls, both vowel length and intonation contour are critical to the construction of *stance* in oppositional talk. Especially in conflict talk, pitch prominence, as indicated through vowel length and fundamental frequency, on negative statements in female conversations is very common. Whereas the normal pitch range of a speaker's talk in ordinary conversation can be between 250 and 350 Hz, in opposition moves the pitch is considerably higher, around 600Hz. It should be noted that Goodwin et al (2002:1643) found a significant difference between the two groups of girls: the Latina girls were much more likely to pitch their opposition turns outside the range of 500Hz than the AAVE groups, but both groups "(...) make use of contours and duration to call attention to what is being said." Brown (1993) calls the use of sarcastic questions in conflict talk among women in Tenejapa, Mexico (as well as in Japan) a form of rudeness and a characteristic female stance: exploiting mutual knowledge and shared agreement strategies to emphasize disagreement.

The above analysis makes clear that besides the use of lexical items ('then') and syntactic shape (interrogative, tag question) in opposition moves the girls also make use of prosodic means such as high rise and vowel duration to express their negative stance which – again - make the listener completely dependent on the questioner. This type of question could be better classified as an Order for Confirmation. An order (command) usually intends to control the addressees *non-verbal* behaviour, this type of order intends to control the *verbal* behaviour of the addressee: compliance by producing the exact and literally *words* preferred by the questioner.

5. Discussion

In this paper I have shown that questioning is the tool *par excellence* to create and maintain (or impose) shared ideas and desires in the common ground. Support for this statement is found in the fact that most interrogatives and tag questions in the boys' conversations are located in humorous or jocular sequences, establishing a common *funny* ground: humour as male bonding, attracting an audience, control the interaction. I have also shown that the girls exploit the whole range of interrogatives, questions and question contour, to a higher extent than the boys, and that doing so is not (always) a sign of their being uncertain or dependent on the addressee: in fact the reverse could be maintained equally well.

Secondly, I demonstrated that the girls make use of questions in which no propositional content or truth value can be established, but are nevertheless answered. These independent questions, also known as pre-requests, as '*do you know what's great too?*' seem to function at the discourse level only, as bids for the floor and/or topic changing devices. These question strategies, as well as the False Question, make *parasitical* use of the properties of 'proper' questions: a (very) high rising tone as an attention getter, the obligation to answer, and the knowledge that dispreferred answers will be avoided by the hearers (as the boys do in their funny sequences). Questions are therefore powerful interactional devices which minimal control the turn taking mechanism in a conversation (discourse level) and maximally put the literally words in the mouth of another (lexical level). The power of questions therefore stretches out over all linguistic levels: discourse level, conversational topic, subtopic, proposition, and lexical level. This is mainly done by the female speakers but also the male speakers exploit questioning in humour-sequences, to attract attention, change topic and reinforce shared common ground.

Based on these findings it is my strong opinion that the analysis of questions and questionhood in terms of epistemic modality (and therefore uncertainty) remains necessary, but is insufficient if one wants to account for the whole range of question-like utterances (questionoids?) that occur in natural conversations. Support for this view can be found in Sinclair & van Gessel (1990) who found only very few classical information questions and state that even referential questions have an expressive content which is independent of their information content. Šafářová (2004) considers, for certain languages, 'question contour' as a modal expression of epistemic uncertainty, but she also wants to account for *attitudinal* associations as friendliness, politeness and submissiveness. We have, however, seen that questions and question contour can be hostile too, since questions do not only contain answer preferences, but express just like rhetorical questions, hidden epistemic 'stances' (strong opinions), which are – in stead of being answered - denied or confirmed by the addressees (see e.g. Heritage 2002). With respect to question contour, I have shown that high and final rise and extended vowel length in Dutch is used in the context of strong disagreement among girls, thereby exploiting these prosodic devices – not as a means of submissiveness, politeness or dependency – but as a powerful contextualisation cue that signals a negative, disagreeing attitude (not hidden, but *overt* stance) towards the listeners. This finding is supported by Goodwin et al (2002) who also stress that there are differences in the use of prosodic devices between Latina and African American female groups, so generalisations should not be made to hasty (again).

My empirical analysis of questions in real conversations leads therefore to the conclusion that questions, interrogativity and ‘question contours’ should be analyzed in terms other than epistemic modal ones. The things that questions can do go far beyond the scope of epistemicity and I would therefore propose to use the more abstract and analytically better notion of discourse stance, since it encompasses both *epistemic* stance as well as *affective* stance (see e.g. Berman et al 2002). Stance is the linguistic expression of *attitudes*, feelings, judgments, or commitment concerning the propositional content of a message. To my knowledge, questions are seldom or not described in terms other than *epistemic* stance, although Koshik (2002:1855) in a note does mention that “other stance displays may also be expressed through these questions”.

By using the more abstract notion of discourse stance, which comprises the attitudes, feelings, opinions but also the epistemic knowledge of the speaker when producing questions, not only logicians and language philosophers, but interactional linguists and others working with ‘real’ questions too, can get a theoretical grip of all the Things that can be done with Questions.

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