CHAPTER 3

The formulation of requests for an answer

So far we have discussed the distinction between concepts-by-postulation and concepts-by-intuition (Chapter 1). We also studied the way basic concepts-by-intuition used in survey research can be expressed in assertions (Chapter 2). In this chapter we will continue with the discussion of how assertions can be transformed into requests for an answer.

While the choice of the topic of requests and the selection of concepts are determined by the research goal of the study, the formulation of questions or requests for an answer, as we call them, provides much more freedom of choice for the designer of a questionnaire. A great deal of research has been done on the effect of different ways in which requests are formulated (Schuman and Presser 1981; Molenaar 1986; Billiet et al. 1986). Also a considerable part of the literature is devoted to devise rules of thumb for the wording of survey items (Dillman 2000; Converse and Presser 1986). On the other hand, relatively little attention is given to the linguistic procedures for the formulation of requests for answers in the survey literature.

Therefore, in this chapter we will discuss different procedures to transform the assertions, discussed in the last chapter, into requests for an answer. In doing so we make use of a large body of research in linguistics, especially Harris (1978), Givon (1990), Weber (1993), Graesser et al. (1994), Huddlestone (1994), Ginzburg (1996), and Groenendijk and Stokhof (1997). The rules for the formulation of requests for an answer in English will be presented in the text, but in general these formulation rules also apply in other languages such as German, Dutch, French, and Spanish. If they are different in one of the languages just mentioned, it will be indicated in the appropriate section by a note.

3.1 FROM CONCEPTS TO REQUESTS FOR AN ANSWER

The term "request for an answer" is employed, because the social science research practice and the linguistic literature (Harris 1978; Givon 1990; Weber 1993; Graesser, et al. 1994; Huddlestone 1994; Ginzburg 1996; Groenendijk and Stokhof 1997; Tourangeau et al. 2000) indicate that requests for an answer are formulated not only as requests (interrogative form) but also as orders or

instructions (imperative form), as well as assertions (declarative form) that require an answer. Even in the case where no request is asked, and an instruction is given or a statement is made, the text implies that the respondent is expected to give an answer. Thus the common feature of the formulation is not that a request is asked but that an answer is requested.

If an assertion is specified for a concept, the simplest way to transform it into a request for an answer is to add a prerequest in front of the assertion. This procedure can be applied to any concept and assertion. Imagine that we want to know the degree of importance that the respondents place on the value "honesty" as in examples 3.1a–3.1d:

3.1a   *Honesty is very important.*
3.1b   *Honesty is important.*
3.1c   *Honesty is unimportant.*
3.1d   *Honesty is very unimportant.*

To make a request from these assertions prerequests can be added in front of them, as for example:

3.2a   *Do you think that honesty is very important?*
3.2b   *Do you think that honesty is important?*
3.2c   *Do you think that honesty is unimportant?*
3.2d   *Do you think that honesty is very unimportant?*

Using such a prerequest followed by the conjunction "that" and the original assertion creates a request called an *indirect request*. The choice of one of these possible requests for a questionnaire seems rather arbitrary or even incorrect as this specific choice of the request can lead the respondent in that direction. Therefore a more balanced approach has been suggested:

3.2e   *Do you think that honesty is very important, important,*
       unimportant or very unimportant?

In order to avoid such an awkward sentence with too many adjectives it is advisable to substitute them with a so called WH word like "how", as in the example below:

3.2f   *Can you specify how important honesty is ?*

This is also an indirect request with a prerequest and a subclause that started with a WH word and allows for all the assertions specified above (3.1a–3.1d) as an answer and other variations thereof.

Instead of indirect requests *direct requests* can also be used; the most common form is an interrogative sentence. This type of request is normally called a "request" or a "direct request." In this case the request can be created from an assertion by the inversion of the (auxiliary) verb with the subject and other variations thereof. The construction of direct requests by the inversion of the verb and

subject component is quite common in many languages but also other forms can be used.[1]

Let us illustrate this with another example "vote intention," which is a behavioral intention. It can be formulated in an assertion of structure 2 (Chapter 2) with an auxiliary verb indicating that the action will be in the future. This leads to the following possible assertions:

3.3a   *I am going to vote for the Social Democrats.*
3.3b   *I am going to vote for the Republicans.*

One can transform these assertions into direct requests by inverting the auxiliary verb and the subject, while a simultaneous change from the first to the second person for the subject is also necessary. It leads to examples 3.4a and 3.4b:

3.4a   *Are you going to vote for the Social Democrats?*
3.4b   *Are you going to vote for the Republicans?*

Here the requests can be seen as "leading" or "unbalanced" because they have only one possible answer option. It could be expected that a high percentage of respondents would choose this option for this reason. Therefore, the requests can be reformulated as follows:

3.5   *Are you going to vote for the Social Democrats or the Republicans?*

A different way to formulate a direct request is also possible. We have seen that the point of interest is the party preference. Therefore one can also omit the names of the parties in the request and place a "WH word" in front of the request. In this case one is interested in the party preference that people intend to vote for. Hence, the words "Social Democrats" and/or "Republicans" are omitted and the WH word "What" followed by the more general term "party" is placed in front of the request, which leads to the following request for an answer:

3.6   *What party are you going to vote for?*

The advantage of this format is that it is not biased to a political party, by mentioning only one possibility or giving first place to a party in the sentence word order.

This overview shows that two basic choices have to be made for formulating a request for an answer: the use of direct or indirect requests and whether to use WH words. The combination of these two choices leads to four different

1 In French it is also possible to place the question formula "Est-ce que" in front of a declarative sentence to indicate the interrogative form. Spanish, for instance, constitutes an exception since one does not have to use the inversion, as rising intonation of the declarative form is already enough. Interrogatives are indicated by two question marks, one in front of the clause (¿) and the other at the end of the clause (?).

types of requests, which we will describe below; however, before doing so, we will discuss one other distinction.

Besides the interrogative form, two other grammatical forms of a request for an answer are also possible, the second of which is the imperative form. In its basic form the request consists only of an instruction to the respondent, as for example:

3.7   *Indicate the party you are going to vote for.*
  1. *Republicans*
  2. *Social Democrats*
  3. *Independents*
  4. *don't know*

Example 3.7 illustrates that requests for an answer can also have another grammatical form than an interrogative one. Example 3.7 is colloquially known as an instruction or in grammatical terms it is referred to as an "imperative." This is another example of a direct request for an answer.

The third grammatical form, a declarative request, is not possible as a direct request for an answer but only as an indirect request. Illustrations are examples 3.8 and 3.9. Both examples have a declarative prerequest, followed by a WH word and an embedded interrogative query, and example 3.9 displays an interrogative prerequest with an embedded declarative query:

3.8   *I would like to ask you what party you are going to vote for.*
3.9   *Next we ask you whether you are going to vote for the Republicans or the Democrats.*

Although these are statements from a grammatical perspective, it is commonly understood that an answer to the embedded interrogative part of the sentence is required.

This overview shows that many different requests for an answer can be formulated to measure concepts like "the importance of the value of honesty" or "vote intention." However, it is important to note that whatever the request form used, there is no doubt that all these requests measure what they are supposed to measure. Therefore there is no real difficulty with making an appropriate request for a concept if the assertions represent the concept of interest well. It only points further toward the importance of the previous chapter in the whole process of designing requests.

3.2   DIFFERENT TYPES OF REQUESTS FOR AN ANSWER

After the introduction of the basic forms of requests for an answer we will now examine how the different requests can be formulated in more detail. Table 3.1 summarizes the different types of requests for answers occurring in survey interviews according to their grammatical form and use in survey research. The table shows that not all theoretically possible combinations can be formulated; direct instructions with WH words are impossible because they automatically

become indirect requests. Indirect requests with embedded declarative statements are also only possible without WH words because these subclauses have to begin with the conjunction "that" to be considered as declarative. We will discuss and illustrate the remaining options starting with direct requests.

Table 3.1: Different types of requests for answers

WH words	Direct request	Direct instruction	Indirect request
WH word not present	Direct request	Direct instruction	Interrogative + interrogative
		Imperative + interrogative	Interrogative + declarative
	—	Declarative + interrogative	—
WH word present	—	Imperative + interrogative	—
	Direct request	Interrogative + interrogative	—
	—	Declarative + interrogative	Declarative + interrogative

3.2.1 Direct request

We have already given several examples of direct requests. Therefore we will be relatively brief about this type of request. We start with the direct instructions.

3.2.1.1 The direct instruction

As was mentioned above, the direct instruction consists of a sentence in the imperative mood. This form is not so common in colloquial language but is quite common in written questionnaires or other written formats that one has to fill out for the government and other agencies. In this case no request is asked but just an instruction is given at what one has to do. Very common examples in very short form appear on application forms starting with

3.10   *First name:* ....
3.11   *Family name:* ....
3.12   *Date of birth:* ....

Most people understand these instructions and write the requested information on the dots. In the case where less elementary information is asked for, more instruction has to be given and full sentences are used. Very common examples include the following:

3.13 Select from the specified possibilities the one that fits your family situation best:

1. *Single*
2. *Single with child(ren)*
3. *Married without child(ren)*
4. *Married with child(ren)*

Another example taken from social research is

3.14 *Indicate your opinion about the presidency of Clinton by a number between 0 and 10, where 0 means very bad and 10 very good.*

Another example from mail questionnaires is also

3.15 *Indicate your opinion about the presidency of Clinton by a cross on the line below:*

Very bad I⎯⎯I⎯⎯I⎯⎯I⎯⎯I⎯⎯I⎯⎯I *Very good*

In interviewer-administered questionnaires these instructions are very uncommon and a more polite request form is preferred.

3.2.1.2 The direct request

As was mentioned before, a direct request contains an inversion of the (auxiliary) verb and the subject. The word order thus is changed. To illustrate we start with the following assertions:

3.16 *The position of blacks has improved recently.*

3.17 *I prefer the Republican Party above the Democratic Party.*

From the first example a direct request can be formed by putting the auxiliary verb "to have" in front of the subject:

3.18 *Has the position of blacks improved recently?*

This is called an *inversion* because the position of the auxiliary verb and the subject are reverted. Example 3.17 in request form could be

3.19 *Do you prefer the Republican Party above the Democratic Party?*

Here the auxiliary is not the verb "to be" but "to do" and the subject is "you." Direct requests can also be formulated as we have seen using WH words. So let us look at this approach a bit more carefully here. The linguistic literature (Lehnert 1978; Harris 1978; Chisholm el al. 1984; Givon 1990; Huddleston 1994)

treats requests introduced by words like "who," "whose," "whom," "why," "where," "when," "which," "what," and "how" as a specific type of request. In English they are also called *WH-interrogatives*. According to Givon (1990:739) a specific request is used when the researcher and the respondent share some knowledge but a particular element is unknown to the former and this component is the asked for element. This element is replaced by an interrogative word and constitutes the focus of the request, which means that the researcher wishes to draw special attention to it. In the previous section we have seen that one reason to use WH words in front of direct requests is to avoid leading or unbalanced requests. The example was:

3.20 *What party are you going to vote for?*

The advantage of this form is that one cannot be blamed for giving an advantage to one of the two parties by mentioning only one or mentioning one party as the first in the request. However, there are other reasons to use WH-fronted requests. Fronting the word "when" realizes the request to ask for the *time* when the change occurred:

3.21 *When did this change occur?*

By asking a "where" request one can determine the *place* where the change occurred:

3.22 *Where did this change occur?*

Finally by asking a "why" request one can determine the *cause* or *motives* of the change:

3.23 *Why did this change happen?*

These examples show that WH requests are used to ask a specific element. Grammatically the WH word stands in the beginning and mostly also a switching of the subject auxiliary occurs. The nature of the WH word determines the missing element. This fronting of the request word occurs in many languages with slight variations.[2]

There are more WH words that can be used. We shall return to this issue in the following sections.

3.2.2 Indirect request

Indirect requests for an answer necessitate further discussion because they can come in many different forms as indicated in Table 3.1. We will discuss the different forms in sequence. Because it is rather natural to use in these indirect requests WH words like "whether" or "what" or "which" we will not completely separate the two types of requests but give examples with and without WH words.

2 In French additionally the interrogative form "est-ce que" might be put after the specific question word.

3.2.2.1 Imperative – interrogative requests

As stated previously, an indirect request consists at least of two parts. The first part is the main clause and contains mostly a prerequest by which the researcher indicates a desire to obtain information about something in a neutral or polite way. The queried topic is then embedded and frequently presented by the second part, a subordinate clause. When a neutral prerequest is formulated as an order in the imperative mood, words like "tell," "specify," "indicate," "show," and "encircle," are characteristic. The researcher signals by the use of these words to the respondent to inform him about something. The topic the researcher wants to know can, for instance, be specified by another main clause that is formulated as direct request. Examples 3-24 and 3-25 serve as an illustration:

3-24 Tell me, did you leave school before your final exam.

3-25 Specify, what were your reasons for leaving school before your final exam.

In the first example (3-24) the imperative is followed by a direct query characterized by the inversion of the auxiliary verb and the subject "did you." In the second example (3-25) the imperative is followed by a direct specific query initiated by the WH word "what" and the inversion of the auxiliary and subject "are the reasons." Note that in both requests the requests are main clauses.

Requests can also be formulated using subordinate clauses. Some examples (3-26 and 3-27) are provided below:

3-26 Tell me, if you left school before your final exam.

3-27 Specify what were your reasons for leaving school before your final exam.

Both examples show that the requests for answers are formulated as subordinate clauses and there is also no inversion present as is the case of direct requests. Example 3-26 has "if" as the conjunction of the subordinated clause. Since the subordinate clauses after "if, which, what, whether, who etc." function as indirect or embedded interrogatives we call this kind of requests (3-24, 3-25, 3-26 and 3-27) of the form imperative + interrogative.

Since the researcher wants to elicit information from the respondent the communication requires some politeness in the interaction. In order to make the prerequests in imperative mood more polite researchers frequently add the word "please" as in 3-28 and 3-29:

3-28 Please, tell me, did you leave school before your final exam?

3-29 Please, specify what were your reasons for leaving school before your final exam.

These examples demonstrate that the grammatical form has not changed, only the utterance is in a more polite tone. We have also shown that indirect requests can be formulated with and without WH words as is generally the

case. Therefore we will not emphasize this issue any further but discuss the use of the WH words in a separate section below.

3.2.2.2 Interrogative-interrogative requests

Another way to make prerequests more polite is to change the grammatical form, namely, replace the imperative mood with the interrogative mood while formulating prerequests. Research has shown that, there seems to be a linguistic continuum where prototypes of imperative forms gradually shade into polite interrogative forms (Chisholm et al. 1984, Givon 1990). Below we demonstrate how imperative prerequests in survey research can gradually change into more and more deferent prerequests in interrogative form. Examples could be:

3-30a Tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election.

3-30b Please tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election.

3-30c Will you tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election.

3-30d Can you tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30e Can you please tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30f Could you tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30g Could you please tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30h Would you tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30i Would you please tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30j Would you like to tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30k Would you mind telling me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

3-30l Would you be so kind as to tell me whether you are going to vote in the next election?

The first two examples 3-30a and 3-30b, are in the imperative mood. The remaining examples 3-30c-3-30l, switch to the interrogative mood, characterized by the inversion of the auxiliary verb and the subject. They use different combinations of the modal auxiliaries such as "will," "can," "could," and "would," indicating that they are asking for permission to ask for something. They start with asking permission by "will," which is gradually more polite than the imperative and are followed by the use of "can," which is a bit more hesitant, where the addition of "please" increases the relative politeness of the sentence. Thereafter the more polite and more distant form of "could" is introduced, which is again combined with "please" to increase politeness mood. Examples 3-30h to 3-30l use the form "would," which is even less forward

than the previous forms and therefore adds to the polite feeling. These examples show some gradations of politeness within its uses by adding "please" or combining it with "would you like," "mind," or "be so kind."

The reader may have noticed that logically the answer "yes" to any of these polite interrogative requests signifies that people are either willing to or can give the answer since it is formally related to the prerequest. Even in the polite form respondents in general will suppose that they are asked to appraise the embedded request presented to them and therefore will answer "yes," meaning that they are going to vote in the next election, or "no," meaning that they are not going to vote. If it is anticipated that polite requests lead to confusion, it is better to avoid using them. An unusual variation of the above two types is illustrated below:

3.30m Which issue, tell me, will mostly influence your vote?
3.30n Which issue, would you say, will mostly influence your vote?

These examples show that the prerequests are placed within the clause that would normally be considered as an embedded sub clause.

3.2.2.3 Declarative – interrogative requests

It is also possible to use polite declarative prerequests. They are presented in examples 3.31a and 3.31b:

3.31a I ask you whether you are going to vote during the next elections.
3.31b I would like to ask you whether you are going to vote during the next elections.

It is interesting to note that in examples 3.31a and 3.31b no actual request is presented. Formally the two texts are statements. As with the case of polite interrogative requests, research practice and conversational custom make it informally understood to listeners that they have to provide an answer to the embedded part in the sentence.

3.2.2.4 Interrogative – declarative requests

Finally it frequently happens that in survey research prerequests are formulated in the interrogative mood and the embedded request, in the declarative form. Examples 3.32a and 3.32.b illustrate this:

3.32a Do you think that the Republicans will win the elections?
3.32b Do you believe that abortion should be forbidden?

These examples show that the request is introduced by the declarative conjunction "that." The most common form of this type of request for an answer is illustrated by the next example:

3.32c Do you agree or disagree that women should have the right to abortion?

This is a popular form because any assertion can be transformed directly into a request for an answer by adding a prerequest (e.g., "Do you agree or disagree" or "How much do you agree or disagree") in front of the statement. Respondents are often provided with whole series of assertions of this type.

3.2.2.5 More than two parts

We also stated that a request for an answer consists at minimum of two parts, which in practice can mean that more than one prerequest occurs, which can take all kinds of grammatical forms. Semantically, one of them can be either neutral or polite, and the other may convey a concept-by-intuition where the proper request follows. Examples 3.33 and 3.34 illustrate this:

3.33 Please, tell me whether you think that homosexuals should be given the same rights as heterosexuals.
3.34 I would like to ask you whether you can tell if you think that homosexuals should be given the same rights as heterosexuals.

In example 3.33 the prerequest "please tell me" is a polite imperative while the second prerequest, "whether you think," introduces a cognitive judgment in an embedded interrogative form followed by a declarative mood "that homosexuals should be given the same rights as heterosexuals," conveying a specific policy.

Example 3.34 illustrates a chain of three prerequests. The first, "I would like to ask you," is a polite declarative statement. The second, "whether you can tell," is a neutral prerequest in interrogative form and the third, "if you think," relates again to an interrogative constituting a cognitive judgment. The main request is initiated by "that" and conveys a policy.

Here it is important to state that while the sentences are becoming quite long, the main risk is that the proper request will fall to the background. In the last section we will formulate some hypotheses concerning the possible effects of the consequences of length and complexity of sentences on the response.

3.3 THE MEANING OF REQUESTS FOR AN ANSWER WITH WH REQUEST WORDS

In all forms of requests for answers WH request words can be used as we have explored in Section 3.2.1.2, which studied direct requests with a specific introductory word. In that section it was also mentioned that these words refer to a specific aspect of an issue assuming that the basic idea is known. The example given previously was a request referring to the change of the position of black people in the United States:

3.35 When did this change occur?

This request for an answer presupposes that the respondent agrees that a change has occurred; otherwise the request has no meaning:

3.36 Has the position of the blacks in the United States changed?

It is clear that example 3.35 asks for the objective concept-by-intuition "time" while example 3.36 measures the subjective "judgment" of possible change. Here we see that a change in meaning similar to that described in the last section occurs. The difference is that now the change in concept is not due to a prerequest but to a WH request word and in general the concept referred to by the WH word is clear, even though some of these words can imply many concepts in a request for an answer. The different meanings of the requests for an answer using the different WH words are the topic of this section, which will be discussed in sequence from simple to complex.

3.3.1 "When," "where," and "why" requests

The most simple WH requests are the requests starting with the word "when," "where" or "why." These requests are simple because the words indicate only one specific concept. It is common knowledge that "when" asks for a time reference; "where" asks for a location, and "why" asks for a reason. Please refer to Section 3.2.1.2 for examples.

3.3.2 "Who" requests

"Who," "whose," and "whom" are used for asking information about a person or several people. "Who" and "whom" are pronouns that substitute for a noun, while "whose" can also be a determiner that occurs together with nouns, like "whose house." "Who" queries the personal subject. Examples of "who" that queries the personal subject are:

3.37   Who is the new president of the United States?
3.38   Who is the most powerful person in the European Union?

Using "whose" signifies requests asking for ownership:

3.39   Whose house is this?

On the other hand "whom" requests information about a personal object:

3.40   To whom did you sell the house?

3.3.3 "Which" requests

The request word "which" is used for preference requests such as

3.41   Which party do you prefer?

or

3.42   Which car do you like the most?

It can also be used as an alternative for "who." In combination with "which one" in example 3.43, it refers to a definite set of persons (Givon 1990: 794):

3.43   Which one did it?

"Which" also can be used as an alternative for "why," "where," or "when," if it is used in combination with nouns like "reason," "country," or "period," For

example, instead of "why," one can use "which" to ask about relations:

3.44   Which was the reason for the changes?

Instead of "where," one can use "which" to ask about places:

3.45   In which area did the change take place?

Instead of "when" one can use "which" to ask about time:

3.46   In which period did the change take place?

And instead of "how" requests (which will be discussed later), "which" requests can also be used to ask about procedures. For example:

3.47   In which way do you solve your financial problems?

The reader should be aware that instead of "which," one can in these cases also use "what." This request word is the topic of the next section.

3.3.4 "What" requests

"What" can be used in even more requests as it asks for the subject or the object. One very common use of "what" is in demographic requests such as

3.48   What is your family name?
3.49   What is your highest education?
3.50   What is your age?

It is also used in consumer research to ask for a specific aspect of the behavior of customers:

3.51a   What did you buy?
3.51b   What did you pay?

In time budget research or studies of leisure time a more open request type of "what" is used to ask for behavior:

3.52   What did you do (after 6 o'clock)?

"What" in combination with verbs like "cause" or nouns like "motives," or "goals" can also indicate a relation:

3.53   What caused the outbreak of World War I?

"What" can also be used to formulate requests about subjective variables. For example:

3.54a   What do you think of Clinton's quality as a president?

or

3.54b   What do you think of President Clinton?

Note that example 3.54a asks for an evaluation. However, it is not clear what concept is measured in example 3.54b. This depends on the answer alterna-

tives. If they are preset, they could be formulated in terms of various concepts. If they are not preset, it depends on what comes to the mind of the respondent at the moment of requesting.

3.3.5 "How" requests

Special attention has to be given to requests using the term "how." This term can be used in different contexts and in still more ways. The following different uses of the request word "how" will be discussed:

Measure of a procedure
Measure of a relationship
Measure of an opinion
Measure of quantity
Measure of extremity
Measure of intensity

We start with the use of "how" when asking about *procedures*. The request word "how" can first be used to ask about *procedures* that people use to accomplish a certain task. Typical examples include

3-55a *How do you go to your work?*

or

3-55b *How do you solve your financial problems?*

Examples 3-55a and 3-55b use the word "how" specifically and similar to the way words like "who," "where" and "when" are used in the previous sections. A second application of the request word "how" is in requests about *relations* such as

3-56 *How did it happen that the position of black people changed?*

In this case the request asks about the *cause* of the event mentioned. This request is rather close to the procedure request but the former one asks for a "tool" while the later one asks for a "cause." The third application of the "how" request is an *open opinion* request such as

3-57 *How do you see your future?*

This request is similar to the open request we mentioned before when we discussed the "what" requests. In fact often one can substitute "what" for "how." The fourth use of the request word "how" is in requests about *quantities* and *frequencies* such as

3-58a *How often do you go to the church?*

or

3-58b *How many glasses of beer did you drink?*

or

3-58c *How many hours a day do you watch television?*

We have put this use of the request word "how" in a separate category because the answer is specific, as in our examples the expected answer is a number. The following applications of "how" are similar, but with different answers.
A fifth application of the "how" request form relates to requests that ask about the *extremity* of an opinion. They modify the request word by an adjective or past participle. Typical examples are

3-59a *How good is Mr. Bush as president: very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad, or very bad?*

or

3-59b *How interested are you in politics: very interested, interested, a bit interested, or not at all interested?*

In requests 3-59a and 3-59b respondents are asked to give more details about their *opinion*. The "how" request form indactes *extremity*. This form can also be applied to objective variables. An example is below:

3-60 *How many kilos do you weigh: under 50 kilograms, between 50 and 60 kilograms, between 61 and 70 kilograms, or above 70 kilograms?*

We should mention that this can also be done by a direct request with answer categories. For example we can ask

3-61a *Is Bush a very good, good, neither good nor bad, bad or very bad president?*

or

3-61b *Are you very interested, rather interested, a bit interested, or not at all interested in politics?*

or

3-61c *Do you weigh under 50 kilograms, between 50 and 60 kilograms, between 61 and 70 kilograms or above 70 kilograms?*

It is unknown whether the direct request or the "how" request is better. However, some experiments have shown that requests with labels as responses are preferable if frequencies are asked for (Saris and Gallhofer 2004).
The sixth application of the "how" request asks for the *intensity of an opinion*. This type looks similar to the previous one, but an argument can be made that it represents a different request form [Krosnick and Fabrigar, (forthcoming)]. If this is the case we do not ask how extreme an opinion is but how strongly people agree with an assertion. For example

3-62a *How strongly do you agree with the statement that Clinton was a good president?*

or

3-62b *How strongly do you believe that you will get a new job next year?*

In such requests the gradation is not asked with respect to the quality of the president or the likelihood of an event but with respect to the strength of an opinion. Therefore it is called the *intensity* of an opinion.

Most of the specific requests have an equivalent translation in other languages. However, the word "how" has different meanings in romance languages like French and Spanish.[3]

3.4 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter we focused on different linguistic possibilities to formulate a request for an answer. We called it a "request for an answer" because not only interrogative forms (requests) are used to obtain information from the respondents; imperative and declarative statements are also commonly employed. What the three request types share in common is that they ask the respondent to make a choice from a set of possible answers.

We have discussed several procedures. The first distinction we made was between direct and indirect requests. Direct requests consist of only one sentence, a request or an imperative, while indirect requests consist of a prerequest in the form of an interrogative, imperative, or declarative sentence with an embedded sentence that contains the real request. We also discussed specific requests introduced by particular request words such as "when," "where," "why," "which," "who," "what," and "how." These request words are used when the researcher wants to get specific information from the respondent about, for example, the time, place, or reason(s) of event. These possibilities are summarized in Table 2.1.

The most important result of this linguistic analysis is that one can formulate very different requests for an answer while the concept, the topic of research and the set of possible responses is the same. Logically that would suggest that the requests provide the respondents with the same choice and therefore the requests can be seen as equivalent forms. However, we have to warn the reader that the possibility cannot be excluded that differences will nevertheless be found in the responses for the different forms because the difference in politeness of the forms may have an effect on the response. In Chapter 4 we will demonstrate how to formulate requests for answers that are linguistically very similar but measure different concepts.

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3 In French, for instance, "how" in procedure, relationship, and opinion requests is translated as "comment." For "how" in frequency requests, "combien," or "avec quelle frequence," or "est-ce souvent que", is used. The extremity and intensity are expressed by "de quelle qualité est" and "dans quelle mesure vous etes d'accord," and so on. In Spanish, "how" in procedure, relationship, and opinion requests is translated by "como." For "how" in frequency requests, "cuanto" is used. The extremity and intensity are expressed by "hasta que punto" or "hasta que grado" and "en que medida."

By specifying all these different forms[4] we tried to indicate the diversity of the possibilities to formulate requests for answers in survey research. Although linguists suggest that in many cases the meaning of the requests is the same, this does not mean that respondents will perceive these requests as identical and that they will reply in the same way.

Without claiming that all requests for answers fit in the system developed in this chapter, we think that it is useful to keep these possibilities in mind when formulating requests for answers and analyzing requests for answers to clearly grasp the diverse grammatical forms and the potential differences in meaning of the requests.

EXERCISES

1. For the following two concepts-by-intuition derive assertions representing these concepts and transform these assertions into different requests for an answer.
   - Trust of the government
   - The occupation of the respondent
2. Two requests for an answer have been mentioned below.
   - *Is it the position of black people that has changed?*
   - *Is it the position of black people that has changed by new laws?*
   a. What are the potential answers to these requests?
   b. Do these answers mean the same?
   c. Why is there a difference?
3. How would you formulate a request about
   a. A perception if women have the right of abortion
   b. The norm that women should have this right
   c. The evaluation of this right
   d. An importance judgment of this right
4. Finally, check for your own questionnaire whether the transformation of the concepts-by-intuition in requests for an answer was done in the proper way. Should you change some requests?

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4 Linguists (Chisholm et al. 1984; Givon 1990; Huddlestone 1988, 1994) also discern some other types of questions that are, in our opinion, typical for normal conversation but not for requests for answers in survey research. To these questions, for instance, belong so-called "echo questions" which repeat what has been said before because the listener is uncertain about having understood the question well. An example could be: "Am I leaving tomorrow?" "Multiple questions" are also used frequently in conversation (Givon 1990: 799) such as "who said what to whom?" In English interrogative tags also are quite common such as "he left alone, didn't he." It is clear that such constructions are too informal and therefore are preferably avoided in survey research.