TROUBLED CONCEPTION

NEGOTIATING THE LIKELIHOOD OF HAVING CHILDREN

Marian May, *University of Tasmania*

Marian May's recent research focuses on analysis of interaction in demographic telephone-survey interviews. Other research interests include children's work and education, research methods, and graduate students' writing, with a particular focus on cross-cultural issues. Marian's particular interest has been the initiation and development of discipline-based academic skills programs in situations where international students are concentrated. She currently works as Postgraduate Academic Adviser for the Faculty of Business, University of Tasmania.
Correspondence to Marian May: Marian.May@utas.edu.au

In the context of low fertility and Australia's ageing population, a national longitudinal telephone survey, *Negotiating the Life Course* (NLC), asks women about their childbearing intentions. This paper uses conversation analysis (CA) to examine interaction between an interviewer and respondents on one NLC question about the likelihood of having children, Question 165. The analysis focuses on excerpts from troubled interviews, making transparent the task of negotiating responses acceptable to the interviewer and shedding light on problems inherent in the question for older women and women for whom prediction is difficult. Analysis shows the trouble to result from lack of congruence in the purposes of the researcher and the respondent: the researcher asks about likelihood, whereas the respondent tells her own story.

INTRODUCTION

Whether Australian women are likely to have children in the future is of great interest to policy makers, demographers and national planning bodies, with much public discussion of issues surrounding Australia's ageing population (Australian Academy of Science 1995; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004; Kippen 2003; Kippen and McDonald 2004; Kippen and McDonald 2006; Legge 2005; McDonald 2005; Office of the Status of Women 1999; Stanton 2002; Tesfaghiorghis 2006). Interviews with women in large-scale surveys such as *Negotiating the Life Course* (NLC) (The Australian National University n.d.) and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2004) are a major source of data on fertility, and survey researchers are keen to develop questions that will enable them to project more accurately the number of children that women will have.

NLC is a national longitudinal telephone survey asking about how Australians manage their work and family lives, including their decisions about and attitudes towards children. The first wave of NLC was conducted in 1997, with a total of 2231 male and female respondents aged 18–54 years. Subsequent waves of NLC have been conducted every three years, in 2000, 2003 and 2006. Researchers designing NLC used a new set of fertility questions, hoping to achieve a more accurate estimate of women's intentions (McDonald 1997). In order to examine how these questions worked in practice, a small repeat telephone survey, the *Women on Children* (WOC) survey, was conducted in 1998 to ask only the questions on having children of a small sub-sample (26) of women from the 1997 wave of NLC. These women were randomly chosen from the 400 NLC 1997 respondents aged 20–54 years living in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, as geographical accessibility was a consideration in the face-to-face interviews planned to follow the telephone survey. WOC interviews were conducted and recorded at the Institute of Family Studies in Melbourne in 1998, using an interviewer trained for the NLC survey. Interviews were transcribed using conventions of conversation analysis (CA),[1] a method increasingly used to provide transparency in survey interaction (for example, Houtkoop-Steenstra 1995, Houtkoop-Steenstra 1996, Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000; May 2002; Maynard and Schaeffer 1997; Maynard and Schaeffer 2002; Maynard et al. 2002; Potter 2003; Schaeffer et al. 1993; Suchman and Jordan 1990).

This paper examines how four respondents and one interviewer, Penny,[2] 'do' the survey, achieving responses to NLC Question 165 on likelihood. The first section of the paper examines the difficulties inherent in survey questions used to ascertain women's intentions. Excerpts from the four interviews then show how, in the asking and answering of Q165, the purposes of the researcher, the interviewer and the respondent often do not coincide. Transcribing interaction in these interviews makes transparent how problematic Q165 is for some women, how the question conflates a number of processes, and how the interviewer manages the unenviable task of obtaining a response without the flexibility and resources of ordinary conversation.

THE CONCEPT OF LIKELIHOOD

Much debate has occurred about the questions which will give the most accurate estimate of the likelihood or probability of women having children. As used by demographers and statisticians, 'likelihood' reflects the statistical sense of the probability of an event occurring (Bailey 1982). Various questions have been tried, focusing on wantedness or desire for children, the number of children the respondent would prefer or like to have,

and physical capability (Headey et al. 2006, 23; IRD and WEC 1987a, 48; IRD and WEC 1987b, 42; IRD and MSI 1990a; IRD and MSI 1990b; Melbourne Survey Group 1979; Singh 1984, 62–66). The accuracy of any estimate can be judged only in retrospect, making the choice of an appropriate question difficult.

In examining fertility motivation, Schaeffer and Thomson (1992, 42) noted that 'researchers do not always distinguish clearly among wanting, intending, or expecting to have a child'. They found that expressions of uncertainty were very common in interviews about women's feelings toward having children, distinguishing between 'task uncertainty' (the respondents' task in using the pre-determined response categories to express their 'true' state), and women's 'state uncertainty' (respondents' uncertainty, neutrality, lack of clarity, ambivalence, or indecision about what their 'true' state was) (Schaeffer and Thomson 1992, 38). The two types of uncertainty are not independent: 'Expressions of uncertainty are produced by the interaction between the respondent's true state and the content and format of a question' (Schaeffer and Thomson 1992, 38). They conclude that tape-recording interaction would improve understanding of uncertainty (Schaeffer and Thomson 1992, 60). Given that the development of questions on fertility has been difficult, a new approach that asks women themselves to ascribe likelihood, as well as using the CA system of transcription that makes interaction on questions in interviews transparent, may prove useful in determining the most appropriate question.

NLC QUESTIONS ON LIKELIHOOD

NLC Q165 asks women to estimate the likelihood of having a child in the future. In asking respondents *how likely*, researchers are asking respondents to attach a probability or chance to having a child, in terms of six degrees of likelihood: *very likely*, *likely*, *not sure*, *unlikely*, *most unlikely* or *definitely not*. The task of the interviewer is to circle the appropriate number from 1 *(very likely)* to 6 *(definitely not)*. The preceding question on the interview schedule, Q164 *Are you currently pregnant?* is closely related to Q165 (Figure 1).

ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS: TROUBLE IN INTERACTION

Transcription of interviews using CA conventions shows the detail of interaction in a way that makes 'trouble' visible (Heritage and Watson 1979, 161; Psathas 1995, 18; Schegloff et al. 1977; Schegloff 1987; Silverman 1998, 124). Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000, 157–158, 164) explored 'trouble sources' in telephone-survey interaction using CA. She

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Q164: Are you currently pregnant?                                     │
│                              Yes              1    (skip to Q167)     │
│                              No               2                       │
│ Q165: How likely are you to have a child in the future, are you       │
│ VERY LIKELY,  LIKELY,  NOT SURE,  UNLIKELY,  MOST UNLIKELY  or        │
│ DEFINITELY NOT?                                                       │
│                              Very likely      1    (skip to Q167)     │
│                              Likely           2    (skip to Q167)     │
│                              Not sure         3    (skip to Q167)     │
│                              Unlikely         4                       │
│                              Most unlikely    5                       │
│                              Definitely not   6                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```

Figure 1 NLC Questions 164 and 165
Source: WOC Interview Schedule 1998

noted a number of instances where the scripted question gave rise to trouble in interviewer–respondent interaction and explored strategies used to overcome the trouble in the quest for a usable answer: that is, a response allowed by the question's response options in the interests of standardisation for statistical analysis. Suchman and Jordan (1990) illustrated situations where the rigid pursuit of standardisation in posing questions led to awkward interaction and responses of dubious accuracy. When interaction is trouble free, questions and answers tend to flow without hesitation, delay, correction and significant repair (Sacks et al. 1974, 723): there are not many 'ums', 'ahs' and 'ers'; speakers do not need to correct themselves; word stress is evident; and intonation indicates completion. In troubled interaction, on the other hand, survey participants behave 'inadequately' from the stimulus-response perspective that survey interviewing presupposes (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000, 17, 18), with hesitation, lack of certainty, delay, requests for clarification, and repetition on the part of respondents, and deviation from standardised interviewing behaviour on the part of the interviewer (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000, 174–179).

Some WOC interviews are 'trouble free' – the interviewer and respondent have no difficulty in arriving at a response; others are 'troubled' – 'troubles' or problems occur in the interaction. In most (21 of 26) interviews the question, *How likely are to you have a child in the future, are you very likely, likely, not sure, unlikely, most unlikely or definitely not?* created no difficulties for the respondent: it was fairly straightforward for the interviewer to circle an appropriate option. Some respondents clearly adopted the

likelihood frame of the interviewer in their responses, using statistical expressions such as '100 per cent', 'five per cent', and 'zero chance' in their responses. For five of the 26 respondents, however, the interaction was noticeably troubled and prolonged. Excerpts 2–4 come from interviews with three of these five respondents (the others are not included for reasons of space). They were chosen because they illustrate how trouble arises in interaction when the question of likelihood is not straightforward, by comparison with Excerpt 1 where the question is answered unequivocally.

The vast majority of WOC women (19 of 26) gave the response *definitely not*. Despite random selection, ten of the 26 women were already over 45 years of age when interviewed and either close to or past menopause; others already had two or more children and wanted no more. Three women had partners or husbands who had had vasectomies; three others had had tubal ligations or hysterectomies. The question proved generally irrelevant in the case of these older women. Excerpt 1 from the interview with Ricky is a typical example of the unproblematic interaction that occurred where the response was *definitely not*:

Excerpt 1: Definitely not (Ricky)

```
59.  Int:          are you currently pregnant.
60.  Ricky:        no. i'm sorry. huh huh huh huh huh huh ·hhh  [huh
61.  Int:                                                       [so the next
62.                 question how likely are you to have another child in the
63.                 future.
64.  Ricky:        zilch and none¿ ha ha [ha ha ha
65.  Int:                                [so definitely not.
66.  Ricky:        definitely POSITIVELY a hundred per cent not.
```
[MMPh#11: 59–66]

Ricky was 40 years old, with two daughters aged 20 and 16. It would be difficult for the interviewer to circle any option here other than *definitely not*. Ricky repeats her unhesitating response in several different ways: 'zilch', 'none', 'definitely, positively, a hundred per cent not', showing no difficulty in accepting the likelihood frame of the question. The stress and loudness accompanying these negatives, together with the absence of pauses and evident amusement (lines 60, 64), leave no room for doubt with Ricky. This kind of certainty was characteristic of the *definitely not* responses to this question, allowing the interviewer to interpret the answer easily in terms of the response options.

Only seven women gave responses other than *definitely not*, and none of the 26 women responded *likely*. Within this group of seven, some responses were quite difficult

to negotiate. The following three excerpts illustrate increasingly more complex interaction in interviews with women whose responses were other than *definitely not*: Lyn (*most unlikely*), Kristen (*not sure*), and Annegret (*very likely*). Lyn's *most unlikely* response takes some negotiation but eventually appears to result in a quite certain response; Kristen's and Annegret's responses are less certain.

Lyn, 38, had two children, aged 13 and 10. The following excerpt starts with the interaction over Q164 after Lyn has interrupted the interview to hang up the phone in another room:

Excerpt 2: Most unlikely (Lyn)

67.	Lyn:	>okay.< sorry Penny. i'm <u>right</u> now [yep¿
68.	Int:	[that's okay. u::m so
69.		the that (last) question was are you currently pregnant
70.		and you said no.=
71.	Lyn:	=no.
72.	Int:	and how <u>li:ke</u>ly are you >to have another child in the
73.		future.<
74.	Lyn:	a:h i don't think i will <u>have</u> another child.
75.	Int:	so would you say you're not sure, unlikely, most
76.		unlikely, or definitely not.
77.	(1.6)	
78.	Lyn:	u:m hhh (4.0) <it's something that i don't see
79.		occurring,>
80.	Int:	°okay.° so we [could say]
81.	Lyn:	[but ah] (4.0) o-oh >i dunno.< (0.3)
82.		=[<u>five</u>] per cent possibility?
83.	Int:	[hhh]
84.		o (h)ka(h)y. so should we say <u>most</u> °un<u>like</u>ly.°
85.		[°is that oka:y?°]
86.	Lyn:	[m o s t <u>mo</u>]st un<u>like</u>ly.
87.	(2.0)	
88.	Int:	a::nd the next question i:s >°<u>why</u> is it unlikely that
89.		you will have another <u>child</u>.°<

[MMPh#2: 67–89]

For Lyn the question of whether she is likely to have another child in the future does not pose much initial difficulty. She gives a negative answer, preceded only by 'a:h': 'a:h i don't think i will <u>have</u> another child.' (line 74). However, her answer does not use the interviewer's cue (indicated by stress and lengthening on the word '<u>li:ke</u>ly'), and the

hedge, 'i don't think', avoids certainty (Coates 1996, 152). Only then does Penny provide four of the six response options as they appear on the interview schedule, although she should have read these as part of the initial asking. Lyn does not answer immediately: 'u:m hhh' and a very long pause begin her turn. When she does answer, she continues to ignore the 'li:kely' used in the question. Both Lyn's answers so far (lines 74, 78) are expressed in terms of what she herself sees and thinks, her own versions of likelihood. Her answers imply that other factors outside her control may make it likely or unlikely, but that as far as she can see (line 78), she will not have another child. For the interviewer these versions are not usable, as they do not suggest words from available response options on the interview schedule; she starts to reformulate Lyn's version with 'so' (line 80). Lyn interrupts, and gives an answer that fits the statistical concept of 'how li:kely' ('but ah (4.0) o-oh i dunno. (0.3) five per cent possibility?').

Penny then reformulates this in terms of the response options in front of her, suggesting the reasonable option 'most unlikely'. She asks Lyn for confirmation: 'is that oka:y?'—a question that predicts a 'yes' response (Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki 1997; Smit 1995). This type of directive probing causes problems in standardised interviewing, but is the easiest way out for interviewers in the stressful situation where they cannot get the respondent to give an answer that fits the response options (Fowler and Mangione 1990, 44; Molenaar and Smit 1996). Lyn repeats Penny's words, 'most most unlikely'. The repetition, stress and falling intonation give the impression that she now accepts Penny's candidate answer.

Penny's failure to deliver Q165 plus response options in one stretch as written on the schedule is a common interviewer practice (Fowler and Mangione 1990, 34; Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000, 99). In Q165 the available options indicate clearly that the response must be about degree of likelihood. Without these options, the respondent does not know that her answer must be in those terms. Lyn, for example, assumes that she may answer in her own terms; this leads to prolonged interaction to sort out 'misunderstanding' of the researcher's frame and to achieve an allowed response. Whether reading out the response options would have resulted in a different answer from Lyn is unclear, especially as she persisted with her own answer even after the options were given to her. If Penny had not asked a question predicting a 'yes' answer (lines 83–84), would Lyn have given a different response and been placed in a different response category?

Kristen also has trouble with the question:

Excerpt 3: Not sure (Kristen)

```
113.  Int:       a:nd (.) are you currently pregnant.
114.  Kristen:   nnno.
115.  Int:       how likely are you to have another child in the future.
116.  Kristen:   hh we:ll i'd like to have another one but it all depends
117.             how my cycle finishes.
118.  Int:       °ri:ght°
119.  Kristen:   i would like to have another one before my cycle
120.             finishes, but it:s up to the gods no:w  [·hh    ] [so
121.  Int:                                               [°ri:ght°] [so do
122.             you think (.) very likely, likely, or not sure.
123.  Kristen:   ↑u:m=
124.  Int:       =or unlikely.
125.  Kristen:   well i'd like to, but i'd sa:y (.) probably not sure.
126.  Int:       °not sure°
127.  Kristen:   yeah (1.0) i'd like to have another one but it all
128.             depends what appens i guess
```
[MMPh#6: 113–128]

In this excerpt, also, the interviewer and respondent are at cross purposes. Three times Kristen answers in terms of whether she would 'like' to have another child (lines 116, 119, 125), whereas the interviewer persists with the question—'how likely'?[3] The similar base of the two words is striking. In line 125 Kristen starts the third attempt to convey what she would like to do 'i'd like to' but complies with the question when she continues 'but i'd say (.) probably not sure.' Although this suggests that Kristen cannot predict likelihood, that the decision is not hers, this answer is enough for Penny; she has an allowed response. This is evident from her sequence-closing third (SCT), 'not sure' (line 126), closing off the question–answer sequence more softly than surrounding talk (Schegloff 1995, 114–115).

Kristen ostensibly accepts Penny's attempt to end the sequence, saying 'yeah' followed by a one-second pause (line 127), at which point Penny could continue with the next question on the schedule. However, Penny does not move on and loses the opportunity to take her turn. Kristen provides a fourth answer (line 127) in terms of what she would 'like' to do. At this point Penny goes to the next question, without giving any further response; Kristen has managed to answer in terms of likelihood while keeping her own sense of what she would like to happen.

For Annegret, the interviewer circled *very likely*. This interview exemplifies the potential difficulties for interviewer and respondent in finding an option that reflects both

the respondent's personal situation and an allowed 'institutional' response. In the interview with Annegret, the interaction is troubled and achievement of a response is difficult:

Excerpt 4: Very likely (Annegret)

44.	Int:	and how <u>li:ke</u>ly are you >to have another child< in the
45.		<u>fu</u>ture,
46.	Annegret:	↑a(h) ha::hh it's a <boi- biological huh huh determinant
47.		the(h)re,> [·hh=
48.	Int:	[ri::ght,
49.	Annegret:	=we're <u>try</u>ing. huh huh
50.	Int:	#oh you're <u>try</u>ing,#=
51.	Annegret:	=yeah,=
52.	Int:	=so its (0.3) its (.) <u>li:ke</u>ly,
53.	Annegret:	↓well, (0.6) t! huh huh it's as likely as hhh >you
54.		know< huh [huh hhh huh huh]
55.	Int:	[$as likely as you] can determine$, ·hh so
56.		we could say <u>very</u> likely, ↓<u>really,</u> [(so) °you know° =
57.	Annegret:	[yeah,
58.	Int:	=i- that's your in<u>ten</u>tion, isn't [it.
59.	Annegret:	[yeah.
60.	Int:	°i'll put down that's your intention° (2.0) (yup)

[MMPh#1: 44–60]

Penny reformulates and eventually redefines the question as it is worded in the questionnaire: from a question about likelihood it becomes a question about intention. From the beginning, Penny's delivery of the question shows the respondent that her key concern is the question of likelihood. She places the main stress on 'how <u>li:ke</u>ly' (lines 44, 45), giving less emphasis to the words 'having another child' by speaking these words more quickly than the surrounding talk. As in Kristen's interview, Penny does not provide Annegret with the response options; thus, Q165 appears to be an open question, with no specified frame for Annegret's answer.

Annegret's answer indicates that the question poses difficulties for her; she cannot answer in a way that satisfies the interviewer. She begins her reply (line 46), with both in-breath and an almost strangled, embarrassed 'laughter', perhaps rendering 'a serious, perhaps more personal, disclosure less serious' (O'Donnell-Trujillo and Adams 1983, 190). These indications of trouble signal that for Annegret the answer is problematic. Her answer is 'dispreferred' (Sacks 1987, 58; Silverman 1998, 123; Schegloff et al. 1977), requiring her to do considerable work to respond. That this may be an emotive issue is

signalled by laughter and the fact that she stumbles over a word, referring to a 'biological huh huh determinant' and implying that it is out of her control.

It is clear at this point in the interview that to answer a question about likelihood is impossible for Annegret because she feels that having a child is out of her control, whereas the term 'likely' in the question assumes that the respondent does in fact have some control. That is, the question assumes that the respondent understands the issues involved in the likelihood of conception and has some control over how likely it is. Pomerantz (1984) shows that, if a speaker meets such a problem in obtaining a response in ordinary conversation, various interactional resources are available to solve the problem, and that speakers will often modify their positions. However, in this type of institutional talk, the interviewer has little scope for such modification to suit individual respondents because of the paramount importance of standardization in analysing responses: the question should be asked in exactly the same way for each respondent (Australian Institute of Family Studies 1998, 23–28). Thus, respondent answers are discounted unless they adopt the frame of the question.

The error correction and 'huh huh' in the phrase 'boi- biological huh huh determinant' are further clues that Annegret is searching for an acceptable way to put her answer that is usable by the interviewer. Annegret's Freudian slip, 'it's a boi-', identical in sound to 'It's a boy!', is interesting in itself, given the topic of having children and given that conversation analysts argue that language use is not accidental or haphazard (Schegloff et al. 1977, 381). Speech errors – slips of the tongue – are in fact quite rare (Levelt 1989, 199) and especially likely to occur 'when there are attentional lapses, or when there are high processing demands (such as in fast speech)'; repair situations are 'almost always "loading" moments for a speaker' (Levelt 1989, 487). The question, *How likely* [...] appears to impose a considerable processing demand on Annegret.

It may be here (line 46) that Annegret is searching for a word that is appropriate to a formal interview situation but also a word that will fit the interviewer's frame of likelihood. 'Determinant' does this without Annegret having to give up her sense that she has no control over the biological aspect of likelihood. Jefferson (1984, 199) notes that the use of 'uh' in (American) English is not a 'trivial, haphazard occurrence', but an orderly interjection with the particular function of correcting an error that one almost produced but did not. Jefferson cites instances of 'uh' being used by speakers to change their language to fit more appropriately with the language of the recipient, signalling 'I need more time to think about how to put this'.

However, when Annegret provides an explanation that does not include any reference to 'how likely', Penny has to do further work: Annegret's answer contains no useful

topical material to help Penny circle a response. Penny says 'ri::ght,' (line 48), with rising intonation, thereby acknowledging a cause-effect relationship of the 'biological huh huh determinant' (Gardner 2005, 10), but giving Annegret the go-ahead to say more. This 'ri::ght,' is the first part of a three-turn sequence by which speakers generate a topic interactionally in conversations (Button and Casey 1984). The preferred next activity is a newsworthy-event-report in a next turn: that is, something that could constitute a topic of interest (Button and Casey 1984, 167). Annegret takes up Penny's invitation immediately – 'ri::ght,' gives her the go-ahead to answer as she likes – and she switches her answer back to the secondary concept in the original question, that of 'having a child'. She does this by giving the positive reply 'we're trying' (line 49), implying the continuation 'to do something': to have another child. The 'trying' indicates failure so far. Laughter and in-breath accompany this answer, once again pointing to her difficulty in talking about this issue and her inability to provide a usable answer (Sacks 1987).

The answer 'we're trying' still does not give Penny a usable response. Penny's rejoinder, 'oh you're trying', indicates that she regards Annegret's new information as potentially informative, but she then rejects this potential: it does not help in circling a response option for Q165. Penny then reformulates what Annegret has said, using 'so' (line 52) in another attempt to bring the question to resolution.[4] However, because this (albeit hesitant) reformulation is still in terms of the problematic 'likelihood' ('so its (0.3) its (.) li:kely'), Annegret still cannot answer the question. Once again, she challenges the frame set by the interviewer, indicating by 'well', a pause, and laughter (line 53) that she cannot unreservedly say 'yes'. Her personal circumstances may not make having another child at all likely; yet she cannot yet say, 'It's not likely at all', given that she and her husband are still 'trying'. Again, she gives a dispreferred response. Pomerantz (1984, 156) showed that, if an assertion is simply unclear, it may be relatively easily solved; however, in the case of an 'offensive, insulting, silly, or wrong assertion', the trouble may be more complicated to repair. Both Penny and Annegret have trouble with each other's assertions here.

Next, Penny takes up Annegret's earlier mention of 'determinant' (line 55), together with yet another attempt to revert to the question of 'how likely', using the words 'as likely as you can determine', with laughter. This time she reformulates a 'no-problem' compromise between what the respondent seems to want to say and what she as interviewer can accept as a response: 'so we could say very likely, really,' – a clear example of interviewer bias (Fowler and Mangione 1990, 40). Penny's 'we' emphasises potential agreement. For Annegret to give a clear 'no' to this reformulation is not possible – she is still hoping that she will conceive; the rising intonation of her 'yeah,' response indicates

her ambivalence. She is still not able to accept the continued reformulation of the answer in terms of likelihood. The ambivalent 'yeah,' with non-final intonation (line 57), on the other hand, indicates tentative agreement, that she also wants it to be very likely that she will, in fact, have another child.

Penny reformulates the question a third time, this time in terms of intention: 'that's your in<u>ten</u>tion, isn't it.', a declarative question predicting a 'yes' answer (Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki 1997, 299). Annegret finally answers 'yeah.'. She can agree with this; it is her intention, after all. She has tried twice to talk about her lack of control in the matter (lines 46ff, 53ff), but does not know that this is not reflected in any response option. It is unlikely that Annegret will try again to address the question of likelihood, given that disconfirmations of formulations 'jeopardize the sense of "the talk thus far"' (Heritage and Watson 1979, 144). It means starting again from square one. Schegloff and Sacks (1973, 303ff) note that formulations act as shutting-down techniques; they are used as 'candidate preclosings', and as such are useful techniques for interviewers in closing interaction on a question. Thus, at the end of the interaction on Q165, Annegret's response seems to be more a case of agreement with the last question posed than genuine agreement with the outcome *very likely*, a phenomenon also noted by Houtkoop-Steenstra (1996, 216–219) in telephone interviews in Dutch.

The interview with Annegret illustrates Suchman and Jordan's argument that interaction in survey interviews 'relies on, but also suppresses' crucial elements of everyday conversation, thus creating an unresolved tension between the survey as an interactional event and as a neutral measurement instrument (Suchman and Jordan 1990, 232). During a subsequent in-depth interview Annegret reported her pessimism about becoming pregnant. She and her husband were under extreme pressure from work; they had been 'trying' for over a year and had undergone various medical procedures and tests. Because the interviewer cannot vary the question without consequences for standardisation and the need to obtain an allowed response, the information that could come from Annegret about her difficulties in becoming pregnant – difficulties that greatly affect the likelihood of her having another child – is lost.

DISCUSSION

The problem for demographers remains how best to obtain an understanding of the factors that result in a figure for likelihood, probability or chance. Analysis of troubled interaction provides a starting point for addressing this difficulty. Likelihood is clearly not simply a matter of wanting, intending or planning to have a child, as Kristen's and

Annegret's interviews show. The likelihood of 'having a child' conflates at least four processes: deciding to have a child, becoming pregnant, carrying a pregnancy to term, and giving birth. Many factors, often beyond the conscious control of women or couples, play a part in the transition from conception to birth. Thus, the question, *How likely are you to have a child in the future?* will be difficult to answer in cases where one or more of these processes is problematic.

Conversation analysis shows how respondent and interviewer resolve incongruence in the way Q165 is framed, and how respondents' answers reflect their personal circumstances. Some respondents, like Ricky and Lyn, were able to respond to the researcher's frame of *how likely.* Others, like Annegret and Kristen, were not, because their personal circumstances did not allow them to predict likelihood. Older women, such as Ricky, who already had the children they wanted, were very clear that they were likely to have no more. However, some younger women found the question difficult: both Kristen and Annegret wanted another child but were experiencing difficulty in becoming pregnant. A common assumption is that questions such as this are sensitive (Coombs and Freedman 1964, 112, 117), whereas analysis here shows the problem to be lack of congruence in the purposes of the researcher and the respondent: the researcher asks about likelihood, whereas the respondent tells her own story. The task for both parties is to resolve this incongruence.

Transcription of interaction on Q165 shows that where task and state uncertainty coincide, trouble may occur. First, Q165 uses a likelihood frame that is problematic for a number of respondents. The incongruence in frames, compounded when the interviewer does not provide response options that indicate what constitutes an allowed response, leads to uncertainty in the task of responding to the question and answers that are shown to be inappropriate (Fowler and Mangione 1990, 50). Second, state uncertainty means that the women themselves may not be able to determine how likely they are to have a child. The interviewer is placed in an unenviable position, having to obtain a response while attempting to maintain a precarious social relationship without the resources of ordinary conversational interaction. When the respondent is also uncertain of her situation, there is no easy resolution.

Transcription of interaction shows how the wording of the question as delivered to each respondent contributes to the ambiguity of Q165. The word 'have' can be interpreted in different ways. An adopting couple, for example, can be said to 'have a child'. In the 2001 Australian SBS television series *Mum's the Word* a woman described having to think twice about whether she had 'had a child' because it was delivered by Caesarian

section. In any case, it may be difficult to contemplate the larger question of how likely it is to have a child, if achieving the pre-requisite of becoming pregnant is problematic.

Detailed transcription demonstrates that responses to Q165 are therefore negotiated and collaboratively constructed. Where respondents' answers do not fit response options, the interviewer shows them to be unusable; respondents also demonstrate that questions do not fit their circumstances. Interaction is locally managed, differing with each interview situation. Neither the interviewer's nor the respondent's contribution then can be usefully examined in isolation.

This situation is not unique to this survey or this question, as shown by previous research (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1995, Houtkoop-Steenstra 1996, Houtkoop-Steenstra 2002; Mazeland and ten Have 1998; Schaeffer et al. 1993; Schaeffer and Thomson 1992; Suchman and Jordan 1990). As Suchman and Jordan (1990, 240) and Schober and Conrad (2002) suggest, interviewers also need to be allowed flexibility to deviate from the standardised schedule, if the complexity of respondents' realities is not to be lost. A CA perspective thus provides a useful dimension for evaluating questions, enabling survey designers to trouble-shoot and formulate alternate strategies. CA transcriptions also provide a potentially very useful tool for interviewer and supervisor feedback.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ENDNOTES

[1] The following transcription conventions are used in this paper:

.	falling intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	low rising/continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses
?	rising inflection, not necessarily a question
¿	rising intonation, weaker than indicated by a question mark
-	cut-off talk
=	connecting talk
‹…›	talk faster than surrounding talk
›…‹	talk slower than surrounding talk
°…°	talk quieter than surrounding talk
YES	talk louder than surrounding talk
$…$	talk while laughing/smiling
#...#	sympathetic talk
↑↓	marked rising and falling shifts in pitch (upper case letters)
(h)	plosive quality
t!	dental click
:::	extension of a sound or syllable
( )	transcription doubt
(( ))	analyst's comments
(1.0)	timed interval
(.)	short untimed pause
hh	audible aspiration
·hh	audible inhalation
<u>so</u>	emphasis
[ ]	overlapping utterance or action

Abbreviated from Gardner (2004), Jefferson (1984), and Sacks et al. (1974).

[2] Pseudonyms are used for the interviewer and respondents.

[3] The 2004 HILDA survey asks two questions, addressing both the researcher's and Kristen's frame: Would you like to have a child of your own/more children in the future? And how likely are you to have a child/more children in the future?

[4] Houtkoop-Steenstra (1996, 216) shows similar reformulation of answers to fit response categories from Dutch data.

REFERENCES

Australian Academy of Science. 1995. *Population 2040: Australia's Choice*. Symposium of the 1994 Annual General Meeting of the Australian Academy of Science. Canberra: Australian Academy of Sciences.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2004. *Australian Historical Population Statistics – 4, Births*. Catalogue No. 3105.0.65.001. Canberra.

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS). 1998. *Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing: Interviewer Manual*. Melbourne.

Bailey, K. D. 1982. *Methods of Social Research*. New York: The Free Press.

Button, G.; Casey, N. 1984. 'Generating topic: The use of topic initial elicitors'. In *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, edited by Atkinson, J.M.; Heritage, J. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coates, J. 1996. *Women Talk: Conversation Between Women Friends*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Coombs, L.; Freedman, R. 1964. 'Use of telephone interviews in a longitudinal fertility survey'. *Public Opinion Quarterly* 28 (1): 112–117.

Fowler, F. J.; Mangione, T. W. 1990. *Standardized Survey Interviewing: Minimizing Interviewer-Related Error*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gardner, R. 2004. 'Conversation analysis transcription'. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* Series S. 11: 185–191.

Gardner, R. 2005. 'Acknowledging strong ties between utterances in talk: Connections through *right* as a response token'. *Proceedings of the 2004 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society,* October 10. Retrieved August 29, 2006, from http://hdl.handle.net/2123/115.

Headey, B.; Warren, D.; Harding, G. 2006. *Families, Incomes and Jobs: A Statistical Report of the HILDA Survey*. Melbourne: Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, The University of Melbourne.

Heritage, J. C.; Watson, D. R. 1979. 'Formulations as conversational objects'. In *Everyday Language Studies in Ethnomethodology*, edited by Psathas, G. New York: Irvington.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. 1995. 'Meeting both ends: Between standardization and recipient design in telephone survey interviews'. In *Situated Order: Studies in the Social Organization of Talk and Embodied Activities*, edited by ten Have, P.; Psathas, G. Washington, DC: International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, and University Press of America.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. 1996. 'Probing behaviour of interviewers in the standardized semi-open research interview'. *Quality and Quantity* 30: 205–30.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. 2000. *Interaction and the Standardized Survey Interview: The Living Questionnaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H. 2002. 'Questioning turn format and turn-taking problems in standardized interviews'. In *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*, edited by Maynard, D. W.; Houtkoop-Steenstra, H.; Schaeffer, N. C.; van der Zouwen, J. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Houtkoop-Steenstra, H.; Antaki, C. 1997. 'Creating happy people by asking yes-no questions'. *Research on Language and Social Interaction* 30 (4): 285–313.

Institute for Resource Development (IRD) and Westinghouse Electric Corporation (WEC). 1987a. 'Model A questionnaire with commentary for high contraceptive prevalence countries'. *DHS Basic Documentation Phase II*. Columbia, Maryland.

Institute for Resource Development (IRD) and Westinghouse Electric Corporation (WEC). 1987b. 'Model B questionnaire with commentary for low contraceptive prevalence countries'. *DHS Basic Documentation Phase II*. Columbia, Maryland.

Institute for Resource Development (IRD) and Macro Systems Inc. (MSI). 1990a. 'Model A questionnaire with commentary for high contraceptive prevalence countries'. *DHS Basic Documentation Phase II*. Columbia, Maryland.

Institute for Resource Development (IRD) and Macro Systems Inc. (MSI). 1990b. 'Model B questionnaire with commentary for low contraceptive prevalence countries'. *DHS Basic Documentation Phase II*. Columbia, Maryland.

Jefferson, G. 1984. 'Transcription notation'. In *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, edited by Atkinson, J. M.; Heritage, J. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kippen, R. 2003. 'Trends in age- and parity-specific fertility in Australia'. *Working Papers in Demography* 91. Canberra: Demography and Sociology Program, Research School of Social Sciences, The Australian National University.

Kippen, R.; McDonald, P. 2004. 'Can increased immigration be perceived as a substitute for low fertility?' *People and Place* 12 (3): 18–27.

Kippen, R.; McDonald, P. 2006. 'Projecting fertility using synthetic parity progression ratios with application to Australia'. Paper presented at European Population Conference, Liverpool, United Kingdom, 21–24 June, 2006.

Legge, K. 2005. 'Born lucky'. *Weekend Inquirer Special Edition* (9–10 April): 19, 28.

Levelt, W. J. M. 1989. *Speaking: From Intention to Articulation*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

McDonald, P. 1997. Personal communication concerning purpose of NLC questions, November 1997.

McDonald, P. 2005. 'Has the Australian fertility rate stopped falling?' *People and Place* 13 (3): 1–5.

May, M. B. 2002. 'Asking Women About Having Children: Interaction in Telephone Survey Interviews'. PhD thesis, Canberra: The Australian National University.

Maynard, D. W.; Houtkoop-Steenstra, H.; Schaeffer, N. C.; van der Zouwen, J. eds. 2002. *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Maynard, D. W.; Schaeffer, N. C. 1997. 'Keeping the gate'. *Sociological Methods and Research* 26 (1): 34–79.

Maynard, D. W.; Schaeffer, N. C. 2002. 'Standardization and its discontents'. In *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*, edited by Maynard,

D. W.; Houtkoop-Steenstra, H.; Schaeffer, N. C.; van der Zouwen, J. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Mazeland, H.; ten Have, P. 1998. *Essential Tensions in (Semi-) Open Research Interviews*. Retrieved October 21, 1998, from http://www.pcsw.uva.nl/emca/ET.htm.

Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research. 2004. *The HILDA Survey*. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from http://melbourneinstitute.com/hilda/.

Melbourne Survey Group. 1979. *Melbourne Survey 1977: Vol. 2 Recently Married 516 Females*. Canberra: Department of Demography, The Australian National University.

Molenaar, N. J.; Smit, J. H. 1996. 'Asking and answering yes/no questions in survey interviews: A conversational approach'. *Quality and Quantity* 30: 115–36.

O'Donnell, N.; Adams, K. 1983. '"Heheh" in conversation: Some coordinating accomplishments of laughter'. *Western Journal of Communication* 47: 175–91.

Office of the Status of Women. 1999. *Women in Australia 1999*. Canberra.

Pomerantz, A. 1984. 'Pursuing a response'. In *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, edited by Atkinson, J.M.; Heritage, J. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Potter, J. 2003. 'Review essay: Studying the standardized interview as interaction'. *Qualitative Research* 3 (2): 269–78.

Psathas, G. 1995. *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk in Interaction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Sacks, H.; Schegloff, E. A.; Jefferson, G. 1974. 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation'. *Language* 50: 696–735.

Sacks, H. 1987. 'On the preference for agreement and contiguity in sequences in conversation'. In *Talk and Social Organization*, edited by Button, G.; Lee, J. R. E. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Schaeffer, N. C.; Maynard, D. W.; Cradock, R. 1993. 'Negotiating uncertainty: Uncertainty proposals and their disposal in standardized survey interviews'. Draft paper presented at the annual meetings of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, St Petersburg, Florida, May 1992, and at the meeting of the International Sociological Association Research Committee (Sociolinguistics), June 25, 1992, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Schaeffer, N. C.; Thomson, E. 1992. 'The discovery of grounded uncertainty: Developing standardized questions about the strength of fertility motivation'. *Sociological Methodology* 22: 37–82.

Schegloff, E. A. 1987. 'Recycled turn beginnings: A precise repair mechanism in conversation's turn-taking organisation'. In *Talk and Social Organization*, edited by Button, G.; Lee, J. R. E. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Schegloff, E. A. 1995. 'Post-expansion'. In *Sequence Organization*, edited by Schegloff, E. Los Angeles: University of California.

Schegloff, E. A.; Jefferson, G.; Sacks, H. 1977. 'The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation'. *Language* 53: 361–382.

Schegloff, E. A.; Sacks, H. 1973. 'Opening up closings'. *Semiotica* 8 (4): 289–327.

Schober, M. F.; Conrad, F. G. 2002. 'A collaborative view of standardized survey interviews'. In *Standardization and Tacit Knowledge: Interaction and Practice in the Survey Interview*,

edited by Maynard, D. W.; Houtkoop-Steenstra, H.; Schaeffer, N. C.; van der Zouwen, J. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Silverman, D. 1998. *Harvey Sacks: Social Science and Conversation Analysis*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Singh, S. 1984. *Comparability of questionnaires: Forty-one WFS countries*. WFS Comparative Studies 32 (June). London: World Fertility Survey.

Smit, J. H. 1995. 'Suggestieve vragen in survey-interviews: Voorkomen, oorzaken en gevolgen'. PhD dissertation, Amsterdam: Faculteit der Sociaal-Culturele Wetenschappen, Vrije Universiteit.

Stanton, D. 2002. 'The fertility crisis? Director's report'. *Family Matters* 63: 2–3.

Suchman, L.; Jordan, B. 1990. 'Interactional troubles in face-to-face survey interviews'. *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 85 (409): 232–241.

Tesfaghiorghis, H. 2006. 'Australia's fertility: A HILDA Survey based analysis'. *Australian Social Policy 2005*: 87–104. Canberra: Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

The Australian National University, no date. *Negotiating the Life Course*. Retrieved August 28, 2006, from http://lifecourse@anu.edu.au.