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*Published in:*  
Text - An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse

2003

*Document Version:*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Linell, P., Hofvendahl, J., & Lindholm, C. (2003). Multi-unit questions in institutional interactions: Sequential organizations and communicative functions. *Text - An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 23(4), 539-571.

*Total number of authors:*  
3

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# Multi-unit questions in institutional interactions: Sequential organizations and communicative functions

PER LINELL, JOHAN HOFVENDAHL, and CAMILLA LINDHOLM

## *Abstract*

*This article deals with multi-unit questioning turns used in different genres of institutional interactions. Analyzing in detail a corpus of about 400 multi-unit questions from health care interactions, court trials, police interrogations, and social welfare office talks from Sweden and Finland (all in the Swedish language), a number of sequential patterns are established. Some of these sequential organizations revolve around the interplay between declarative and interrogative units. Several interrogatives in a series usually narrow down questions, for example, by suggesting candidate answers to the initial more general questions. However, many multi-unit questioning turns are concluded with an appended generalizing question.*

*The communicative functions of these different question delivery structures are summarized. We argue that the theory must be sensitive to differences between communicative activity types. However, on the general level, we propose that designing a multi-unit question is an attempt at solving a complex communicative task, which typically involves several, possibly mutually conflicting, demands on the speaker. For example, in court trials, the avoidance of leading questions must be balanced against the need for precise answers. At the same time, the use of an appended generalizing unit might be formulated to secure anything that could count as an acceptable response.*

*Keywords:* question; multi-unit design; sequence; communicative function; institutional talk; communicative dilemma.

## **1. Introduction\***

Traditional and theoretical grammar typically deal with questions in terms of interrogative sentences considered out of context. Similarly, speech-act

theory (Searle 1969) assumes that a questioning speech act is prototypically expressed through a sentence (i.e., a one-unit utterance) in interrogative format, and that the act of issuing a question is an active, initiatory intervention in discourse, rather than a response to prior talk. Such theories belong to a philosophical, non-empirical, and monologist tradition, in which linguistic actions are not seen in their interactional embeddings.

In actual fact, asking a question is often part of a complex communicative project. For example, many questions are not simply initiatives (first pair parts) eliciting responses but are themselves responsive to prior contributions to discourse. Such ‘responsive questions’ include ‘contingent questions’, that is, ‘questions produced in pursuit of some specification of a prior answer’ (Boyd and Heritage 2000: 22), counterquestions, and repair initiations, etc. Furthermore, there may be other aspects of context, which are relevant for, or are made relevant by, the questions. These questions are motivated by an underlying issue or problem, *quaestio*, to use a term from ancient rhetoric (cf., Stutterheim 1997), by ‘reasons’ for asking the questions. Therefore, such questions cannot always be felicitously asked and responded to without the speaker giving some background. Accordingly, many questioning turns are different from the single interrogative sentence format. Many deploy a multi-unit design; others display an ‘elliptical’ format, which is less than a full interrogative sentence.

In this article, we will study multi-unit questions, or to be more exact: multi-unit questioning turns (MUQTs), as they are deployed in actual situated interaction. There are reasons to believe that MUQTs are used in institutional interactions more often than in mundane free-floating conversations. We shall therefore use a comprehensive data corpus of various kinds of institutional interactions.

## **2. Research on multi-unit question designs**

A multi-unit question or questioning turn (MUQT) is one type, or rather, a family of types, of what has been termed ‘question delivery structure’ (Heritage and Greatbatch 1991: 99) or ‘question delivery unit’ (Mazeland 1992). We will define a MUQT in terms of two conditions: (a) it consists of two or more turn-constructional units (TCUs),<sup>1</sup> which are delivered together, either in one single turn or in a close-knit turn sequence with no intervening substantial responses from the responder (see extract [2]) (i.e., we allow nothing more than receipt or acknowledgement tokens to intervene), and (b) one or more of the TCUs are formally designed as questions or, more precisely, interrogatives, that is, such a TCU is marked by one or several interrogative indicators.<sup>2</sup> A TCU within a MUQT is prototypically

clause-shaped, although we count some phrasal units, that is, units which are not (full) clauses, as primary components (TCUs) of MUQTs, provided that they are prosodically exposed and demarcated as units, that is, with a clear intonational terminal.

A substantial part of the relatively few available studies on the topic of MUQT have been based on Conversation Analysis (CA), or at least have been informed by CA. They mainly deal with issues like: in which situations are such questions asked, and by whom (from the position of which activity roles)? Given that most questioning turns are, after all, formatted as single interrogative utterances, one may ask oneself which specific contexts favor the use of multi-unit designs. Several studies suggest that MUQTs are associated with topic initiation rather than the subsequent pursuit of a current topic. For example, Clayman and Heritage (2002) studied presidential press conferences and were able to establish that in those contexts, many topic-initiating questions are multi-unit, or 'elaborated' (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 754), whereas follow-up questions (the few that are allowed) are predominantly single sentences (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 756, footnote 5). Heritage (2002) points to the agenda-setting function of 'compound questions', that is, questions with one or several prefaced assertions. Bergmann (1981), who draws his data from several activity contexts, including psychiatric intake interviews, also suggests that the MUQTs he considers, which are primarily of the particularizing and paraphrasing type (see below), are predominantly topic-initiating. Vehviläinen (1999), in her study of counseling in career guidance training, shows that counselors tend to use MUQTs when they initiate a new agenda point. Puchta and Potter (1999), who analyze market research focus groups, find that moderators in such groups tend to use MUQTs ('elaborate questions'), and they argue that these MUQTs have a dual function. On the one hand, they serve to govern and control the participants' discussion, that is, to make it focus on the issues that are to be discussed; and on the other hand, they contribute to providing different angles on the current problem or issue in focus, giving focus group members a choice: several distinct questions in the same turn come to represent an open category of perspectives on the issue in focus.<sup>3</sup>

Clayman and Heritage (2002) argue that in the sometimes confrontational context of press conferences, single-unit questioning turns are neutral and information-seeking, whereas MUQTs are assertive and opinionated. Yet, the distribution of MUQTs is similar in the maternal health care encounters of Linell and Bredmar (1996), which is a conversationalized and cooperative activity, in which parties seek to develop mutual rapport. Here too, new agenda points are preferably delivered in multi-unit designs, whereas other information gathering questions are single-unit turns.

However, the pattern with MUQTs as topic-initiating devices does not hold for all activity types. Another pattern is represented by interviews that prefer a beginning with requests to tell openly and at length. This occurs when the speaker wants the respondent to produce information, or a story, more or less independently of the speaker's own expressed or implied expectations and preferences. Thus, the interviewer would start with an open single-unit question (e.g., 'can you tell us in your own words'), whereas some subsequent, retopicalizing, questions are more specific and might need some framing. Open single-unit questions sometimes occur as opening questions in courtroom interviews. Nevertheless, Adelswärd et al. (1987) found that legal professionals often preferred topic-openers with multi-unit designs ending in closed-ended questions (see extract [1] lines 1–5). Interestingly, this happened more often with more serious offenders ('recidivists') than with first-time defendants; it seems that the professionals used the constraining 'question cascades' (i.e., 'different versions of what is ostensibly the same question' [Clayman and Heritage 2002: 757]) when they were particularly concerned about controlling and steering the interview more strongly.

Our review may have so far suggested that MUQTs are often used by the professional, and dominant parties in professional/client interactions. The professionals (journalists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc.) are of course also the ones who ask the overwhelming majority of the questions, rather than providing the answers, in many institutional activity types. Nonetheless, several studies of questions posed by the lay parties in institutional talks suggest that *they* tend to choose MUQT designs. In a study of radio phone-in programs, Thornborrow (2001) found asymmetries in question design: callers use a framing design, while hosts do not do so regularly. Similarly, patients in oncological follow-up talks (Sandén et al. 2001) ask MUQTs (framing designs with prefatory statements) especially when they initiate topics that have not been invited or prompted by the doctor, implied by current topic, or supported by the agenda. Thus, such MUQTs help patients (a) enter the agenda and establish the right to ask a question, (b) give a background, frame or context for an issue which was not present on the agenda beforehand, and (c) refrain from trying to control answers, thus opening a wider range of possible answers.

Despite the valuable contributions on MUQTs reviewed here, there are few studies, which treat the topic comprehensively. Some of the apparent contradictions in the patterns of occurrence reported might have to do with the fact that differences in MUQT formats have not been sufficiently attended to. Accordingly, the present article begins to address the need within studies informed by Conversation Analysis to make comparative analyses across activity types (Drew 1998).<sup>4</sup> It will report on two studies of

the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic relations between units (TCU) within MUQTs, on data drawn from different institutional interactions. We are interested in the sequential patterns and communicative functions of MUQTs. The present article is therefore primarily intended as a contribution to interactional linguistics, rather than to CA per se.

### **3. Data and their contexts**

The data to be used in this article are drawn from institutional interactions conducted in Swedish. This article is based on two separate studies specifically focused on multi-unit question designs. Details of the data analyses have been reported in Hofvendahl (2000) and Lindholm (1999, 2003). Hofvendahl (2000) used data from four institutional activity types: booking interviews in maternal health care, social welfare office talks, criminal court trials, and police interrogations, all recorded in Sweden. In total, nine different talks (almost six hours of talk) were explored, two of each type, except for the social welfare office talks ( $n = 3$ ). In another study, Lindholm (1999, 2003) investigated MUQTs, and other question designs, in a corpus of 20 doctor consultations with patients with fibromyalgia (about 12.5 hours of talk), which were recorded in Finland, but conducted in Swedish. The two data corpuses, which include a little less than 400 multi-unit questions, will be used and compared in this article.

It should be noted that all these activity types are dyadic; even the court trials which involve several persons, are dyadically organized in almost all their specific phases (Adelswärd et al. 1987). A significant feature is therefore that the interactions are two-party rather than multi-party, and this distinguishes them from several of the interaction types studied by other researchers. However, there are other features of the overall turn-taking organization that are significant conditions for the occurrence of different question designs. All our activity types are very much question-oriented; the professional party asks a lot of questions, often in episodes of question and answer (plus follow-up) sequences. In some activities, notably some phases of the court trials, the interrogation or interview character of the interaction is so strong that virtually every turn by the professional is heard and oriented to as a question, even if it is not delivered in a distinctly interrogative format. At the same time, the pre-allocation of turn types means that the turn transition from the legal professional is not made relevant until he or she has produced at least one unit that can be heard as 'accomplishing questioning' (cf., Roth and Olsher 1997: 9). However, this is not in itself sufficient to explain the use of series of questions within the same turn (which is one major type of MUQT that is discussed in Section 5.2).

A difference within our data corpus concerns levels of formality. In the court trial, the physical and social-psychological distance between parties is considerable, and defendants and witnesses are highly unlikely to respond quickly. Indeed, their response patterns give rise to plenty of pauses and may encourage judges and lawyers to expand their questions into relatively more MUQTs. (The frequency of MUQTs, as a proportion of all questioning turns, is slightly higher in the court trials than in the other activity types.) Moreover, the legal professionals are institutionally entitled to require the interviewee to wait for him or her to be asked before responding, and they can therefore rather freely produce a number of prefatory statements. In this respect, the court trials are similar to the news interviews as studied by Clayman and Heritage (2002). Most of the other interactions in our corpus are different on this point. They also allow for more of conversation-like interactions, even though there is very seldom any obvious competition for the turn space.

The overwhelming majority of all questioning turns (about 90%), whether single-unit or multi-unit in design, are produced by the professional party. The number of MUQTs, whether asked by the professional party or the client, was 168 in Hofvendahl's (2000) corpus and 206 in Lindholm's (2003) corpus. These account for about 16% of all questioning turns in both corpora. In other words, the findings we are going to present are based on a total of 374 MUQTs. What kinds of syntactic forms do these MUQTs exhibit? Why are some (16%) of the questioning turns designed as 'elaborate', that is, as MUQTs, rather than as free-standing single units grammatically formatted as interrogative or declarative clauses/sentences ('single-unit questioning turns')? And when are such designs used? What are the sequential and contextual conditions to which questions of different designs are responsive, and what kinds of communicative functions do multi-unit questions perform?

#### **4. MUQTs: Two introductory examples**

Let us first discuss a couple of MUQT examples in some detail. These extracts are drawn from the same court trial. In the phase from which the extracts (1) and (2) were taken, a witness (W) is being interviewed on a train of events in which a drunken person, the defendant, was observed breaking into a car, then driving away in the car and colliding with other objects, including another car and a balcony. Extract (1) is from the very beginning of the prosecutor's (P) interview with the witness (W). (Transcripts follow the conventions adopted within Conversation Analysis and are listed in the Appendix.)<sup>5</sup>

(1) Tema K: A28: 28. Court trial: P is a (female) prosecutor, W is a (male) witness

- 1 P: °mm°, .hhh eh de gäller en: händelse (0.3) °en°  
 2 tisdanatt i somras när (0.3) du och eh Erik Nilsson  
 3 (0.4) såg en (1.1) påverkad person köra iväg i en  
 4 → bil. (0.4) .hh kan (.) du berätta var ni va nånstans,  
 5 → var ni stog, och (0.5) va du har sett.  
 6 (0.8)  
 7 W: öh ::  
 8 (1.2)  
 9 W: °ja vi va ju hemma hos min eh (0.3) far och min farmor  
 10 som bor på Pildammsgatan trettifyra°

- 1 P: °mm°, .hhh ah it concerns an °event° (0.3) °on a°  
 2 Tuesday night last summer when (0.3) you and Erik  
 3 Nilsson (0.4) saw a (1.1) intoxicated person drive off  
 4 → in a car. (0.4) .hh can you tell us whereabouts you were,  
 5 → where you were standing, and (0.5) what you've seen.  
 6 (0.8)  
 7 W: erh ::  
 8 (1.2)  
 9 W: °well we were with my (0.3) father at his house and  
 10 with my grandmother who live at Pildammsgatan  
 11 thirty-four° ((street name))

The prosecutor starts with a complex turn, which exemplifies one type of MUQT. There is first a statement (or assertion), which in itself is fairly long and syntactically complex (lines 1–4). Then comes a request for a story to be told (*kan du berätta* ‘can you tell us’) followed by three specific questions (lines 4–5), which are all syntactically subordinated (XSV word order) to the story-requesting (*berätta*) clause. From a strictly syntactic point of view, this structure could be seen as one complex TCU, laid out and possibly planned as one structure, rather than by increments (Schegloff 2000). Prosodic and semantic (pragmatic) features, however, make the three subordinate interrogative units hearable as distinct questions. It is noticeable that the prosecutor intonationally projects a continuation after the second question (marked by ‘,’ after *stog* ‘were standing’) and then pauses after the ‘and’ in line 5, thus maintaining control of the turn, before proceeding to the third and final question. On an abstract level, the MUQT has the structure S + Q + Q + Q (S stands for statement, Q stands for questioning or interrogative utterance).

We will now compare extract (1) to (2), a sequence from the same trial and the same interview with the same witness, which occurs only a couple of minutes later. Here, the prosecutor asks another MUQT, which, on the face



of it, seems quite similar to the one in extract (1). On an abstract formal level, the complex turn (or turn sequence) of extract (2) also has the form of a statement followed by several questions (here: S + Q + Q + Q + Q).

(2) Tema K: A28: 29:30. P is a (female) prosecutor, W is a (male) witness

- 1 → P: .hhh och-eh (1.3) <sen ser ni honom köra iväg,>  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 → P: eh hur går den där färden?  
 4 (0.9)  
 5 → P: går den bra, eller kör han på nåt? =vet du nåt om  
 6 → de?  
 7 W: ((clears his throat)) (0.3) de enda ja hörde liksom de va, ja såg  
 8 först att bilen va krockskadad fram.  
 9 (0.8)  
 10 W: på vänster eller höger sida °tror ja.°  
 11 (0.6)  
 12 W: de va de ja la märke till.  
 13 (0.4)  
 14 W: men ja hann aldri se nåt (.) registreringsnummer på  
 15 bilen.
- 1 → P: .hhh and-eh (1.3) <then you see him drive off,>  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 → P: eh how does that trip go?  
 4 (0.9)  
 5 → P: does it go alright, or does he run into  
 6 → anything? = d'you know anything about that?  
 7 W: ((clears his throat)) (0.3) the only thing I sort of heard was, I saw  
 8 first that the car was damaged in a collision in the  
 9 front.  
 10 (0.8)  
 11 W: on the left or right hand side °I think.°  
 12 (0.6)  
 13 that was what I noticed.  
 14 (0.4)  
 15 but I never had time to see any (.) registration  
 16 number on the car.

This sequence too starts with an assertion (line 1), although this is delivered with a non-falling intonation terminal and could possibly be heard as a question. It is also followed by a one-second pause. When no response is forthcoming, the prosecutor delivers a plain question in interrogative format, followed by another pause of about a second and with no response

following. One may argue that the witness thus passes up two opportunities to take the turn; this interpretation is particularly relevant as regards the pause in line 4. Instead, the prosecutor goes on, redesigning her question delivery structure. To the extent that this is in reaction to the fact that the witness refrains from responding, one may talk about a dimension of co-construction here. When the prosecutor continues talking (lines 5–6), she does so in a series of three additional interrogative TCUs, delivered without any intervening silences.

Semantically, these TCUs are related in a rather different manner than in extract (1). Although the statements (S) in both cases can be said to formulate, or activate, parts of the relevant background for the upcoming question(s), the questions are related in different ways. In extract (1), the prosecutor's opening question to W, the statement has a framing function, and the following units are more or less collateral questions, dealing with three aspects of the desired account: where was W when the events began, where exactly was he standing—implying a particular viewpoint in concrete terms—and what did the witness see (under these circumstances)? One might regard these as a three-part list of three different questions, although they are logically ordered and there is a certain implicative relationship from Q1 to Q2 to Q3. The witness starts his answer by first addressing Q1 (and he then goes on to deal with Q2 and then Q3, although this ensuing part of his response is not shown here). Thus, in this case of three questions subordinated to a request to talk about something (*kan du berätta*), the respondent deviates from the usual rule of dealing with the last question first (Sacks 1987 [1973]). The prosecutor's MUQT in extract (1) is designed as a typical opening question, dealing with the objective circumstances of the testimony and the subjective perceptions of the witness. That is, the prosecutor orients to her partner as a witness in court.<sup>6</sup>

Both extracts (1) and (2) are composed of a statement followed by three or four questions. But whereas extract (1) is framing a sequence to come, requesting a narrative which should cover different aspects, extract (2) is quite different. In extract (2), the prosecutor uses the statement to return to, and reactivate an earlier topic: W has mentioned earlier in the episode that the defendant had been observed driving off; the prosecutor introduces a general question (line 3), formally an open how-question, relating to this event (Q1: *hur går den där färden?* 'how does that trip go (i.e., come off)'), then (lines 5–6) by formulating a more specific question (Q2) suggesting a candidate answer (see Pomerantz 1988) (i.e., 'it (the trip) goes alright'), then by another equally specific question (Q3) offering another (alternative) candidate answer (i.e., 'he runs into something'), and finally adding a generalizing metaquestion (Q4: *vet du nåt om de?* 'd'you know anything about that?'), thereby appealing to the witness once more for a response but at the

same time possibly offering an opportunity for him to avoid answering the previous questions: he could say: ‘no, I don’t know anything about that’.

The first how-question (Q1: line 3) in extract (2) introduces a presupposition of the following yes/no-questions, thus in a way severing the specific question from (one of) its presupposition(s) (Boyd and Heritage 2000). The yes/no-questions have a clear preference structure by inviting agreement (or disagreement) with candidate answers. The whole MUQT is a ‘question cascade’ (see Section 5.2). Pragmatically, the positive answers to Q2 and Q3 are each other’s complements, that is, either the ride ‘goes alright’ or ‘he collides with something’. Of course, in the particular situation, the expected answer (which is known to both parties, although W cannot necessarily know that P already knows) is the one implicated by, or incorporated in, Q3. Although Q2 and Q3 together might be seen as a way of opening up equivalent possibilities for both answers, it is clear that the expected answer is ‘no’ in the case of Q2 and ‘yes’ to Q3.<sup>7</sup> This is clear from different levels of the context, including the fact that the wording of Q1 might be heard as suggesting that there was something problematic about the car ride (*den där färden* ‘that trip’ sounding slightly derogative in Swedish). Thus, already the initial question (Q1) is slightly biased, and not completely innocuous. Q1 (in line 3) does not receive a response (line 4), and is (retroactively) replaced by the more specific questions (lines 5–6), which, as we noted, at least on the face of it avoid leading the witness.

The final Q (or MUQT component), Q4 (*vet du nåt om de?* ‘d’you know anything about that’, lines 5–6) could also be seen as a further specification of the desired answer to the preceding questions, although it might be more appropriate to say that it concerns a premise, or condition, for being able to answer the previous questions; does W have the subjective knowledge required for a credible answer to the preceding questions? However, it can also be seen as having a generalizing function, suggesting that there may be other answers than those implied by the previous two questions. It can be heard as opening a wider response range. In a sense, it therefore implies a return to the overall question (Q1). But, together with the interjected, specific questions Q2 and Q3, it increases the pressure on W to provide some kind of specific answer to Q1. The MUQT design as a whole may therefore partially serve as a solution to a communicative dilemma that is activity-specific: that of securing precise answers without constraining (or leading) the witness unnecessarily.

In extracts (1) and (2), the complex MUQTs are built to reflect the two aspects of the prosecutor’s professional concern: first, what happened at the site of the alleged offense, that is, what are the objective facts, and second, which subjective evidence does the witness have for making claims about this? It appears that many MUQTs asked by the interviewing legal professionals in our data from police interrogations and court trials involve

final position Q-TCUs dealing with the interviewee's knowledge, perceptions, or memory. These components are appended without interjacent pauses, so that the entire MUQT is packaged and dispatched as one complex question.

## 5. The internal sequential organization of MUQTs

We will now proceed to a general account of the overall structure of MUQTs. In order not to burden the account with details, we will not go into quantitative measures (but see notes 8, 9, 11, and 13). Nor will we go into the specifics of the formal properties of MUQTs as regards combinations of declaratives and interrogatives, etc.<sup>8</sup> Suffice it to say that we distinguish between two main types in 'syntactic' terms; MUQTs that include one or several statements (S), usually before but sometimes after the interrogative unit(s) ('question': Q), and those that comprise exclusively a sequence of interrogatives (two or more Qs). We will discuss the main subtypes of these, primarily in terms of the semantic-pragmatic relations between constituent TCUs (Ss and Qs).

### 5.1. *Framing questions: S + Q*

In the S + Q type (Heritage 2002 calls this a 'compound question'), a pre-fatory statement (or several statements), preceding the question(s) always provide(s) some background for the adjacent question(s). Extracts (1) and (2) are cases in point. The questions invariably take interactional precedence over the statements; it is the question(s), which the interviewee has to respond to, and does respond to (Lindholm 2003). This is also true if the statement follows the question(s), which is the more unusual case (see extract [4]: line 9). Thus, questions tend to override the principle that the next speaker responds (first) to the item produced last. The statement contextualizes the question(s). As Heritage (2002) shows, it can contribute to setting the local agenda and topic, and it can embody presuppositions for the question and/or indicate preferences for kinds of answers. In cases of several backgrounding statements (Clayman and Heritage 2002: 757), the effect of the successive steps is often one of narrowing down the final query to one single proposition to confirm. The principle of supersession of questions also holds in cases, in which skilful interviewees, such as certain politicians in political interviews, choose to first deal with, for example, object to, some of the presuppositions embodied by statements; they subsequently—almost always—return to, or are made to return to, the question itself.

Extracts (1) and (2) above both involved statements preceding the question(s). In each case, these statements provided some contextual background for the upcoming questions. In extract (1), we were faced with a ‘framing question’, which initiated the phase, setting the topic for a whole episode or even an entire interview. However, there are other types of statements initiating MUQTs.

(3) Tema K: E201:8. Social welfare office: S is a social worker, C is a client

1 → S: å: får ja får ja fråga dej en annan sak = dina

2 → kompisar, va har du för kompisar?

3 C: .hh ja har en del bra kompisar ((goes on))

1 → S: a:n’ may I may I ask you about another thing,

2 → =your mates, what kind of mates do you have?

3 C: .hh I have a bunch of good mates ((goes on))

This extract involves a pre-positioned metastatement announcing that a particular question is forthcoming. Such pre-announcements (Schegloff 1980) are quite common components of MUQTs.

In some cases, there are post-positioned statements after the question(s).<sup>9</sup> These share features with some introductory statements in that they provide some backgrounding, although this comes only after the main material of the MUQT. They usually contain some explanation why the interviewer could ask a particular question or was interested in a specific piece of information. Consider extract (4).

(4) Tema K: P20:12. P is a police officer, S is a suspect, ‘Andersson’ is a suspected accomplice

1 P: då blir de så här va (.) att den här Andersson han

2 måste ju också komma upp till mej.

3 S: mm.

4 P: vi visste i princip att de va Andersson eller ana att att

5 de va han innan <så du behöver inte känna dej som att du

6 har> avslöjat honom.

7 (1.1)

8 → P: .hh men (0.3) skulle du vilja be Andersson att han ringer

9 → till mej?=du har ju min kallels[e].

10 S: [mm

1 P: then it will be like this you see (.) that this

2 guy Andersson he too has to report to me, right.

3 S: mm.

4 P: we knew in principle that it was Andersson or thought



- (5) Tema K: P29:3c. Police interrogation: P is a police officer, S is a suspect

1 → P: va har du hatt för nåra anställningar? (.) har du vatt

2 → hos den här arbetsgivaren hela tiden eller?

3 S: ja.

1 → P: what kind of jobs have you had? (.) have you been

2 → with this employer all the time or?

3 S: yes.

Here, the police officer (in Q2: line 2) suggests a specific candidate answer to the general question (Q1). Note, however, the final *eller?* ('or?'), which somewhat counteracts the narrowing character by opening up for other responses. Another case is the 'what about' question, as in extract (6):

- (6) Lindholm, INK 16:11. Doctor 4 interviewing Patient 16. The patient suffers from fibromyalgia

1 P 16: ja sover no för natten

2 → D 4: jå+å (.h) hur e de me me den här spända nacken nu,

3 → =ha den där krampkänslan börja [släppa

4 P 16: [hördu ida igår då ja

5 plocka (.) så känd int ja. uta den där krampkänslana

6 (.h) [men då ha ja ju hålli opp nästan en hel vecka.

7 D 4: [°aha°

1 P 16: I do sleep at night

2 → D 4: yeah (.h) what about this tension in the back of your neck

3 → now, =has that feeling of cramp gotten any [easier

4 P 16: [well today

5 yesterday when I was picking (.) then I didn't feel that feeling

6 of cramp (.h) [but then I had had an almost one week long

pause

7 D 4: [°oh°

Here, the parties have been talking about the patient's sleeping habits. In line 2, the doctor first acknowledges the patient's information, and then initiates a new topic (which has been talked about earlier in same encounter); she does this using a particular construction ('what about (this) X'; *hur e de me*, literally: 'how is it with (this) X'), where X denotes the new topic (here: 'this tension in the back of your neck'), which is common in the data in precisely this function (Lindholm 1999). The general introductory 'what about' question is a (re)topicalizer, which is immediately followed by a particularizing question (line 3). Roth and Olsher (1997) similarly identified retopicalization as one recurrent function of 'what about' interrogatives in

news interviews. At the same time, their data suggest that such questions are often so open in themselves as to defy answering. In extract (6), the doctor goes right on to the particularizing question without marking the boundary of the first question intonationally.

### 5.3. *Some related kinds of question sequences: Paraphrases and collateral questions*

The semantic (or logical) relation between a Q and a following Q in question sequences is not always of a particularizing type. However, Clayman and Heritage (2002) do not distinguish between particularizing and other types; most of their examples of ‘question cascades’ are of the successively particularizing type. By contrast, we will differentiate between some additional categories. One type is the generalizing one, which often involves ‘or-prefaced’ TCUs. We will deal with these separately, since they seem to be of a special nature. In addition to particularizing questions and generalizing questions (see Section 5.4), there are ‘*question paraphrases*’: two (or more) questions in a sequence are variants of the same question at approximately the same level of generality. Here, rather than particularizing the initial question by suggesting a candidate answer as in extracts (2), (5) and (6), the speaker presents the same question in different words, paraphrasing it, and often moving from a more formal or institutionalized language to a more colloquial style. Compare the relationship between second and third units (lines 2–3) of extract (7).

(7) Tema K: P20:5a. Police interrogation. P is a police officer, S is a suspect

- 1 → P: nu kommer en konstig fråga här. (0.8) <arbetsför å  
 2 → hälsotillst<sup>and</sup>?> =om du e frisk eller om du lider  
 3 → av nåra sjukdomar.  
 4 (0.7)  
 5 S: °nä: (.) (ja e fr[isk)  
 6 P: [du e frisk.

- 1 → P: now comes an odd question here.(0.8) <fit for  
 2 → work and state of health?> =if you are healthy,  
 3 → or if you suffer from any illnesses.  
 4 (0.7)  
 5 S: °no (.) (I’m hea[lthy)  
 6 P: [you’re healthy.

Here, the police officer asks (lines 1–2) about the suspect’s health (*arbetsför å hälsotillstånd?* ‘fit for work and state of health’). This is formally a



compound phrase, produced with an interrogative prosodic terminal; it is prosodically exposed as a unit of its own. In fact, it is taken from the printed form and read aloud by the police officer. Its somewhat bureaucratic formulation evidently makes the police officer comment on this fact in the metacommunicative 'pre'-TCU ('now comes an odd question here'), and it also leads to a final position reformulation: a kind of definition, which explains its meaning in more intelligible terms. This question component takes the form of a subordinate question (which is, in turn, a pair of alternative collateral questions), as if subordinated to a main clause; here, it actually fits the introductory, declarative 'pre'-unit, thus in effect retroconstructing the interstitial 'bureaucratic' unit as a parenthetical insertion. This insertion is pronounced in another 'voice' and at a slower pace. Incidentally, Lindholm (2003) also found examples that backgrounding declarative units were pronounced with another tempo (slower) and voice quality (more creaky) than the adjacent interrogative. The interactional precedence of the interrogative was therefore prosodically enacted.

Another paraphrase occurs in extract (8):

(8) Tema K: P20:5c. P is a police officer, S is a suspect

- 1 → P: förmögenhet?  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 → P: har du mycke pengar på ban[ken?  
 4 S: [näe: hh  
 5 för närvarande ingenting-hh.

- 1 → P: capital?  
 2 (1.0)  
 3 → P: do you have a lot of money in the ba[nk?  
 4 S: [no:.  
 5 at the moment nothing.

This sequence starts with a naked noun phrase (*förmögenhet* 'capital'), which functions as a topic initiator. It is clearly one of the policeman's agenda points and is also taken from his printed form. This, in addition to its being delivered with an interrogative terminal (and followed by a pause), motivates its treatment as a separate component question, despite its non-clausal form. Functionally, it resembles the introductory 'what about' questions discussed in extract (6).

In extract (8), Q2 ('do you have a lot of money in the bank') is designed to pursue a response that has so far not been produced (compare the long pause in line 2). One may therefore talk about the policeman's MUQT (or close-knit sequence of questions) as an interactional accomplishment. We take the second question in extract (8) to be a paraphrase of the first unit (line 1). However, it can also be categorized as a particularizing question.

Indeed, Bergmann (1981), who discussed so-called ‘question paraphrases’ (*Frageparaphrasen*) as a type of MUQT, used many examples of a kind that we would call ‘particularizing’. Accordingly, the boundary between these types is hardly clear-cut.

We can also talk about *collateral questions*, which are *different* questions, without any particularizing, generalizing, or paraphrasing relation to each other, although they are delivered together. However, such questions often are particularizations of an introductory, more general question, as, for example, in extract (2), line 5. In other cases, the general question is not made explicit, at least not in the adjacent, prior co-text. Nevertheless, there must arguably be some underlying ‘super-topic’ common to the collateral questions; otherwise, they could hardly be heard as parts of the same ‘package’. Extract (1) is a fairly good example, but extract (9) is perhaps even more clear-cut:

(9) Lindholm: INK 17:12. Doctor 4 interviewing Patient 17

- 1 P 17: °ja+a°  
 2 (.)  
 3 → D 4: va de (0.2) ett olycksfall eller [eller  
 4 P 17: [nä  
 5 → D 4: bräst den där senan av sej själv  
 6 (1.0)  
 7 P 17: nå: då ja ha läst nu (0.2) i di där pappren som  
 8 ja hadd då då ja va ti Arposalo å så hadd ja ju  
 9 nämmt axeln också redan nittifem  
 10 (0.2)  
 11 D 4: mm + m
- 1 P 17: yeah  
 2 (.)  
 3 → D 4: was it (0.2) an accident or [or  
 4 P 17: [no  
 5 → D 4: did that tendon snap by itself  
 6 (1.0)  
 7 P 17: well: I had read now (0.2) in those articles that  
 8 I had when when I went to Arposalo and then I had  
 9 mentioned my shoulder already in ninety-five  
 10 (0.2)  
 11 D 4: mm + m

The disjunctive pair of questions in lines 3 and 5 alludes to an injury of the patient’s shoulder (cf., line 9). However, the topic itself is not explicitly mentioned immediately prior to the question. Yet, these are clearly heard as alternative candidate answers to an implicit, more general question. The

second interrogative (line 5) may well have been triggered by the patient's negative response (line 4) to the first one in line 3. The internal relationship between the interrogatives is a collateral one.

In addition to these types, we found a fair amount of another one, in which a question or a statement exhibits a *metacommunicative* relation to the main question. The metacommunicative unit can be either pre-positioned or post-positioned. Extract (7) exemplified pre-positioned statements, and in excerpt (2), there was a post-positioned metaquestion.

#### 5.4. *Generalizing appended questions*

Sometimes, there is a *generalizing* semantic relation between two adjacent Q, that is, if the subsequent  $Q_n + 1$  generalizes the prior  $Q_n$ , thus widening the scope of possible answers. Generalizing question components seem to occur as last units of MUQTs; they are generalizing appendices. In some cases, the final generalizing question has some amount of a substantial reference, but many MUQT-final generalizing components do not have a specific reference, but simply opens up for a wider scope of possible answers. They are commonly prefaced with 'or' (Swedish *eller*). This kind of topically empty generalizer appears in extract (10):

(10) Lindholm: INK 20:5. Doctor 5 interviewing Patient 20

- 1 D 5: dricker du mjölk  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 P 20: jo+o  
 4 (0.7)  
 5 → D 5: ö: dedär: (0.9) e: (1.4) he: (0.4) t- tar du  
 6 → alkohol, ö: mycky eller lite, (h) [eller eller  
 7 P 20: [hhh  
 8 → D 5: eller eller int alls eller hur sku du säga,  
 9 P 20: (h) ja hördu de+e no (0.5) mycke lite eller inte  
 10 \*alls\* sku ja [(ju) säga att (.h) (0.3) för att  
 11 D 5: [jaja  
 12 P 20: de+e som de int alls riktigt sku passa  
 13 (0.3)  
 14 P 20: ja blir så [förskräcklit yr  
 15 D 5: [du e känsl. för effek[tena (.)  
 16 P 20: [jå

- 1 D 5: do you drink milk  
 2 (0.3)  
 3 P 20: yeah

- 4 (0.7)  
 5 → D 5: eh: now (0.9) eh: (1.4) e: (0.4) d- do you  
 6 → use alcohol, eh much or a little (h) [or or  
 7 P 20: [hhh  
 8 → D 5: or or not at all or how would you say,  
 9 P 20: (h) oh well it's (0.5) very little or or not at all  
 10 I would [say that (.h) (0.3) because  
 11 D 5: [yeah  
 12 P 20: it's like it doesn't suit me at all  
 13 (0.3)  
 14 P 20: I get so [terribly dizzy  
 15. D 5: [you're sensitive to the effect[s (.)  
 16. P 20: [yes

Here, the doctor first asks the patient about drinking milk (line 1) and gets a straight answer. Then, he raises the issue of alcohol, which is done in a characteristic manner with a lot of hesitation phenomena ('perturbations of delivery') that mark the question as delicate (cf., Linell and Bredmar 1996). The issue is introduced with a general formulation ('do you use alcohol'), which is then followed by three alternative candidate answers, all given in an elliptical form ('or' followed by a quantifying adverb). These alternatives are strongly reminiscent of what often appears on printed forms. Before the doctor gives the third alternative ('or not at all'), the patient interjects him with a clear outbreath (line 7), which may signal her preparation for a response, or perhaps a protest. Indeed, the video shows her leaning forward and opening her mouth as soon as the doctor has produced the word 'alcohol' in line 6. As it turns out later (line 9), her final response does not fit the two alternatives offered so far (lines 5–6) pronounced by the doctor. Thus, the incipient disagreement in line 7 would undercut the presupposition of the alternatives given (i.e., that the patient may drink 'a little or a lot' of alcohol), and makes it relevant for the doctor to incorporate a third alternative, in a manner similar to what Jefferson (1981) described as 'post-response pursuit of response'. The whole sequence is then closed by yet another 'or' component (line 8: *eller hur sku du säga* 'or how would you say'), but this is not an alternative like the preceding ones (and it is given as a full clause); rather, in deploying this kind of clause-formed 'generalized list completer' (Jefferson 1990: 66), the speaker alleviates (at least pro forma) the burden on the respondent by opening up a wider response range, retroactively mitigating a preceding question, as if diminishing its proportions.<sup>12</sup> The topic in extract (10) is, as we noted, a sensitive one. Like several of the other extracts, the sequence demonstrates a case of interactional emergence of a MUQT.

Many of the final generalizing questions have a routine, partly pro-forma character. Sometimes, the final component is reduced to the final particle *eller* ('or'), which is used as a questioning tag:

## (11) Lindholm; INK 6:15. Doctor 2 interviewing Patient 6

- 1 → D 2: *hur* va de tidigare *vakna* ni mitt i natten, eller *vakna* ni tidit  
 2 → på måran eller  
 3 P 6: (.h) ja tror att ja *allti* ha vakna mitt i natten men ja *lär*  
 4 ha vakna tidit på måran berätta min mor redan när ja va  
 5 (h)(.) *beibi*.(0.3) klockan *tre* sku ja ur sängen (0.2) å *ner* på  
 6 golve å leka så att ja *tror* att de+e nån sån dän *inbyggd*  
 7 °ryt[m°  
 8 D 2: [mhm  
 9 (0.2)  
 10 D 2: °just [så°  
 11 P 6: [(.hh)

- 1 → D 2: how was it before did you wake up at night or did you wake  
 2 → up early in the morning or  
 3 P 6: (.h) I think that I always have woken up in the morning but  
 4 my mother told me that I woke up early in the morning  
 5 when I was (h)(.) a baby (0.3) at three a'clock I wanted out of  
 6 the bed (0.2) and down to play on the floor so I think that it's  
 7 some kind of a built-in rhyt[m  
 8 D 2: [mhm  
 9 (0.2)  
 10 D 2: oh [right  
 11 P 6: [(.hh)

Here, the doctor asks about the patient's earlier sleeping habits (line 1: 'how was it before'). Then come two alternative candidate answers, which are collateral questions with respect to each other but particularizing with respect to the first question. The whole MUQT is brought to an end (line 2) with the particle 'or' (in Swedish: *eller*, see also extract [5] line 2.) This final particle was studied in detail by Lindström (1999), who shows that it has the mitigating effect of widening the scope of possible answers; it relaxes the compulsion for a choice between (in this case) only two alternatives. Our suggestion is that it is itself a reduced variant of a topically empty generalizer.

A generalizing appendix, that is, a general question appended at the end of the turn, is in contrast to the particularizing question(s) in that it widens, rather than constrains, the range of preferred answers. A subsequent generalizing question often dissolves the presupposition of a prior component, thereby opening up the whole MUQT, allowing for a wider range of responses. Its function seems, in this respect, opposite to a statement preceding (or following) a question; as we have seen, such a statement often expresses

a presupposition or some other background for the question. However, our data suggest that a generalizing appendix sometimes follows one or several particularizations (see extract [10]); the speaker may first guide or press the respondent into specific kinds of answers, then (at least pro forma) give him or her more freedom again.

The final generalizers are designed as if to give the respondents more freedom in choosing or formulating their answers. The absence of a final generalizer, on the other hand, often makes the MUQT highly constraining and sometimes hostile, especially if it has the design of a so-called alternative question, that is, a pair of yes/no-questions connected through a disjunct marker ('or'); (the usually) two candidate answers are presented as if they exhausted the set of possible answers. Such pairs of questions are often placed after a fairly open or broad initial question. In extract (12), the alternatives are indeed exhaustive, at least according to legal reasoning. Yet, we find the second alternative ending in a final 'or' tag, which lends it the character of a stylistic feature.

- (12) Tema K: P29:8. P is a police officer, S is a suspect
- 1 → P: eh: va säger du om brottslighetstanken?=erkänner  
 2 → du eller förnekar du förberedelsen här eller?  
 3 S: nä, förberedelsen e ju själv-  
 4 (.)  
 5 P: ja.  
 6 S: [klar.  
 7 P: [den (.) den erkänner du ja.
- 1 → P: uh: what do you say about the idea of crime = do  
 2 → you admit or do you deny making preparations here or?  
 3 S: no, preparations are self  
 4 (.)  
 5 P: yes.  
 6 S: [evident.  
 7 P: [that (.) that one you admit, yes.

## 6. The communicative functions of MUQTs

We will now follow up our previous observations and summarize the communicative and interactional functions of MUQTs: What actions are they used to perform? What activity sequences are they part of? What kinds of communicative projects are they designed to solve? It is apparent that in designing and producing a MUQT, a speaker does more than asking a specific question. He or she indulges in a complex communicative project,

the solution of which seems to necessitate a complex form with several units. Our studies suggest that the communicative functions can be grouped together in roughly four different, though overlapping, categories.

First, we found that MUQTs often contribute to *establishing a new topic* (or a new agenda point or a new activity phase) *or resuming a topic or topical aspect*, which has not been in focus in the immediately prior talk, at least not in the preceding turns (local context). In the former case, we often find a so-called ‘framing question’, which introduces (or ‘frames’) a sequence (or topical episode) in which a topic, such as a train of events reported in a court trial (see extract [1]), or a number of symptoms experienced by a patient, as in the list of extract (13), is to be dealt with.

(13) Tema K: BM4:7c. Maternal health care center. M is a midwife, EM is an expectant mother

- 1 → M: .hh hjärt kärlsjukd- =<<ja frågar om olika  
2 → sjukdomar ja.>>  
3 EM: mm.  
4 → M: .hh eh hjärt kärlsjukdomar? (.) inget du har?  
5 EM: °°.nä.°°  
6 → M: nån psykisk sjukdom?  
7 EM: nä.  
8 → M: gynekologisk sjukdom eller operation?  
9 EM: nej.  
10 → M: blodpropp?  
11 EM: nej.
- 1 → M: .hh cardi- cardiovascular dis- <<I ask about  
2 → different diseases you see>>  
3 EM: mm.  
4 → M: .hh cardiovascular diseases? (.) nothing you have got?  
5 EM: °°no°°  
6 → M: any psychic disease?  
7 EM: no.  
8 → M: gynaecological disease or operation?  
9 EM: no.  
10 → M: thrombosis?  
11 EM: no.

As illustrated in extract (13), a topic-initiating, complex MUQT (lines 1–2, 4) often governs a series of subsequent questions that are agenda-bound and organized in a list, as part of a form-filling activity (Heritage and Sorjonen 1994: 12). In extract (13), this can be seen in lines 6, 8, 10. The initial framing question sets the agenda for a subsequent sequence (or episode) of specific questions; it indexes points on a checklist, all subordinated to

the same frame. Checklist questions are often sequentially parasitic on the preceding framing question, and can therefore be delivered in an elliptical format.

The second case involves questions that topicalize aspects that have been mentioned before and may have been topicalized or not during that prior occasion. In multi-party encounters, the initiation of a new topical episode sometimes co-occurs with the establishment of the speakership (the right to the floor) for a new participant; a party who has not been active in the immediately prior sequence, may have to have his or her right to ask a question confirmed, at the same time bringing up, or coming back to, a topic he or she considers relevant at the particular moment. There are some examples of these phenomena in our court trials, but due to space limitations, we will abstain from giving examples in this article. Both *topic shift* and *speaker shift* contribute to conditioning a MUQT design; a single question often does not suffice, if the speaker must accomplish these shifts, in addition to asking his or her core question.

One specific MUQT structure which seems to be prevalent, when the task is to frame, background or contextualize a new topic or activity phase is the 'compound' type with one or more statements prefacing the question(s). Examples are found in press conferences (Clayman and Heritage 2002), in framing questions in maternal health care talk (Linell and Bredmar 1996; cf. extract [13]), or as opening questions in police interrogations or courtroom interviews. Innocuous variants are those involving a pre-unit, announcing that the speaker will, or would like to, ask a question and/or raise a certain topic, and those in which the speaker returns to a prior, non-local topic. On the other hand, Clayman and Heritage (2002) point to some variants in press conferences, which are more hostile to the respondents.

Related to some types of topic initiation is our second category of communicative functions: *breaking off the agenda* (while it is being realized). Thus, MUQTs are used particularly by the lay party in the institutional interaction, the person who does not control the agenda and who has more limited opportunities (or even rights) to ask questions.

(14) Lindholm, INK 2: 26. Doctor 1 interviewing Patient 2

- 1 → P 2:     ja >bara funderar (.h)< alltså finns de int (.)
- 2 →           int int efterlyser >ja mediciner för int e ju de man e ute
- 3 →           [efter men< (.h) (.) men finns de ingenting som sätter
- 4     D 1:     [nä:
- 5 → P 2:     fart. (.) sprätt på b- blodcir°kulation° ((snuffles))
- 6     D 1:     °egentligen int°
- 7           (0.3)
- 8     P 2:     [f<sub>i</sub>nn<sub>i</sub>s de int de?



- 9 D 1: [(x x x x)]  
 10 D 1: nå no finns de cirkulationsmediciner å visst får du pröva  
 11 de men a:t--
- 1 → P 2: well >I'm just contemplating< isn't there I am not not  
 2 → fishing for >drugs because that's not what I'm [out for but<  
 3 D 1: [no:  
 4 → P 2: (.h) (.) but isn't there anything that speeds hurries up the  
 5 → blood cir°culation° ((snuffles))  
 6 D 1: °not really°  
 7 (0.3)  
 8 P 2: [isn't there  
 9 D 1: [(x x x x)]  
 10 D 1: well there are some circulation drugs and you can try them  
 11 but--

The patient here introduces an issue of her own, which could be heard as a request for a prescription of a new medicine. She clearly orients to this interpretation herself and tries to pre-empt it by the use of a disclaimer (lines 2–3: 'I am not fishing for drugs . . . but'). Moreover, she also tries to use a pre-positioned metastatement, which tries to deprive the request of its force (line 1: 'I am just contemplating'). Arguably, the patient's MUQT serves several functions; it secures space for an issue, which was not part of the common agenda, and it treats this issue as somewhat sensitive.<sup>13</sup>

Thirdly, MUQTs seem to occur regularly, when one party feels the need to bring up an issue, which might threaten the other party's (or his or her own) face and is therefore *interactionally delicate*. A sensitive topic may be difficult to manage interactionally by simply asking normal single-unit questions (Linell and Bredmar 1996). Extract (15) is an example from the same corpus as extract (14), this time with the doctor using the MUQT.

- (15) Lindholm; INK 13:27. Doctor 3 interviewing Patient 13
- 1 D 3: just så att du kan  
 2 P 13: j[å  
 3 D 3: [tänka på de [(vise)  
 4 P 13: [jå att ja ha börja tänka på [de vise  
 5 D 3: [mm  
 6 (0.6)  
 7 → D 3: (.h) [förresten ännu en sak ja sku villa fråga (.h) i å  
 8 P 13: [(x)  
 9 → D 3: me nu att du sitter här [så undrar ja liksom att (.h)  
 10 P 13: [.ja

11 → D 3: nu åtminstone så du: berätta ju hur du sköter dej själv  
 12 → [å du har många olika metoder, [å du har bra balans på  
 13 P 13: [mm: [mm + m  
 14 → D 3: [(h) de å känner igen dina [symtom ha du haft nån  
 15 P 13: [ja [((clears her throat))  
 16 → D 3: hjälp av sjukvården ha du haft nån läkare som ha  
 17 → (0.2) som har eller ha ha du ha de vari besvikelser mest

1 D 3: so you can  
 2 P 13: y[es  
 3 D 3: [think in that [way  
 4 P 13: [yes I've started thinking in [that way  
 5 D 3: [mm  
 6 (0.6)  
 7 → D 3: (.h) [by the way another thing that I'd like to ask you about  
 8 P 13: [(x)  
 9 → D 3: when you're sitting here now[I wonder (.h) now at least you:  
 10 P 13: [yes  
 11 → D 3: told me how you take care of yourself [and you have many  
 12 P 13: [mm:  
 13 → D 3: different methods, [and you have those things in good  
 14 P 13: [mm + m  
 15 → D 3: balance [(h) an' recognize your [symptoms have you been  
 16 P 13: [yes [((clears her throat))  
 17 → D 3: helped at all by the medical service have you seen any  
 18 → doctor who has (0.2) who has or have have you have there  
 mostly been disappointments

The patient is portrayed by the doctor as a person who is quite active and successfully copes with her condition (lines 11–14). This extensive background is used as a basis for asking the question if the health care system has caused 'disappointments' mostly (line 17), an issue which might be delicate to tackle for both parties. Its delicacy is arguably further indicated by the fact that the doctor begins his rather complex MUQT with a fairly elaborated pre-announcement (lines 7, 9).

The case of using MUQTs to pre-empt interactionally awkward events is close to cases in which an interactional problem of some complexity has already evolved and caused some kind of misunderstanding, uncertainty or unclarity. (Due to space restrictions, we have not examined such examples from our data in this article.) Question paraphrases (extracts [7] and [8]) often seem to be used in order to pre-empt or impede possibly

upcoming difficulties of understanding or repair incipient misunderstandings (Bergmann 1981). Professionals may use this technique when they feel a need to translate administrative or professional terms into a language, which is more accessible to the lay party (extract [8]). There may be a pedagogical touch to this technique. However, it could also be that this method reflects an uncertainty on the part of the speaker as to how the query should be formulated. In any case, it gives the respondent several opportunities for comprehending the query and the reasons behind it.

The three types of communicative function that we have suggested so far do not account for the majority of cases, however. Instead, as we indicated earlier on, the most common communicative task or dilemma, for which MUQT designs are regularly recruited, is that of *asking a fairly broad question*, for example, a request for an account, *while at the same time suggesting specific directions which relevant answers should take*. Accordingly, we find the common strategy of first asking a fairly general question and then asking one or several particularizing questions that circumscribe the range of possible answers to the prior query, often in fact suggesting a candidate answer to it; this technique has sometimes been called a ‘funneling strategy’ (Adelswärd et al. 1987: 319).

At the same time, one may also argue that both narrowing (particularizing) and broadening (generalizing) components of MUQTs serve the purpose to secure a response. The difference is that an added particularizing unit seems designed to secure a reasonably *precise, adequate* response (adequate for professional purposes), whereas a generalizing appendix seems geared towards securing *anything* that could count as a relevant or *acceptable* response.

## 7. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

Many analyses of questions, both in traditional grammar and speech act theory, have worked with decontextualized sentences, which are described as being direct or indirect expressions of information- or confirmation-seeking intentions on the part of speakers. Such analyses miss significant aspects of what is involved in questioning in real social interactions. In this article, we have adopted a CA-informed analysis of certain types of question designs, especially multi-unit questioning turns.

We have suggested a limited number of MUQT designs as discursive methods for solving recurrent communicative problems. We have tentatively discussed what appear to be common communicative functions of MUQTs. It should be added, however, that we do not think that communicative functions are inherent properties of abstract MUQT

structures as such, since communicative functions are properties of situated and contextualized contributions to specific interactions. Rather, MUQT types, and other grammatical constructions, may be assumed to have certain functional potentials, that is, capacities to contribute to communicative functions in specific interactions, as a result of the interplay with various contextual factors.

MUQTs are often discussed in terms of 'question design', as if they were simply part of the speaker's design. In fact, we, too, are guilty of a certain speaker bias. To some extent, this may be explained, or excused, by the fact that we analyzed situations in which (often quite dominant) professional parties have indeed time and discursive space for 'designing' their contributions. But it must be emphasized that MUQTs are ultimately the outcome of an interaction with the other party, a collaborative accomplishment. We have pointed to various moments in our data extracts, when the addressee's response (or lack of response) seems to have influenced the progressive production of the MUQT. One can of course find MUQTs that are collaboratively constructed and completed by other speakers (in the sense of Lerner 1989), but we did not find many cases of this in our data.

The issue of co-construction is just one of several points where more research on MUQTs is necessary. In general, the results obtained in this study can provide only fragments of a possible taxonomy (or theory), to be used as a basis for hypotheses to be tested in future research. Among the many aspects of MUQTs that remain to be explored are the ways in which MUQTs (and other question designs) are responsive to prior talk, and to situations, activity types and *quaestios*, as well as the ways to which MUQTs are responded to in subsequent talk (but see also Lindholm 2003). Another issue concerns the detailed syntactic and prosodic properties of different kinds of MUQTs, for example, as regards syntactic structure (subordination versus coordination, and increments versus new TCUs), degrees of prosodic exposure versus integration, pauses versus latching, etc.

Using a MUQT is an example of a communicative strategy in the sense of a routine solution to a recurrent communicative problem (Linell 1998: 228). Formulating or designing a MUQT is often (an attempt at) solving a complex communicative task. This may involve combining several, possibly mutually conflicting, demands in a 'communicative dilemma' (Adelswärd 1988: 165). For example, MUQTs are used in court trials to solve the dilemma of avoiding leading questions versus securing precise answers to legally relevant questions, or between leaving options for respondents and guiding them into focusing on particular aspects. Similar dilemmas occur in the news interviews and press conferences studied by Heritage and Roth (1995), Clayman and Heritage (2002), Heritage (2002),

Nylund (2000), and others. These authors have pointed to two conflicting norms of journalistic conduct; journalists must be neutral (impartial, objective, unbiased and disinterested), and at the same time, they often need to provoke politicians to respond, thus subscribing to a norm of adversarialness. The demand for neutrality in isolation would seem to call for simple questions, allowing for different answers and leaving some leeway for respondents to design their answers on their own terms. In fact, this deferential type of journalistic conduct was clearly more common a few decades ago (Clayman and Heritage 2002). However, journalists also have an interest (on the behalf of the public) in urging politicians to become more specific in their answers, also in response to difficult questions.

Therefore, the general and simple answer to the question why speakers use MUQTs seems to be that speakers try to do two (or more) things that are not straightforwardly compatible and cannot be easily expressed in and through a single-unit utterance. Perhaps, the most common feature of the communicative tasks resulting in MUQTs is the wish to be both general and specific at the same time. So, in order to do the two (or more) things, speakers use two (or more) units. But this is not a matter of just doing one thing first, and then the other. The particular communicative effects arise from the juxtaposition in a particular sequence of the units, from their being delivered in one package.

## **Appendix: Transcription conventions**

<u>Underlining</u>	(of the orthographic counterpart of the syllable nucleus (e.g., <u>hela</u> ) denotes that word is stressed with a focal accent (only in the Swedish originals)
[	marks the beginning of simultaneous talk by two speakers
=	marks that the following talk is latched on to the prior talk without any interjacent pause whatsoever
(2.0)	marks a timed pause in seconds and tenths of seconds
(.)	denotes a micro-pause, shorter than a quarter of a second
(( ))	transcriber's comments
(XXXX)	undecipherable words
°°	(degree signs) denotes speech in a low volume
°° °°	very soft voice (whisper)
> <	(arrows) denotes speech which is spoken at a faster rate than the surrounding talk
< >	denotes speech at a slower rate than the surrounding talk
(.h)	marks an inhalation
-	speaker interrupts him/herself in mid utterance

**	(asterisks) indicates laughter in the speaker's voice while pronouncing the words enclosed
: (:)	sound lengthening
Tema K	reference to files at the Department of Communication Studies, Linköping
A28: 28	exact (page) reference to the data corpus involved
→	points to lines of specific interest

## Notes

- \* This article was first read at the EuroConference on Interactional Linguistics in Spa, Belgium, 16–21 September, 2000.
- 1. Turn-constructural units and related notions have been discussed at length in the CA (Conversation Analysis) literature, for example, by Schegloff (1996).
- 2. Interrogative indicators (markers), corresponding to what Searle (1969: 30) would call IFID (i.e., 'illocutionary force indicating devices') for questions, include inverted word order (i.e., verb-initial clause), wh-word, interrogative prosody (e.g., a rising, or at least not a distinctly falling, intonational contour), particles (e.g., 'final 'or?'), final interrogative tags ('isn't it?', 'do you think?'), lexical items expressing a request for a verbal response ('tell me', 'I wonder', 'I want to ask you'). If the utterance concerns a so-called B-event, that is, an event of which only B has first-hand knowledge (Labov 1972), this also contributes to its liability to be heard as a question: 'B-event question'.
- 3. See also Vehviläinen (1999: 104) for a similar point.
- 4. We take 'activity type' roughly in the sense discussed by Levinson (1992) and Sarangi (2000).
- 5. In this article, the original Swedish extracts are shown first and then fairly close English translations are given. Naturally, all analyses have been carried out on the originals, even though we report and discuss them in English. Note that in some cases, lines in the Swedish and English versions do not match exactly; in a few such cases, when we refer to line numbers in our text, these references pertain to the Swedish original.
- 6. However, it might be true also of other activity types that final position units in MUQTs require subjective experiences or stances, whilst earlier units in the same MUQTs deal with objectively formulated circumstances. For data from doctor/patient interactions, see Lindholm (2003).
- 7. If yes/no-questions by default embody a preference for an affirmative answer (Clayman and Heritage 2002: fn. 10), this effect of Q2 is immediately cancelled by the delivery of Q3 suggesting an alternative answer.
- 8. Hofvendahl (2000) identified 179 MUQTs in his nine institutional talks. Of these, 58% were two-unit structures, 30% were three-unit structures, 8% were four-unit structures, and the rest (n = 8) comprised of more than four units. Correspondingly, Lindholm (2003) found 62% (128/206) two-unit structures, 24% three-unit structures, 7% four-unit structures, and 7% (14/206) delivery structures with more than four units. We found that the overwhelming majority of these MUQTs could be subsumed under either of two formal types, in terms of their syntax (or structure): *S + Q* or *Q + Q*, and *expansions of these*, that is, instead of one S, you can have two or more, and instead of one Q, you can have a series. That is, there are sequences such

as S + Q + Q, S + Q + Q + Q, S + S + Q, Q + Q + Q, etc. Statements within MUQTs are typically prefatory, but there are also occurrences of Q(+Q)+S. The two structures and their expansions account for 93% (167/179) of Hofvendahl's cases. In other words, there were rather few instances in which Ss and Qs are piled up pell-mell (e.g., no Q + S + Q + S + S). If we divide the MUQTs up into those containing only questions and those containing at least one statement, they were 45% (81/179) and 53% (109/206) of the former type in Hofvendahl's and Lindholm's corpuses, respectively, and 55% (98/179) and 47% (97/206) of the latter type. For more details, see Hofvendahl (2000) and Lindholm (2003).

9. These amount to 4% (8/179) of Hofvendahl's MUQTs, and 14% (28/206) of Lindholm's MUQTs.
10. See also note 2. The particle *ju* is hard to translate into English. Its contribution to the utterance is indicated in the translation of extract (4), line 9, by the final tag 'right?', but this is only a (partly inadequate) approximation.
11. In Hofvendahl's corpus, 81% (101/124) of the component questions (interrogative TCUs) had particularizing relations to their preceding (head) questions (including some tokens of paraphrases), 11% (n = 14) cases were of a generalizing type, and 7% (n = 9) cases were of the metacommunicative type. In other words, the particularizing type was much more common than the others. Lindholm's data confirmed this pattern; about a fourth were of the generalizing type, while the rest was mostly particularizing. Many of Lindholm's generalizing questions were of the type topically empty generalizers; arguably, her medical context seems to have favoured such questions more than Hofvendahl's corpus, which was dominated by the legal contexts (court trials and police interrogations containing 62% (111/179) of his MUQTs).
12. A study of patterns of responses to MUQTs (Lindholm 2003) shows that generalized list completers are not like normal final interrogatives; they are not responded to as separate questions.
13. Extract (14) is the only case where we cite a MUQTs that is introduced by the lay party. In general, we do not have any conclusive evidence that clients use MUQTs more often than professionals, as some studies in the literature review suggest. In Hofvendahl's (2000) corpus, the lay parties used *fewer* MUQTs, 11% (11/104) of all their questioning turns, as compared to the professionals' 19% (168/920). However, a special study of eight doctor-patient encounters in Lindholm (1999) suggests that the patients do indeed use MUQTs more often; 28% (9/23) of their questions are multi-unit, as opposed to single-unit (72%), while the corresponding figures for doctors are 15% (54/360) and 85%. More specifically, patients turn out to use significantly more of particular *types* of MUQTs, namely, those with with prefatory statements rather than question cascades. On this point, there were similar trends as in the data studied by Sandén et al. (2001) and Thornborrow (2001).

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