**Type of Interview Question Phrasing on Children’s Recall of an Event**

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**Abstract**

This study assessed the effectiveness of invitations, directives, forced-choice questions and paraphrasing on children’s recall for an experienced event. Sixty-nine children between 3 and 8 years of age (mean = 5 years, 4 months) participated in an interactive science presentation and were interviewed approximately eight weeks later about the event. Both the quantity of accurate facts and the quality of the information (the proportion of statements that were accurate) were used as outcome measures. Invitations elicited the greatest amount and best quality information. Forced choice questions and straight paraphrasing resulted in fewer and less accurate reported facts. This is important for forensic and medical interviewing.

**Methods**

**Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** Free-recall and open-ended (directive) questions will elicit more accurate and complete information from children than closed-ended or forced-choice questions, consistent with prior research (e.g., Lamb et al., 2003; Marin et al., 1979).

**Hypothesis 2:** Increased paraphrasing is expected to increase the quantity and quality of information reported by children (e.g., Lamb & Fauchier, 2001). The accuracy of the information recalled did not differ as a function of question type. Paraphrasing alone, however, may encourage less accurate information. Future research should carefully assess this possibility.

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**MEASURES**

Recall Measures:
- **Quantity of Facts** (total number of facts recalled)
- **Quality** (number accurate facts/total number of facts recalled)

Our examination of interviewers’ choices in a natural narrative did not involve a scripted manipulation of question type, but rather coded the different types of questions and instances of paraphrasing spontaneously used by interviewers.

**MEASURES**

**Question Types**

- **Invitation:** Open ended request for information
  - Tell me about the day Dr. Spider came.
  - Tell me about the accident.

- **Directive Questions:** Question focused on a particular aspect of the event (Wh/How)
  - What color were the spiders?
  - Where does it hurt?

- **Forced Choice:** Questions which limit responses
  - Were the spiders black or brown?
  - Did you eat breakfast?

**Paraphrasing:** Interviewer repeats child’s statement

Child: We saw spiders.

Interviewer: You saw spiders?

Interviewer: You saw spiders? Tell me more.

**Effects of Question Type on Quantity and Quality of Recalled Information**

In line with prior findings, children recalled significantly more facts per question when invitation type questions (i.e., free recall prompts), $F(1, 67) = 29.37$, $M = 2.86$, were asked rather than when directive ($M = 2.20$) or forced-choice type questions were asked ($M = 1.08$). All $p$'s < .001.

In addition, children’s responses to forced-choice questions ($M = .42$) were less accurate, $F(1, 67) = 36.00$, than invitations ($M = .79$), or directives ($M = .50$). All $p$’s < .001.

Invitations and directives did not differ from each other.

**Effects of Different Paraphrasing Styles on Recalled Information**

There was a difference in quantity of facts reported as a function of paraphrasing type, $F(2, 44) = 12.07$, $p < .01$. Children recalled less when the question was a Paraphrase of the child’s response ($M = 1.45$) than responses to Invitation-style questions ($M = 3.86$), or the combined Paraphrase & Invitation question style ($M = 2.52$). In addition, the combined Invitation & Paraphrase style questions elicited significantly less information than Invitation-style questions.

Of concern, was the finding that the accuracy of the information recalled differed as a function of paraphrasing. $F(2, 44) = 4.99$, $p < .05$. Responses following a paraphrase style question were less accurate ($M = .78$) than those following either an Invitation ($M = .88$), or a combination Paraphrase & Invitation ($M = .83$).

**Discussion**

We found a difference between the quantity of information recalled by children in response to invitations and directives supporting prior research (e.g., Lamb & Fauchier, 2001). The accuracy of the information recalled did not differ as a function of question type. Paraphrasing alone, however, may encourage less accurate information. Future research should carefully assess this possibility.