

THE PERSON OR THE ISSUE? RELATIONAL PROCESS, PERSON- AND IDEA-TARGETED QUESTIONS IN UK AND GHANAIAN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS

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Abstract

Using parliamentary questions as data and a corpus-assisted systemic functional approach through WordSmith Tools, this paper, with specific reference to relational processes, explores yes/no interrogatives in order to establish how MPs encode in their questions issues of attitudes, commitments, personalities and ideas of (Prime) Ministers during Ghanaian Minister's and UK Prime Minister's Questions. The paper finds that MPs use yes/no interrogatives with relational processes to describe (Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain attributes relating to their positions and responsibilities, while some of the questions are issue-focused. To achieve this, MPs employ two main questioning strategies: person-targeted and idea-targeted pragmatic strategies, thereby raising issues of (Prime) Ministers' credibility and commitment to duty. The paper has implications for parliamentary questions, party politics and MPs' and (Prime) Ministers' duties as representatives of their constituents.

Keywords: corpus-assisted, relational process, Ghanaian Minister's Questions, UK Prime Ministers Questions, person-targeted questions, idea-targeted questions

Introduction

Studying parliamentary questions, in particular, and parliamentary discourse, in general, has the potential to offer insights into the behaviour, attitudes and motivations of parliamentarians (MPs) when they are engaged in their constitutionally-mandated task of legislating and scrutinising government policies and actions. In principle, MPs ask questions of the executive/government for several reasons: for information, action, personal publicity; or to defend/promote constituency/sectoral interests, inform/question policy, hold executive/government accountable, and enhance/undermine government's image (Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996). This paper explores an aspect of parliamentary questions, namely: yes/no interrogatives that are constructed with relational processes (Halliday 1994, p.112) in order to uncover the focus of MPs' questions. The limitation is based on the need for in-depth analysis and lack of space. The paper looks at the following in turn: parliamentary questions, theoretical approach (interrogatives and relational processes), research design and data, analysis and discussion, and conclusion.

Parliamentary questions

Parliamentary questions (written or oral) are one major way by which MPs hold the executive and governments accountable for their political decisions, actions and inactions (Akirav, 2011; Ilie, 2006; Proksch & Slapin, 2010). The questions considered for this study are oral questions, which are spoken requests for information or action.

Parliamentary questions, which follow question-response sequences representing the default adjacency pairs (Ilie, 2015), have been variously studied, especially in the western world. These include the roles and functions of parliamentary questions (Cole, 2007; Rosenberg & Martin, 2012); the effectiveness of procedures of questioning in various European parliaments (Russo & Wiberg, 2010); parliamentary questions as a means of raising alarm over national governments' failure to implement European Union policies (Jensen, Proksch & Slapin, 2013). Others include parliamentary questions as a means of measuring constituency focus (Martin, 2011a; Russo, 2011); and as a means of understanding the preferences and the behaviour of parliamentarians (Martin, 2011b; Rosenberg & Martin, 2011).

One parliament that has received substantial scholarly attention is the UK parliament, with particular attention on Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs), due to its status as the mother-of-all parliaments (Ilie, 2006; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). While the practice of questioning Ministers dates back to the late 17th or early 18th century, the current form of questioning is as recent as the 1960s (Harris, 2001; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Being adversarial in nature, PMQs has been investigated from pragmatic perspectives employing speech act theory (Ilie, 2010), face-threatening acts (Bull & Wells, 2012) and politeness theory (Harris, 2001; Murphy, 2014). During PMQs, questions are often planted for political purposes (Inside the Commons – Lifting the Lid 2015), and, PMQs

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become more confrontational when questions are asked by the opposition; for which reason it has been labelled as “a facethreatening genre”, even though “the high frequency of face-threatening acts is counterbalanced by a wide range of politeness strategies” (Ilie, 2006, p.192). Wilson (1990, p.146) has stated that *yes/no* interrogatives are the most frequent type of interrogatives among UK parliamentary questions. This is corroborated by Harris (2001, p.457), adding that *yes/no* interrogatives in PMQs are usually designed in such a way that they are followed by a “proposition oriented in a broad sense either to information or ... to action”, as for example: will the Prime Minister send + a proposition. Harris (2001, p.457; see also Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018) further states that, sometimes, the questions “seek expressions of opinion” in contravention of the parliamentary rules of questioning. In the context of parliamentary questions, such propositions are very significant, as they affect the meaning and implication of the questions and sometimes indirectly make the questions appear as offering information.

Unlike the PMQs, Ghanaian Ministers Questions (GMQs) has received very little scholarly attention (see Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). The research gap on Ghanaian parliamentary questions makes the current study highly relevant. The relative lack of such studies may emanate from the fact that Ghana has had unstable republican parliamentary systems, with the current republic (which is 25 years old) being the most stable republican system in Ghana’s history (Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Since the Ghanaian parliamentary system is modelled on the Westminster system, comparing an aspect of the practices of an old Westminster parliament and a young Westminster-modelled Ghanaian parliament allows for introspection and retrospection for both parliaments. The current study is substantially different from the previous ones as it looks at the questions from a multilevel theoretical and methodological approach: a corpus-assisted discourse analysis.

Theoretical approach: interrogatives and relational processes

Interrogatives can be recognised structurally. They are typically constructed with a subject-operator inversion (e.g. Is he your father?) or introduced with a “wh” item (e.g. What is the Minister going to do?) or even through the use of a minor sentence (e.g. Any ministerial response?). Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) have identified five types of interrogatives:

- i. *yes/no* questions (truth-seeking questions),
- ii. *wh*-questions (information-seeking questions),
- iii. alternative questions (choice-making questions),
- iv. *tag*-questions (confirmation-seeking question and
- v. declarative questions (a declarative structure, a type of *yes/no* question).

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985, 1972) identify three main types: *yes/no* (with declarative and *tag*-questions being sub-categories), *wh*-questions and alternative questions. There are also open (*wh*-questions, indirect questions and requests) and closed questions (*yes/no*, declarative, *tag* and non-sentence questions) (Tkačuková, 2010). For want of space and the need for in-depth analysis, this paper examines only *yes/no* interrogatives that involve relational processes. It should, however, be noted that, pragmatically, it could be misleading to label interrogatives as above, since form and function of clauses do not always coincide (Biber et al., 2002; Downing & Locke, 2006, p.197). Pragmatically, interrogatives function as directives/ commands, statements and exclamations (Biber et al., 2002, p.249; Downing & Locke, 2006, p.211), including question, rhetorical question, rebuke, exclamation and directive (order, request) (Downing & Locke (2006, p.211; Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). Questions can reveal attitudes and preferences of the questioner as well as his/her level of knowledge towards the issue at stake (Heritage, 2010). Parliamentary questions are meant to hold governments accountable by criticising their policies, exposing abuses, and seeking redress (Ilie, 2015). Sometimes, questions are used either to attack or praise a government depending on whether they are asked by opposition or position MPs. Thus, questions may have either positive, negative or neutral orientation, each of which determines the question’s focus and implication (Downing & Locke, 2006; Quirk et al. 1972, 1985). Ilie (2015, p.9) further states that “parliamentary questioning strategies are not intended to elicit specific answers, but rather challenge or embarrass the respondent into making uncomfortable, damaging, or self-revealing declaration”. Questions that seek information or action are likely to focus on the subject matter, whereas those intended to challenge or embarrass are likely to target the person. One of the strategies for attacking persons is to employ interrogatives involving relational process constructions, hence the deployment of the principle of relational process for analysis in this paper.

Relational process is the category of

transitivity that generally concerns things “of being”, with the “central meaning ... that something is” (Halliday, 1994, p.112) and are “typically realized by the verb be or some verb of the same class (known as copular verbs)” (Bloor & Bloor, 2013, p.122). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.215), there are two “modes of being” that characterise relational processes, viz: attributive (“Is he aware?”, where aware indicates an attribute of he) and identifying (“Is he the Minister?”, where the Minister identifies he). In “Is he [the Prime Minister] proud of his legacy...?” (UK 6 Jun 07/Col 252), “is” “is a relational process and “proud” is an attributive adjective. The question raises some reservation about the Prime Minister (PM); it targets the person. Attributives can express “emotion/attitude” (e.g. proud, sad), “cognition/probability” (e.g. doubt, certainty) or “desideration/obligation” (e.g. desirability, acceptability) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.223). Thus, [i]n the “attributive” mode, an entity has some class ascribed or attributed to it. Structurally, we label this class the Attribute, and the entity to which it is ascribed is the Carrier — the “carrier” of the “attribute” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.219). In asking (Prime) Ministers questions that involve attributives, MPs are ascribing to

them certain qualities of attitude and behaviour. Oftentimes, instead of directly questioning an attribute of the (Prime) Minister, the question is designed in such a way that an idea is made the entity, in which case the question becomes idea-targeted, as for example, Is the information right?, where the focus is on “the information”. Thus, relational process interrogatives bring to bear two question types: person- and idea-targeted questions (Gibbons, 2003, p.112), which are explored in this paper.

Research design and data

The paper employs a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis, that is, the study of “the form and/or function of language as communicative discourse which incorporate[s] the use of computerised corpora in their analysis” (Partington, Duguid & Taylor, 2013, p.10). Employing Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2012), the study uses concordances to observe words in context by examining their collocates, and interpreting them qualitatively (Adolphs 2008; MacEnery & Wilson, 2001). For instance, Figure 1 is a sample concordance output of “is the Minister” from the Ghanaian data.

N	Concordance
1	have been given contracts to undertake, is the Minister aware that the highways are still
2	is, if there is no managerial problem here, is the Minister sure that the contractor has
3	I will proceed to my next question. Mr. Speaker, is the Minister aware that at the time the
4	roads in every district capital; my question is, is the Minister supposed to tar all roads within

Figure 1: Concordance of “is the Minister” from GMQs

The words on both sides of “is the Minister” are collocates, which allow us to see the words to the left and right of “is the Minister” in each line so that we can decipher what is attributed to the Minister in each line. For example, in line 2, “sure that the contractor has...” may indicate an expression of doubt by the MP who asked the question. While the concordance tool provides words (and expressions) in context, it is not able to indicate syntactically wrong structures or identify mistakes. Also, the tool provides only the strings of linguistic patterns in the corpus without giving any interpretation; it is the corpus linguist who does the analysis and interprets the data (see Woolls, 2011). However, these limitations are offset by the fact that the corpus-assisted approach helps to draw on the concept of situational context to identify the

pragmatic functions of MPs’ questions (Adolphs, 2008). While the corpus tools allow us to observe words within their co-texts, the interpretation of such words goes into the social, cultural and political contexts.

The UK data (obtained from www.parliament.uk) are Hansards of parliamentary proceedings between 2005 and 2014 inclusive, comprising about 178,581 tokens (running words) from 33 PMQs sessions, 11 each from Labour PMs Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and Conservative PM David Cameron administrations. The Ghanaian data, which comprise about 148,461 tokens, are Hansards of 29 sessions of GMQs. They include 14 from the J.A. Kufuor (2005-2008, excluding 2007, which was unavailable) and 15 from the J.E.A. Mills/J.D. Mahama administrations (2009-2013). The periods

of 2005-2013/14 were selected purposively so as to obtain a broad range of corpus data spanning different governments' administrations as well as acquire data that could "be considered to 'average out' and provide a reasonably accurate picture" of UK PMQs and GMQs (McEnery & Wilson, 2001, p.30).

It is known that Hansards transcribers either omit or change certain lexical items used by MPs, including the generic you, speaker, give way, make sure, look at, have to (Mollin, 2007, p.207; see also Sarfo-Kantankah, 2018). However, the lexical items that are usually affected do not appear among the words that are the focus of this paper. Therefore, the said changes and omissions do not affect the analysis .

Analysis and discussion

The analysis is divided into two parts. The first part examines person-targeted questions, while the second part looks at idea-targeted questions. Table 1 represents the forms and the number of operators (will, would, can, does, be) used in forming the relational process interrogatives in the two datasets. The Table also indicates the number of relational process interrogatives (115 in GMQs, 208 UK PMQs), the number of person- and idea-targeted (Tgt.) questions involved, including their normalised frequency (NF) distributions, which demonstrate which items under reference (operators, person- and idea-targeted questions) were statistically more frequent in the two datasets.

Table 1: Operators, person-/idea-targeted questions and their normalised frequencies

	GHANA	Person-	Idea-	UK	Person-	Idea-
Operator	Freq. %	Tgt. %	Tgt. %	Freq. %	Tgt. %	Tgt. %
Will	4 (3.48)	3 (75)	1 (25)	43 (20.67)	40 (93.02)	3 (6.98)
Would	4 (3.48)	2 (50)	2 (50)	0		
Can	3 (2.60)	2 (66.67)	1 (33.33)	19 (9.13)	19 (100)	0
Does	5 (4.35)	2 (40)	3 (60)	22 (10.58)	11 (50)	11 (50)
Be	99 (86.09)	60 (60.61)	39 (39.39)	124 (59.62)	66 (53)	58 (47)
Total	115	69 (60)	46 (40)	208	136 (65.38)	72 (34.62)
NF	7.75/10k	4.65/10k	3.10/10k	11.65/10k	7.62/10k	4.03/10k

The NF was calculated as:

$x/10,000$ (i.e. base of normalisation) = raw frequency/corpus size where x represents the normalised frequency for each corpus (see McEnery & Hardie, 2012, pp.48-50). Thus, the NF distribution indicates that all the items were stylistically more frequent in the UK data than in the Ghanaian data. The UK data recorded 11.65, 7.62 and 4.03 per 10,000 tokens for the operators, person-targeted and idea-targeted questions respectively, as against Ghana's 7.75, 4.65 and 3.10 per 10,000 tokens respectively. The overall picture is that there were more person-targeted questions in the PMQs than in the GMQs (a difference of 3.9/10,000 tokens). In both parliaments, the person-targeted questions were more frequent than the idea-targeted questions, which shows that the MPs' relational process yes/no interrogatives were more personality-focused than issue-focused. However, the PMQs were

more person-focused than the GMQs (a difference of 2.97/10,000 tokens). The implication is that the UK MPs targeted personalities of their PMs more than their Ghanaian counterparts did.

It must be noted that the examples provided for the subsequent discussions are prototypical of the various types of person- and idea-targeted interrogatives as well as the categories (desideration/obligation, emotion/attitude and cognition (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, pp.223-224)) found in the data. This was done to save space. Note also that some of the examples are concordance lines. Since the relational process interrogatives appear more similar than different in the two datasets, the analysis is intertwined, pointing out differences between the UK and Ghanaian data as and when necessary.

Person-targeted yes/no interrogatives

Person-targeted questions are questions that focus on the person(ality) of an addressee. The questions target and ask about the addressee’s attributes and behaviour, often raising doubts and reservations about the addressee’s personality, character, disposition, and qualities, among others. These questions are mostly constructed with relational

process verbs called copular verbs, the most common among them being the verb “to be”, with various adjectives as complements indicating various categories of attributes (see Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p.225). Table 2 represents the various categories of attributes contained in the two datasets.

Table 2: Categories of attributes and their frequencies in the GMQs and PMQs

Category	GMQs		UK PMQs	
Cognition/probability	Aware	57	Aware	31
	Supposed	2	(to) ensure	22
	Sure	1	Guilty	4
	Fair	1	Wonder	3
	Possible	3	Surprised	2
		64 (92.75%)	Convinced	2
Emotion/attitude			have (any idea)	6
			<i>Feel</i>	2
			confident	2
			sound	2
			relaxed	1
			familiar	1
			78 (57.35%)	
	Kind	2	Proud	8
		(2.90%)	Satisfied	1
			Concerned	7
		ill-judged	1	
		Right	6	
		Petrified	1	
		Afraid	6	
		Bovvered	1	
		In favour	5	
		Bothered	1	
		Pleased	5	
		Able	1	
		Embarrassed	2	
			45 (33.09%)	
Desideration/obligation				
	Willing	1	Prepared	9
	Required	1	Willing	3
	Prepared	1	On	1
	3 (4.35%)		13 (9.56%)	

As can be observed from Table 2, in both parliaments the words of cognition/probability were the most frequent in the person-targeted questions, which means that the majority of the questions in both parliaments (GMQs, 92.75%; PMQs, 57.35%) were knowledge seeking. The questions concentrated more on the (Prime) Ministers’ knowledge of events, actions, policies, among others. However, there were more emotive/attitudinal questions in the PMQs (33.09%) than in the GMQs (2.90%). This implies that the UK MPs were more emotional in their questions than their Ghanaian counterparts. In other words, the UK MPs demonstrated more strong feelings or agitations about the attitudes and behaviours of their PMs.

Portraying (Prime) Ministers as carriers of attributes and attitudes

Relational process interrogatives in the parliamentary questions foreground (Prime) Ministers’ personalities and their attitudes towards their responsibilities. They are used to describe

(Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain qualities or values relating to their positions. This is achieved mostly by employing attributive adjectives. For example, the concordance lines in Figures 2 and 3 illustrate some of the descriptive adjectives used in such interrogatives: Figure 2 – “is the hon. Minister aware” (line 1), “is she willing” (line 4) and Figure 3 – “Will he be able” (line 1), “Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough” (line 4). These mean that “the hon. Minister”, “she”, “he” and “my right hon. Friend” carry the attributes of awareness (cognition), willingness (desideration), ability and kindness (emotion) respectively, which portray qualities and characteristics of the (Prime) Ministers.

Attributive clauses normally have carrier (i.e. the participant), relational process and attribute (Flowerdew, 2013, p.18), as in: He (carrier) is (relational process) prepared (attribute). However, in an interrogative form, we will have requested carrier,

N	Concordance
1	. Mr. Agbesi: Mr. Speaker, my question is, as at today, is the hon. Minister aware that the roads in Middle
2	of tarring roads in every district capital; my question is, is the Minister supposed to tar all roads within the
3	Answer is, if there is no managerial problem here, is the Minister sure that the contractor has been paid,
4	was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon?

Figure 2: Sample concordance lines of relational processes in GH MQs

N	Concordance
1	kind of formal recognition for those brave men. Will he be able to bring that to a conclusion
2	to do whatever we can to relieve their tragedy? Will he be good enough to have a word with the
3	review of the voting systems in this country. Will that be yet another pointless exercise, or can
4	threatening their energy and fuel supplies. Will my right hon. Friend be kind enough to tell

Figure 2: Sample concordance lines of relational processes in GH MQs

relational process and attribute (see Examples 1 and 2, Table 3 below). In Example 1, “the Hon Minister” is cast as a requested “Carrier” of the “Attribute” of preparedness (Flowerdew, 2013, p.18).

The main purpose of Dr. Osei’s question is to request evidence from the Minister whether he secured approval for his action. As a former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MFEP), Dr. Osei knows that Gen Smith “must seek approval from” that Ministry. He wants to know whether Gen. Smith (Minister for Defence) followed standard procedures to acquiring approval for funding from the MFEP. Dr. Osei sounds sceptical about Gen. Smith’s handling of securing funding and presupposes a contravention of procurement procedures. In his response, Gen Smith implies that he has not received funding yet, as he has not had time to apply for approval from the Ministry because the reports were received only “some few days back”. Gen. Smith also responds to the assumption of contravention of procedures, indicating that, when the approval is obtained, “we will do the right thing”.

In his question, Dr. Osei implies a lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of the Minister, as expressed in the use of “be prepared to”, a semantically negative expression. It indicates a desire/willingness (desideration) to act. The concordance shots (see Figures 3 and 4) of “be prepared to” from the International Corpus of English-Ghana (ICE-Gh) and the British National Corpus (BNC) show that it has a negative semantic prosody, the “consistent aura of meaning with which a form is imbued by its collocates” (Louw, 1993,

p.157). Figure 4 indicates the only five collocates of “be prepared to” in the ICE-Gh; while Figure 5 indicates the first ten (10) per 1000 collocates of “be prepared to”, which amounts to a frequency of 10.17 instances per million words in the BNC.

The collocates show that “be prepared to” occurs mostly in negative contexts, such as to make concessions, yield or give something away. For example, in the ICE-Gh, to “actually offer free services ...” (line 1), “you must have the ability to accept change ... learn and seek help when necessary” (line 2), “share powers, functions and resources” (line 3) and “take private accommodation for the week” (line 4) imply making compromises and forfeitures. In the BNC, “sentence someone to death” (line 2), “risks some indulgence” (line 3), and “budge on the issue even now” (line 9) connote negativity. Thus, “be prepared to” means being ready to accept some negative consequences. This demonstrates that Dr. Osei is pessimistic about the Minister’s handling of procuring funds for the recruitment exercise. The MP is not only interested in requesting information, but also questioning the Minister’s commitment, trust and sincerity in the performance of his political duties. As noted by Bull, Fetzer and Johansson (2008, p.326) political commitment is essential in politics, and, as a basis of their decision to vote for one political leader or another, “voters may question the extent to which politicians can be trusted to keep their word or to implement their promises”. Therefore, Dr. Osei raising a question of trust has some political point-scoring implications.

Example 2 (Table 3 above) performs two functions. First, it requests confirmation or otherwise

Preface	Operator	Requested Carrier	Relational process	Attribute	Circumstance
<p>Example 1: GH 10 Jun 09/Col. 444/5:</p> <p>Dr. Osei [NPP]: Madam Speaker, in his Answer and with your permission, I quote: "Recruitment funding would therefore be used to improve physical conditions in the training school". What I want to know is that, has the Hon Minister sought approval for moving from item 3 to item 4 for this purpose? The requirement is that he must seek approval from the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. If such approval was sought and it was given,</p>	would	the hon. Minister	be	prepared	<i>to provide the evidence that he got the approval?</i>
<p>Lt. Gen. Smith (ret'd) [NDC]: Madam Speaker, we received the reports just some few days back and if I say I directed, the process will take its course and the necessary approvals will be sought and we will do the right thing. Thank you</p>					
<p>Example 2: UK 20 Jun 07/Col 1373</p> <p>Gordon Banks (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will be aware that since being elected to this House I have campaigned for formal recognition of the Bevin Boys and the role that they played in our world war two success and the defeat of Nazism. In January, the Prime Minister acknowledged their role and said that he would make progress on some kind of formal recognition for those brave men.</p>	will	he	be	able	<i>to bring that to a conclusion before he leaves office next week?</i>
<p>The Prime Minister [Lab]: I congratulate my hon. Friend on the campaign that he has mounted for some recognition for the Bevin Boys and the extraordinary work that they did in world war two, without which our war effort would have been seriously hindered. We will have a special commemorative badge for the Bevin Boys, and we will announce that later today. It will provide some recognition for the tremendous work that they did, express the sense of gratitude that the country has for them, and show why it is a good idea that on this day we should commemorate their work.</p>					

Table 3: Participants in the relational clause

N	Concordance
1	S2: [mm]par S9: [So] I think that lawyers must sometimes be prepared to actually offer free legal advice
2	you must have the ability to accept change, be a self-starter be prepared to learn and to seek help when necessary.
3	the light of these expectations, the District Assembly should be prepared to share powers, functions and resources with
4	our own postgraduates do not get it. I will try for you, but be prepared to take private accommodation for the week or
5	submit to full treatment within the three months period and be prepared to testify to the public after treatment. It called

Figure 4: Semantic prosodies of ‘be prepared to’ from the ICE GH

N	Concordance
1	he liked. And we both knew that hardly anyone would be prepared to speak out and arouse my case. I remember
2	all jurors have to believe in capital punishment, and be prepared to sentence someone to death. Since black
3	you can bring something of your own imagination to it, and be prepared to risk some indulgence. Keep Titania tough,
4	that pictures are part of a tradition; finally, children may be prepared to make a judgement going beyond an
5	the biggest problems if you're up for a 'tart' part you must be prepared to present a flavour of the role as you see it. If
6	that you may face longish periods of unemployment and to be prepared to deal with this constructively. Isolation is one
7	just sit around waiting for the telephone to ring. Actors must be prepared to create their own work. Anywhere — on the
8	a forthcoming forum. Facing the Financiers'. Would you be prepared to contribute? If so, please write to Amanda
9	of divorce in a future united Ireland, indeed that they might be prepared to budge on the issue even now. But the
10	nearer the mark. I think that many of his readers would be prepared to bear witness to the sense that somewhere

Figure 5: Semantic prosodies of “be prepared to” from the BNC

of the PM’s ability to, before leaving office, bring “formal recognition for those brave men”, the “Bevin Boys”, young British men who were conscripted to work in the UK coal mines between 1943 and 1948. Second, it politely requests the PM to do so before his departure. Asking a question of capacity, when Gordon Banks assumes Tony Blair is able, is designed to reveal Blair’s competence as a PM; it

also allows Blair to express his desire to attend to the needs of and recognise the contribution of those who have contributed to the course of Britain as a country. In asking the question, Gordon Banks takes the opportunity, in his preface (initial statement), to do personal publicity (Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), portraying himself as someone who represents the interest of the Bevin Boys: “since

being elected to this House I have campaigned for formal recognition of the Bevin Boys ...". The PM accordingly congratulates him "on the campaign". This shows that when MPs are asking questions, they are not only putting the (Prime) Minister on the spot, but also projecting themselves as serving the interest of their constituents and the citizenry as a whole. This is politically prudent as the MP has "social ties" with the constituents and, as a representative, "belong[s] to the same social community" as the constituents (Manin, 1997, p.203). Given that Gordon Banks has engaged in a campaign for the recognition of the Bevin Boys, and he being a government MP, it would be highly surprising if he did not know that Tony Blair was going to announce a special commemorative badge later that day. This confirms the view that he was doing some publicity for himself by asking the

question.

Questions of attitude display interesting features of parliamentary questions when they are constructed with forms of "be" (is, are, was, and were), as discussed in section 4.1.2.

Be-operator yes/no interrogatives and person-targeting

Person-targeted yes/no interrogatives are clearly demonstrated by the use of be-operator interrogatives. In person-targeted constructions, the (Prime) Ministers are usually made the requested carriers. For instance, out of 99 be-operator questions in the GMQs, 60 (60.61%) were constructed using "the Minister" (9, see Figure 6, line 3), "the hon. Minister" (13, lines 1 and 2), "he"/"she" (38, lines 5-11) as requested carriers.

N	Concordance
1	. Mr. Agbesi: Mr. Speaker, my question is, as at today, is the hon. Minister aware that the roads in Middle
2	not comment on. Col. 1969, 7 Jul 10 But Mr Speaker, is the Hon Minister aware that the President promised
3	of tarring roads in every district capital; my question is, is the Minister supposed to tar all roads within the
4	Answer is, if there is no managerial problem here, is the Ministe sure that the contractor has been paid,
5	august House to establish any unit within her Ministry? Is she required by law to come before this House to
6	was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon?
7	, 2008 commenced the process on 4th March 2008. Is he aware? Is he aware of it that this letter from the
8	establish police stations in the newly created district. Is he aware that some of the established, existing old
9	424. Mr Speaker, my question to the Hon Minister is, is he aware that a bunch of the added staff of 283 are
10	is not working ever since it was moved to that place? Is he aware that it lacks accessories because the
11	, he did not get it and he was transferred there. So, is he aware that a lot of — [Interruptions.] Mr First

Figure 6: Sample concordance lines of person targeted questions in GMQs

N	Concordance
1	the Prime Minister support such an investigation, or is he afraid that there is something to hide? The Prime
2	the problems of global warming and climate change, is he convinced that, following the comprehensive
3	Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or is he just not "bovered"? The Prime Minister: I think
4	months, if not years, for their cases to be determined. Is the Prime Minister proud of the service that his
5	top—in the top five poorest regions in western Europe. Is the Prime Ministe at all concerned, or is he, like
6	is to force four-year-olds to take exams in mental health. Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or
7	, we see the threat, and the time for action is now." Is my right hon. Friend confident that he can persuade
8	sure that they do. Anne Snelgrove (South Swindon) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend able to use his influence in the

Figure 7: Sample concordance lines of person targeted questions in UK PMQs

In the UK PMQs, 136 (about 65.38%) of the 208 relational process interrogatives had "the Prime Minister" (79, e.g. Figure 7, lines 4 and 5), "he" (45, lines 1-3), "my right hon. Friend" (8, lines 7 and 8), "the Government" (1), "we" (1), "people" (1) or "parents" (1) as requested carriers. The implication is that by means of person-targeted questions, MPs normally touch on the attitudes and personalities of (Prime) Ministers.

Let us examine in detail Example 3 from the GMQs.

Example 3: GH 2 Jun 09/Col. 95:

[Q*i*] **Mr. Yaw Maama Afful [NPP]**: Since the Hon Minister is telling us and she has agreed that the lagoon is polluted, yet she is not going to ban fishermen from fishing from it, is she telling us she will be willing to eat fish from that lagoon? [Interruptions.]

Ms. Ayittey [NDC]: Madam Speaker, we will still not consider banning it but we will intensify the public education. [Interruptions.]

[Q*ii*] **Mr. Afful [NPP]**: Madam

Speaker, I think my question was not answered. My question to the Hon Minister. Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon? [Interruptions.]

Ms. Ayittey [NDC]: Madam Speaker, I reserve my comments — [Interruptions.]

Example 3 relates to Ms. Ayittey's willingness (desideration) to eat fish from the lagoon under reference. The question is both illocutionarily a challenge and an accusation. Mr. Afful questions the Minister's decision not to ban fishing in the polluted lagoon and raises doubts about the Minister's genuineness/sincerity. Mr. Afful implies that the Minister is being inconsiderate to the general public: if the Minister agrees that the lagoon has been polluted, then it is sensible that fishing in the lagoon is banned. To put the Minister on the spot, Mr. Afful asks her readiness to eat fish from the lagoon. Mr. Afful imputes irresponsibility on the part of the Minister. Notice that the question is in two parts: [Qi] is the main question and [Qii] a follow-up which comes as a result of the Minister evading [Qi]. Ms. Ayittey evades the surface meaning of the question ("yes" or "no") and responds to the inverted meaning of challenge and accusation by stating that they "will still not consider banning it" because they "will intensify public education". However, thinking that his question has not been answered, Mr. Afful, dropping the telling part, changes the question to a more coercive form: "Is she willing to eat fish from that lagoon?" Even though question [Qi] raises mistrust about the Minister, its illocutionary force is mitigated by the interrogative structure, which is that the relational process of "willingness" is embedded in a verbal process of "telling". The verbal process of "telling" allows the Minister to give some explanation to what she has said earlier. But question [Qii] is direct and, therefore, illocutionarily more coercive; it directly puts the Minister on the spot. Realising the embarrassment in the question, she decides not to comment anymore. This is an indirect admission of guilt in her decision not to ban fishing in the lagoon because the Minister knows that she will not eat fish from the lagoon and that being the case she must ban others from fishing in it. The question succeeds in exposing the contradictions in the Minister's position not to ban fishing in the lagoon. This corroborates Harris' (1991, p.93) statement that "[e]vasiveness is most likely to emerge in response to questions which expose contradictions in a position".

The be-operator interrogatives create direct relationships between (Prime) Ministers and their attitudes, thereby heightening the illocutionary force

of such interrogatives. Let us consider Example 4, an emotive/attitudinal question.

Example 4: UK 6 Jun 07/Col 252:

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): Fifteen per cent. of school-age children are obese, and under-age drinking has doubled. Yesterday, the Children's Society said that 43 per cent. of parents are scared to let their children go out with their friends. Schools have become exam factories, contributing to the one in 10 children suffering mental health problems, to which the Prime Minister's solution is to force four-year-olds to take exams in mental health. Is he proud of his legacy on the state of our children, or is he just not "bovvered"?

The Prime Minister [Lab]: I think that the hon. Gentleman is exaggerating the situation a trifle. Of course, there are pressures on children today: pressures through exams and through the type of things to which they have access a lot earlier than generations past. The majority of young people whom I meet are working hard and are extremely responsible, decent members of society who behave very well. There is a minority who either misbehave or are socially excluded and we need specific measures to help them. However, I do not think that the debate is helped by that type of hyperbole, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind my saying so.

Example 4 relates to the attitude of PM Tony Blair towards children's welfare. The question is emotionally loaded. It is an alternative question, with two parts representing opposite ends of a spectrum. It gives two impossible alternatives, that is, failure to deliver on children's welfare and not being "bovvered" about it, each of which mocks Blair. The use of "or is he just not 'bovvered'", especially, is humorous, ironic and mocking. "Bovvered" (a colloquial form of "bothered") is associated with aggression, violence, hooliganism and comedy. "Bovvered" was popularised by The Catherine Tate Show (2015), a BBC Two comedy sketch series that was first performed in 2004. In the show, Luran Cooper, "an argumentative and idle teenage girl ... gets out of awkward situations by asking" repeatedly, "Am I bovvered?" Thus, "Am I bovvered?" has come to represent a generational expression of teenagers and their speaking style. Using "bovvered" to describe Blair is, therefore, an attempt to ridicule him, as it somehow aligns him with disaffected, troublemaking and rowdy street

gang youths and comic characters, who do not care about anything. The question cannot, therefore, be said to be neutral. Based on the statistical information provided in the preface (“Fifteen per cent. of school-age children ..., 43 per cent of parents ...” and “one in 10 children suffering mental health problems ...”), Tim Loughton infers that Tony Blair has failed to offer proper support for children’s wellbeing. The implication is that a competent PM will not be “proud” of such a “legacy on the state of our children”. Political leadership such as being a PM concerns caring attitudes towards the governed. If a leader has a positive attitude towards the citizenry, the better it is for his/her political success. Thus, when MPs ask questions of attitude, it is an attempt to portray to the citizenry their (Prime) Ministers’ attitudes, opinions and feelings towards the citizenry. Again, the statistical information makes it difficult for Tony Blair to respond either as “yes” or “no” to the question. If he says “Yes, I am proud of my legacy”, he would appear to be insensitive to the plight of children; and saying “no” could also imply that he has failed as a PM. Each of these responses will be damaging. For Wilson (1990, p.137) the design of political questions makes it difficult for politicians to answer them in that questions are rarely straightforward, but are, rather frequently prefaced by a variety of statements (often controversial). If politicians attend to the propositions contained in these pre/post statements they may be seen as trying to avoid the question. On the other hand, if politicians fail to attend to such propositions they may be seen as accepting certain controversial claims as matters of fact.

Such is the paradox facing (Prime) Ministers during parliamentary questions. No wonder, in the above question, Blair admits that “there are pressures on children today”. This admission makes Blair appear a responsible, sincere leader who has empathy for children. Tony Blair’s statement that “the hon. Gentleman is exaggerating the situation a trifle” is a reproach, which is an attempt to counter the face-threat in Tim Loughton’s question (see Bull & Wells, 2012).

It is noteworthy that the majority of the be-operator interrogatives in the UK PMQs form part of multipart interrogatives as in Example 5. In such cases, the \neg -be-operator interrogatives seek to ask about the PMs’ knowledge or awareness (cognition) of a situation or their attitudes towards that situation, and then the other interrogative is used to ask what the PMs are going to do about such situations.

Example 5: UK 3 Jun 09/Col 274:

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): [Qi]

Is the Prime Minister aware that his departing Home Secretary leaves a legacy of 342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year? [Qii] May I ask him to ensure that he re-examines the effectiveness of policies in that area, because of the cost in human misery on the victims and the cost to our caring services?

The Prime Minister [Lab]: I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be fair and acknowledge that the Home Secretary has also led the way on tougher sentences on domestic violence, including in domestic violence courts. This Government, led by the Leader of the House as well as the Home Secretary, have a record in taking on domestic violence by also funding centres for women throughout the rest of the country. That is vital public expenditure, and we believe that it is important for the health of this country. We will continue to support that measure to help women in our country.

Example 5 [Qi] asks whether the PM is “aware that his departing Home Secretary leaves a legacy of 342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year” and [Qii] implores the PM to re-examine the situation regarding his “policies in that area”. [Qi] is an assertion that seeks to establish a condition for Mr Jack to request the PM to take action. Establishing the PM’s awareness of the situation is a kind of information control (Gibbons, 2003, p.103), which is a coercive measure to put pressure on the PM to act. Ascertaining awareness appears to be a key feature in the discourses of the two parliaments, as “aware” is the most frequent word among the words in the person-targeted questions in both parliaments. For instance, if the PM denies knowledge of the situation, he would be deemed to be not in control of affairs as a PM, and if he answers “yes”, he is admitting to failure. Consequently, the PM defends the Home Secretary while accusing Mr Jack of being unfair to the Home Secretary. He goes ahead to state the record of his Government in fighting domestic violence. He defends his Government’s record because Mr Jack attacks the Government. Mr Jack’s first question is ironic, as it creates a semantic conflict and opposition between “legacy” and “342,000 cases of domestic violence in this country every year”. The word “legacy” has a semantic feature and a positive value of wealth, wherewithal, money, a bequest or a gift. So, to say that the Home Secretary’s legacy is “342,000 cases

of domestic violence ... every year” is being ironic and imputative because this is a truly unwanted gift in anybody’s imagination.

However, Example 6 from the GMQs is not part of a multipart question. The question asks the Minister’s awareness of “the said market” being initiated by “the traditional chiefs”.

Example 6: GH 13 Jul 05/Col. 1873/4:

Mr. Kyeremeh [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, *is the hon. Minister aware that the said market was started by the traditional chiefs and as a result they are demanding some percentage of the market proceeds to initiate projects of their choice for the well-being of the people?*

Mr. Bintin [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, that is so and we are in consultation with them. We are talking with them to get the issue resolved.

This is a yes/no interrogative but it does not just demand a “yes” or “no” as a response; such a response would be pragmatically inappropriate. It performs two functions: one, a surface realisation, seeks a(n) (dis)affirmation of the Minister’s awareness of the situation and the other, an inverted/indirect realisation, is a request for action (see Grosz & Sidner 1986:178). Mr. Kyeremeh inferentially requests Mr. Bintin to say what he, as a Minister, is doing about the traditional chiefs’ demand for “some percentage of the market proceeds”. In the context of parliamentary questions where MPs ask questions either for information or to push for action (Harris, 2001; Proksch & Slapin, 2010; Raunio, 1996), it would be strange to assume that Mr. Kyeremeh only wants to know if the Minister is aware or not aware of the situation. Accordingly, the Minister does not only confirm his knowledge of the situation but also responds to the inverted realisation by telling the House what is being done, that is, they are in “consultation with them”.

So far, we have observed person-targeted

yes/no interrogatives. As demonstrated in Examples 1 to 6 and Figures 2 to 7, we have indicated that the person-targeted relational process interrogatives describe (Prime) Ministers as carriers of certain qualities or values relating to their positions, and question or praise their attitudes and commitment towards their duties as (Prime) Ministers. The categories of attributes expressed in the questions include cognition/probability, emotion/attribute and desideration/obligation. The next section examines idea-targeted relational process yes/no interrogatives.

Idea-targeted questions

The majority of the idea-targeted questions in both parliaments were identifying clauses, with the copular being complemented by noun phrases/clauses. This is understandable because nouns and nominals are idea-denoting structures. In the GMQs (see Table 4), 38 (82.61%) out of the 46 questions contained identifying complements, while eight (8 (17.39%)) were attributive complements. Also, 39 of the questions involved the use of the be-operator, one (1) involved will-operator (will that amount be enough ...?). There were six (6) do-operator constructions involving the verb “mean”, all of which connote “symbolization” (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.235). All the idea-targeted questions in the PMQs were identifying clauses (see Table 4), eighteen (18 (25%)) of which perform a “demonstration” function (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004:235). These eighteen verbs were intensive verbs; they were verbs of proving (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.648). This implies that the UK MPs asked questions that sought evidence of issues more than their Ghanaian counterparts. The high concentration of identifying clauses in the idea-targeted questions supports Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004, p.238) view that “interpreting evidence” is one of the uses of identifying clauses.

Table 4: Categories and their frequencies in the GMQs and PMQs

Category	GMQs	UK PMQs
Identifying		
Is + identifying	32 <i>(see Figure 8)</i>	Is (not) + identifying 54 <i>(see Figure 9)</i>
Does + identifying	6	Does + identifying 18
Symbolization		Demonstration function
Mean	38 (82.61%)	Show 7
		Sound 4
		Represent 2
		Demonstrate 2
		Illustrate 1
		Prove 1
		Go to 1
Attribute		
Cognition/probability		
Is it + Possible	4	
Is it + Fair	2	
Advisable	1	
Will (be) + enough	1 8 (17.39%)	
Total	46	72

Figures 8 and 9 represent examples of the “is”-constructed interrogatives that are identifying clauses. We have not provided examples of these types of clauses in Table 4 for lack of space and the difficulty in classifying them due to the vastness of items functioning as identifying complements. Thus, concordance lines are used to exemplify them. In Figure 8, “is it a one-time supply to an individual” (line 2) has “is” as the process, “it” as the value/identified, and “a one-time supply to an

individual” as the token/identifier (see Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, p.215, 235).

MPs use idea-targeted questions to ask about specific policies, practices and actions of the (Prime) Ministers, governments or Ministries. Such interrogatives use as requested carriers nominal groups or reference items such as: “it” (see Figure 8, lines 1-9; Figure 9, lines 1, 3-5), “that...” (Figure 8, lines 11, 13; Figure 9, lines 12-13), “this...” (Figure 9, line 2), “the idea...” (Figure 9, line 6).

N	Concordance
1	whether we should be discussing it the way we are doing it here Is it not sub judice? Madam Speaker: Well, I have been watching the
2	from the Hon Minister how often a child would receive a uniform Is it a one-time supply to an individual? Mr Tetey-Enyo: Mr Speaker,
3	out with “the following”, but there are no time lines. Is it six months? Is it a year? It looks very vague. So I would like the Minister to give
4	Col. 1830, 5 Jul 10 of lands for use by the Ghana Armed Forces? Is it a practice that settlements, that is, villages are acquired? Lt. Gen.
5	which are being acquired. Madam Speaker, I want to know from him Is it a practice in the acquisition Col. 1830, 5 Jul 10 of lands for use by
6	. Mahama: Mr. Speaker, this incident happened in 2002; we are in 2005. Is it the case that three years after the incident, the advice of the
7	of the uncompleted projects, how many are left now uncompleted? Is it that it is only Juapong Health Centre which was discriminated
8	Buah: Madam Speaker, I want to ask the Hon Deputy Minister Is it not a fact that the NPA has already taken some punitive action
9	says it will come out with “the following”, but there are no time lines Is it six months? Is it a year? It looks very vague. So I would like the
10	Messrs Abdulai Alhassan Company Limited on the 30th of June 2005 Is the sum involved €3.4 million or €3.4 billion? Dr. Anane: Mr. Speaker
11	or that they were corrupted to the extent that they inserted these — Is that what you are pointing out to us? I would want an answer. I
12	referred to. Q118. Mr. H. Iddrisu: Mr. Speaker, this is my final question Is it a firm assurance that the Minister is giving this House, that
13	Deputy Speaker: On behalf of the Committee. Mr Owusu-Agyemang Is that the right thing to do? Mr First Deputy Speaker: Hon Member, it

Figure 8: Sample concordance lines of idea-targeted questions in the GMQs

N	Concordance
1	2008 : Column 1308 May I ask the Prime Minister what his priority is? Is it to put bioethanol in a Range Rover's fuel tank or to put
2	advice being the exclusive preserve of the rich and the privileged Is this by design or accident? The Prime Minister: First, everyone
3	be spending on public services. The issue for the country is this: Is it public services for the many or inheritance tax cuts for the
4	resources. The Conservative party really has to make up its mind Is it going to deny families and businesses real help in difficult
5	patients. What is the Prime Minister doing about that situation, or Is it case of going to jail if you want dental treatment? The Prime
6	will support it. But I asked the Prime Minister a specific question Is the idea of offenders in orange uniforms Government policy or
7	people face economic uncertainty and high youth unemployment? Is youth unemployment a price worth paying? The Prime Minister: It
8	will be raised in the course of the G8. Sir Menzies Campbell Is it not time not only for tougher sanctions against the
9	it will be lower in this country over each of the next five years? Is it not the case that the actions of this Government prepared
10	waiting for their education maintenance allowances? However, Is it not right that the Learning and Skills Council has today
11	frank about the past, no one will believe him about the future? Is that not one of the reasons why it is so difficult to get
12	families claiming housing benefit in the Stockton borough. Is that not further proof that the jobs that the Prime Minister
13	say and he must be heard. 4 Sep 2013 : Column 315 John Mann Is it not the case that real wages have fallen by nearly £1,500 a
14	announced a delay in the UK climate change review programme. Is it not the case that Britain is becoming the dirty man of

Figure 9: Sample concordance lines of idea-targeted questions in the UK PMQs

As noted earlier in Table 1, there were 39 (39.39%) idea-targeted yes/no interrogatives in the GMQs, while there were 58 (47%) instances of them in the UK PMQs. Idea-targeted questions, to some extent, depersonalise issues, as illustrated in Example 7 below. In this question, “is it a practice” shows a focus on the “practice” of acquiring land

by the Ghana Armed Forces. Even though Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu indicates some reservation about the “practice”, he does not target the personality of the Minister, Lt. Gen. Smith. The question seeks a confirmation from the Minister if indeed “settlements are ... acquired” for use by the Ghana Armed Forces.

Example 7: GH 5 Jul 10/Col. 1829/30:

Mr Kyei-Mensah-Bonsu [NPP]:

Madam Speaker, the parcels of land are acquired for use by the Ghana Armed Forces. In the second paragraph of the Hon Minister's Answer, he refers to sections within the Nkaakom village which have been acquired or which are being acquired. Madam Speaker, I want to know from him, is it a practice in the acquisition of lands for use by the Ghana Armed Forces? Is it a practice that settlements, that is, villages are acquired?

Lt. Gen. Smith (ret'd.) [NPP]:

Madam Speaker, I think before the Ghana Armed Forces takes any steps to acquire a piece of land, we make sure that there are no settlements on the land. At the time we started the process to acquire the piece of land, there were no settlements in the area. As I said in my statement, there have been encroachers; so there has been encroachment since we started the process to acquire the piece of land.

Depersonalising the question reduces interactional confrontation and conflict. It does not necessarily mean that idea-targeted questions are always non-confrontational. To attack a policy or practice may entail or imply an attack on the person who instituted the policy or practice. Gibbons (2003, p.112) acknowledges that the boundary between "person targeted" and "idea targeted" questions can be fuzzy. For instance, contextualization cues, "any feature of linguistic form that contributes to the signalling of contextual presuppositions" (Gumperz, 1982, p.131) can make idea-targeted questions even more confrontational than person-targeted ones. Example 8 illustrates this.

Example 8: GH 14 Jul 05/Col. 1903/4:

Mr. Mahama [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, I will just make a point. Mr. Speaker, Question time for Ministers is a very serious exercise and when we ask Questions in this House, we require detailed Answers... — [Interruption.] ... so that this House carries out its mandate to the people of this country. Mr. Speaker — [Interruption.] ... Mr. Speaker, this incident happened in 2002; we are in 2005. *Is it the case that three years after the incident, the advice of the Attorney-General has not yet been procured in order that action can be taken on this matter?*

Papa Owusu-Ankomah [NPP]: Mr. Speaker, I also with due diligence crave your indulgence to say that indeed as Ministers, we take this House extremely serious and certainly, for me who has occupied the Majority

Leader's seat, I take this House seriously; and we endeavour to do our best. Unfortunately, we cannot anticipate all details and because we seek to be fair and candid with this House, we try as much as possible to be sure of our Answers.

Even though Mr. Mahama's question focuses on the "incident" that happened, the preface (initial statement) to the question makes it abrasive. To say that "Question time for Ministers is a very serious exercise" and, therefore, Ministers should give required details when demanded implies that the Minister, Papa Owusu-Ankomah, is not serious about Minister's questions. This raises a credibility issue, and, therefore, it is no wonder that Papa Owusu-Ankomah rebuts and defends Ministers, "we take this House extremely serious[ly] ..." Example 9 from the UK data has a similar feature.

Example 9: UK 23 Apr 08/Col. 1307/8:

Mr. Robert Goodwill (Scarborough and Whitby) (Con): The first stage of the renewable transport fuel scheme came into operation last week. May I ask the Prime Minister what his priority is? *Is it to put bioethanol in a Range Rover's fuel tank or to put bread in an African's stomach?*

The Prime Minister [Lab]: We had a seminar on food yesterday in Downing street, with all the different organisations that are involved, and I think there is a general recognition that the policy on bioethanol has got to be reviewed ... But there is also a determination that we do more to increase the supply of food in the world. ... That is why we discussed yesterday emergency measures that could both increase food supply in the short term and avoid famine ... in every country in the world...

This is an idea-targeted question; it concerns what the PM's "priority is". However, the co-text of the question makes it inferable that Mr. Goodwill thinks the PM has got his priorities wrong. Thus, even though the question is primarily on "bioethanol" and food security, it ironically questions the PM's credibility and commitment to fighting hunger in Africa. Therefore, the question is also person targeted – which, in fact, has a stronger interactional effect than the idea targeting. Note that, being an alternative question, the question employs grammatical parallelism for rhetorical emphasis. It gives two opposite points, one undesirable and the other desirable. Both points concern consumption, but while the former is an aspirational consumption, the latter is consumption for human survival. Thus,

Mr. Goodwill controls the information to coerce (Gibbons, 2003) the PM to choose the desirable option, “to put bread in an African’s stomach”. By giving a choice between a(n) undesirable and desirable choices, Mr. Goodwill aligns himself with the desirable choice, thereby casting himself into a positive light. Consequently, the PM is forced to tell the House the measures he has taken to respond to food insecurity, while acknowledging that “the policy on bioethanol has got to be reviewed”. He attempts to debunk the idea that he has got his priorities wrong by stating the measures he has taken so far on food security. The aforesaid shows that while we can identify person- and idea-targeted questions as different, the boundary between them in terms of their pragmatic focus can be blurring and difficult to pinpoint.

Conclusion

This paper sought to investigate the focus of relational process yes/no interrogatives in UK Prime Minister’s Questions (PMQs) and Ghanaian Minister’s Questions (GMQs). The paper finds that MPs use relational process yes/no interrogatives to question (Prime) Ministers’ personalities and attitudes towards their responsibilities as well as inquire about specific policies, practices and actions. The questions, thus, can be either person or idea targeted, which attempt to question, undermine or enhance the (Prime) Ministers’ image and attitudes towards their responsibilities. The questions in the two parliaments are more similar than different in orientation, which suggests that some aspects of their parliamentary practices are related. The differences depend on the frequency and density of the categories identified in the two datasets. For example, in both parliaments, there are more person-targeted relational process yes/no interrogatives than idea-targeted ones. However, the PMQs are more person targeted than the GMQs. Among the person-targeted questions, three classes of attributes are identified, namely, cognition/probability, emotion/attitude and desideration/obligation. Cognition/probability is the most frequent in both datasets. This implies that the majority of the person-targeted questions are knowledge-seeking. In other words, they ask about (Prime) Ministers’ awareness of various policies, situations and events, including the actions being undertaken to deal with them. Again, the UK dataset contains more emotional/attitudinal categories than the Ghanaian dataset. The assumption is that the UK MPs appear to be more emotional in their questions than their

Ghanaian counterparts. Whereas all the idea-targeted questions in the PMQs are all identifying clauses, there are 82.61% identifying and 17.39% attributive clauses in the GMQs. Identifying clauses are evidence-seeking and evidence-interpreting clauses. Thus, there are more evidence-seeking questions in the PMQs compared to the GMQs. Through the use of verbs of demonstration and proving, the UK MPs often appear seeking proof of policies, issues, actions, etc., which seems to be a more compelling way of demanding accountability.

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