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THE POLITICS OF QUESTIONING: ASPECTS OF UK AND GHANAIAN PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION TYPES

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Abstract

In spite of the many authoritative classifications of questions, the examination of questions in different institutional contexts continues to generate new and interesting insights into the nature of questions. Research shows that question forms and functions substantially differ in institutional contexts such as courtroom, classroom, medical and political/parliamentary contexts. Using data from the UK Prime Minister's Questions and Ghanaian Minister's Questions, this paper explores UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions. Based on the contextual properties of parliamentary questions, the paper categorises questions into independent/direct *yes/no* interrogatives, independent/direct *wh*-interrogatives, independent/direct alternate interrogatives, dependent/indirect *wh*-interrogatives and multiple interrogatives. The Ghanaian data contain two additional question forms, namely, dependent/indirect *yes/no* interrogatives and dependent/indirect alternate interrogatives. The paper further indicates that the major difference between UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions is indirect *yes/no* interrogatives with mental process verbs. Again, using what I call *tellex* (tell, explain) *yes/no* questions, I submit that indirectness is a key feature of parliamentary questions, as it reflects the adversarial and ideological nature of parliamentary discourse. I show that the *tellex* questions are used as strategies and tactics for political point-scoring.

Keywords: questions, parliamentary questions, direct and indirect interrogatives, *tellex* yes/no   interrogatives

1. Introduction

The study of questions has a long-standing history, starting from the ancient Greek philosophers and rhetoricians such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, who used questions and answers for rhetorical purposes and the acquisition of knowledge (Ilie 2015; Miller

1993). However, the study of questions took a grammar and linguistic turn when Aristotle advanced that questions were "utterances whose truth or falsehood cannot be established" (Ilie 2015: 1). In linguistics, various approaches have been employed to explore the forms, meanings and functions of questions, including the structural grammarians (who emphasise syntax, e.g. word order) and transformational-generative grammarians (who consider questions as derived from statements). Questions have also been classified in syntactic/structural, semantic and pragmatic ways. Structurally, interrogatives are typically constructed with: (a) subject-operator inversion (*e.g. Is the Prime Minister* at all concerned?, where the subject, *the Prime Minister*, swaps position with the operator *is*); (b) introduced with a *wh-* item (e.g. *Who* is to blame for that piece of mismanagement?), or (c) through the use of a minor sentence (e.g. Any ministerial appointments?).

In spite of the many authoritative definitions and categorisation of questions, the examination of questions in different institutional contexts continues to generate interesting insights into language use in general and questions in particular. Researchers do not agree on the exact types of questions due to their structural, pragmatic and functional complexities. Current literature shows that looking at questions from pragmatic perspectives and institutional contexts is essential for understanding how questions work (cf. Ilie 2015). Classifying questions based on specific contexts has scholarly benefits, as it prevents overgeneralisation of classifications and the controversy between form and function. Thus, this study examines questions from a parliamentary perspective by exploring and comparing aspects of UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions. It contributes to the ongoing debate that context-specific categorisation of questions has the potential for understanding pragmatic, contextual and institutional importance of language use. It also contributes to the view that native and non-native varieties of English language use can exhibit interesting similarities and differences.

The rest of the paper is organised into five sections, namely: review of relevant literature, theoretical lens, methodology, analysis and discussion, and conclusion.

2. Review of relevant literature

This section reviews literature on questions generally and institutional questions specifically. The general, non-context-specific categorisation of questions is examined first, followed by context-specific forms of questions, including studies on parliamentary questions. The purpose of the review is to demonstrate that classifying questions is contextually-conditioned and the fact that there are overlaps among the question types. Recognising the overlaps helps to appreciate the forms and functions of context-specific questions. Thus, the review of literature offers grounds for the reader

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to appreciate the kind of question classification I provide in the analysis and discussion in this paper.

2.1 General, non-context-specific categorisation of questions

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartvik (1985: 387-401, 408-410) put questions into three main categories (*yes/no*, *wh-* and alternate questions) and three minor questions (exclamatory, rhetorical and echo questions), according to the response they require.

Yes/no questions (with declarative and tag-questions being sub-categories) are questions that demand a *yes/no* answer, as in: *Are the students travelling abroad? Yes/no* questions are usually constructed with a subject-operator inversion, that is, the subject (e.g. *the students*) and the operator (e.g. *are*) in the declarative sentence (e.g. *The students are travelling abroad*) swap positions. Subsumed under *yes/no* questions are declarative and tag questions. Declarative *yes/no* questions have a statement form but are normally said with a rising intonation, as in: *The students are travelling abroad?* Tag questions are questions which are attached to statements – the question is tagged onto statements, as, for example, *The students are travelling abroad, aren't they?*

Yes/no questions usually contain some orientations, leanings or preferences for answers and indicate the questioner's interest and thought. Quirk et al. (1985) talk of positive and negative orientations. Such orientations are important because they normally influence how the answerer/responder answers/responds to the question. This means questions can often be "biased according to the kind of answer the speaker expects, and are based on neutral, positive or negative assumptions" (Downing and Locke 2006: 202). Neutral orientations/assumptions are usually marked by non-assertive forms such as "any", "anybody", "ever", "yet", as, for example: *Are you inviting anybody to the programme?* Positive orientation is often marked by assertive forms such as "some", "somebody", "always", "already" and "too", as in: *Are you inviting someone to the programme?* (Downing and Locke 2006: 201-202; Quirk et al. 1985). Again, Downing and Locke (2006: 201-203) assert that negative-interrogative *yes/no* questions are based on conflicting attitudes. The speaker had originally expected that the answer would be or should be positive, but new evidence suggests that it will be negative. This conflict produces a feeling of surprise, disbelief or disappointment. If the addressee is directly involved, the biased question can imply a reproach. For example, *Is no one going to answer me?* (Someone has to answer me, but it seems no one is ready to do so). However, in their "'Some' vs 'Any' Medical Issues", Heritage and Robinson (2011: 30) observe that "any"-designed questions have "negative polarity and will tend to exert a chilling effect on patient response". This reinforces the concept that linguistic structures usually have different pragmatic functions in different contexts.

Wh-questions are questions which are introduced by such *wh*-words such as *who, whom, whose, which, where, when, why, what* and *how*. The questions demand answers which supply missing pieces of information. For example, *Who are those singing behind the building?* When we are forming *wh*-questions, the *wh*-words together with the clause containing the *wh*-word are placed at the initial position, except when the whole clause is introduced by a preposition, that is, when the clause acts as a prepositional complement.

Alternative questions are questions which demand as answers one of two or more alternatives contained in the questions. They are constructed by conjoining two or more separate questions. For example, *Do you want the red one or the white one?*

Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad and Finegan (1999) and Biber, Conrad and Leech (2002) identify five types of interrogatives, which are similar to the Quirk et al. (1985) types discussed above. They include: (a) *yes/no* questions (which ask the truth or otherwise of a proposition); (b) *wh*-questions (which seek information); (c) alternative questions (which make a choice between two or more options); (d) tag-questions (which seek confirmation of an expressed proposition); and (e) declarative questions (use declarative structures, which are also a type of *yes/no* question).

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 867-917), on the other hand, have classified questions severally from semantic and pragmatic perspectives. They include the following: polar questions, alternative questions, variable questions, information questions, direction questions, biased questions, neutral questions, echo questions and ordinary (non-echo) questions,

Polar questions are questions which demand a *yes* or a *no* for an answer, similar to the *yes/no* forms identified by Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Biber et al. (2002). *Alternative questions* give a set of answers for the answerer to choose from, similar to those of Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Biber et al. (2002). *Variable questions* are a form of open interrogatives, marked by phrases containing interrogative words: *what, when, where, which, who, whom, whose, why* and *how*. They are similar to *wh*-questions as indicated by Quirk et al. (1985), Biber et al. (1999) and Biber et al. (2002). Answers to variable questions are open-ended.

Information questions are questions whose answers are in the form of statements, as in: *Have you written the exam? Direction questions*, contrasted with information questions, have their answers being in the form of directives, as, for example: *Shall I call the doctor?* It should be noted that right answers to information questions are true, but answers to direction questions cannot be said to be true or false.

Biased questions are questions in which the speaker is inclined towards accepting one answer as the right one. This is usually understood in context, where the speaker expects a certain response from the addressee. Huddleston and Pullum subsume declarative and tag-questions under biased questions. *Neutral questions*, contrasted with

biased questions, are questions which do not prefer one answer to another – questions are not inclined towards one answer over another.

Echo questions (see also Quirk et al. 1985) are formed out of what we call stimuli. A stimulus makes a statement and that statement is repeated (either fully or partially or by a pro-form) with a rising tone to make it a question. For example: *The lecturer says we are reading 10 books in one month* (stimulus). An echo question to this stimulus can, among others, be: *We are reading 10 books in one month? or 10 books in one month?* Each of these questions raises either a surprise on the part of the speaker in relation to the stimulus or that the speaker did not hear the stimulus properly and, therefore, needs a repetition of it. *Ordinary (non-echo) questions*, unlike echo questions, are questions whose subject matter happens to be the content of the utterances from which the questions are formed. In other words, the process of forming ordinary questions is the same as that of the echo question, except for the fact the answer to the ordinary question coincides with the content of the statement from which the question is constructed.

Closely related to the above-mentioned classifications of questions are close-ended and open-ended question (cf. Tkačuková 2010a, 2010b). Close-ended (or closed) questions are questions that allow for only a minimal range of answers/responses. Included in this category of questions are *yes/no*, alternative, declarative and tag questions. Due to their limited range of answers/responses, close-ended questions are said to be coercive. Open-ended (or open) questions are those which allow for a wider range of answers/responses. They mostly include *wh*-questions, which are said to be less coercive, since they allow the answerer/responder more room to decide which information to provide as an answer.

Ilie (2015) talks about other forms of questions such as standard and nonstandard questions, which include rhetorical questions, examination questions, riddle questions, rhetorical questions and echo questions (for the explanation of echo questions, see as discussed above). This classification is pragmatically based. The questions are categorised based on the appropriateness of their answers. This is based on the assumption that questions fundamentally seek answers or information. Thus, questions that demand answers or information are said to be *standard/genuine* questions. Questions which do not require answers or information, but elicit such responses as confirmation, permission, suggestion, order, advice and other forms of directives are *nonstandard* questions. According to Ilie (2015), *nonstandard* questions occur in both institutional and non-institutional settings and interactions. The relevant question type for the purpose of this paper is rhetorical questions.

Rhetorical questions: rhetorical questions are questions that demand no answers from the addressee. They are questions by form, but assertions/statements functionally (Quirk et al. 1985). According to Ilie (1994: 128), a "rhetorical question is a question

used as a challenging statement to convey the addresser's commitment to its implicit answer in order to induce the addressee's mental recognition of its obviousness and the acceptance, verbalized or nonverbalized, of its validity". Jameel, Al-Ameedi and Al-Shukri (2013) list the following as some of the functions of rhetorical questions: accusation, assertion, blame, boast, complain, criticism, lament, predicting, rebuke, reminding, suggestion, advice, command, plea, request, warning, refusal, invitation, protest, admonishing, contempt, desperation, displeasure, dissatisfaction and anger, helplessness, impatience, indignation, insult, powerlessness, uncertainty, surprise, irony and sarcasm.

Ilie (2015) has also categorised questions into answer-eliciting, action-eliciting and mental-eliciting questions. These are categories of questions which are based on *response elicitation* or their *eliciting force*, that is, "the kind of response expected and/or required by the question" (Ilie 2015: 5-6). Answer-eliciting questions usually demand information to fill an information gap, and therefore are considered as standard questions. They may also be confirmation eliciting, permission asking and echo and questions. The *action-eliciting* class of questions include information or answer eliciting questions. *Mental-eliciting* questions include rhetorical questions, which do not usually demand any response.

Questions can also be classified as *direct* and *indirect* or *independent* and *dependent* (Downing and Locke 2006: 106; Ilie 2015: 2). Whereas direct/independent questions are constructed with independent interrogative clauses (e.g. *Where are you?*), indirect questions are embedded in matrix/superordinate clauses, where the indirect question becomes a complement of a verb such as *ask*, *find*, *know*, *wonder* (e.g. *I am asking where you are.*).

A close look at the foregoing indicates that there are overlaps among the question types. For example, Tkačuková (2010a; 2010b, see also Gibbons 2003) identifies *wh-*questions, indirect questions and requests as open questions, while *yes/no*, declarative, tag and non-sentence questions are considered closed questions, depending on the kinds of answers expected from the answerer. Another observation is that expected answers or responses are a major influencing factor for the classification of questions. And since institutional contexts have specific expectations and responses to questions, institutionalized studies of questions are crucial for understanding the nature of questions.

2.2 Context-specific question types: institutional and parliamentary questions

Questions have been studied from various institutional settings such as classroom interactions (see Chang 2012; Koshik 2010; Sánchez-García 2020); media context (Clayman 2010; Heritage 2002; Thornborrow 2011); legal context (Ahmed 2012;

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Gibbons 2008; Tkačuková 2010a); medical context (Heritage 2010; Heritage and Robinson 2011; Raymond 2010); and political and/or parliamentary contexts (Bird 2005; Heritage and Roth 1995; Sarfo-Kantankah 2018). For the purpose of this paper, and because of space limitation, I will discuss questions in legal and political/parliamentary contexts, as a result of certain pragmatic similarities in questions in the two contexts.

Research in courtroom and legal settings indicates that, for the purpose of achieving witness and information control (Archer 2005; Gibbons 2003), restrictive and coercive questions such as *yes/no* interrogatives, alternative questions, declarative and tag-questions are predominant, especially in cross-examinations (Gibbons 2008; Ilie 2015; Luchjenbroers 1997). Ahmed (2012) has noted that declarative questions with or without tag and *yes/no* interrogatives or choice forms are the most frequent question types found in cross-examinations in the courtroom. The preponderance of coercive questions stems from the powerful status of attorneys or counsels and magistrates in the courtroom. However, Ilie (1994, 1995, 2015) has noted that questions in the magistrate's court also function argumentatively and that coercive questions such as rhetorical and tag-questions are also asked by witnesses or defendants to counteract power manipulation in a notoriously asymmetrical and adversarial interaction. Coercive, witness and information control and argumentative questions are familiar in the parliamentary context too.

Parliamentary questions have severally been studied and classified from discourse-structure, syntactic and pragmatic approaches. From a discourse-structure approach, Sarfo-Kantankah (2018) states that parliamentary questions are usually designed to make assertions instead of asking for information or confirmation. Politically, MPs' questions normally seek to either praise and enhance the integrity of (Prime) Ministers or governments, or impute motives, insinuate wrong doings in order to embarrass and damage the image of the (Prime) Ministers or governments (cf. Ilie 2015). The questions are mostly designed for political point-scoring purposes. Thus, according to Sarfo-Kantankah (2018), from a discourse structure perspective, parliamentary questions are designed as: (Preface/pre-question statement) + Question + (postscript/post-question statement). In the design, "preface/pre-question" and "postscript/post-question" statements, which are optional, are statements respectively made before and after asking a question. The preface/pre-question and postscript/post-question statements provide the contextual basis for the interpretation of the questions. Sarfo-Kantankah (2018) notes that the questions may be constructed with: (i) a preface plus the question; (b) the question plus a postscript; (c) a preface, the question and a postscript; (d) a mid-script, and (e) the question only. The study shows that about 89% of the UK and 76% of the Ghanaian parliamentary questions are designed with accompanying statements as prefaces, post-scripts or mid-scripts. Such accompanying

statements set out the "facts" on which the questions are based. The statements often contain assumptions that either accuse, criticise or praise the (Prime) Ministers and/or their governments, make propositions, give information, imputations, insinuations and suggest their own answers or convey particular points of view (Sarfo-Kantankah 2018).

The above-stated question design is similar to Harris' (2001: 458) finding that UK parliamentary questions are normally designed with a "proposition oriented in a broad sense either to information or, probably less frequently, to action". Both Wilson (1990) and Harris (2001) note that the predominant question form in the UK parliamentary questions is the *yes/no* interrogative form. Our position is that, due to the nature of parliamentary questions and responses, it is unfruitful to classify parliamentary questions as simply *yes/no*, *wh*-questions, alternate questions, open or closed just by looking at the syntactic structure of the question. It is better to examine them using a multilevel approach, that is, considering the syntactic-semantic-pragmatic factors simultaneously. This is important because the grammatical form of a question does not normally determine its pragmatic function (see Hymes 1974).

3. Theoretical lens: formal-pragmatic-functional identification of interrogatives and mental process

This section describes the theoretical approach employed in the study. It looks at how questions have generally been identified and indicates the approach adopted in this paper. It also explains mental process and why it is adopted as an additional theory.

The definition and classification of questions have been said to be elusive as a result of the multiplicity of ways in which they can be defined and classified (Tsui 1992) and the fact that what counts as a question is not self-evident (Holmes and Chiles 2010). They can be categorised as a semantic category, a pragmatic or speech act category, a discourse category and a syntactic category (Tsui 1992). As noted earlier in the literature review, semantically (based on expected response) and syntactically (based on how they are formed), Quirk et al. (1985) categorise questions into three major types, viz: *yes/no* questions, *wh*-questions and alternate questions. Biber et al. (1999: 203-210) and Biber et al. (2002) identify similar question types based on the same/similar assumptions as Quirk et al. (1985). The classification of questions by these scholars has been described as problematic because, for example, a *yes/no* question may not necessarily seek an affirmation or disaffirmation, but rather seek (detailed) information (cf. Tsui 1992). The response to a question, therefore, depends on the context of its use, especially when questions are said to contextually obtain different orientations (Downing and Locke 2006; Quirk et al, 1985; Tsui 1992).

Scholars disagree on whether or not there is a relationship between question form and function (see Freed 1994: 634, for further expatiation on the argument about

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the form-function relationship). Freed (1994) herself finds a relationship between form and function, and calls for a careful investigation of the correspondence between the two. She identifies six question types based on their forms and functions.

According to Hymes (1974), while speech acts can be analysed from syntactic and semantic structure perspectives, the interpretation of utterances is a feature of interaction and context as well as of grammar. Hymes (1974: 53) notes that, from a speech act standpoint:

> a sentence interrogative in form may be now a request, now a command, now a statement; a request may be manifested by a sentence that is now interrogative, now declarative, now imperative in form; and one and the same sentence may be taken as a promise or as a threat, depending on the norm of interpretation applied to it.

Hymes' position is that the meaning of an interrogative is dependent upon context, as each speech community develops its own norms for understanding question formulation and interpretation (cf. Freed 1994). Hymes' position affirms the difficulty in identifying interrogatives.

The foregoing, including the literature reviewed in section 2, points to the challenges regarding the description and classification of questions and that questions can be classified in several other ways for specific purposes. The various theoretical issues imply that question identification is context specific. Therefore, in this study, I use a three-way approach to identify questions, namely: formal approach (*yes/no*, wh-, alternative, tag- and declarative questions), and direct/independent and indirect/dependent (Downing and Locke 2006) and pragmatic/functional approach (cf. Freed 1994; Tsui 1992). This approach is employed to account for the complex levels of interpretation, especially how parliamentarians use questions for political manoeuvring and the exposure of hidden agendas as well as ideological and tactical bias and political point scoring. Political mind-games are encoded in mental process verbs, an aspect of transitivity, that is, the grammar of experience, representing the modelling of experience (Halliday 1994).

It was realised in the analysis that most of the indirect/dependent forms in the Ghanaian parliamentary data involved the use of mental process verbs. It, therefore, became necessary to give those questions some special attention. Mental processes concern states of mind or psychological events (Bloor and Bloor 2013). They demonstrate "how speakers encode in language their mental picture of reality and how they account for their experience of the world around them" (Simpson 1993: 88); with the "understanding that people possess beliefs, thoughts and intentions that are part of their internal world, distinct from the world of observable behaviour and physical events" (Shatz, Wellman and Silber 1983: 301-302).

4. Methodology

This section describes the data and methods of analysis employed in the study.[1] The UK parliament is said to be the oldest in the world, whose practices and Hansard publications date back to the 18th century (Harris, 2001), while Ghana's parliamentary practice and Hansard publication were only about 25 years old at the time of my data collection. Again, we are comparing English language use from an English-as-a-first-language setting (UK) with English-as-a-second-language setting (Ghana), which can give insights into the concept of new Englishes and nativisation.

The data were randomly selected questions from Hansards of the UK Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) (accessed from www.parliament.uk) and Ghanaian Minister's Questions (GMQs), which were obtained from the Hansard Department of the Parliament of Ghana. The UK PMQs is a weekly 30-minute session of the House of Commons when the Prime Minister answers questions from MPs (House of Commons 2013), while the GMQs is a one-hour session when Government Ministers answer questions from MPs on government programmes, actions and policies. It was such questions that were the focus of attention for the study. The PMQs data consisted of randomly selected 33 sessions of Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQT), spanning 2005 through 2014. Four hundred and twelve (412) questions were randomly obtained for the purpose of the study. The GMQs, on the other hand, comprised 29 randomly selected sessions of Minister's Question Time, covering 2005 through 2013. Out of the data, 438 questions were randomly sampled for the study. After sampling the questions, I read each question and identified it according to its form (that is, structure), directness/indirectness and function.

5. Analysis and discussion

This section analyses and discusses the findings of the study. It discusses the types of UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions, and gives a special attention to indirect/dependent *yes/no* interrogatives with mental process verbs as the major difference between the UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions, and *tellex yes/no* interrogatives.

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[1] The data were part of a major study of UK and Ghanaian parliamentary discourse (see Sarfo-Kantankah 2016, 2018) for a detailed description of the setting, that is, the UK House of Commons and the Parliament of Ghana, and the methodology of the study).

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5.1 Types of UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions

As noted earlier, the parliamentary questions were categorised according to their form (*yes/no*, wh-, alternative, tag- and declarative questions), their directness/indirectness and function. The analysis yielded the following question types.

i.   Independent/direct *yes/no* interrogatives, e.g.
Madam Speaker ... Can he tell us the state of the infrastructure that compelled him and the Military High Command to suspend the recruitment?
     (GH: Mr. I. A. B. Fuseini, 10 Jun 09/Col. 441)

ii.   Independent/direct wh-interrogatives, e.g.
What plans does the Prime Minister have to protect the progress that has been made and the way in which waiting lists have plummeted?
     (UK: Linda Gilroy, 7 Apr 2010/Col. 966)

iii.   Independent/direct alternate interrogatives, e.g.
... will the Prime Minister support such an investigation, or is he afraid that there is something to hide?
     (UK: John Mason, 7 Apr 2010/Col. 970)

iv.   Dependent/indirect wh-interrogatives, e.g.
Mr. Speaker, I want to find out from the hon. Minister what approximate proportion of the annual production of about four hundred thousand metric tonnes of fish is attributed to aquaculture?
     (Mr. Effah-Baafi, 6 Jul 05/Col. 1653)

v.   multiple interrogatives, e.g.
Mr. Speaker ... [#i] I just want to know if that contract is going to be executed this year, and if so, [#ii] when it is going to start and [#iii] when it is going to be completed.
     (GH: Mr. J. K. Avedzi, 9 Jun 06/Col. 764)

In addition to these, the Ghanaian data contained:

vi.   dependent/indirect *yes/no* interrogatives, e.g.
Mr. Speaker, I would like to know from her whether some exercise has been carried out to determine such areas of high potential for aquaculture development.
     (Mr. J.A. Ndebugre, 6 Jul 05/Col. 1653)

vii.   dependent/indirect alternate interrogatives.
Madam Speaker ... I want to know whether this is a tradition for the district to provide or it should be provided by the Ghana Fire Service.
     (Mr. Amidu, 2 Jul 10/Col. 1786)

Independent interrogatives (also called direct interrogatives by Downing and Locke (2006) are characterised by main clauses (see Examples i-iii). Independent/direct *yes/no* interrogatives are usually constructed with a subject-operator inversion as in Example (i). The independent/direct *wh*-interrogative is a question directly introduced by *wh*-words such as *who*, *which*, *when*, *where* and *how*, and usually followed by a subject-operator inversion (Example ii). Alternate interrogatives are characterised by two or more clauses (in the form of options) connected by *or*. Example (iii) is an alternate interrogative with two clauses connected by *or*: ... [#i] *will the Prime Minister support such an investigation, or* [#ii] *is he afraid that there is something to hide*? Multiple interrogatives (cf. Dickson and Hargie 2006) are multipart questions which combine two or more question forms in one question turn, as in Example (v). This example has three different parts, each of which can be a question on its own: *I just want to know [#i] if that contract is going to be executed this year*, and if so, [#ii] *when it is going to start* and [#iii] *when it is going to be completed*.

On the other hand, dependent interrogatives are characterised by embedded questions (Examples v-vii), also called indirect questions by Downing and Locke (2006). Examples include: dependent *wh*-interrogative (Example iv), dependent *yes/no* (Example vi) and dependent alternate interrogatives (Example vii). They are characterised by subordinate clauses that are attached to matrix clauses. Example (iv) contains a matrix clause (*I want to find out from the hon. Minister*) and an embedded interrogative (*what approximate proportion of the annual production of about four hundred thousand metric tonnes of fish is attributed to aquaculture*). Example (vi) has a matrix clause (*I would like to know from her*) and an embedded interrogative (*whether some exercise has been carried out to determine such areas of high potential for agriculture development*). The matrix clause in Example (vii) is *I want to know*, while the two coordinated embedded interrogatives are *whether this is a tradition for the district to provide* and *it should be provided by the Ghana Fire Service*. Figure 1 represents the frequency of various interrogative forms identified in both the Ghanaian and UK data.

Figure 1 shows that *yes/no* interrogatives were the most frequent in both datasets, similar to Wilson's (1990) distribution of parliamentary question types. The independent and dependent *yes/no* interrogatives in the Ghanaian data (27% + 16% = 42%) are almost the same as the UK independent forms (46%). There are differences between the UK and Ghanaian dependent *wh*-interrogatives and multiple interrogatives, but I am unable to explore them due to space limitation and the need for in-depth analysis. I discuss only aspects of *yes/no* interrogatives in this paper, though, where necessary, other forms are utilised in the analysis.
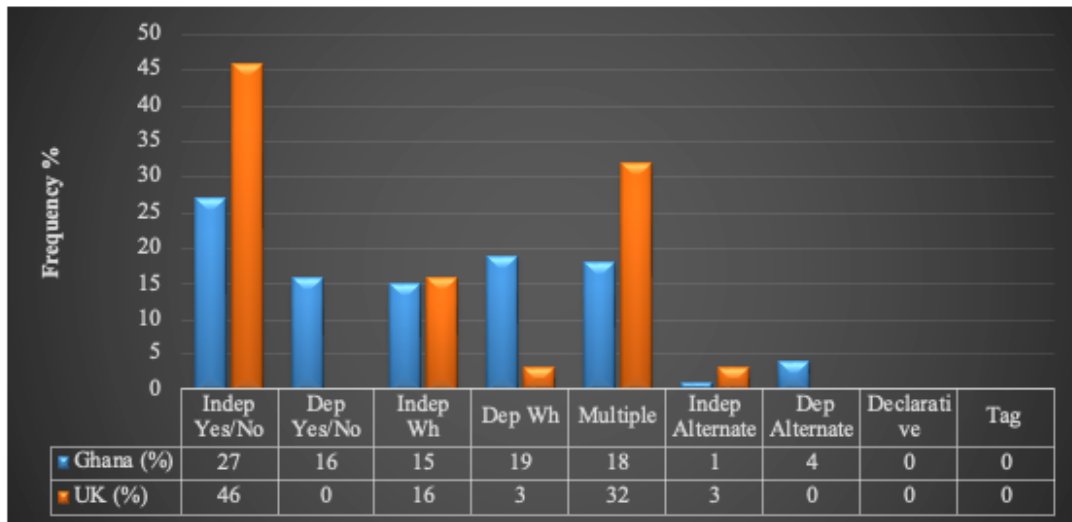
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Figure 1: Categories of Ghanaian/UK parliamentary questions

	Indep Yes/No	Dep Yes/No	Indep Wh	Dep Wh	Multiple	Indep Alternate	Dep Alternate	Declarative	Tag
Ghana (%)	27	16	15	19	18	1	4	0	0
UK (%)	46	0	16	3	32	3	0	0	0

5.2 Indirect *yes/no* interrogatives with mental processes: the major difference between Ghanaian Minister's and UK PM's questions

One major difference between the GMQs and the UK PMQs is the use of indirect *yes/no* interrogatives with mental processes in the Ghanaian data. As indicated in Figure 1, 16% of the GMQs were indirect/dependent *yes/no* interrogative forms, while there was none in the UK PMQs. The use of dependent/indirect interrogative forms as a major source of difference is also demonstrated by the use of dependent/indirect *wh*-interrogatives (Figure 1), where the Ghanaian MPs' use (19%) is six times that of the UK MPs' (3%). Indirect *yes/no* interrogatives (also called dependent/embedded interrogatives) are introduced by a requesting clause, and the *yes/no* question is embedded in that introductory clause. In this case, the embedded clause is usually introduced by either *whether* or *if* (Downing and Locke 2006: 105), as illustrated by Example 1.

> Example 1: 8 Jun 06/Col. 709
>
> **Mr. Moses Asaga [NDC]**: [i] Mr. Speaker, in Nabdam constituency, we have con-structed a police station, but we do not have the living quarters. Therefore, [Qi] *I want to know from the hon. Minister* [Qii] <u>*whether*</u> *there is a central Government budget for the building of police stations since we already constructed one but we need to complete it*.

Mr. Kan-Dapaah [NPP]: Yes, Mr. Speaker, there has always been from time immemorial, a budgetary allocation to the police to provide these facilities. The trouble is that it has not been sufficient enough to be able to meet the many needs of the many districts that we have. ...

In this example, the whole of the italicised structure is a superordinate clause, with an introductory matrix clause, [Qi] *I want to know from the hon. Minister*, and a subordinate clause/an embedded *yes/no* interrogative, [Qii] <u>*whether*</u> *there is a central Government budget for the building of police stations since we already constructed one but we need to complete it*. Number [Qii] contains two more clauses: a subordinate clause, *since we already constructed one*, and a co-ordinated clause, *but we need to complete it*; which form a postscript and a basis for the question. Number [Qi] is a boulomaic request, that is, an expression of a wish, hope or desire (Hengeveld 1988) or a "desiderative" expression (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 210), which Mr Asaga uses to express a desire "to know" whether there is a central government budget allocation for the building of police stations. The desiderative expression *I want to know* allows Mr Asaga to thrust himself into a senser position. And since it is *want to know* <u>*from the Minister whether ...*</u>, there is a complex chain of knowing, which allows Mr Asaga to request the opportunity to share in the knowledge of the Minister. There are two pragmatic implications for such a construction. First, the matrix clause (*I want to know from the Minister*) foregrounds the desire. Second, by thrusting himself into the senser position and expressing the desire or wish to know, Mr Asaga makes the question conditionally hearer-oriented (Grzyb 2011), showing his "entitlement" to ask the question and the "grantability" of response (Antaki and Kent 2012; Drew and Walker 2010: 109-110). Parliamentary questions allow MPs to hold (Prime) Ministers and their governments "accountable for their political intentions, statements, and actions" (Ilie 2006: 192). MPs are, therefore, entitled to ask their questions and (Prime) Ministers are obliged to answer/respond to them. Expressing and foregrounding the desire to ask the question, when Mr Asaga is entitled to ask, signals politeness, while it obliges the Minister to answer or respond more positively. Wilson (1990: 62) has said that supporting the use of first-person singular forms by mental-process verbs such as "think", "want", "wish" may reflect "intrinsic attitudes, particularly in the communication of *sincerity*". Such expression of sincerity may scaffold the politeness contained in Mr Asaga's question.

Other desiderative structures for constructing matrix clauses in the dependent questions are: *I would want to*, *I would like to*, *I will want to*, *I wish to* and *I would be grateful*, which are usually followed by such verbs as *know*, *find out* and *ask*. In other words, the dependent *yes/no* interrogatives have the following structures (Table 2), as illustrated in Examples 2-7.

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Table 2: The structure of dependent *yes/no* interrogatives

	Desiderative	**Verb**		**if/whether + nominal clause**
i.	I want to	know *(38)*/find out *(3)*/ask *(7)*	...	+ if/whether + nominal clause
ii.	I would want to	know *(12)*/find out *(8)*/ask *(3)*	...	+ if/whether + nominal clause
iii.	I would like to	know *(23)*/find out *(2)*/ask *(6)*	...	+ if/whether + nominal clause
iv.	I will want to	find out *(1)*	...	+ if/whether + nominal clause
v.	I wish to	find out *(1)*	...	+ whether + nominal clause
vi.	I would be grateful .... *(1)*		...	+ if/whether + nominal clause

"Know" (73 in all) and "find out" (15) are mental (cognitive) processes, which are knowledge seeking; whereas "ask" (16) is a verbal process, which demands an answer (note: these verbal processes are here only for the purposes of illustrating the dependent/indirect *yes/no* interrogatives). In all, the mental processes account for 85% of these processes in Table 2. The following are illustrations.

(i) I want to know/find out ... + if/whether + a nominal clause

Example 2: GH 1 Feb 07/Col. 100:

Alhaji Pangabu Mohammed [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, *I want to find out from the hon. Minister whether there is good collaboration between the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Trade and Industry.*

(ii) I would want to know/find out ... + if/whether + a nominal clause

Example 3: GH 6 Jul 05/Col 1641:

Mr. John Gyetuah [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, *I would want to ask the hon. Minister whether she could tell the House the stock level of fishes in the marine waters.*

(iii) I would like to know/find out ...+ if/whether + a nominal clause

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Example 4: GH 9 Feb 11/Col. 936

Prof George Y. Gyan-Baffour [NPP]: Madam Speaker, *I would like to know from the Hon Deputy Minister if he is aware that the resettlement programme that is going on now is supposed to be the nucleus of this Bui City concept that he has mentioned.*

(iv)   I will want to know/find out ...+ if/whether + a nominal clause

Example 5: GH 3 Jun 09/Col. 157

Ms. Beatrice B. Boateng [NPP]: Madam Speaker ... He mentioned the wearing of seat belts, et cetera. I know it embraces a lot, but I think there is something very important, like using mobile phones while driving. *I will want to find out* <u>whether</u> *that is part of the things he is going to enforce....*

(v)   I wish to find out ... + whether + a nominal clause

Example 6: GH 8 Jul 05/Col. 1768:

Mr. Effah-Baafi [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, *I wish to find out from the hon. Deputy Minister* <u>whether</u> *he is aware that the availability of a police facility is a prerequisite for the establishment of a banking institution, one of which is in the offing at Jema*.

(vi)   I would be grateful + if/whether + a nominal clause

Example 7: GH 3 Jun 2009/Col. 161:

Mr. Joe Ghartey [NPP]: *I will be grateful* <u>if</u> *the Hon Minister could tell us under   what law the police are arresting people for tainted windows.*

Based on the above-given analysis, the general structure for the indirect *yes/no* interrogatives can be represented as:

I want to/would like to/would want to/will want to/wish to + verb + (from X) + whether/if + Y.

Whether/if + Y is technically referred to as a *yes/no* interrogative nominal clause (Leech and Svartvik, 1994). The structure of the questions allows MPs to delay the questions by embedding them in another clause, which is a hedging strategy that reduces imposition and, therefore, marks politeness. This is reinforced by the matrix clauses being hedged performatives (Adika 2012: 159; Downing and Locke 2006: 211), as in Examples (ii)/3, (iii)/4, (iv)/5, (v)/6 and (vi)/7 above, signalled by *would*, *will* and *wish*. In all about 48% of questions in the GMQs employed these forms of structures. Apart from their pragmatic effects of foregrounding, mitigation and politeness, these interrogative forms may also be accounted for by mother tongue (L1) interference.

According to Adika (2012), most, if not all, indigenous Ghanaian languages lack modals. Anderson (2009: 72) states that when making polite requests, Ghanaian speakers of English "do not frequently use modals such as 'can', 'could', 'may', and 'might'… [they rather] use more 'want'-statements and imperative forms that may be perceived as impolite forms in native varieties of English". Adika (2012: 159) reports that studies in ways of making request among Ghanaians

> indicate that the syntactic forms combined with the lexical choices that characterise the semantic and syntactic structure of requests made by Ghanaians point to a uniqueness of use (cf. Bamgbose 1997) that distinguishes these forms from the stylistic preferences of inner circle users. Broadly, GhaE requests forms are characterised by direct request strategies involving the use of imperatives, need/want statements, hedged performatives, and mild hints among others. Also, unlike native speakers Ghanaian users of English do not frequently use modals when they make requests in naturally occurring situations; instead they prefer to use imperatives and 'want' statements because there are no modals in any of the indigenous Ghanaian languages.

The lack of modals and other auxiliaries in indigenous Ghanaian languages reflects in the absence of subject-operator inversions in the formation of questions in those languages, as in examples (i)/2-(vi)/7 above. The implication is that questions in Ghanaian languages are formed by means of declarative structures. Adika (2012: 159, see also Anderson 2006, 2009: 71) gives examples of ways of making requests in Ghanaian English as:

i. *Imperatives*: Bring me the file of Mr. Ocran, please; Give me some rice please;
ii. *Hedged performatives*: Please, I would be most grateful if you sign these letters for me.; I would like it if you gave me a pay-in slip.
iii. *Want statements*: Please I want a pay-in slip; Please I need a pay-in slip.

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iv.   *Query preparatory forms*: Please, can I have a pay-in slip? Could you please sign my form for me?

v.   *Mild hints*: Please sir, tomorrow is the deadline for registration; Please, I am here to register.

Adika (2012) and Anderson (2006, 2009) are quick to add that these are features of spoken rather than written Ghanaian English. To a very large extent, the Ghanaian parliamentary questions support Adika's claim, as about 48% of the question forms used the "would/want to" structures.

There are structural differences between some of Adika's examples and our parliamentary indirect *yes/no* interrogatives, though. First, apart from *hedged performatives*, Adika's *imperatives* and *want statements*, which are direct request forms, do not contain *whether/if* subordinators. The presence of *whether/if* expresses a weak obligation. This demonstrates the institutionalised and polite nature of these parliamentary questions. Second, *mild hints* are not found in our data. Third, the *query preparatory forms* are modalised forms and subject-operator inversions, which are also found in our data. This shows that requests made by Ghanaian speakers of English can be both direct and indirect, including a lexical form such as "please" (Anderson 2009: 81). "Please" occurred 40 times (0.27/1000 words) in the Ghanaian data, while it occurred nine times (0.05/1000 words) in the UK data. The majority of the GMQs (about 52%) were constructed using the subject-operator inversion rule of English. This points to the fact that, as English-as-second-language (ESL) speakers, Ghanaian parliamentarians are conversant with interrogative constructions in English. However, to the extent that the indirect interrogative forms are mainly a spoken feature, this suggests a transfer of L1 features into English in naturally occurring communicative situations and contexts. There is a fusion of English and Ghanaian language features in the parliamentary question forms.

Another group of *yes/no* interrogatives is what I have called *tellex* (tell, explain) *yes/no* interrogatives. While the *tellex* interrogatives are syntactically *yes/no* interrogatives, functionally, they are wh-interrogatives, as discussed in the next section.

5.3 Tellex yes/no interrogatives

MPs' *yes/no* interrogatives are often designed in such a way that they ask (Prime) Ministers to give narrative, explanatory responses or disclosure of information. The *tellex yes/no* interrogatives are characterised by narrative-requesting verbs such as "explain", "tell" and "clarify", similar to what has been called TED (tell, explain, describe) questions in legal contexts (cf. Oxburgh, Myklebust and Grant 2010; Gabbert, Hope, La Rooy, McGregor, Ellis and Milne 2016). But there was only

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one instance of "clarify" and no use of "describe" in the data for the current study. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) (2014) gives about seven (7) senses for the verb "explain", of which the relevant ones are (italics and emphasis mine):

i. To unfold (a matter); to *give details of, enter into details* respecting (Sense 3a).
ii. To *make plain or intelligible*; to **clear of obscurity or difficulty** (Sense 3b).
iii. To assign a meaning to, *state the meaning or import of*; to *interpret* (Sense 4a).
iv. To *make clear* the cause, origin, or reason of; to *account for* (Sense 5)
v. To *make one's meaning clear* and *intelligible, speak plainly*; to **give an account of one's intentions or motives** (Sense 6).

It also defines the verb "tell" in about 25 senses, among which the relevant ones for our discussion are:

i. To mention in order, *narrate*, relate. Make known, declare (Sense 1).
ii. To *give and account or narrative of (facts, actions, or events)*; to narrate, relate (Sense 2a).
iii. To **make known by speech** or writing; to *communicate (information, facts, ideas, news*, etc.); to *state, announce, report, intimate* (Sense 3a).
iv. To **declare, state formally or publicly**; to *announce, proclaim, publish* (Sense 3b).
v. To *express in words* (thoughts, things known) (Sense 4c).
vi. To **disclose or reveal** (something secret or private); to divulge (Sense 5a).

The highlighted parts of these definitions of "explain" and "tell" indicate that narratives are required. Particularly, the bold parts of senses 3b and 6 ("explain") and 3a, 3b and 5a ("tell") imply disclosure of hidden agenda, which is an important part of parliamentary discourse. Such questions are significant because "parliamentary dialogue contributes to revealing frames of mind and beliefs as well as exposing instances of doublespeak and incompatible or inconsistent lines of action" (Ilie, 2010a: 337) and it helps to "reveal hidden agendas and ideological, tactical, bias" (Ilie 2010b: 1). These definitions denote that when "explain" and "tell" are used in framing questions, as found in the data, they demand descriptions as responses or answers. They are knowledge-seeking or knowledge-establishing questions (Hall 2008) and, thus, require (Prime) Ministers to provide details of facts, actions and events. Let us consider Examples 8 and 9.

Example 8: GH 3 Jun 08/Col 259:

Ms. Akua Dansua [NDC]: Mr. Speaker, *can the hon. Deputy Minister **tell** this august House who the other members of the committee are?*

Dr. (Mrs) Ashitey [NPP]: Mr. Speaker, I do not have my list, but I know that Mr. Eleblu was the chairman of the committee.

Ms Dansua's question is a request for information, which is designed to reveal the Deputy Minister's bias in constituting the committee. The substantive question was about measures taken to implement recommendations of a special audit report on perceived malfeasances by the National Health Insurance Council. Some MPs had already raised doubts about the authenticity of the report and its recommendations. Therefore, Ms Dansua's question about the members of the committee reinforces the doubts, since the authenticity of the report partly depends on the quality of the membership of the committee. For example, was the membership partisan such that it could have ignored issues that could damage the image of the government in the report? Thus, Dr (Mrs) Ashitey's failure to provide the names of the other members of the committee is evasive, an attempt to avoid further debate about the legitimacy of the report. Consider also:

Example 9: UK 22 Mar 06/Col 282:

Mr. Angus MacNeil (Nah-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): *Can the Prime Minister **explain** to the House **why**, even before the loan scandal and the Metropolitan police investigation, 80p in every pound of individual donations to the Labour party came from people who were subsequently ennobled by him?*

The Prime Minister [Lab]: I am proud, actually, that the Labour party has the support of successful business people and entrepreneurs. I am quite sure that that is not the case with the Scottish National party—for the very good reason that its policies would wreck the Scottish economy.

The expression "Can the Prime Minister ***explain*** ... ***why***" demands detailed information. The question is a directive and a challenge to PM Tony Blair to explain why he ennobled people who donated to the Labour party. The question is also a criticism, as it draws a comparison with "the loan scandal", referring to the "loans for peerages" scandal (Helm 2006: no pagination). Being a narrative-requesting or information-requesting verb, "explain" requires Tony Blair to make plain, clear obscurity or give details of his

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decision and action. It is an attempt to expose abuse of office by the Prime Minister by asking him to make self-revealing declarations in order to embarrass and damage his image (Ilie 2015). This is a parliamentary questioning strategy and tactics for political-point scoring. The demand for details is emphasised by "why", an adverb of reason. The question imputes that Blair had had underhand dealings with "people who were subsequently ennobled by him" – it suggests people had paid bribes to get knighthoods. A "Yes, I can explain" or "No, I cannot explain" response without a further explanation would appear rude, strange or demonstrate a lack of understanding of the importance of the question. It would also imply admitting to being paid bribes. Tony Blair, rather sarcastically, explains why and defends his association with "successful business people and entrepreneurs" as a good one, thereby debunking the dishonesty implied by the question.

The *tellex yes/no* interrogative types included the following forms.

GH: Can ... *explain* ... why (1)
      Could ... *explain* what (1)
      Can ... *tell* ... what (3), when (2), which (1), who (1), that (1), whether (1), the (5), some of the (2)
      Will ... *tell* ... what (2), how (2)
      Would ... *tell* ... what (2), which (1), when (1), zero-wh (2)
      May ... ask ... *to tell* ... the form of assistance which ... (1)

UK: Can ... *explain* ... why (13)
      Could ... *explain* exactly what (1)
      Will ... *explain* ... why (7)/what (1)/that (1)
Can ... *tell* ... why (5)/what (11)/how (3)/when (1)/whether (2)/of any (1), the number (1)
      Will ... *tell* ... why (1), what (4), whether (5), how (1), which (1), that (2) to- infinitive (2)

Designed mostly to seek specific or detailed information, the *tellex* questions are highly ideologically biased. They are mainly constructed to request information that reveals damaging secrets about the (Prime) Ministers or governments. The *tellex* questions reflect the adversarial and ideological nature of parliamentary discourse. Asking (Prime) Ministers to reveal secrets and biases is an attempt to discredit them and damage their political career, for the opponents' advantage, which is a political-point scoring strategy or tactics.

The *tellex yes/no* interrogatives can be considered at different levels: by form, they are *yes/no*; by function, wh-questions, and can also be considered as a hybrid, being a combination of a *yes/no* and a wh-question. Tkačuková (2010a, 2010b) calls them

indirect wh-questions. We need to recognise an unspoken *yes/no* answer embedded in the responses. By giving the information (Example 9), the (Prime) Minister has agreed to give it, which is a silent response to the *yes/no* part of the question. Example 8 can be split into: *can the hon. Deputy Minister tell this august House* as a *yes/no* and *who the other members of the committee are* as a wh-interrogative. In this sense, there is always a silent response to the *yes/no* part of the question, if the (Prime) Minister does not evade the question. This is similar in structure to quoted questions, such as Example 10.

> Example 10: UK 22 Mar 06/Col. 284:

> **Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD)**: Last week I asked the Prime Minister a perfectly straightforward question about long-term care of the elderly, and he gave me a totally inadequate reply about pensions. *So can I ask him again: why do elderly people in this country continue to have to sell their homes to pay for their care in old age, eight years after he said that he would leave the country if that was still the case?*

So can I ask him again is a *yes/no* interrogative that introduces the quoted question: *why do elderly people in this country...? So can I ask him again*, a metadiscourse structure (cf. Hyland 1998), functions as request for permission to ask the question and shows the emphasis and urgency that Mr Heath attaches to the question. Of course he does not need permission from the PM to ask the question, and, therefore, it could be considered as marking politeness.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to identify forms of UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions from a multilevel approach, namely: formal, (in)directness and pragmatic/functional approaches. The question forms identified include: independent/direct *yes/no* interrogatives, independent/direct *wh*-interrogatives, independent/direct alternate interrogatives, dependent/indirect *wh*-interrogatives and multiple interrogatives. The analysis further shows that Ghanaian Members of Parliament (MPs) use two other forms of questions that are not used by UK parliamentarians, viz, dependent/indirect *yes/no* interrogatives and dependent/indirect alternate interrogatives. The paper demonstrates that the major difference between UK and Ghanaian parliamentary questions is the use of indirect *yes/no* interrogatives with mental process verbs by Ghanaian MPs. A detailed analysis shows that the indirect *yes/no* interrogatives have the structure:

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I want to/would like to/would want to/will want to/wish to + verb + (from X) + whether/if + Y.

The *verb* includes main verbs such as *know*, *ask* and *find out*, X is the (Prime) Minister, and *Y* is the action or object requested of the (Prime) Minister. *Whether/if + Y* is technically referred to as a *yes/no* interrogative nominal clause (Leech and Svartvik, 1994: 313). The structure of the questions allows MPs to delay the questions by embedding them in another clause, which is a hedging strategy that reduces imposition and, therefore, marks politeness. The paper notes that, apart from their pragmatic effects of foregrounding, mitigation and politeness, these interrogative forms may also be accounted for by mother tongue (L1) interference. Research (see Adika 2012; Anderson 2009) shows that indigenous Ghanaian languages lack modals and, therefore, when Ghanaian speakers of English make polite requests, they do not normally employ modal auxiliaries such as *can*, *could*, *may* and *might*. They rather use *want*-statements and imperative forms, which is why we see the indirect *yes/no* interrogative forms among the Ghanaian parliamentary questions.

By further exploration of the *yes/no* interrogatives, the paper additionally identifies what I have described as *tellex* (tell, explain) *yes/no* interrogatives. The analysis shows that, while the *tellex* interrogatives are syntactically *yes/no* interrogatives, they are functionally *wh*-interrogatives. The *tellex* interrogatives are used largely for political manoeuvring and the exposure of hidden agendas as well as ideological and tactical bias and political point scoring. In other words, the *tellex* interrogatives are used for reasons that serve specific desired outcomes: to discredit political opponents for political purposes.

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