

Questioning Strategies in Courtrooms

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Received: December 14, 2023

Accepted: January 22, 2024

Online Published: February 5, 2024

doi:10.5430/wjel.v14n2p376

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v14n2p376>

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the different strategies of questioning in courtroom discourse, by highlighting the various discursive structures employed to form a question between courtroom interlocutors. More specifically, this research looks at the techniques employed in courtroom cross-examination to persuade the judge(s) to accept attorneys' accounts of what happened as well as the effectiveness of responses in fending off the influence and power of barristers. The corpus of this study is taken from 3 testimonies of prosecution witnesses in the trial of Timothy McVeigh concerning the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1997. By employing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the study investigates six questioning patterns, including *wh*-questions, *yes-no* questions, tag questions, *so*-questions, *say*-questions, and declarative questions. The study reveals that some types of questions used in courtrooms are strategically utilized to persuade juries and judges, confirm a piece of information, clarify an argument, threatening witnesses' face, manipulate and/or coerce interlocutors within courtrooms. The paper also reveals that questioning is not only used to instigate an answer or a response but also to communicate information and draw conclusions.

Keywords: law, language, courtroom discourse, questioning, persuasion, manipulation, argumentation

1. Introduction

One of the striking facts about legal discourse is that it is completely different from ordinary language that is used in everyday occurring conversations. Language employed in courtrooms has its own pragmatic, ideological and discursive functions (Zydervelt, et al., 2017). Within courtrooms, questioning has various linguistic patterns that are intended to achieve specific purposes before juries or judges (Stygall, 2012; Woodbury, 1984). These patterns of questions target pragmatic meanings that go beyond their semantic functions in ordinary language (Aldosari & Khafaga, 2020). This study tries to explore the extent to which the various patterns and techniques of questioning are strategically utilized to communicate the intended meanings of their users in courtrooms. As such, this study sheds light on the various uses questioning strategies convey to interlocutors other than the semantic functions of its surface propositions. These include the use of questioning to persuade, manipulate and/or coerce. Questioning, in light of this study, is not only utilized to extract responses on the part of the addressees, but also serves to communicate information and to confirm arguments.

Within courts, questioning and answering are two of the major events that make up the complex genre of courtroom discourse (Heffer, 2005). Questions are dexterously used by lawyers to get lay witnesses to relate stories during trial exams, but they also frequently provide them the chance to share their own stories and recount incidents from a legal standpoint. The nature and purposes of questions and answers in the courtroom have been the subject of an increasing number of studies on legal discourse in recent years (e.g., Archer, 2005; Heffer, 2005; Matoesian, 2008; Freed & Ehrlich, 2010; Tkačuková, 2010; Eades, 2012; Zydervelt et al., 2017). According to earlier research, there are a number of purposes for which language manipulation in courtroom speech is employed, including expressing regret, grumbling, challenging, expressing astonishment and disbelief, assigning responsibility, and more (Matoesian, 1993; Khafaga, 2023b). Because the discourse aspects involved in defining a question are contingent upon the type of the actions in which it is employed, questions have also been regarded as playing a central part in courtroom activity (Levinson, 1992).

The significance of this study can be demonstrated from its attempt to explore the different strategies and techniques of questioning that are strategically used in courtrooms. The study, therefore, tries to contribute to the field of legal discourse analysis. It shows the reciprocal relationship between language and law and the extent to which each of which affects the other. This is conducted by exploring the different strategic patterns of questioning used in the selected data and the way these strategies and patterns are used to communicate specific meanings. In order to better understand how attorneys utilize questions in criminal cases and how they affect witnesses' replies, this study is being done. The paper, therefore, highlights the integration of the various social sciences the analysis of language employed by interlocutors among courtrooms. The study also draws attention to the practice of courtroom examination in criminal prosecutions. Furthermore, this study is anticipated to be useful for students of law in the various educational institutions, as it provides useful insights into the understanding of the language of law in courtrooms, and therefore contributes to the fields of legal discourse analysis and forensic linguistics.

The rationale of this study is to shed light on the nature of questioning in courtroom discourse, which in turn serves to contribute to research on courtroom examination globally. This study, therefore, is intended to contribute to linguistic knowledge in two ways. First, the results of this study will have theoretical and practical ramifications for legal practitioners in general and for legal counsels in particular. Legal counsels can use the results as a reference, allowing them to consult culturally relevant literature on courtroom discourse, as they offer useful insights into the understanding of the way discourse is produced, received, and managed in courts. Second, it is anticipated that the results will add to the body of research already available on courtroom discourse and matters related to bilingual courtrooms.

This is how the remainder of the article is structured: The literature review in Section 2 examines earlier research and pertinent material in the area of courtroom discourse. The methodology is covered in Section 3, along with a description of the data utilized and an explanation of the analytic processes. The analysis of the selected data is presented in Section 4. The results are discussed in Section 5. The article's conclusion is offered in Section 6.

1.1 Research Objectives

The current study has four objectives:

- 1) To identify the common questioning patterns employed in courtrooms.
- 2) To show the extent to which the various questioning patterns are managed to communicate the meanings targeted by interlocutors.
- 3) To demonstrate the most effective questioning strategies used in extracting, confirming and elaborating information in the selected corpus.
- 4) To highlight the pragma-semantic integration in the analysis of legal language.

1.2 Research Questions

The study tries to provide answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the common questioning patterns utilized in courtrooms?

RQ2: To what extent do these questioning patterns communicate the intended meanings targeted by interlocutors?

RQ3: What are the most effective questioning strategies used in extracting, confirming and elaborating information in the selected corpus?

The following sections present the rest of this study. In section 2, the literature and theoretical preliminaries are reviewed. Section 3 provides the methodology of this article. In section 4, the study offers the analysis of the selected data and the results obtained from the analysis. Section 5 is the discussion of the results of the study. Section 6 is the conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Since language serves as the primary means through which the authority of law is expressed (Danet, 1980), it is obvious then to state that both language and law are reciprocally integrated, theoretically and analytically. Laws are laid down, practiced and maintained via the use of language. Therefore, there is a mutual relationship between the two concepts. Human connection and the realization and exercise of legal authority are both made possible by language. Within the general scope of linguistics, the field of forensic linguistics is entirely concerned with the study of and the relationship between language and law, and has advanced significantly over the past few decades to be perceived as independent discipline in legal studies (Johnson & Coulthard, 2010). This field of study addresses various topics related to legal language. These include the investigations conducted by the governmental and police institutions, the use of language with all its manifestations within courtrooms, legal processes, trials, authorship analysis, and forensic phonetics. The different forensic linguistics approaches applied to the study of these areas aim to provide linguistic insights, methodologies, and knowledge to legal practice (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Coulthard et al., 2016). Accordingly, the main goal of forensic linguistics revolves around one main point: to offer legal discourse analysts various solutions for the problems related to crimes and law by highlighting the relationship between language and law.

Forensic linguistics reveals how ordinary people are controlled in many situations and places for institutional objectives and aims. According to Cao (2011), restrained power that people are not aware of is a feature of language and linguistics. While language has more subtle power (Khafaga, 2019), the force of the law is more palpable and obvious. However, Cao (2011) argues that language has the ability to demonstrate and conceal, to notify and inform, as well as to deceive and delude. In-depth research on the diverse examinations of witnesses in courtrooms is only one model of the forensic linguistic field's work on the connections between law and language. Thus, conducting a study in which to demonstrate the way through which ordinary people cannot easily grasp the meaning communicated by legal language in courtrooms is crucial in the sense that it clarifies the extent to which there is discrepancy between the two ways of the linguistic expressions used in courtrooms or outside its borders. Forensic linguistics plays an essential role, therefore, in mediating between ordinary language and everyday-occurring conversations.

As a branch of discourse analysis, forensic discourse analysis is a methodology that combines findings from several linguistic disciplines, as it allows the incorporation of various social and linguistic approaches and models into its theoretical and analytical framework. Sometimes, these approaches are psychologically based, contextually based, socially based and/or culturally based (Olsson, 2008).

Cotterill (2010) further highlights the use and application of the analytical models of forensic linguistics to the different legal, linguistic, social, and cultural themes. This is due to the fact that the use of corpora in forensic linguistics illuminates the various archetypal language structures in various and legal settings, including cross-examination in courtrooms (Flowerdew, 2004).

It is worth mentioning that courtroom discourse has a specific pattern of expressions as well as a distinguished structure of sentences and utterances (Woodbury, 1984). It is a type of discourse that is dedicated to courtrooms, legal texts and judicial documents and practices. For instance, the different legal practices in judicial examination allocate speaking places to participants and limit the topics they are allowed to discuss (Thornborrow, 2002). A prosecution barrister's objective, for instance, is to advise the jury or judge(s) with evidence that creates the burden of proof in a criminal trial conducted under an adversarial system. Examination and cross-examination are two examples of the legal practices that are utilized by means of various linguistic strategies to communicate specific purposes in discourse (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007). These linguistic realizations serve to construct the general structure of courtroom discourse, as well as to determine its defining features and principles (Heffer, 2005). Lawyers' inquiries during cross-examinations of lay witnesses in court are crucial for drawing out their stories, but they also provide them the chance to share their own information and stories by expressing them within particular linguistic expressions that ultimately function to communicate what they desire by the discursive way they prefer.

According to Ehrlich and Sidnell (2006), courtroom discourse is considered as a type of institutional discourse. Because of the nature of institutional discourse, it is impossible to separate language analysis from the examination of the role and intent of language in the particular interactions it involves. Consequently, in order to analyze language used in institutional discourse, like legal discourse, we need to have a solid understanding of the social dynamics that shape the identities and beliefs of that specific type of discourse. Crucially, power and control are recurrent subjects in the study of institutional discourse (Ehrlich & Sidnell, 2006; Khafaga, 2017). This is especially important when studying courtroom discourse since it is important to comprehend the power dynamics and control among the participants. Such an understanding of the nature of courtroom discourse as a form of institutional discourse serves to expand our understanding of the various language techniques used by attorneys and witnesses to manage the conversation during courtroom exchanges.

Much research has been conducted on the use of questions and their answers in courtroom discourse by focusing on the use of the different linguistic strategies in courtrooms in general and the use of questioning with all its tools in particular (e.g., Catoto, 2017; Zydervelt et al., 2017). These studies have come to terms that legal language is characterized by particular linguistic features that are different from ordinary language, and they also accentuate the fact that questions within courtrooms are not only used to instigate answers on the part of the addressees, but they also serve to communicate and confirm further pragmatic meanings. Previous studies have shown that questioning is strategically used by courtrooms' interlocutors to achieve and communicate a variety of purposes, including blaming, complaining, confronting, expressing astonishment and disbelief, and apologizing (Aldosari, 2020). Furthermore, in courtroom discourse, power relations differ, that is, there are different types and levels of power, but all of them revolve around the rhetorical dimension of using the concept within a particular linguistic setting. Power is institutionally based in courtroom discourse; power that is closely associated to particular rules and ways of expressions, as well as ascribed to specific lexis, terms of address, and vocabularies. This situation relates to how interactional practices are organized in courtrooms, which, in turn, clarifies the way through which conversations are delivered and conversational turns are controlled and managed among interlocutors (Stygall, 2012).

2.1 Questions in Courtrooms

For Stenström (1984), questioning in courtroom discourse should be approached with the study of meaning in connection to speech contexts, rather than being an object per se that can be recognized on its own merits. Thus, the context wherein legal discourse in general and questions in particular are delivered is very crucial in the interpretation of the pragmatic meaning of discourse. Here lies the importance of pragmatics in the study of courtroom discourse as it focuses on the intended meaning of speakers (Leech, 1983). Questioning in courtroom discourse is different from those used in ordinary conversations conducted between interlocutors. Questions are employed in courtrooms to achieve specific pragmatic purpose by persuading and/or manipulating. In this regard, Archer (2005) argues that in casual conversations, where there is typically a greater degree of symmetry between the speakers, queries are not as likely to display the same level of control as they do in legal discourse.

According to Quirk et al. (1985a) and Biber et al. (1998), questions are classified into six categories. These are (i) declarative questions, which refer to the questions that take the sequence of a statement, as in 'you are the only person in the room at the time of the crime?'; (ii) wh questions, which start with the common wh-words, such as what, when, where, how, why, and who, to ask for information about things, persons, places, times, and reasons; (iii) yes/no questions, which refer to the questions that start with a helping or auxiliary verb, such as 'did you remember the face that you met in the bank?'; (iv) tag questions, which come after a piece of information to emphasize it positively or negatively, as in 'you are inside the bank at 1 pm, agree/ are you?'; (v) alternative questions, which are structurally based on the use of the choice marker 'or' in forming the question, as in 'do you remember the time of his phone call or the number of his phone?'; and (vi) non-sentence questions, which are usually formed by one or two words, as in: *right?* Stenström (1984) argues that not all types of questions elicit a response because the functions of questions are determined by their discourse qualities, or context. The impact of the questions given to the receivers is linked to the elicitive force or control (Archer, 2005). Comparably, a conducive question suggests that the person asking it is inclined to receive the response that they had anticipated or desired (Quirk et al., 1985).

It is noteworthy to note that, contrary to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) concept of face, which contends that avoiding personalization

with pronouns is a negative politeness strategy, personalization in courtroom speech is an overt tactic and hence poses a risk of face threatening. According to Kryk-Kastovsky (2006), questions are not just a tool used by lawyers to manipulate or frighten witnesses and defendants, but they may also be used to carry out face threatening acts that force others to believe their version of events. Because of the nature of the activity, which Archer (2008) refers to as ‘verbal aggression’, it is anticipated that cross-examination will be face-threatening in this sense. Further, using questions, irrespective of their linguistic constructions, serves to achieve control over the discourse of recipients. Such a type of discourse control necessitates a specific type of rhetorical power, that is, the power of using words, in order for speakers to be able to extract the information they need from witnesses. Again, here lies the importance of the pragmatic dimension in analyzing questioning in courtroom discourse, as it reveals the intentionality that lies beyond the linguistic expressions used by courtroom interlocutors.

Due to the fact that the discursive characteristics pertaining to the forms and patterns of questioning in courtrooms, question, whatever their linguistic realizations are, constitutes various forms according to the way discourse operates in courtrooms and the way conversational turns among interlocutors are managed (Levinson, 1992), questions have also been viewed as playing a central part in courtroom action. Therefore, we anticipate that the questions posed during cross-examination would differ from those asked during direct-examination. Questions will be viewed as playing a significant part in speech events between attorneys and recipients in order to contextualize the current inquiry in the literature because they will disclose language manipulation used to accomplish a variety of legal purposes and objectives. It is strongly suggested that further research be done on the "interactional dynamic" (Aldosari & Khafaga, 2020) of the pragmatic purposes and characteristics of inquiries and responses in legal situations. Participants may be able to recognize the language approach, but owing to their limited linguistic skills, they are unable to comprehend how it works.

2.2 Previous Studies

Studies on courtroom discourse that look into the types of questions and answers in the courtroom and judicial process have become more and more common in recent years (e.g., Harris, 1984; Newbury & Johnson, 2006; Eades, 2008; Tkačuková, 2010; Ehrlich, 2011; Johnson, 2015; Zydervelt et al., 2017; Khafaga, 2023a), among others. These studies have contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the way through which courtroom discourse is linguistically structured, particularly in terms of the employment of questions among interlocutors within legal courts. In an early study, questions were categorized by Danet and Bogoch (1980) based on their typologies and functions. The declarative question type was found to be the most coercive due to its form and purpose, which restricts the response, while the wh-question was found to be the least coercive. Danet and Bogoch’s (1980) study focused on the concepts of persuasion and coercion as being main purposes of using questioning in courtroom discourse. Woodbury (1984) and Harris (1984) also created a taxonomy of question types that categorizes which inquiries have the potential to control and restrict replies or force a speaker’s words on the hearer. According to Woodbury (1984), the declarative prosodic inquiry is the most dominating type of question since it forces a lawyer’s interpretation of the evidence on witnesses.

At the micro level of discourse and language use, miscellaneous studies examined the discourse markers used in courtroom discourse (e.g., Tkačuková, 2015), illocutionary force communicated by questioning (e.g., Cotterill, 2003), and metalinguistic markers in forming questions in legal discourse (e.g., Heffer, 2005). These studies have come to terms that these discourse markers are crucial for conveying a speaker’s intention in an utterance, even if they might not have propositional substance. An additional benefit of performing micro-level analysis is that it demonstrates how attorneys utilize question sequences as a conceptual framework to undermine the credibility of witnesses (Aldridge & Luchjenbroers, 2007). According to Johnson (2015), the use of quoted speech, that is, the testimony of the prisoner or defendant, in lawyer’s questions can effectively shape the defense attorney’s version of events and influence the jury. Further, in terms of the type of questions, Harris (1984) discovered that whereas inquiries about *how* and *why* needed more than a minimal response, disjunctive wh-questions of the kind *what*, *how much*, and *how many* generated minimal responses on the part of recipients (Thornborrow, 2002). These studies also accentuate the assumption that due to the fact that these types of questioning exercise a strong form of control on the witnesses and defendants, questions are viewed as playing a crucial part in judicial proceedings since they are contingent upon the activities taking place (Levinson, 1992).

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The data of this study is taken from 3 testimonies of prosecution witnesses in the trial of Timothy McVeigh concerning the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1997. The total number of words in the selected corpus is 62457 words, distributed to the three selected testimonies. The data was collected from the famous trials site on the internet, available at <https://famous-trials.com/>. The study uses both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis in order to arrive at credible and concise results pertinent to the use of questioning in courtroom discourse. The direct links to the three selected prosecution testimonies are added in the appendix at the end of this paper. Table 1 adds more clarification to the selected data.

Table 1. Number of testimonies, names of witnesses, and number of words

No. of Testimony	Name of Witness	No. of Words
Testimony 1	Lori Fortier	24177
Testimony 2	Jennifer McVeigh	10931
Testimony 3	Michael Fortier	27349
Total: 3 Testimonies	3 Witnesses	62457 words

The rationale for selecting the trial Timothy McVeigh concerning the Oklahoma City Bombing is due to the fact that this trial abounds in many prosecution testimonies that are rich with different patterns of questions, which is relevant to the current study. Also the reasons for selecting questioning to be investigated here is due to three reasons: first, questioning is the most common linguistic tool to be used in courtrooms; second, questions are not information seeker but also information containers and notifiers; and third, questioning in its linguistic nature are more relevant to the study and nature of legal language within courtrooms.

3.2 Procedures

This study adopts some analytical procedures that revolve around four stages. The first stage constitutes the data preparation, in which data was collected, organized, classified and then written in a word file to be ready for the analysis. The second stage comprises the identification of the various questioning strategies employed in the selected data. In this stage, the identified strategies of questioning were categorized into the various types and patterns of questions. The third stage deals with the linguistic investigation of the various manifestations of questions in the selected data, by demonstrating the different pragmatic meanings that lie beyond the semantic propositions of each type of question. The fourth stage discusses the ideological weight of employing the various types of questions in the selected corpus, by showing the extent to which these questioning structures and forms contribute to the communication of persuasion, manipulation, and/or coercion within courtrooms.

4. Analysis and Results

This section presents the analysis of the selected data. It analyzes six types of questioning that are used in courtroom discourse, including *wh*-questions, *yes-no* questions, tag questions, *so*-questions, *say*-questions, and declarative questions.

4.1 The Use of *Wh*-Questions in the Testimonies

Wh-questions are frequently used in the three testimonies under investigation. The various *wh*-words are employed by the attorneys in their direct examinations to the three witnesses. According to Lyons (1977), questions are just statements made by language users in a certain situation in order to accomplish a specific communication goal. This study adopted this perspective on questions so that meaning-assignment for questions used in the direct examination phases of a trial was informed by the understanding that interrogative utterances are speech acts, and as such, the pragmatic relationship they have to their context of use and their propositional content determine how they should be interpreted. Table 2 clarifies the various question words and their frequency that are employed in the three testimonies.

Table 2. Distribution of *wh*-questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
Question word	Freq.	Question word	Freq.	Question word	Freq.	
what	264	what	61	what	243	What did he say about the United Nations?
when	123	when	36	when	98	When did he tell you about network of friends?
where	66	where	21	where	92	Where were these gun shows?
why	76	why	0	why	45	Why did you ask them to notify you before the search?
who	17	who	11	who	13	Who wrote that, Ms. McVeigh?
how	43	how	15	how	23	How was he going to fuse it from the front to the back?
how long	32	how long	4	how long	21	How long did you live with your mother in Florida?
how often	4	how often	2	how often	2	How often did you see him during that several-month period of time?
how many	5	how many	1	how many	10	How many times were you contacted by FBI agents after the 21st of April?
how much	4	how much	2	how much	4	How much explosives he was carrying?
how far	2	how far	0	how far	5	How far away were you when it detonated?
whose	0	whose	28	whose	3	Whose handwriting is that on Government's Exhibit 447?
which	10	which	6	which	7	Which portion of the document do you recognize the handwriting?
Total	646		187		566	

Table 2 indicates that various *wh*-questions are used in the direct examinations of the three witnesses. These questions are headed by various question words, including *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, *who*, *how*, *how many*, *how much*, *how often*, *how far*, *whose*, and *which*. The analysis shows that all *wh*-questions are mainly information seekers. That is, they are employed to ask for information. This sought information, in turn, functions to clarify a point to the court or as an introductory phase to another question that supports a piece of information or argument. The total number of occurrences (1399 occurrences) of these *wh*-questions demonstrates that this pattern of questioning is one of the most frequently questioning patterns used in courtrooms, particularly in direct examinations of witnesses, as is the case with the current study. The table also shows that all the *wh*-questions used in the three testimonies serve to communicate their ordinary semantic functions of asking for things and objects, persons, time, place, possession, choice, manner, etc. They, therefore, are perceived in light of this study as information seekers. According to Archer (2005), these purposes targeted beyond *wh*-questions refer to the pragmatic reality this pattern of questions is used for.

4.2 The Use of yes/no Questions in Testimonies

The three testimonies under investigation have also witnessed a copious usage of yes/no questions. This pattern of questioning is structured by the use of various auxiliaries, including do, did, does, has, have, had, will, would, could, etc. This type of questions is used in order to confirm a piece of information or to negate it. In both cases, i.e., affirming or negating a piece of information, the answer to yes/no questions is ultimately to support or undermine a specific argument before the court. Consider Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of yes/no questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
Auxiliary	Freq.	Auxiliary	Freq.	Auxiliary	Freq.	
did	236	did	111	did	185	Did he try to persuade you to participate in this activity?
does	4	does	4	does	0	Does this picture reflect the room that he was staying in?
do	138	do	109	do	81	Do you recall what years he was in the Army?
is	41	is	30	is	64	Is that the first time you had heard him discuss using explosives to blow up something?
are	10	are	2	are	7	Are those similar to the forms that you observed?
was	31	was	7	was	23	Was anybody else present?
were	19	were	2	were	20	Were you expecting the bombing to happen that day?
has	1	has	1	has	1	Has that attorney remained your attorney throughout this whole process?
have	5	have	13	have	3	Have you lived in Lockport your whole life?
had	12	had	2	had	7	Had you previously heard of this person?
will	0	will	2	will	0	Will it be easier for you to read Government's Exhibit No. 15?
would	9	would	8	would	10	Would he highlight the entire document?
could	11	could	27	could	7	Could you describe them for us?
Total	517		318		408	

Table 3 clarifies the different auxiliaries employed in the three testimonies investigated in this study. As shown in the table, the most frequent auxiliaries are *do*, *did*, *is*, *was*, *were*, and *could*. The examples in the table demonstrate the main function of this type of questions, that is, affirming or negating something. As demonstrated by the examples in the table, this type of courtroom questioning is usually employed to guide the examination process.

4.3 The Use of Tag Questions in Testimonies

Using tag questions is another type of questioning employed in cross examination in the three testimonies at hand. Crucially, the structure of Tag Questions is what gives them their coercive quality: the user poses a statement containing the proposition they wish to advance, and then the question that follows compels the listener to confirm (by affirming or negating) the proposition the user advanced. As a result, the tag that is added at the conclusion of the declarative statement asks for the declarative to be confirmed (Loftus, 1980). The grammatical form of Tag Questions, thus, emphasizes the examiner's ability to extract testimony from a witness, as further highlighted by Moeketsi (1999). Consider Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of tag questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
Tag question	Freq	Tag question	Freq	Tag question	Freq	
Is that right	27	Is that right	6	Is that right	29	He didn't spend Christmas with you and your father in 1994. Is that right?
Right?	4	Right?	0	Right?	3	Well, you know now that microphones were implanted in your house; right?
Is that correct?	2	Is that correct?	6	Is that correct?	10	He didn't spend Christmas with you and your father in 1994. Is that right?
Correct?	1	Correct?	1	Correct?	3	So you're sure this is the same letter that he wrote on the computer back in November of 1994; correct?
Total	34		13		45	

As displayed in Table 4, the three witnesses are subject to such type of questioning, i.e., tag questions, from the court attorneys. The table shows that the testimony of the third witness, Michael Fortier has the highest number of tag questions, with a total frequency of 45, whereas the testimony of the second witness, Jennifer McVeigh, has the least number of tag questions, with a total frequency of 13. As for the testimony of the first witness, Lori Fortiers, it contains 34 tag questions. In the three testimonies, it is obvious that tag questions constitute four syntactic structures by the employment of the questioning operators *is it right?* *Right?* *Is it correct?* And *correct?* It is analytically noticed also that in all its syntactic structures in the three testimonies, tag questions are argument controllers. That is, they are used by attorneys to control and direct the arguments being delivered in courtroom towards a specific meaning that targets the benefits of the

attorney, or to make an argument clear in front of the court’s judge. This is clearly shown in the examples in the above table. In the four examples above, it is clear that the attorneys direct the cross examination of witnesses towards a particular purpose. In the four examples we can obviously notice that attorneys attempt to extract some sort of confirmation in terms of a specific point of argument. The syntactic structures of tag questions, therefore, allows no freedom of elaboration or clarification on the part of witnesses; tag questions are arguments controller as they require a very short answer usually by the positive or negative operators ‘yes’ or ‘no’, or by just a confirmation by using the same words employed in the questions, i.e., by using only one word-response: *right* and/or *correct*. Indicatively, the fact that the witness can only provide a Yes/No response is evidence of the powerful role tag questions play in cross examinations, particularly in terms of topic control.

4.4 The Use of So-Questions in Testimonies

A further strategy of questioning in courtroom discourse is the employment of So-questions. So-questions, as its title indicates, constitute the combination of the operator ‘so’ and a declarative sentence that follows. They are often used by attorneys in cross examination to direct the witness to acknowledge or confirm a piece of information. Table 5 adds more elaboration.

Table 5. Distribution of so-questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
<i>So-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>So-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>So-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	
So+ declarative sentence	35	So+ declarative sentence	5	So+ declarative sentence	51	- So you pled guilty to all of the counts that you were charged with? - So you try to leave the building at 5 but they prevented you? - So you are there, in the same room, when he contacted her?
Total	35		5		51	

Table 5 demonstrates that So-questions are recurrently used by attorneys in the three testimonies under investigation. The testimony Lori Fortier witnesses a frequency of 35 occurrences for So-questions, the Testimony Jennifer McVeigh has the least frequency of 5 occurrences of the same construction, and the testimony of Michael Fortier has the highest number of occurrences with a frequency of 51. So-questions are declarative in the form of questions (Khafaga, 2023a); that is, they are not direct and clear interrogatives. In this sense they are like say-questions in their syntactic structures as well as in their targeted purposes. So-questions are often used in cross examination by attorneys to seek the confirmation of an argument. Consequently, it can be claimed that so-questions are not mainly information-seekers, but also information confirmers. The usage of so-questions in courtrooms in the research sample seems to indicate that the examiner's goal, even during direct examination, is to make sure the witness's evidence supports a specific version of events. According to Johnson (2002), so-questions summarize a witness's testimony in a way that presumes the witness would concur with the questioner's account. The examples in the data also showed that the so- questions may be used to introduce not just a new question but also the examiner's assessments and conclusions on the witness's answers when they made reference to the witness's instantaneous response to one. The witness is relegated to the role of simply filling in information that support the examiner's desired interpretation of reality by verifying such assessments and conclusions.

4.5 The Use of Say-Questions in Testimonies

Say-questions are a type of questioning that are formed by the verb ‘say’ with all it derivatives, and a declarative sentence. This type is also recurrent in the three testimonies at hand. Consider Table 6.

Table 6. Distribution of say-questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
<i>Say-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Say-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	<i>Say-question</i>	<i>Freq</i>	
You+ say/said	14	You+ say/said	8	You+ say/said	19	- You said that he stayed with you during this time for a couple of days? -You also said that you lied about having -- whether McVeigh had knowledge of explosives? -You said that Mr. McVeigh remained in the area that summer until sometime in August?
Total	14		8		19	

Table 6 indicates that say-question are frequently employed in the three testimonies, with a total frequency of 14 for the first testimony, 8 for the second testimony, and 19 for the third testimony. As is shown in the examples, say-questions are declaratively structured but interrogatively in meaning. They do not seek information; they confirm information. In the examples above, say-questions are intended to control the sequence of argument. They direct the witness towards a particular acknowledgement of a piece of argument. This type of questioning also functions as a conclusion establisher (Khafaga, 2023a). That is to say, they are usually employed by attorneys to draw a conclusion about an argument. Such intended conclusions target the benefits of attorneys and serve as a technique to clarify and emphasize

something in the trial to the court’s judge.

4.6 The Use of Declarative Questions in Testimonies

Declarative questions are another questioning strategy employed in courtroom discourse. This type of questioning is structured in a declarative mode, that is, without the use of any of the interrogation words or operators, as is the case, for example, with wh-questions and yes-no questions. In terms of question coerciveness, declarative questions rank second. Declarative questions were similar to tag questions in that the examiner made a claim that they anticipated the respondent would either affirmatively or negatively confirm. Such an affirmation could be required during direct examination in order to make things clear and support the version of the facts that the direct examiner wants to establish. Consider Table 7.

Table 7. Distribution of declarative questions and their frequencies in the three testimonies

Testimony (1): (Lori Fortier)		Testimony (2): (Jennifer McVeigh)		Testimony (3): (Michael Fortier)		Examples
Declarative question	Freq	Declarative question	Freq	Declarative question	Freq	
Subject+ complement	17	Subject+ complement	4	Subject+ complement	23	- You were married in July? - This was for your personal appearance in Oklahoma City? - You read it?
Total	17		4		23	

Table 7 shows that the three testimonies abound in many declarative questions with a total frequency of 17 for the first testimony; a total frequency of 4 for the second testimony; and a total frequency of 23 for the third testimony. As indicated in the examples in the above table, declarative questions are formed without the use of any interrogation operators; they are usually accompanied by a rising tone of voice. As is shown in the examples, declarative questions perform the same function of yes-no questions, in the sense that they require a yes-no answers without any further clarification on the part of the witness. *You were married in July?*

This was for your personal appearance in Oklahoma City? And *You read it?* In the table above necessitate one way of answering: yes or no. Similar to its counterparts, this type of questioning does not only seek information, but also directs and controls the process of argumentation. In this sense, they can also be claimed to be information controllers, and not only information seekers.

5. Discussion

The analysis of the selected data show that questioning in courtroom discourse is linguistically realized by six types or structures: wh-questions, yes-no questions, tag questions, so-questions, say-questions, and declarative questions. As is indicated in the analysis the six types of questions are used not only to seek information but also to confirm information, to control an argument, to summarize an argument, and/or to draw a conclusion about an argument. These various uses of questions accentuate their pragmatic function in communicating specific meaning within courtrooms. This correlates with many previous studies (e.g., Gibbons, 2003; Farinde, 2009; Aldosari & Khafaga, 2020; Khafaga, 2023a), who emphasize the assumption that questions in courtrooms are not only information seekers but also information confirmers. Significantly, in courtrooms, the question-answering procedure is a defining characteristic of the conversation in courts. Since it may be written as a yes-or-no question or as a wh-question, asking questions takes on several shapes. The speaker asks for a response in each instance. These inquiries are sometimes made in search of information, and other times they are made in order to verify a claim.

The analysis of the selected data demonstrates how language is skillfully employed in courtrooms to achieve particular aims and purposes. The capacity of conversation participants to interpret meanings beyond the literal definitions of linguistic phrases fosters communication and facilitates the resolution of any litigation that is being considered. This is consistent with Farinde’s (2009) argument that discursive intelligibility is a necessary condition for effective communication in a court of law. Therefore, the more skillful and pleasing the outcome, the more language is employed. This also supports Mead’s (1985) claim that language is employed in courts to support the state of defense in addition to its grammatical meaning. The purpose of this kind of assignment is to stimulate participants’ cognitive capacities.

The purpose of questions in discourse is to gather information about a particular topic, but this information-gathering isn’t necessarily objective or impartial (Quirk et al., 1985). This is due to the fact that questions might be constructed in a way that indicates bias towards a particular response. Because of this, a question may be conducive, meaning that it suggests the speaker is inclined to receive the sort of response he has anticipated or desired (Quirk et al., 1985). The analysis shows that the use of questions in the discourse surrounding the legal process has come to center around the idea of conduciveness of questions (Danet, 1980; Eades, 2000; Harris, 1984; Woodbury, 1984). Question typologies that illustrate the connection between question form and conduciveness have been used in these studies. In general, subject operator inversion produces negative Yes/No questions that are more conducive than positive ones. Therefore, asking, "Don't you like my new shirt?" is more likely to elicit a yes answer than asking, "Do you like my new shirt?" Declarative and tag inquiries, according to Quirk et al. (1985), communicate maximal conduciveness because they appear to require the hearer’s verification of the proposition contained in the question.

The analysis further clarifies that, within courtrooms, the trial’s power dynamics are reflected. The analysis shows that power is consistently portrayed in courtroom language. Participants in discourse originate, replicate, and consume it. The usage of questions is one

among other linguistic manifestations of power relations in courtroom discourse. The study has demonstrated how different power relations are reflected in the discourse among interlocutors. This power is exercised and maintained by means of using questioning. This highlights the ideological function that language has in conveying power, whether via manipulation or persuasion. This makes sense in light of the claims made by Fairclough (2013) and Khafaga (2023a) on the ideological weight of language in the communication of various pragmatic and ideological meanings. The analysis also reveals that using questioning is very indicative when trying to understand information from participants in the discourse. The investigation further shows that questions, irrespective of their types, are occasionally used in courtrooms to emphasize and validate facts rather than to gather information. This is consistent with the argument made by Aldosari and Khafaga (2020) that using questions to elicit information is not as indicative of judicial procedures as using them to clarify and/or validate information.

It is clarified in the analysis of the selected data that the distinction between the definition of a question based on grammatical and, on occasion, semantic or sociolinguistic grounds—the former primarily focusing on formal syntactic properties only (interrogative) and the latter taking into account the pragmatic reality in which the question is used—is highlighted by Crystal (1985, p. 254). Convincing their recipients to accept the parties' version of events is the overarching objective of language used by litigants and other trial participants, such as prosecutors and attorneys. This persuasion is carried out by questioning, which is employed to either elicit information or to affirm a specific version of arguments that the questioner has in mind (Gibbons, 2003; Khafaga, 2021). In this regard, Bülow-Møller (1991) shared an assessment with Jacquemet (quoted in Gibbons, 2003) stating that the purpose of questioning tactics in court is to win rather than assist the court in gathering evidence. In the same vein, Baldwin (1993) argues that questioning during a legal interrogation is more about obtaining proof than it is about discovering the truth.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the different strategies of questioning in courtroom discourse, by highlighting the various discursive structures employed to form a question between courtroom interlocutors. The analysis of the selected data showed that there are various types of questioning used in courtroom discourse. These types have various techniques employed in courtroom cross-examination to persuade recipients to accept attorneys' accounts of what happened as well as the effectiveness of responses in fending off the influence and power of barristers. The study used a corpus of a variety of extracts taken from various famous internal trials and identified six questioning patterns that are frequently used in the three testimonies under investigation, including *wh*-questions, *yes-no* questions, tag questions, *so*-questions, *say*-questions, and declarative questions. The analysis demonstrated that some types of questions used in courtrooms are strategically utilized to persuade juries and judges, confirm a piece of information, clarify an argument, threatening witnesses' face, manipulate and/or coerce interlocutors within courtrooms. It is analytically clarified also that questioning is not only used to instigate an answer or a response but also to communicate information. Questions, irrespective of their linguistic manifestations, target to convey various discourse, legal, and pragmatic functions, which in turn revealed that questioning is the most common strategy used in courtroom discourse to reveal facts, confirm information, persuade and/or manipulate recipients. Finally, this study recommends further extensive studies of the persuasion power of the different strategies of questioning in legal discourse in both the written mode (documents) of legal discourse and the spoken mode of this type of discourse. These studies might reveal findings different and/or similar to the finding demonstrated in this study, which is expected to contribute to the linguistic analysis of legal discourse.

Acknowledgement

The author extends his appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the project number (PSAU/2023/02/26019).

Authors' contributions

Not Applicable

Funding

The author extends his appreciation to Prince Sattam bin Abdulaziz University for funding this research work through the project number (PSAU/2023/02/26019).

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press. The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix (1)

Links to the three testimonies of prosecution witnesses:

- (1) Testimony of prosecution witness Lori Fortier
(<https://www.famous-trials.com/oklacity/724-loritestimony>)
- (2) Testimony of prosecution witness Jennifer McVeigh
(<https://www.famous-trials.com/oklacity/723-jennifertestimony>)
- (3) Testimony of prosecution witness Michael Fortier
(<https://www.famous-trials.com/oklacity/712-fortiertestimony>)