# Asking more than one question in one turn in oral examinations and its impact on examination quality

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## A R T I C L E   I N F O

## A B S T R A C T

The assessment of oral skills is a key part of school examination systems around the world. Typically, examiners engage candidates in a conversational encounter to elicit assessable talk. However, we know little about how examiner's elicitations may impact, constrain, or create opportunities for subsequent talk by candidates. In this study, we analyse a Norwegian dataset comprising video-recorded disciplinary oral competence exams in secondary schools. Using conversation analysis, we focus on a specific phenomenon observed in the data, in which examiners' elicitations comprise more than one discrete question—what are termed "multi-unit questions" (MUQs). We found that MUQs within the same turn scaffolded the candidates' answers, provided hints and steered the candidates towards adequate answers. However, when the MUQs were separated by more talk across turns, candidates typically addressed only the final question. When this final question provided a pragmatic context for a specific answer, it constrained the candidate's opportunity to expand upon their overall answer. However, high-performing candidates overruled preference constraints to produce sequence-expanding answers. We conclude that MUQs both afford and constrain opportunities for candidates to display competence and discuss how the current imprecision in guidelines may impact examination quality.

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## 1. Introduction

The assessment of oral skills is a longstanding component of secondary school examinations in education systems around the world. In the Norwegian school context, students' learning outcomes in different school disciplines (Norwegian language and literature, mathematics, science, etc.) are assessed through final 'disciplinary oral competence exams' (DOCEs) in Year 10 (age 15) in lower secondary school and in Year 3 (age 18) in upper secondary school. The DOCEs are high stake tests, designed to provide information about the candidates' competence within the discipline and to rank candidates by a grading system (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019a). Because grades are recorded on the candidates' final school diploma for both year groups, they have direct bearing on subsequent access to further education and career possibilities. However, despite the

fact that DOCEs are widely used, we know very little about their quality in terms of validity, reliability and fairness (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019a; Pellegrino et al., 2001). From previous research on oral tests in settings as foreign language proficiency interviews, we know that the way in which examiners approach the tests, constrains candidates' answers, and thus their performance and grade (Kasper and Ross, 2007; Sandlund and Sundqvist, 2019). As the stakes for the students in Norwegian DOCEs are high, we need more knowledge about how the conversational methods used by examiners impact the examination quality in this particular setting. The primary objective in this paper is to expand our understanding of how examiners (i.e., teachers) in DOCEs in the school discipline Norwegian in secondary schools afford or constrain interactional options for candidates (i.e., students), by addressing a particular type of elicitation, what we call 'multi-unit questions' or MUQs.

The Norwegian DOCEs consist of an oral presentation followed by a dialogue between the candidate's teacher (the examiner) and the student (the candidate). The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research provides general guidelines concerning the implementation of the exam:

> The aim with the oral presentation and the *disciplinary conversation* [emphasis added] is that the student 'shall have the opportunity to show competence in as large a part of the curriculum as possible. Hence, the examiners must *ask questions that allow the student to demonstrate as broad of a competence in the discipline as possible* [emphasis added]' [authors' translation from Norwegian]. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019b)

In addition, the ministry recommends but does not mandate that common guidelines be created for the schools in the same regional authority or county:

> Common guidelines are not required, but may contribute to securing predictability, clarify expectations, and provide a shared understanding about responsibilities and framework for the exam situation [authors' translation from Norwegian]. (Ministry of Education and Research, 2019b)

This means that any "assessable" dialogue is not produced by standardised instructions; in other words, examiners do not use a scripted set of questions. The guidelines are, therefore, susceptible to variation in practice between different schools, between different classes in the same school, and even between pupils in the same class. In addition, while the guidance implies that examiners *may* prepare scripted questions, it also enables them to improvise as the conversation unfolds. A crucial question, then, is what the empirical translation of such guidelines looks like, and how variation may affect candidates' performance.

Generally speaking, in oral tests, candidates' responses to the examiner's initiating actions should be expansive; for example, yes/no questions such as "Did you think X was good?" should be understood as a vehicle for eliciting displays of interactional and subject specific competence rather than a grammatically fitted yes or no. That is, everything that candidates say constitutes material with the potential to be assessed—as data—for evaluation and grading against the examiner's (and the institution's) assessment criteria (cf. Seedhouse and Nakatsuhara, 2018, p. 11). The examiner's actions and conduct, therefore, have a direct impact on the candidate's performance. Because the stakes for candidates are high, it is particularly important that the methods employed by examiners are valid, reliable and fair (c.f. Pellegrino et al., 2001, p. 39). Over the years, the validity of foreign language proficiency assessments, such as Oral Proficiency Interviews (OPIs), and interviews in general, have been widely debated, and many studies have criticised the weak construct of L2 oral tests in particular (Okada, 2010, p. 1647). Comparison of the interactional organisation of OPIs with that of ordinary conversations has demonstrated that there are differences in participants' speaking rights. OPIs are highly asymmetrical, and the interviewer is the one who has the power to determine turns and topics. We have observed these differences to apply also to DOCEs in the Norwegian context.

Furthermore, conversation analytic research has shown that the social organization of interview-based interactions affects the data that they produce (e.g., Antaki, 1999; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 1999; Maynard and Marlaire, 1992; Maynard and Shaeffer, 2006) and that, since interviewers' behaviour shapes interviewees' performance, interview outcomes are "co-produced" (Kasper and Ross, 2007, p. 2047; Potter and Hepburn, 2012). This research has also found that the spoken delivery of standardised surveys, diagnostic instruments, scripted questions, and interviews often deviates massively from what is written on the page, for many different reasons, including comprehensibility, progressivity, and preference organizational constraints. In examination contexts, such deviations may have unintended consequences for the person being assessed. This suggests that there is an empirical and moral need to scrutinise the interactional behaviour of anyone conducting tests and related activities, including non-standardised disciplinary oral competence exams in secondary schools, as is the focus in the current study, to examine *how* their conduct influences outcomes for those being assessed. There is very little empirical research on how DOCEs in secondary schools are carried out, turn by turn, and how examiners' questions affect interactional trajectories and outcomes.

Against this background, the aim of our study is to analyse how examiners ask questions of candidates in school oral examinations. More specifically, we investigate what happens when examiners pose more than one question in a turn and how the design of examiners' questions creates or constrains candidates' opportunities to produce what are later assessed as either high- or low-quality answers and assessable content. The extract below provides an example taken from an authentic examination, in the original Norwegian with English translation. The examiner initiates a sequence by posing two discrete questions within a single turn:

**Extract 1: Multi-unit Question (MUQ)**

| 01 EXAMINER: | Kanke du fortelle: (.) hvilke bøker du leste?=Og |
| | Why don't you tell: (.) what books you read?=And |
| 02 | hva som #var e: problemstillingen din.# |
| | what #was your e: research question.# |

In Extract 1, the examiner produces a multi-unit request containing two "WH-interrogatives" across two "turn-constructional units" (TCUs), with no gap emerging in between. In other words, there is very little opportunity for the candidate to respond to the first question before the second one emerges. Our analysis will focus on how posing more than one question *within the same turn* may impact what happens next: Do candidates respond to both questions? In what order? Or do they just respond to one—and if so, which one? We will address these questions by analysing the structural properties and interactional consequences of MUQs and consider the implications of our findings for oral examinations as a test construct and for the pragmatics of questions in interaction. While our research does not evaluate the validity, reliability or fairness (c.f. Pellegrino et al. (2001, p. 39) of DOCEs directly, it gives an empirical basis to inform such evaluation, and shaping of DOCE guidelines. In such, the empirical results of this study contribute to inform policymakers and professionals of the interactional organization of oral proficiency exams (c.f. Peräkylä and Vehviläinen, 2003).

## 2. Questions and multi-unit questions

Conversation analysts have investigated questions—their grammatical and sequential organisation, and the actions for which they are vehicles—for decades. One of their core observations is that questions exert constraints on subsequent actions (Raymond, 2003). This is because questions generally establish the first pair part (FPP) of what Schegloff and Sacks (1973) term an "adjacency pair." Any subsequent response to the FPP constitutes the second pair part (SPP)—although sequences can be inserted between the "base" FPP and the SPP (Schegloff, 2007). FPPs render a limited range of type related responses relevant (Raymond, 2003, p. 944). For example, if an examiner asks a question, whatever happens next is inspectable and accountable as a relevant response. FPPs further constrain responses, either in terms of seeking a "preferred" action (e.g., agreement) or polar response (e.g., yes/no), and/or in terms of how they are grammatically structured, in which case the degree to which the response conforms to the constraints embodied in the grammatical form ("type-conforming responses") or not ("nonconforming responses") (Raymond, 2003, p. 946).

However, questions are not always formed as a single interrogative. Many questions emerge in a *multi-unit design* (Linell et al., 2003, p. 540). In other words, speakers may produce one question followed by another before completing their turn. Multi-unit questions (MUQs) therefore comprise two or more *complete* questions, posed by the speaker *within the same turn,* resulting in two or more discrete actions that may be responded to next. The TCUs are formally designed as questions (interrogatives), or marked by one or more interrogative indicators, such as interrogative prosody (e.g., TCU-final rising intonation), lexical items expressing a request for a verbal response ('Tell us about', 'I wonder', 'I want to ask you') and final interrogative tags ('do you think?', isn't it?') (cf. Linell et al., 2003, p. 540). In literature on the topic, multiple questions have been described as "elaborate questions" (Puchta and Potter, 1999) or "expanded question sequences" (Gardner, 2004). Regarding the latter, Kasper and Ross (2007) further specify the phenomenon in focus in the current paper: turns in which an initial question is immediately followed by another or by a question increment in the same turn, yielding a *horizontal* arrangement of questions. Horizontally organised questions occur within the same turn:

Turn 1: Question 1 + Question 2 + Question 3 (etc.)

(Kasper and Ross, 2007, p. 2050, p. 2050)

This contrasts with any other arrangement (e.g., questions across two TCUs with a gap or something else between, such as repair initiation; see Gardner, 2004; or vertically organised questions; see Kasper and Ross, 2007, p. 2050).

Most communication and other guidance (e.g., research interview textbooks) advise against asking more than one question at a time (e.g., Kvale and Brinkmann, 2017, p. 165) because of the notion that it will be difficult for subjects to know how to address them. However, MUQs are readily observed in interactions that occur in institutional (healthcare, law, academic, etc.) settings (e.g., Antaki, 2002; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki, 1997; Konzett-Firth, 2019; Linell et al., 2003; Vehviläinen, 1999; Jones et al., 2016). Researchers share a finding that MUQs tend to occur in the environment of topic shifts: they have an agenda-setting function (Heritage, 2002; Linell et al., 2003) and are used to pursue responses and to pre-empt misunderstandings and dispreferred answers by guiding the interlocutor towards a relevant answer, limiting the response options (e.g., Gardner, 2004; Konzett-Firth, 2019; Svennevig, 2012). Clayman and Heritage (2002) also found that extended questions were used in press conferences as topic initiators, whereas follow-up questions were predominantly single (p. 756). The initial part of an MUQ provides contextual information that renders the question intelligible to the audience and sets a more constrained agenda for the response (Clayman and Heritage, 2002, p. 754). Other studies found that MUQs work to offer the participants an array of components based on which they may provide a selective response (Puchta and Potter, 1999). Furthermore, in OPIs, MUQs reduce the risk of miscomprehension but can be biased in

that the assessment construct is rendered unstable. For example, MUQs enable change and variation in assessment construct, in that candidates who meet single question formats may receive less support (Kasper and Ross, 2007, p. 2066).

Given that we know a great deal about questioning in the contexts discussed above, including the ways in which different designs and organisations constrain or facilitate what happens next, it is important to consider how such turn designs impact recipients in an environment in which what they say is assessed, and bear consequences in a particular way. A problem with previous studies is that they treat the MUQ practice "as one single and homogenous category and ascribe functions to the category as such" (Svennevig, 2012, p. 191). While much is known about the overall category of MUQs, less is known about the interactional consequences of different formats (cf. Linell et al., 2003, p. 565), which is our focus in the current study. For candidates taking part in oral examinations, examiners' knowledge of the constraints involved in different question formats and question design are crucial, since questions can both hinder and facilitate a candidate's opportunity to demonstrate competence, and hence the examiner's questioning habits could have bearing on the candidate's future.

Most previous studies of MUQs have examined information-seeking activities (e.g., police interrogations, courtroom interviews, maternal health care talks) wherein the information seeker's purpose is quite different from that of an information seeker in the context of an oral test. In most current studies, the information seeker most likely poses a question from a position of not knowing, labelled "K-" (Heritage, 2013), and an "authentic" need for information. In contrast, in an oral examination, it is expected that the examiner knows in advance what the adequate, correct, relevant, and assessable answers to the question may be (see Mehan, 1979, on 'known information questions') and, as such, poses questions from a position of knowing (K+). Thus, the information-seeking questions used to elicit candidates' responses are not posed based on the examiner's "authentic" need to know the answer, but rather for the purpose of gathering information about the interlocutor's subject specific competence, and to put this on record for the purposes of evaluating and marking the candidate's oral competence within the given discipline. Because of this difference between the motives behind the test talks studied here and those of conversations examined in previous studies, the current study may reveal additional functions of MUQs than were previously identified.

## 3. Data and methodology

The data analysed comprised 36 (23 + 13) video-recorded oral examinations with six different examiners across four different primary schools in Norway: two lower secondary schools (students aged 16) and two upper secondary schools (students aged 18), containing 18 hours in total (11.5 + 6.5) of recorded examinations (See Table 1).

**Table 1**
Overview of data.

| Lower secondary school | Hrs | Higher secondary school | Hrs |
|---|---|---|---|
| School West (Teacher 1): 17 | 8.0 | School East 1 (Teachers 3 + 4): 5 | 2.5 |
| School East (Teacher 2): 7 | 3.5 | School East 2 (Teacher 5): 4 | 2 |
| | | School East 2 (Teacher 6): 4 | 2 |
| **SUM: 23** | **11.5** | **SUM: 13** | **6.5** |

To measure oral skills, Norwegian students undergo final oral exams in one subject after year 10 in lower secondary school and year 3 in upper secondary school. Norwegian DOCEs assess both disciplinary content and oral competence. Oral skills are one of five key competences assessed in the Norwegian curriculum. This implies that all school disciplines (Norwegian language and literature, Science, Social Science, Mathematics etc.) are associated with specific learning aims and outcome descriptions concerning oral skills. For example, one aim in the Norwegian curriculum after grade 10 is for students to be able to "discuss the form, content and purpose of literature, theatre and films and present interpretative readings and dramatizations" (Ministry of Education and Research, 2013). Similarly, all school disciplines have precise learning outcome descriptions concerning oral, reading, and writing skills. The students are examined by their teacher (an internal examiner) in the given subject, and by a teacher from a neighbouring school in the county (an external examiner), who observes the examination and has the final say in setting the student's grade. During the examination, the candidate and the two examiners sit around a table in the classroom. The examination consists of two parts: one oral presentation on a given subject followed by a conversation in which the candidate must answer questions taken from the curriculum. After the examination, a grading discussion between the internal and external examiner is held while the candidate waits outside the room. When the two examiners have agreed upon a grade, it is communicated to the candidate, usually accompanied by a short explanation.

The examinations that form the data for this study were recorded with one 360 camera positioned in between the participants (for close-ups) and one camera capturing the activity from a distance of 2—3 m. All participants signed a letter of consent and the project was approved by the Norwegian Centre of Research Data (NSD). Data was transcribed using Jefferson

(2004) transcription conventions for conversation analysis. All instances of horizontal multi-unit questions were collected and examined in detail.

Data was analysed in accordance with the Conversation Analysis (CA) methodology (Sidnell and Stivers, 2013). From the initial unmotivated looking (Sacks, 1984) and the initial observations in the analytical process (cf. Sidnell, 2013, p. 86), we were puzzled about the recurrence of multiple questions within teachers' turns. From the initial observations, we collected instances of what we later named MUQs, that is, cases where a series of questions were produced successively in a teacher's single turn of talk, prior to any transition-relevance place (TRP), i.e., prior to any structurally provided opportunity for the student to produce an answer. The presence of a TRP boundary was established through a detailed inspection of prosodic and pragmatic features, including the timing between successive turn-constructional units. We identified 196 cases of such MUQs in our data. These were entered into a spreadsheet and inductively described according to the question format, question design, interactional environment, and the candidates' subsequent responses. By the term "multi-unit question format" we refer to MUQ and how the individual questions in this compound format are semantically related. By the term "question design", we refer to the design of the individual question (yes/no-interrogative, WH-interrogative etc.). As we will demonstrate in the next section, we identified three different categories of MUQ formats based on the semantic relation between initial and subsequent questions. All multi-unit question formats were in interrogative grammar and we did not find any instances of MUQs with declarative grammar in our data. In order to identify the interactional consequences of different MUQ formats, we also examined candidates' answers to these questions (Heritage, 1984, p. 255).

## 4. Analysis

First, we present a summary of the MUQ formats we identified in our dataset. Second, we identify types of MUQs that elicited expanded, detailed (and, from the point of view of assessable talk, "better") answers from candidates. Third, we analyse MUQs that afforded the candidates in answering the initial question. Fourth, we analyse cases where MUQs may constrain answers from candidates. Finally, we examine some potentially deviant cases, where the MUQ format undermined its own purpose. We note that it is not our intention to claim that there is a 1:1 relationship between MUQ formats and their interactional consequences, but rather to show the affordances and constraints related to different multi-unit question formats.

### 4.1. A summary of the MUQ formats

We identified three MUQ formats. The first format is what we are calling *side-ordered horizontal questions*: formats that include two discrete questions within one turn connected with the conjunction "and." Typically, this format is grammatically framed as a request ("Can you tell …"), followed by two discrete questions ("which books you read" and "what was your research question") where the answer to one question does not provide an answer to the other.

**Extract 2: Side-ordered question**

| | |
|---|---|
| 01 EXAMINER: | Kanke du fortelle: (.) hvilke bøker du leste?=Og |
| | Why don't you talk about: (.) which books you read?=And |
| 02 | hva som #var e: problemstillingen din.# |
| | what #was your eh: research question.# |

The second format is what we are referring to as *sub-ordered horizontal questions*: formats identified by a general question (which is commonly a WH-interrogative) followed by a specifying one. There is a particularizing and specifying relation between the two or more adjacent questions, where the preferred answer to the specifying questions is also a possible answer to the preceding more general question (Linell et al., 2003, p. 14). The general question is one for which there is more than one possible answer, whereas the specifying, nuancing, or clarifying question narrows the focus, commonly by providing a "candidate answer" (c.f. Pomerantz, 1988).

**Extract 3: Sub-ordered question**

| | |
|---|---|
| 01 EXAMINER | Hvordan står det til med språket vårt i dag? |
| | What is the situation with our language today? |
| 02 | Er det sånn at det norske språket blir på:virket av |
| | Is it the case that the Norwegian language is in:fluenced by |
| 03 | no:e i forhold til- |
| | some:thing regarding- |

The third format, questions organised as *alternatives,* are series of questions connected with the conjunction "or" and take the form of a list construction. Here, the conjunction "or" is a marker of a choice, and projects alternative approaches to the more general first question (cf. Lerner and Kitzinger, 2015, p. 60f). Alternatives are similar to sub-ordered questions with the exception that there is more than one specification, each providing an *alternative* approach to the more general first question.

### Extract 4: Alternatives

| 01 EXAMINER: | >Hva er det med dialekter_=Kan du fortelle litt om- |
|  | >What is it with dialects_=Can you talk a little about- |
| 02 | (.) Hvordan <finner vi ut> mellom dialekter_eller |
|  | (.) How <do we find out> between dialects_or |
| 03 | hva- .h hva bruker vi dialektene til_=>Eller hvordan |
|  | what- .h what do we use the dialects for=>Or what |
| 04 | er tilstanden til dialektene?<= |
|  | is the situation for the dialects?<= |

To see the frequency of the MUQs in the data, we made a rough estimate based on one of the four datasets (School West, lower secondary school). The distribution shows that in dataset 1, approximately one fifth of the test questions are in a compound format (Table 2), and that sub-ordered questions are the most frequent (See Table 3):

**Table 2**
Distribution of single vs. multi-unit questions (School West, lower sec. school).

|  | Single questions | Multi-unit questions |
|---|---|---|
| Student 1 | 19 | 5 |
| Student 2 | 28 | 4 |
| Student 3 | 20 | 5 |
| Student 4 | 31 | 8 |
| Student 5 | 26 | 9 |
| Student 6 | 36 | 11 |
| Student 7 | 14 | 5 |
| **Sum** | **174** | **47** |

**Table 3**
Distribution of side-ordered, sub-ordered and alternative questions (School West, lower sec. school).

|  | Side-ordered | Sub-ordered | Alternative |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student 1 | 3 | 2 |  |
| Student 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Student 3 | 1 | 4 |  |
| Student 4 | 1 | 7 |  |
| Student 5 | 1 | 6 | 2 |
| Student 6 | 1 | 9 | 1 |
| Student 7 | 5 |  |  |
| **Sum** | **13** | **30** | **4** |

In the following analysis, we focus especially on side ordered and sub-ordered questions and the interactional consequences of MUQs.

### 4.2. MUQs that elicit expanded answers

Some MUQs are used to elicit elaborate answers. These are side-ordered questions that are produced in a "Tell me about A and B" format. This format occurs in the sequential environment of topic-initiation and projects a multi-unit turn in which the candidate provides a response, first to A and then to B. The MUQ in line 01 Extract 5 (marked with an arrow) occurs in the opening phase of the disciplinary conversation and the environment of sequence initiation. In the discipline Norwegian language and literature, the students have had a specialization study, which involves reading and analysing 2-3 novels. This is common knowledge for both examiner and candidate:

**Extract 5: MUQs as scaffolds for producing expanded answers**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 EXAMINER: → | Kanke du fort<u>e</u>lle: (.) hvilke bøker du leste?=og | |
| | Why don't you talk about: (.)  which books you read?= and | |
| 02 | hva som #var e: problemstillingen din.# | |
| | what #was your e: research question.# | |
| 03 | (1.1) | |
| 04 CAND: | M: jeg leste: tre bøker av forfatteren Gillian Flynn, | |
| | M: I read: three books by the author Gillian Flynn, | |
| 05 EXAMINER: | ((*Nods*)) | |
| 06 CAND: | E: den +første: >første< boka hennes heter+ | |
| | E: the +first: >first< book is called | |
| 07 CAND: | +*lifts up one finger*                        +*silent sneeze* | |
| 08 | "Åpne sår", | |
| | "Open wounds" | |
| 09 EXAMINER: | ((*Weak nod*)) | |
| 10 CAND: | den +andre heter "Mørke rom"=og den | |
| | the +other is called "Dark rooms"=and the | |
| 11 CAND: | +*lifts a second finger* | |
| 12 | +tredje heter "Flink pike", | |
| | +third is called "Good girl", | |
| 13  CAND: | +*lifts a third finger* | |
| 14 EXAMINER: | ((*Nods*)) | |
| 15 CAND: | E: problemstillinga mi (.) var hvordan fremstilles disse | |
| | Eh: my research question (.) was how are these three | |
| 16 | tre hovedkarakterene og (.) hva skiller dem fra | |
| | characters presented and (.) what differentiates them | |
| 17 | andre ho- kvinnelige hovedkarakterer (.) i litteraturen.= | |
| | from other cha- female characters (.) in literature.= | |
| 18 EXAMINER: | =Ja, det er veldig spennende,=E: hva kom du fram til? | |
| | =Yes, that is very interesting,=Eh: what did you find? | |

The examiner initiates a new sequence with a FPP yes/no interrogative, which is syntactically produced as two side-ordered WH-interrogatives connected with the conjunction "and" ("Why don't you talk about: (.) which books you read? = and what #was your e: research question.#), lines 1—2). The two WH-interrogatives are produced as a multi-unit turn containing two TCUs with no gap emerging between them. The rising intonation after the word "read" in line 01 constitutes the first question as one TCU. However, as the teacher latches into next question (=and what was your research question"), the candidate is not given a slot to produce an answer after the first TCU. A two-part answer to the question is relevant next, i.e., the answers to (1) "Which books …?"; (2) "What research question …?".

After a 1.1-second gap, and a hesitation marker "M:" (line 04), the candidate answers the first question first, in lines 04—08, then proceeds to answer the second question in lines 15—17, complying with the course of action initiated by the examiner. The candidate initiates her answer not by naming the books she read, but by categorising them according to their author: "I read three books by the author Gillian Flynn" (line 04). She thereby organises her answer according to a key feature the books share (author), then proceeds to list the individual books. The answer is not directly fitted to the question format, yet it effectively sets up a multi-unit turn for completing her two-part answer turn, to which the examiner gives a go-ahead by nodding in line 05. Thus, the candidate uses the examiner's question as a resource for answering the question but does so somewhat independently from the question format. The candidate displays evidence of stalling to allow time to remember the first title (silent sneeze in line 07), then proceeds to effortlessly name the next two, following the examiner's acknowledging nod in line 09. With a further nod in line 14, the examiner displays acceptance of the answer so far, i.e., to her first question, but also keeps the sequence open for more, i.e., the candidate's answer to the examiner's second question. With no further prompt, the candidate answers the second question in lines 15—17. It is implicit in her answer that "these three characters" refer to the main characters in the three books she listed, and the examiner treats the candidate's answer (to both questions) as complete in line 18, with an assessment ("that is very interesting") followed by a new question expanding on the candidate's answer: "what did you find." In sum, Extract 5 demonstrates that the candidate use the side-ordered MUQs as scaffolds for producing an expanded answer.

Extract 6 shows another case with the side-ordered "Tell me about A and B" format, making relevant two SPPs:

**Extract 6: MUQs as scaffolds for producing expanded answers**

```
01 EXAMINER:        E::hm det er veldig bra,
                    E::hm that is very good,
02                  Da tenker jeg at vi kan hoppe litt over på: .h
                    Then I think we can make a little jump to: .h
03                  e: en annen den- en >tredje gruppe som
                    eh: another the- a >third group that
04                  vi snakka om< det er ungdom, =Og du eh du
                    we talked about< that's youths,=And you eh you
05                  har skrevet om e: ungdomslitteratur i
                    have written about eh: youth literature in
06                  fordypningsemnet ditt?
                    your specialisation study?
07 CAND:            Ja.
                    Yes.
08 EXAMINER:  →     Eh vil du si litt om problemstillingen din
                    Eh would you say a little about your research question
09                  og: hva du (.) kom fram til i det-=
                    and: what you (.) found there-=
10 CAND:            =Ja
                    =Yes
11 EXAMINER:        [(E:)]
12 CAND:            [E:h]
13                  Jeg hadde da problemstillingen eh hvordan vonde
                    I had the research question eh how painful
14                  hendelser påvirker (.) ungdom, og da mennesker
                    incidents affect (.) youths, and then people in
15                  generelt,
                    general,
16 EXAMINER:        ((Nods))
17                               (0.8)
18 CAND:            Og min konklusjon var det at ehm
                    And my conclusion was that ehm
19                  <folk kan> (.) eh <oppleve sorg [og> (.) eh >vonde
                    <people can> (.) eh <experience grief [and> (.) eh
20 EXAMINER:                                        [((Nods))
20 CAND:            hendelser på forskjellige måter<], og i hvert fall i
                    >painful incidents in different ways<], and at least in
21 EXAMINER:                     ((Nods))          ]
22 CAND:            de bøkene jeg leste så var det jo mange som ble
                    the books I read there were many people who got
23                  avhengig av (.) alkohol og dop og røyk?
                    addicted to (.) alcohol and drugs and cigarettes?
24 EXAMINER:        ◦Mm◦
```

In line 02, the examiner explicitly directs the candidate to a new topic ("make a little jump"), then gives a background on what this new topic is: youth and youth literature (lines 04—05) (line 06). Following this preface, the examiner sets the agenda for the next question in more explicit terms with a FPP yes/no interrogative ("Would you tell a little about your research question and what you found there"). The conjunction "and" projects a two-part shape for the candidate to fill in her response. In contrast to Extract 5, the candidate in Extract 6 first produces a type-conforming response ("Yes") latched with the examiner's turn completion in line 10, before she answers the two incorporated requests consecutively. The candidate recycles the examiner's wording "research question" ("problemstilling," line 13), before she continues to elaborate on her "conclusion" (lines 18—19), which implicitly connects to the examiner's "what you found" ("hva du kom fram til").

What we see in Extracts 5 and 6 is that two side-ordered WH-interrogatives occur in the environment of topic transition. Candidates treat this format as two FPPs that require two SPPs, organised as a multi-unit turn answer to questions A and B, respectively. When examiners produce MUQs in this format, the MUQs provide a model or a template that the candidate can use for structuring her answer, and thus the MUQs function as a scaffolding device for the candidate to develop an elaborate answer connecting components A and B in the question. This format is commonly used in our data, in which candidates show a clear

orientation to the A and B questions being side-ordered and equally relevant to the answer. In the following section, we look at MUQ formats wherein the examiner poses a WH-interrogative followed by a more specific, sub-ordered, question. In these cases, the candidate does not treat the MUQ as requiring two SPPs, but we will see how the questions provide options for the candidate, and in that regard, afford yet constrain the candidate in her responses.

### 4.3. MUQs that afford the candidate in answering the initial question

In sub-ordered MUQs, the response possibilities are narrowed, and the specifying questions guide the candidate towards a correct, relevant, or preferred answer. The cases in this category varied between consisting of one general question followed by one specifying question and one general question followed by three or more specifying questions. We show how the candidate's opportunities to answer the initial question are reduced as the sequential distance from the initial question increases. First, we show three cases in which the sub-ordered specific questions afford the candidate in answering the initial question. Then, in the next sub-section, we show two instances in which the final question is sequentially displaced from the initial one and we suggest how this adversely affects the candidate's ability to answer the initial question.

Extract 8 shows a sequence wherein the candidate is about to produce a synopsis of a short story and film called "Sky-lappjenta [The Eyelap-girl]." At the end of the candidate's elaboration (lines 01–07), the examiner takes the floor and produces a follow-up multi-unit question (lines 09–13)

**Extract 7: MUQs that provide explicit hint**

```
01 CAND:          det er sommer når hun er med han,
                  it is summer when she is with him,
02                Men så blir det høst og de:t det
                  But then it turns to autumn and i:t it
03                blir jo mer- d- de krangler, og så blir det vinter,
                  becomes more- th- they argue, and it becomes winter,
04                (.) og da har hun det veldig dårlig, (1.0) Det er
                  (.) and then she feels very bad, (1.0) It is
05                når de slår opp og sånt, (.) Men så blir det jo vår
                  when they break up and stuff, (.) But then it turns to spring
06                igjen, og da (1.0) eh >på måte< skjønner hun at det
                  again and then (1.0) eh >in a way< she realizes that all is
07                går bra. Og (.) hun er liksom mer enn [(deppa)]
                  fine. And (.) she is like more than [(depressed)]
08 EXAMINER:                                          [Mm.   ]
09  →             Hvordan +viser hun det helt konkret i
                  How does +she show this concretely in
10 EXAMINER:            +hand gesture starts
11                filmen,=I i (.) omgivelsene, (.) Husker du det
                  the film,=In in (.) the surroundings, (.) Do you remember
12                at det er et brudd når hun tar det steget ut i (.) i
                  that there is a shift when she takes the step out into (.) into
13                (0.3) virkeligheten?+ =
                  (0.3) reality?+=
14 EXAMINER:                 +hand gesture ends
16 CAND:          =Hun går eh ut fra skogen,
                  =She walks eh out from the forest,
17                [der] det er snø, [så ] går hun ut i eh byen.
                  [where] there is snow, [then] she walks into eh town.
18 EXAMINER:      [ja,]      [ja,]
                  [yes]      [yes]
19                Ja.
                  Yes.
20 CAND:          Som det er sol.
                  Where there is sunshine.
21 EXAMINER:      Mm. Hva kaller vi det når vi har noen sånn helt
                  Mm. What do we call it when we have some
22                forskjellige:-
                  completely different:-
23 CAND:          Kontrast.=
                  Contrast.=
24 EXAMINER:      =En kontrast, ja.
                  =A contrast, yes.
```

The first interrogative of the MUQ, "How does she show it concretely in the movie" (lines 09—10) indexes something from the candidate's own description in the previous turn, via "it," tied to specific film techniques. The examiner does not allow any gap to emerge following her first interrogative as she "rushes into" an increment specifying what aspect of the film she is referring to: "in the environment" (line 11). During this same process, the examiner also uses a manual gesture, initiated during the first interrogative (lines 09—11) and maintained during the increment (line 11) and the second interrogative (lines 10—14). Thus, though producing syntactically complete TCUs, the examiner also holds her turn by means of gestural as well as vocal prosody (c.f. Sikveland et al., 2021), showing that the second interrogative does not orient to an answer as absent, as with vertical MUQs (Kasper and Ross, 2007), but pro-actively (re-) developing her question to set appropriate conditions for a relevant answer.

After a micropause, the examiner formulates a second interrogative ("Do you remember that there is a shift when she takes the step out in reality?") in lines 11—13. While the first interrogative left the definition of "it" in the candidate's description implicit, the second interrogative makes it explicit what "it" refers to, i.e., "when she takes a step out in (0.3) reality" (lines 11—13). While taking the form of a yes/no question, the second interrogative includes a candidate answer to the initial base question: the word "shift" in line 12 refers to the visual resources the film producer has used to emphasise the shift in the main character's mood and may be heard as a "candidate answer" to the initial question. As such, it works as a clue that may assist the candidate to remember a disciplinary term and then produce a correct answer.

Toward the end of the word "virkeligheten"/"reality" in line 13, the examiner puts her hands on her lap and marks the completion of her question (line 14). The candidate's answer is produced immediately and latching the end of the examiner's question in line 16. The candidate elaborates on how the weather changes from winter to summer, which can be related to the "shift" that the examiner refers to in line 12, and it also conforms with the examiner's hint to "take a step out in reality." The candidate's answer fits the specifying question (lines 11—13) and is also a possible answer to the initial, more general question (line 09—11). The examiner provides acknowledgement in line 21 and adds a new follow-up information-seeking question that elicits a disciplinary term ("what do we call it"), orienting to the candidate's answer as being "almost there." By repeating the candidate's terms ("A contrast, yes") in line 24, the examiner ratifies the answer and closes the sequence. In summary, the second question in the MUQ format provides information that works as a candidate answer. It steers the candidate toward a relevant and assessable answer to the whole MUQ. The examiner orients to the production of a disciplinary concept ("contrast") as the assessable object.

Leading the candidate toward a correct answer by adding a separate question with a candidate answer, as shown in Extract 8, is a common way of narrowing the range of possible relevant answers in our data. In addition, there are other ways of narrowing the initial question. When the examiner is posing a question that sets a broad agenda, the candidate is (apparently) free to set the agenda, as well as to select content and how to approach it. In addition to leading the candidate toward the *correct answer*, the specifying question may also lead the candidate toward selecting one *relevant entry* among many possible entries. In Extract 8, the examiner nominates content for a new sequence (the specialisation study), followed by questions that point toward different entries to that content and that provide opportunities to launch a more elaborate answer. By the third question in line 13 ("Did you find some literary resources …"), the examiner points at one concrete entry, and it is this final question which the candidate addresses. The examiner's topic launch in Extract 8 (line 1) is produced after a sequence-closing third followed by a 5-second silence, which is omitted from the transcript. The MUQs are found in lines 08—12, and the sub-ordered question is in line 11.

### Extract 8: MUQs that provide one specific entry among others

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 01 EXAMINER: | Jeg har litt lyst til å høre med deg om: (.) den | |
| | I would like to hear from you about: (.) that | |
| 02 | fordypningsoppgaven ↑din ↑jeg.=Som du har hatt. | |
| | specialisation study of yours. =That you've done. | |
| 03 | (1.0) | |
| 04 CAND: | Den me::d «Vi holder livet» og «Bestevenner», | |
| | That one wi::th «We hold life» and «Best of friends», | |
| 05 | (0.7) | |
| 06 EXAMINER: | Ja? | |
| | Yes? | |
| 07 | (0.5) | |
| 08 | Kunne du sagt litt om det_=og kanskje sagt bare | |
| | Could you talk a little about that_=and maybe talk | |
| 09 | sånn- .h trenger ikke ta hele oppgaven, | |
| | a little like- .h don't need to go through the whole study, | |
| 10 | .h Men fant du noe funn som er litt sånn (0.7) | |
| | .h But did you find any findings that are a little like (0.7) | |
| 11 → | .h norskfaglig,=Fant du noe >virkemidler du kunne | |
| | .h Norwegian subject related,=Did you find some >literary resources | |
| 12 | tenkt deg å sagt noe om< eller_ [.hhh | |
| | you could talk a little about< or [.hhh | |

```
13 CAND:                                              [fant også virket-
                                                      [also found liter-
14                         (.)e: virkemidler i den derre «21. juli»,
                           (. e: literary resources in that «July 21st»,
15                         [men e: ∘jeg vet ikke jeg∘]
                           [but e: ∘I don't know I∘  ]
16 EXAMINER:               [↑Da ↓syns jeg du skal] si det først,
                           [↑Then ↓I think you should] say that first,
17                                 (0.4)
18                         Det var atte- (1.1) eh:m (1.0) eh:m «tiden flyr,»
                           It was that- (1.1) eh:m (1.0) eh:m «time flies,»
                           ((Candidate elaborates))
```

The examiner initiates a new topic in line 01 ("I would like to hear with you about …"). The candidate responds in line 04 with a clarification question, to which the examiner provides confirmation in line 06. After 0.5 seconds the examiner goes on to produce a list of interrogatives (lines 08−12), without leaving a slot for the candidate. The first interrogative in line 08 explicitly requests the candidate to talk about her specialisation study ("Could you say a little about that"), where the deictic expression "that" refers to the previously mentioned "specialisation study." The examiner continues to produce an additional interrogative in line 10, delimiting the preferred response to address "findings that are Norwegian-related/ curriculum-related." The third interrogative in line 11 further narrows the possible preferred answer to address literary resources in the given text and thereby elicits specific scientific concepts. The candidate suggests literary resources from "July 21st" as a possible answer in line 13, and in line 16 the examiner gives a go-ahead ("Then I think you should say that first"). The candidate then initiates a multi-unit turn, about metaphors that she has identified in the text (line 18 and further).

While the specifying questions in Extract 8 assist the candidate in choosing *one specific approach* when talking about her specialisation study, the specifying questions in the next case (Extract 9) are produced as a three-part list (Jefferson, 1990) with *a selection of approaches* on which it is possible for the candidate to expand. The topic until this point has been language and identity and the role of Norwegian language compared to other Scandinavian languages. There has been a sequence closing and an upshot formulation by the examiner, and now, she directs the topic toward other ways of showing identity, inviting the candidate to nominate a sub-topic. The MUQ is in lines 07−10.

### Extract 9: MUQs provide a selection of approaches

```
01 EXAMINER:      Men på hvilke andre måter har vi å vise identitet
                  But what other ways do we have to show identity with
02                språket vårt.
                  our language.
03                       (0.5)
04 CAND:          Dialekter.
                  Dialects.
05 EXAMINER:      Ja?
                  Yes?
06                       (1.5)
07 EXAMINER: →    >Hva er det med dialekter_=Kan du fortelle litt om<-
                  >What is it with dialects_=Can you talk a little
08                (.) Hvordan <finner vi ut> mellom dialekter_eller
                  about<- (.) How <do we find out> between dialects=Or
09                hva- .h hva bruker vi dialektene til_=>Eller hvordan
                  what- .h what do we use the dialects for=>Or what
10                er tilstanden til dialektene?<=
                  is the situation for the dialects?<=
11 CAND:          =Ja, E: Altså det er jo fire forskjellige grupper er
                  =Yes, Eh: Well there are four different groups
12                det ikke det?=
                  aren't there?=
```

| 13 EXAMINER: | =Jo.= |
| | =Yes.= |
| 14 CAND: | =I forhold til dialekter, (0.4) det er |
| | =Concerning dialects, (0.4) there are |
| 15 | nordnorsk, (0.7) e: trøndersk, (0,7) vestnorsk |
| | North Norwegian, (0.7) eh: Trøndersk, (0,7) West Norwegian |
| 16 | og østnorsk? |
| | and East Norwegian? |
| 17 EXAMINER: | [Mm,    ] |
| 18 | [((*Nod*))] |
| 19 CAND: | E: <u>vi</u> er da en del av østnorsk, |
| | Eh: <u>we</u> are a part of East Norwegian, |

The candidate nominates "dialects" as a next topic in line 04 and the examiner acknowledges this with a go-ahead in line 05. The 1.5-second gap in line 06 fills a slot that the candidate could have used as an opportunity to elaborate on the topic, but instead she withholds her turn. The examiner then produces a follow-up question, initiated by a general question with a slightly open agenda: "What is it with dialects?" (line 7), followed by three additional questions (lines 8—10) connected by the alternative conjunction "or" and produced as a three-part list using list intonation. These questions constitute the MUQ in this case. By posing the three sub-questions ("How do we find out between dialects ["How can we identify dialects?"], "What do we use the dialects for?" and "How is the condition for the dialects?"), the examiner suggests an open category of different angles on the current topic of dialects (see also Puchta and Potter, 1999, p. 541). In line 11 the candidate initiates her slot by presenting four different groups of Norwegian dialects before elaborating and mapping them out in lines 15—16. The candidate's answer is implicitly connected to the overall content but does not explicitly address any of the questions. The open category list is presented as an array of alternatives—as multiple choice—something that allows the candidate to select content that is semantically related. The candidate produces an elaborate answer that is later acknowledged by the examiner (not shown in the transcript). Interestingly, the candidate does not directly answer any of the questions, something that may indicate that she is treating the questions as "possible" ones in a wider collection of possible questions. The answer responds to the question "How do we classify dialects?" and here, the student implicitly resists any of the terms set by the questions and produces an independent transformative answer (Stivers and Hayashi, 2010), thus setting the agenda herself and opting to approach the broader content of "dialects."

Extracts 7—9 have shown that sub-ordered multiple questions work to secure a correct, relevant, and adequate response. The specific questions direct candidates toward adequate answers, where the examiners provide them with a piece of information that functions as a candidate answer, or a hint, or indicates relevant entries to relevant answers, without explicitly or formally answering on the candidate's behalf. This gives the candidate the opportunity to provide an adequate and assessable answer while simultaneously accepting authorship of it. By guiding the candidate toward a relevant answer, the examiner avoids leading the candidate onto a problematic trajectory, with a potentially irrelevant/inadequate answer, and having to remedy these answers or otherwise treat the candidate's answer as faulty. Since the specifying questions direct the candidates toward an assessable answer, they function as facilitative scaffolding devices. Simultaneously, by steering the candidate toward a relevant and adequate answer, the candidate loses the opportunity to provide an independent answer to the initial question, which we will examine further in the next section.

### 4.4. MUQs that constrain candidates' answers

Until now, we have shown cases where a general question followed by specific question(s) occasion independent, expanded, and assessable responses. In contrast, we now turn to two boundary cases where the facilitative function of the questions is not as straightforward as in previous cases. Our data shows that it may be more difficult for the candidates to answer the general question (base question) when there is a sequential distance between the initial and final questions. Sequential distance is observable, not necessarily in terms of time (as in seconds), but rather in terms of how the final question within the MUQ may narrow the options for possible answers, making it less straightforward to answer the more general opening question. Consequently, candidates commonly answer the final question only in such cases.

Extracts 10 and 11 show how constraining queries like alternative questions and yes/no-interrogatives might be used to secure an answer from the candidate by constraining answer options. In the following extract, the candidate has finished a 10-minute oral presentation of a book about July 21st and the terror attack on Norwegian adolescents, and the examiner is about to ask follow-up questions. The MUQ takes place in lines 10—16.

**Extract 10: Securing an answer by posing alternative questions**

```
01 EXAMINER:      ↑Du,(0.8) E::h (0.7) e::h (1.5) Jeg har lyst til å
                  ↑You,(0.8) E::h (0.7) e::h (1.5) I would like to
02                spørre deg.hhh hva du tenker om den 21. juliteksten?
                  ask you.hhh what do you think about that 21. July text?
03                .hh[h for de]n er .h (0.6) Den var tatt fra en roman,
                  .hh[h because i]t is .h (0.6) It was taken from a novel,
04 CAND:              [°M-m,° ]
05 EXAMINER:      Også er det blogginnlegg,
06                And then it is a blog post,
07                [også er]re .hhh Også eh- diskuterte vi jo dette,
                  [and it]is .hhh And eh- we discussed this,
08 CAND:          [°M-m° ]
09 EXAMINER:      Om det var en sakpreget tekst, romantekst,
                  If it was a non fictional text, a novel,
10 →              .hhh Kan du utdype litt dine tanker der,
                  .hhh Can you elaborate a little on your thoughts there,
11                =Er det- Du- Ser du noen trekk som du l- tenker .h
                  =Is it- You- Can you see any features that you think .h
12                ↓Åh, nei detta er da en roman, eller- Nei detta
                  ↓Oh no this is a novel or- No this
13                er da en artikkel, Nei- Har du- Lissom–
                  is an article, No- Have you- Like-
14                .hhh Kan du bare tenke de tankene når du lestn
                  .hhh Can you just think those thoughts while you read it
15                .hh Syns du det er en vanlig roman,
                  .hh Do you think it is an ordinary novel,
16                eller synes du det er en sakpreget tekst.=
                  or do you think it is a non-fiction text.=
17 CAND:          =Jeg syns det er en sakpreget tekst?
                  =I think it is a non-fiction text?
18 EXAMINER:      Hvorfor det da?
                  Why is that?
19 CAND:          Fordi den: handler jo om det som har skjedd,
                  Because it: is about what has happened,
20 EXAMINER:      Ja.
                  Yes.
21                      (0.7)
22 CAND:          O:g det som har skjedd på ekte?
                  A:nd what has happened for real?
23 EXAMINER:      Det har skjedd på ekte,
                  It has happened for real,
24                Mm
```

As with previous examples, the question in line 01 arises in the environment of a topic shift. The examiner produces a "preliminary" to the question (Schegloff, 2007, p. 47) ("I would like to ask you") and a WH-interrogative in line 1 ("What do you think about the 21. July text?"). In lines 03 to 09, she then provides contextual information that works as an account for the question, and in line 10 requests the candidate to elaborate on her thoughts. In connection with the previous question, in line 14 the examiner produces a yes/no interrogative, asking for literary features in the text. In lines 14 and 15 come two additional questions, the second of which invites the candidate to select one of two response categories of an alternative question ("Do you think it is an ordinary novel or do you think it is a non-fiction text?). The question receives an immediate response from the candidate ("I think it is a non-fiction text"), and this is delivered to fit the examiner's question. In line 18, the examiner produces a follow-up question, ("Why that then?"), with which she elicits additional information, something that demonstrates that she deems the candidate's one-TCU-response as insufficient. The examiner deems the candidate's account in lines 19/22 as good enough to go on (and perhaps one that qualifies as an answer for the record), and the sequence closes (lines 23–24).

What we observe in Extract 10, is how a series of questions produced after the initial general WH-interrogative ("I would like to ask you what you think of that 21. July text?"), may increase the sequential distance between the initial and final question. In this case, following the broad opening "can you elaborate on that" (line 10), the examiner moves from targeting similarities between genres (line 11), to embodying an internal response to reading (lines 12–13), to asking directly whether the candidate thinks the relevant text represents non-fiction (line 16). The latter question clearly sets constraints for the kind

of answers that will move the sequence forward. This makes it more demanding to provide an answer that orients to the initial general question. The candidate no longer has options but relies on the examiner to progress the sequence. On the other hand, by posing a question with only two alternatives, the examiner pre-empts a possibly irrelevant answer, and as such avoids potential trouble. Simultaneously, she offers the candidate the opportunity to provide an answer for the record, even if it is short and not necessarily an extended reflection as the initial question invited. But as a result, both parties need to initiate more interactional work to facilitate more advanced and independent reflections (line 18).

Constraining the answer is clearly a strategy that examiners may use to support the candidate and ensure that the sequence progresses. Extract 12 shows a case in which the candidate fails to respond to the examiner's initial narrowed MUQs, and after the gap, the examiner produces a retroactively oriented yes/no-interrogative. We show that the examiner's specifying question after the candidate's non-answer narrows the response options to a type-conforming "yes" or "no" response. In Extract 12, the candidate is on her way to producing a synopsis of a Norwegian short story called "Karens jul" ("Karen's Christmas") by the Norwegian author Amalie Skram. The MUQ is in lines 20−22.

**Extract 11: Securing an answer by posing no-tilted yes-/no interrogative**

```
01 CAND:          og da ser han at hun >sliter veldig,< (0.8) og=eh-
                  and then he sees that she >suffers a lot,< (0.8) and=eh-
02                han prøver å hjelpe henne, (0.5) men (0.6) det går
                  he tries to help her, (0.5) but (0.6) that doesn't
03                ikke,
                  work,
04                        (0.6)
05 EXAMINER:      Hun vil ikke?
                  She doesn't want to?
06                ((shakes head))
07 CAND:          Ne[i.]
                  No.
08 EXAMINER:        [Ne]i,
                     No,
09                        (0.5)/((shakes head))
10                        (0.2)
11 EXAMINER:      Hun vil bare være der hvor den er.
                  She will only be where that ((her dead baby)) is.
12                        (0.3)
13                +Mm
                   +nods
14                        (0.8)
15                Og hva fører det til=e::h
                  And what does that lead to=e::h
16                        (1.3)
17 CAND:          #Hun dør,#
                  #She dies,#
18 EXAMINER:      Hun +dør, ja. (0.2) Ja, rett og slett. (0.8) E:h
                  She +dies yes. (0.2) Yes actually. (0.8) E:h
19                     +nods
20 →              (1.0) °hv-° (0.2) hva var tanken liksom til Amalie
                  (1.0) °wh-° (0.2) what was the idea Amalie
21                Skram tror du med den teksten her=Hva er det hun vil
                  Skram had do you think with that text=What is it that she wants to
22                vise,
                  show,
23                        (2.2)
24 EXAMINER:      Hadde Karen egentlig noen sjanse?
                  Did Karen really have any chance?
25                        (0.8)
26 CAND:          Ikke egentlig.
                  Not really.
27 EXAMINER:      Ikke egentlig. (0.5) Nei. (.) Hun var født fattig og
                  Not really. (0.5) No. (.) She was born poor and
28                hun døde fattig.
                  she died poor.
```

When the candidate has finished her synopsis, the examiner poses additional questions in lines 05 and 11. When these receive short responses ("No," "She dies"), the examiner repeats and acknowledges the response in line 15, and after a one-second gap in line 23, the examiner produces multiple questions, first by an WH-interrogative that invites the candidate to reflect on the author's message ("What was the idea of Amalie Skram do you think"). Latched to this question, she produces an additional one that specifies the first ("What is it that she wants to show?"). The candidate does not answer, and after a 2.2-second gap (line 26), the examiner produces a new question in line 27 ("Did Karen really have any chance"). Unlike the previous examples, the examiner did not plan for this last question within a MUQ but produces it as a means of orientation in the absence of an answer—as in vertical MUQs. This question is produced as a "no"-tilted yes/no interrogative and prefers a type-conforming "no" response. The candidate produces a preferred non-conforming answer in line 29 ("ikke egentlig"/ "not really"), and the examiner repeats and confirms this answer in line 30 before she concludes and closes the sequence with a third position upshot formulation (Heritage and Watson, 1979) with falling intonation ("Hun var født fattig og hun døde fattig."/"She was born poor and she died poor"). The upshot formulation provides new information, and the falling intonation makes it hearable as an inference drawn from the candidate's speech production. However, the upshot contains no recognisable elements from the candidate's previous talk. It works to acknowledge the candidate's contribution, simultaneously as it highlights the assessable and close the sequence without treating the answer as insufficient (cf. Solem and Skovholt, 2019). The upshot and sequence-closing third prevent the candidate from elaborating any further on the topic. The examiner thus misses the opportunity to receive an elaborate response and, potentially, substantial information for the assessment record.

What is noticeable in Extract (11) is that the final question ("Did Karen really have any chance") delimits the response options by steering the candidate toward a type-conforming response. On one hand, this final question can be heard as a candidate answer to the initial question in line 23, and thus implicitly involves a hint, as it alludes to the philosophical belief of "determinism" within the literary period of naturalism (Determinism, 2020). On the other hand, the yes-/no interrogative secures an answer by offering the candidate an opportunity to provide an easy, type-conforming, and assessable answer. The examiner's final specific and tilted question is thus a way of pursuing the question, and securing an assessable response, while at the same time not treating the absent answer in line 26 as absent. In our data, we have observed that when the examiner's question does not occasion any response from the candidate, the examiner may choose to break the general question into smaller pieces and pose constraining ones—questions that have fewer response opportunities. This is one means of securing a response for the examiners' record (Vonen, Solem & Skovholt, in review).

To summarise the last two sections, in oral examinations, posing subsequent specific questions that narrow the initial and more general questions work to secure a relevant, adequate, and assessable response and reduce the risk of miscomprehension. The specific question directs the candidate toward the preferred answer and gives the candidate a clue/trajectory without the examiner explicitly giving away the answer. This gives the candidate the opportunity to provide an assessable answer while simultaneously accepting authorship for it. By guiding the candidate toward a relevant answer, the examiner avoids a possible misunderstanding, irrelevant/inadequate response, and eventual repair sequence. Since the specific question gives the candidate a clue about the preferred answer, it functions as a scaffolding device. When the sequential distance between the initial and final question increases, the candidate tends to respond to the final question. In addition, when the final question in a series of questions is designed as a yes/no-interrogative, it constrains the response possibilities and may occasion a type-conformed (yes or no) answer (Raymond, 2003). Such formats may hinder the candidate from producing a high-quality answer in terms of a sequence expansion. However, high-performing candidates may override the constraints set by the questions and produce sequence expansion with high-quality content.

### 4.5. MUQs that defeat their purpose

Until now, we have shown cases where candidates are not explicitly orienting to MUQs as problematic for the conversation's continuity and contiguity, yet the questions may undermine the candidate's opportunities to form independent answers. In two deviant cases, however, we see that the MUQ format does not necessarily make answering any easier, and that the candidates expose the MUQ as either problematic in some way (Extract 12) or as an opportunity to show competence beyond the MUQ design before answering the question (Extract 13).

**Extract 12: Candidate exposes the MUQ as problematic**

```
01 EXAMINER:      Og så nevner du=du sier realismen og naturalismen,
                  And then you=you mention realism and naturalism,
02                (.) .H e:::h (.) De er jo veldig tett e::::: tett
                  (.) .H e:::h (.) They are very tight  e::::: tightly
03                knytta sammen,.h men er det noe sånn:: hovedskille
                  related, .h but there is something like:: a main difference
04                som du: .hhh (.)>kan presisere der,=Hvis< vi sie:r e: .hh
                  that you: .hhh (.) >may present there,=If< we say: eh: .hh
05                sånn som Amalie Skram "Karens jul" kontra da Henrik Ibsen
                  like Amalie Skram «Karen's Christmas» versus Henrik Ibsen
06                og "Et dukkehjem" "Villanden" (1.0) hh i forhold til hvem
                  and "A doll's house" "The Wild Duck" (1.0) hh in relation to who
07                de skrev om og hvordan de: presenterte samfunnet?
                  they wrote about and how they: presented the society?
08                        (2.6)
09 CAND:          U::hm
10                        (1.9)
11 CAND:  →       Kan du stille spørsmålet på en litt annen må[te,]+Ehe
                  Can you pose the question in a different w[ay,] +Ehe
                                                          +smiles
12 EXAMINER:                                      [Ja, ]
                                                  [Yes]
13 CAND:          [Ehe
14 EXAMINER:      [Det kan jeg] prøve på,
                  [  I can    ] try,
16 CAND:          Ehe
17 EXAMINER:      U::m altså du sier e:: Amalie Skram og
                  U::m well you are saying e:: Amalie Skram and
                  ((continues))
```

The examiner's first question (line 03) invites the candidate to present the main difference between two movements in the history of literature: realism and naturalism. Latched to this question, in line 04, the examiner moves into a unit that specifies authors from the two movements. This unit has a rising intonation, and pragmatically indicates interrogative design. The following 2.6- and 1.9-second gaps indicate some sort of trouble in hearing or understanding, and in line 11, the candidate initiates repair, accompanied by laughter tokens (line 11, 13 and 16).

In Extract (12), the candidate requests that the entire question be asked again, while in Extract (13), after receiving the question, the candidate resists its set terms by asking for a go-ahead to organise her answer with a different starting point than the MUQ requires.

**Extract 13: Candidate transforms the terms set by the question**

```
01 EXAMINER:      E:: jeg tenker at vi går rett videre til de to tekstene
                  Eh:: I think that we'll go directly on to the two texts
02                du har lest jeg=Kan du gi oss et kort-
                  you have read=Can you give us a short–
03                hva- du sier det er noveller. Eh Vil du fortelle
                  what- you say these are short stories. Eh Would you tell
04                oss litt sånn kort om +handlingen og hva det
                  us a little like about +the synopsis and what it
05 EXAMINER:                    +claps
06                er som viser at disse to tekstene er noveller?
                  is that shows that these two texts are short stories?
07 CAND:  →       E: skal jeg begynne med å si hva en novelle er [først?]
                  E: shall I begin with saying what a short story is [first?]
08 EXAMINER:                                          [Det  ]=
                                                      [You ]=
09                =[   kan du  ] godt gjøre.
                  =[could well] do that.
10 CAND:          E: forskjellen mellom noveller og romaner er det at
                  Eh: the difference between short stories and novels is that
                  ((continues))
```

As we can see in line 07, the candidate initiates a repair in response to the examiner's test question. In her question "Shall I begin with saying what a short story is first?" she suggests setting her own agenda for the answer. The premise for her question is that one needs to know the features of a short story before demonstrating why certain texts may be categorised as such. The examiner accepts this suggestion in line 08, and the candidate continues by answering her own question first, then answering those of the examiner (omitted from the transcript). While the trouble source in the repair in Extract (12) seems to be problems in understanding the question, the candidate in Extract (13) redefines the premises for the questions and suggests her own agenda and independent approach to the subject. In this way, she implicitly questions the logical terms of the questions, and displays agency and competence to answer both parts of the question. The two repair-sequences demonstrate that candidates may orient to problems in examiners' question design, and that they have the agency to hold the examiner accountable for the problem—and even reset the premises for questions.

## 5. Conclusion

Despite consistently advising practitioners to avoid asking more than one question at a time, in interviews, surveys, and supervision practices, this study showed that MUQs are extensively used in oral examinations and occur in a range of different formats. Focusing on the two most prevalent formats (side-ordered questions and sub-ordered questions), we analysed the pragmatics of MUQs and demonstrated the ways in which MUQs constrained or facilitated candidates' opportunities to expand sequences of responding and produce independent, high-quality, and assessable answers. Our major finding is that two or more questions asked within a single turn worked primarily as scaffolding devices for securing adequate answers and preventing miscomprehension. However, the same practice could also hinder the candidate in displaying subject specific competence.

*Side-ordered multiple questions* (e.g., "Can you tell me what books you read and what was your research question?") occurred in the environment of a topic transition and were used to elicit expanded answers. The side-ordered format provided a model that the candidates used to structure their answers. The candidates oriented to the questions in this format as two separate FPPs that required two separate SPPs, to which they provided an elaborate answer that connected the two components in one turn (Extracts 5 and 6). Thus, the side-ordered question format functioned as a scaffold for the candidates' answer.

*Sub-ordered multiple questions* (e.g., "What is the situation for our language today. Is it influenced by something?") occurred in the environment of follow-ups and worked to steer the candidate toward a relevant answer. Subsequent questions (that follow the initial question) contained response options that worked as hints and provided relevant entries to an adequate answer (Extracts 7, 8, and 9). By asking subsequent questions, examiners supported candidates in answering their initial question, without explicitly answering on candidates' behalf. Simultaneously, examiners avoided leading candidates toward a possible faulty or inadequate answer and having to treat their answers as such. Sub-ordered multiple questions allowed candidates to expand the sequence and produce expanded answers, but only answers that fitted the examiners' sub-ordered, specifying questions. As such, this format to some extent constrained response opportunities, since the specifying questions hindered the candidates in answering independently the initiating general questions.

Asking two or more questions in one turn leaves a limited opportunity for the candidate to respond to the initial question before the second one emerges. Consequently, there may be many lost opportunities to respond during an oral examination. Our analysis of sub-ordered multiple questions showed that the opportunity to answer the initial question diminished as the distance between the first and the final question increased. When the final question in a series of questions was designed as an alternative question, or a yes/no interrogative, it sometimes hindered the candidate to provide an independent and elaborate response. By constraining the answer to a "yes" or "no" (Extract 11), or to one of two alternatives (Extract 10), the examiner placed interactional constraints on the action the recipient may properly produce next (Stivers and Hayashi, 2010, p. 2). In such cases, we found that candidates commonly answered the final question, while the initial question – most commonly one with a broader agenda that invited more reflection and expansion of the answer in different directions – remained unanswered. The candidates were offered an easy way out, but simultaneously lost their opportunity to display competence by independently producing an extended answer.

Posing constraining questions may be a way for examiners to tailor questions to the candidate's competence level. Given the examiners' (who are teachers) prior knowledge about the candidates' (their students') abilities, the interviewers may know which candidates can benefit from multiple questions, and thus design the task to match the anticipated ability of the candidate. Specific questions such as yes/no-interrogatives and alternative questions may elicit minimal answers that secure *some* basis for an evaluative score in the grading discussion, especially for low-performing candidates (Vonen, Solem & Skovholt, in review). At the same time, high-performing candidates may override the normative constraints set by the limiting question in MUQs and produce non-fitted, but high-quality answers (as in Extract 9). It is also important to consider that adapting the design of sequence-initiating questions means that the assessment is not standardized; furthermore, building expectations about students' performance into the design of questions may, in fact, reproduce structural inequalities (e.g., Campbell, 2015).

To fully understand the pragmatics of MUQs in oral examinations compared to other settings (institutional and everyday), the practice must be considered in light of the institutional goal of the activity and the (potential) epistemic asymmetry between the interlocutors. A general feature of seeking information is, according to Pomerantz (1988, p. 362), that the "information seeker's purpose (…) is relevant for the recipient's determination of what information to give." A question in an

oral exam is posed to address competence aims in the curriculum, and from an overall aim to elicit assessable talk from the candidate. However, as our results suggest, if the examiner's question sets an agenda that is too broad, it may be difficult for candidates to identify the agenda behind the question and to answer it adequately. In the case of sub-ordered MUQs, accompanying a general question by additional, more specific questions may make the initial question easier to comprehend, provide hints on what is relevant to report on and steer the candidate towards a relevant answer. In this way, the additional questions assist candidates in that they provide alternative angles on the subject at hand. As such, they serve to contextualise and frame the question—and make the agenda salient—in contrast to presenting a question from a predefined list of questions in a topically disjunctive manner, something that has been identified as a source of trouble in previous research (Seedhouse and Nakatsuhara, 2018). Whereas the initial question, as we have seen, opens for reflection and an expanded answer, the additional questions are more specific and provide candidates with the opportunity to produce fitted responses, or even minimal yes/no responses. The dilemma, however, is that the subsequent questions may prevent candidates from answering the initial question—that is, the one that invites the most favourable type of answer, and it is up to the candidate to assume agency or eventually overrule the preference constraints and conditional relevance of constraining questions in order to produce high-quality answers. This is perhaps most difficult for low-performing candidates, and reflecting on the pragmatic function and agency connected to MUQs could therefore be a potential subject of training ahead of exams—for examiners and candidates alike.

### 5.1. Implications for oral examination as a test construct

The present study may contribute to a larger discussion on test design and how multiple questions may affect the validity, reliability and fairness of oral examinations. As demonstrated, MUQs (side-ordered and sub-ordered) may function as a scaffolding device that steers the candidate toward a preferred and possibly high-quality answer. Thus, it is important to consider whether all candidates have the same opportunity to receive assistance through MUQs, in terms of how examiners balance between providing direction and giving away the answer in the same turn, for example. In their study of oral proficiency interviews, Kasper and Ross (2007, p. 2067) suggested that interviewers who use horizontal multiple questions without immediately prior evidence of the candidate's troubles with topical uptake, may potentially "bias rating outcomes by reducing the odds that interview questions will be misunderstood by the candidate." In contrast, "interviewers tending to use single-question formats may beget relatively more candidate troubles in understanding the topical focus of each question." Furthermore, Kasper and Ross (2007, p. 2067) emphasise that graders are "more inclined to hold the candidate accountable for comprehension problems made evident in vertical multiple question sequences but are less likely to infer that candidates' rejoinders to horizontal multiple questions are potentially assisted by the interviewer's pre-emptive questioning strategy." In other words, graders can possibly "punish" candidates when examiner (interviewer) expose their trouble when posing a vertical multiple question, and possibly "reward" candidates who receives horizontal multiple questions. These implications of posing MUQs are supported by Channon et al. (2018, p. 12), in that "non-response to an initial question in favour of the most specific and/or most recent question, may be regarded as not giving (or even withholding) information, even though the sequential analysis shows that there is no room given to answer the first question." Relevant to the question of validity, reliability and fairness are cases where questions carry the potential of hindering the candidate in producing high quality answers. In such cases, the examiners run the risk of data underrepresentation for the subsequent grading discussion. The possibility that some candidates receive assistance through examiners' sub-ordered MUQs while others do not, creates, as noted above (c.f. Campbell, 2015), unfairness and potential inequalities. In order to link the findings of this study to issues of validity and reliability, the next step to be taken is to examine how examiners in subsequent grading discussions retrospectively reconstruct, report and assess students' performance and compare this to what actually happened the interview. One approach may be to investigate how examiners' inferences about students' answer to a test question relate to examiners' multiple question design and its impact on students' opportunities for producing high quality answer.

However, the main challenge for oral examinations revealed in the analysis was when examiners, in attempting to produce a question with a clear topical focus, produced series of questions, resulting in sequential distance between initial and final questions (Extract 8 and 9). To improve the test instrument, the examiner may be guided to prepare a list of questions to ask all candidates and, in doing so, ensure that central curricular-relevant questions are clearly formulated. This may pre-empt possible miscomprehension and the need to reformulate and repair questions moment by moment during the questioning turn. In addition, such preparation would ensure that all candidates have more or less identical question formulations. Whether teachers actually deliver in speech what is written on paper is an empirical matter that we discussed earlier — deviations from the script are common. To conclude, we argue that being more sensitive to the crucial role that the design of questions play during the examination, and raising awareness of how the examiner's conduct may influence a candidate's outcome, will improve the quality of oral examinations, secure examiners' control over their questions, and reduce the risk of posing questions randomly. Against this background, we recommend that educational authorities take this aspect of test questions into greater account when issuing their next set of guidelines.

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