



The use of paraphrasing in investigative interviews[☆]

Angela D. Evans^a, Kim P. Roberts^{b,*}, Heather L. Price^c, Candyce P. Stefek^b

^a University of Toronto, Canada

^b Wilfrid Laurier University, Department of Psychology, Canada

^c University of Regina, Canada

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 September 2008

Received in revised form 21 January 2010

Accepted 27 January 2010

Available online 11 June 2010

Keywords:

Child abuse

Investigative interview

Paraphrasing

ABSTRACT

Objective: Young children's descriptions of maltreatment are often sparse thus creating the need for techniques that elicit lengthier accounts. One technique that can be used by interviewers in an attempt to increase children's reports is "paraphrasing," or repeating information children have disclosed. Although we currently have a general understanding of how paraphrasing may influence children's reports, we do not have a clear description of how paraphrasing is actually used in the field.

Method: The present study assessed the use of paraphrasing in 125 investigative interviews of allegations of maltreatment of children aged 4–16 years. Interviews were conducted by police officers and social workers. All interviewer prompts were coded into four different categories of paraphrasing. All children's reports were coded for the number of details in response to each paraphrasing statement.

Results: "Expansion paraphrasing" was used significantly more often and elicited significantly more details, while "yes/no paraphrasing" resulted in shorter descriptions from children, compared to other paraphrasing styles. Further, interviewers more often distorted children's words when using yes/no paraphrasing, and children rarely corrected interviewers when they paraphrased inaccurately.

Conclusions and practical implications: Investigative interviewers in this sample frequently used paraphrasing with children of all ages and, though children's responses differed following the various styles of paraphrasing, the effects did not differ by the age of the child. The results suggest that paraphrasing affects the quality of statements by children. Implications for investigative interviewers will be discussed and recommendations offered for easy ways to use paraphrasing to increase the descriptiveness of children's reports of their experiences.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

When interviewed in an open-ended manner, children can provide testimony that is equally accurate, or even superior to that of adults (Goodman & Reed, 1986). However, young children's descriptions of maltreatment are often sparse, creating the need for techniques that elicit lengthier accounts from children (McCauley & Fisher, 1995a; Saywitz & Snyder, 1996). Effective techniques for eliciting accurate and detailed accounts from children have been studied for many years including the use of structured interviews, interview location, and the use of anatomically correct dolls (Edwards & Forman, 1989;

[☆] A portion of the results were presented at the biannual meeting of the American Psychology and Law Society, in Jacksonville, Florida, in May 2008.

* Corresponding author address: Wilfrid Laurier University, Department of Psychology, 75 University Ave. West, Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5, Canada.
E-mail address: kroberts@wlu.ca (K.P. Roberts).

Gordon et al., 1993; Samra & Yuille, 1996; Shrimpton, Oates, & Hayes, 1998; Sternberg, Lamb, Esplin, Orbach, & Hershkowitz, 2002). One specific technique that can be used by interviewers in an attempt to increase the length of children's reports is paraphrasing. For the purposes of this paper, paraphrasing is defined as repeating information a child has disclosed in whole or in part. For example, if a child stated, "She hit me," an interviewer may restate the information as "She hit you." Previous research has experimentally assessed the influence of different types of paraphrasing on children's event reports and found that some styles of paraphrasing are indeed more beneficial than others (Evans & Roberts, 2009). However, little is known about the prevalence and potential effects of different types of paraphrasing in actual investigative interviews.

To date there has been one study that has explored the use of paraphrasing in investigative interviews of child witnesses. Roberts and Lamb (1999) assessed "distortions" that naturally occurred in investigative interviews. Distortions were defined as any word, phrase, or utterance by the interviewer that changed or contradicted what the child had said (e.g., if the child said "It happened *by* the cafeteria," one interviewer replied with, "It happened *inside* the cafeteria."). Only one-third of such distortions were corrected by children and, when not corrected, interviewers continued to use the distorted details throughout the remainder of the interview. However, only a small sample of investigative interviews was used ($n = 68$) and the interviewers were not trained in open-ended interviewing. In addition, no prevalence data was reported on the number of paraphrases used, the style of paraphrasing used, or children's utterances in response to accurate paraphrases.

Although no studies to date have specifically investigated the use of different styles of paraphrasing in investigative interviews, 1 study has experimentally manipulated paraphrasing styles in a laboratory study. In Evans and Roberts (2009) children participated in a staged event and were interviewed about the event 1-week later by an interviewer who either paraphrased children's statements by incorporating them into open-ended prompts (*expansion paraphrase* condition: in response to a child saying "I dressed up" the interviewer would say, "You dressed up, tell me more."), paraphrased children's statements and used intonation to turn it into a yes/no question (*yes/no paraphrase* condition: "You dressed up?") or only used open-ended prompts (*control* condition: "Tell me more."). Results indicated that children in the expansion-paraphrasing condition reported significantly more details overall and proportionally more accurate details than children in the yes/no-paraphrase condition. Thus, the style of paraphrasing used by interviewers influenced children's reports, at least in these laboratory interviews.

While there has been little research completed on paraphrasing in investigative interviews, previous literature examining the influence of question format on children's responses can provide insight into the influence of paraphrasing on children's reports. In investigative interviews, cued invitations (i.e., "Tell me more about [something the child has mentioned]") have been found to elicit more information than simple invitations alone (i.e., "Tell me more") (Lamb et al., 2003; Orbach & Lamb, 2000). Some researchers suggest that the increased information is a result of the cue (the specific detail the interviewer is referring to) focusing children's attention and fostering elaboration of essential or central details (Orbach & Lamb, 2000). The efficacy of these recall cues are dependent on accurate paraphrasing (repeating) of children's utterances. In addition to recall cueing, another theoretical possibility is that the format of the cued invitation *motivates* children to report more information. By including the cue, children may feel as though the interviewer is listening to them and cares about what they are saying. In turn, children may feel motivated to provide additional information.

Evans and Roberts (2009) proposed two ways that paraphrasing may motivate children to expand their responses. First, paraphrasing may encourage rapport between the child witness and interviewer. When the interviewer restates what the child just said, it highlights to the child that the interviewer is listening to the child's disclosure and cares about what the child has to say. This may result in the child feeling supported and motivated to disclose additional information to an interviewer that they trust. Second, paraphrasing may transfer control to children. This idea of transferring the control to the child is a component of the Revised Cognitive Interview (Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). Paraphrasing may be effective in transferring control because it highlights the child's statement over the interviewer's. Previous studies have found that children interviewed using the Revised Cognitive Interview protocol tend to report 46–84% more correct information than children interviewed with a standard interview technique (McCauley & Fisher, 1995a, 1995b).

However, we do not have a clear understanding of how paraphrasing is actually used in the field and what effects different styles of paraphrasing have on children's testimony. In the current study, we investigated the use of paraphrasing in 125 child maltreatment investigative interviews. Four styles of paraphrasing were assessed based on Evans and Roberts' scheme (2009; see Method).

The present study attempts to answer four primary questions. First, how often do investigative interviewers use each style of paraphrasing? We then examined which style of paraphrasing elicits the most information in investigative interviews. It is hypothesized that significantly more details will be reported in response to an expansion (open-ended) style paraphrase than yes/no paraphrasing (Evans & Roberts, 2009). As indicated by researchers such 'cued invitations' prompt children to provide additional information (e.g., Hershkowitz, 2001; Sternberg, Lamb, Orbach, Esplin, & Mitchell, 2001) and, as argued here, may motivate children because the interviewer is clearly attentive and interested (as revealed in the repetition of the child utterances). In contrast, yes/no paraphrasing simply requires a yes or no response and does little to maintain rapport and motivate children to expand on their responses. Rather, it can appear to be a test (Roberts, Lamb, & Sternberg, 2004).

Third, we assessed whether the effects of paraphrasing varied by age. Previous studies assessing the use of paraphrasing have not found significant age differences (Evans & Roberts, 2009; Roberts & Lamb, 1999). Additionally, work conducted on the NICHD investigative interviewing protocol, which includes paraphrasing in the form of cued invitations, has been found to be effective in improving both younger and older children's reports. Further, there are few developmental differences in investigations of motivated reporting (e.g., Roebbers & Fernandes, 2002). Thus, paraphrasing was not expected to influence

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/345004>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/345004>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)