

Response Types to Direct Questions in Two-Party Text Disputes

E. Cavill and D. Ostrowski

Institute for Terminal Discourse Studies

The manual is Table 1. Participants were not shown the codes applied to them; see Section 2.

Abstract

A question put to a participant in these channels is usually not answered, and the ways in which it is not answered are various enough to require a manual. We developed one over 1,950 questions drawn from 47 channels, coding each response into thirty-one mutually exclusive categories, of which two describe an answer. A direct answer was recorded in 214 cases (11.0 per cent) and a truncated one in 131. The commonest response of any kind was a question put in return, at 268. Two categories admit an external check: of 109 responses asserting that the question had already been answered, a prior answer was locatable in the channel in 18, and of 55 deferring the answer to a stated future occasion, the occasion arrived in 2. Four coders applying the manual agreed at $\kappa = 0.71$ on whether a response contained an answer and at $\kappa = 0.24$ on which of the twenty-nine non-answering categories applied, so the field agrees that a question was not answered and does not agree about why. We then wrote to 291 participants to ask why particular questions had gone unanswered. Forty-seven replied, thirteen of them with a question.

1 Introduction

The literature on these channels has measured how disputes end, how positions move, and how often a named fallacy is attributed. It has not measured what happens to a question. This is an omission of some size, because the question is the instrument by which a participant is supposed to be held to a position, and if it does not function the rest of the apparatus rests on nothing.

Our object here is deliberately modest. We do not ask whether the answers given are good ones. We ask only whether an answer was given, and if not, what was given instead. The second half of that question turned out to require twenty-nine categories.

2 Corpus and coding

We drew 1,950 direct questions from 47 public channels. A direct question is one put by one participant to another, in the second person, ending in a question mark, and admitting an answer in fewer than fifty words. Rhetorical questions were excluded by two coders in agreement; 340 candidates were discarded on this ground.

Each question was followed to its disposition: the responding participant's next several turns, up to either an answer, a change of subject sustained for ten turns, or the responder's departure from the channel.

Participants were not shown the codes applied to their messages. This departs from our practice and requires a word. The previous attempt on an adjacent problem, arghXiv:2510.03920, showed 44 participants the codes applied to their exchanges; 39 disputed the code they had been given and 11 supplied a code of their own, and the paper was withdrawn rather than the coding. We took the view that a participant's account of why they did not answer is a datum in its own right and should be collected as one, separately and afterwards, rather than as a challenge to a code. We did collect it. It is Section 6.

3 The manual

Table 1 gives the categories with their counts. The Latin is not ornament. The named fallacies carry Latin names because a name that is not a description survives translation into a new dispute without acquiring a fresh meaning each time, and the phenomena below have had no names at all, which is why the literature has been reduced to describing them one exchange at a time.

Within each group the order is by kinship rather than by frequency, so that the categories most easily confused with one another are adjacent: the grounds concerning the asker's own conduct, then those concerning the question, then those concerning the asker, then those placing the answer elsewhere, later, or out of sight. A coder deciding between two categories is almost always deciding between neighbours. Ordering by count would separate them, and would rearrange the manual every time a corpus was recoded.

Only one category needs no qualifier.

Four categories were added after the first pass and are worth naming as additions. *Silentium loquax* was originally coded with departure, on the reasoning that both are silence. They are not the same silence: the responder who leaves has stopped, and the responder who continues to post for a further median of 84 messages without addressing the question has not.

arghXiv:2512.07740 reads a silence of the second kind as a concession. On this corpus it is not one: the participant is still arguing, at length, beside the question they have not answered.

Signum sine verbo is a property of the medium, in which a reaction may be placed on a message without any reply being made; a response consisting of a reaction is a response, and 25 of the 52 were laughing reactions. *Quaere ipse* was originally coded with *quod vide*, on the reasoning that both send the asker away; they are not the same instruction, since *quod vide* says where to go and *quaere ipse* does not, which leaves the asker to establish what would have answered their own question. *Emendatio rogationis* was added after a coder objected that it was not a category. It was retained on the ground that it occurred 19 times.

A second revision added six further categories, each split from one it had been folded into. *Ad vocem* — an invitation to a voice channel, offered as the answer — had been coded with *quod vide*, both being a direction elsewhere; but what the asker is directed to does not yet exist, and arghXiv:2608.02840 measures what the transfer removes. *Tu quoque* was coded with *onus ad rogantem* until it was observed that alleging inconsistency and demanding proof are different demands, and that the first is satisfied by nothing. *Infra dignitatem* was separated from *negatio ad hominem*: the refusal is on the question's level rather than on the asker's, and 4 of the 18 were addressed to a participant the responder had answered on the same subject a week earlier. *Omnes sciunt*, *testimonium privatum* and *retractatio tacita* were added last, and are the three smallest categories in the manual.

A third revision added one category, split from *prius tu*. *Numquam responsum est* — the assertion that the asker has never addressed the responder's own argument — had been coded there, on the reasoning that both withhold an answer on the ground of the asker's conduct. They are not the same ground. *Prius tu* states a condition, and a condition can be met: the asker who answers first is owed an answer in return, and in 14 of the 92 they were given one. *Numquam responsum est* states a verdict on the exchange so far and asks for nothing, and in 1 of the 26 was anything put to the responder afterwards. It is placed beside *iam responsum est*, which it mirrors: the one holds that the question has been answered, the other that it was never owed an answer at all. The corpus total is unchanged and every figure in Sections 2 and following stands as first reported.

4 Two categories that admit an external check

Most of the manual records what a participant did. Two record what a participant claimed, and the claim can be checked against the channel.

Iam responsum est asserts that the question has already been answered. We searched each channel for an answer to that question, given by that participant, before the claim was made, and accepted any answer a coder judged responsive. Of 109 claims, a prior answer was located in 18. In a further 31, an answer was located to a different question. In the remaining 60 no answer was found. We note that in 7 of the 18 successful cases,

Name	Response	N
<i>The question is answered</i>		
<i>responsio</i>	The question is answered	214
<i>responsio mutila</i>	Part is answered; part is left	131
<i>The answer is a question</i>		
<i>rogatio pro responso</i>	A question is put in return	268
<i>ignoratio rogati</i>	A weaker question is substituted and answered	96
<i>onus ad rogantem</i>	The asker is told to prove the contrary	51
<i>The answer is withheld, and a ground is given</i>		
<i>prius tu</i>	The asker must answer first	92
<i>tu quoque</i>	The asker is quoted doing the same	23
<i>rogatio vitiosa</i>	The question is rejected as defective	142
<i>infra dignitatem</i>	Refused as too elementary to answer	18
<i>iam responsum est</i>	The question is said to have been answered already	109
<i>numquam responsum est</i>	The asker never addressed the responder's own argument	26
<i>negatio ad hominem</i>	Refused on an attribute of the asker	45
<i>negatio ad malam fidem</i>	Refused on the asker's supposed motive	48
<i>quod vide</i>	Referred to a document, recording, or image	30
<i>quaere ipse</i>	Told to find the answer; no source named	35
<i>omnes sciunt</i>	Said to be common knowledge; no source named	8
<i>roga alium</i>	Referred to a third party	31
<i>ad vocem</i>	Invited to a voice channel for the answer	14
<i>ad kalendas Graecas</i>	Deferred to a stated future occasion	55
<i>testimonium privatum</i>	Evidence held privately, and not produced	12
<i>The answer is withheld, and no ground is given</i>		
<i>idem clamosius</i>	The original position is restated unchanged	96
<i>copia sine responso</i>	A long response containing no answer	29
<i>risus pro argumento</i>	A laugh, entire	78
<i>signum sine verbo</i>	A reaction placed on the question; no reply	52
<i>emendatio rogationis</i>	The question's spelling is corrected	19
<i>ad spectatores</i>	The reply is addressed to the onlookers	66
<i>retractatio tacita</i>	The claim is deleted; the question loses its subject	12
<i>silentium loquax</i>	Participation continues; the question is not addressed	116
<i>exit ante responsum</i>	The responder leaves the exchange	24
<i>exclusio rogantis</i>	The asker's access to the responder is withdrawn	6
<i>Not verifiable</i>		
<i>alibi responsum est</i>	An answer is said to have been given elsewhere	4
		1,950

Table 1: The manual, with counts. Categories are mutually exclusive; where a response satisfied two, the earlier row was applied.

the answer had been given more than four months earlier in a different channel, and we have counted these as found.

Ad kalendas Graecas defers the answer to a stated future occasion: an evening, a weekend, a recording to be made. We followed each of the 55 for ninety days. The occasion arrived in 2. The median deferral, among the 53 that did not arrive, was expressed as three days.

5 Agreement

Four coders applied the manual to the same 300 responses. On the first question the manual asks — was an answer given — they agreed at $\kappa = 0.71$. On the second — which of the twenty-nine non-answering categories applies — they agreed at $\kappa = 0.24$, and on 61 of the 300 returned four different categories.

We report both figures because the gap between them is the finding. The categories are not difficult to tell apart in principle; the difficulty is that a single response frequently satisfies four of them at once, and the coder must choose which the responder was chiefly doing. That is a question about intent, and the manual does not contain the answer to it. Neither, on the evidence of Section 6, do the participants.

6 The questionnaire

We wrote to 291 participants whose questions had gone unanswered in the corpus, quoting the question and asking, in one sentence, why no answer had been given.

Forty-seven replied. Thirteen replied with a question, nine of them asking why we wanted to know. Six stated that they had answered, and in one case they had. Four described the original question as not having been a real question. Two supplied an answer to the original question, four months and eleven months after it was asked; we have not coded these, as the corpus was closed. Ten did not address the question we had asked.

The remaining twelve replies gave a reason, and the reasons do not fall into groups. They are reproduced in Appendix B.

7 Limitations

An answer given in a private message, or in a channel outside the corpus, is invisible to us. We coded 4 responses as *alibi responsum est* where the responder said this had happened. We cannot check them, and we have not treated them as either answers or non-answers. If the practice is common, our figure for *responsio* is too low, and we can say only that the participants who told us an answer existed elsewhere were four.

A block leaves no trace. We coded 6 responses as *exclusio rogantis*, in every case because the asker said in the channel that they had been blocked; a block that goes unremarked is indistinguishable from a responder who has stopped replying, and the figure is a floor of unknown depth. The muted case is worse than the blocked one. The responder continues to read the channel, the asker continues to put the question to someone for whom it does not appear, and what the transcript records is a *silentium loquax* with the wrong participant assigned to it. We do not know how many of the 116 are that, and neither, in the muted case, does the asker.

The corpus is public channels. Whether a question is answered more often where it cannot be seen is a question we are not able to put.

8 Discussion

A direct answer was given to 11.0 per cent of direct questions. The instrument by which one participant is supposed to hold another to a position functions, on this measurement, about one time in nine.

We had expected the residue to be silence, and it is not. Silence in the ordinary sense — departure — accounts for 24 of 1,950. The responder is almost always still there, still typing, and still, by the count in

Section 3, posting a further 84 messages. What is withheld is not participation. It is the answer, and only the answer, and the participant continues in every other respect as before.

We do not offer an account of why. We offer twenty-nine names for it, on the view that a thing which happens 1,605 times in a corpus of 1,950 should at least be possible to refer to.