

Experiment – Quien

Description: the participants play a version of the game “Who am I?” in which one of them (the “questioner”) has to guess the identity of a person that only the other (the “knower”) knows.

Objectives: to elicit basic and natural forms of pronominal and polar questions, and of declaratives uttered with a maximum of epistemic certainty from a semi-spontaneous discourse.

Participants

Speakers: 2

Researchers: 2 (“technician” + “moderator”)

Materials and preparation

The researchers prepare a number of small cards. On each card, the name of a person that should be known to both speakers is written. This could be either a very famous public personality (current or historical), or some locally well-known person, or even one of the people present at the recording (e.g. one of the two researchers, if the relationship between researchers and speakers is amicable enough). 2-4 such cards are enough.

How to do it

The moderator gives one of the cards to one of the speakers (the “knower”), so that the other (the “questioner”) can’t see the name written on it. The moderator explains to the speakers their different roles: the knower now knows the name of the person that the questioner has to guess. The questioner has to try and find out who the person is using only questions. They can ask polar or pronominal questions, and the knower has to respond truthfully, to the best of their knowledge, but only directly answering the question, without giving away any additional information. The only questions that are not allowed are the pronominal ones that ask directly for the identity of the person (“who is it?” or “what’s the name on the card?”, etc.), but polar questions asking directly whether it is some person or other are allowed (“is it person X?” etc.). When the questioner has come to an impasse or doesn’t know how to go on, the knower may give them small hints or advice. If this doesn’t happen by itself anyway in such a situation, the moderator can suggest it to the knower. The game is over when the questioner has managed to guess the correct identity of the person on the card. Everything is recorded, from the beginning of the moderator’s explanations, until the end of the discussion that may follow the revelation of the name on the card. In the complementary recording session in the other language, the speakers should change roles, so that each is questioner and knower once.