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Moerman, G.A.

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Probing Behaviour in Open Interviews

A Field Experiment on the Effects of Probing Tactics on Quality and Content of the Received Information

Gerben Moerman

This dissertation is focussed on the tactic the interviewer uses while probing. A probing tactic is an interviewer stance towards the answers of the respondent and the reaction following from this stance. In this research three different probing tactics are distinguished: the accommodating, the encouraging and the challenging.

A field experiment with 36 interviewers was held to determine whether these probing tactics have an effect on the quality and content of the received information. In order to tackle any possible topic-dependency of the effects of the probing tactics, in each of the 214 interviews three different topics of social categorisation: 'Amsterdammers', friends and 'allochthons'.

The results of this study are remarkable considering what is known about effects of interviewer behaviour in closed interviews and what is often supposed in literature on open interviewing.