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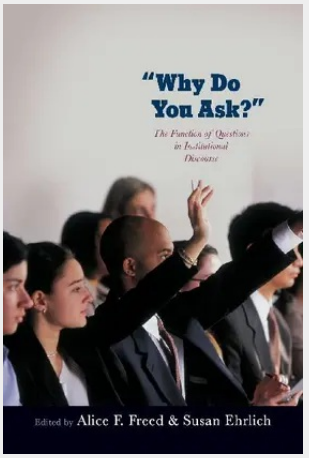
Why Do You Ask?

The Function of Questions in Institutional Discourse



The act of questioning is the primary speech interaction between an institutional speaker and someone outside the institution. These roles dictate their language practices. "Why Do You Ask?" is the first collected volume to focus solely on the question/answer process, drawing on a range of methodological approaches like Conversational Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Discursive Psychology, and Sociolinguistics-and using as data not just medical, legal, and educational environments, but also less-studied institutions like telephone call centers, broadcast journalism (i.e. talk show interviews), academia, and telemarketing. An international roster of well-known contributors addresses such issues as: the relationship between the syntax of the question and its discourse function; the kind of institutional work that questions perform; the degree to which the questioner can control the direction of the conversation; and how questions are used to repackage responses, to construct meaning, and to serve the institutional goals of speakers. Why Do You Ask? will appeal to linguists and others interested in institutional discourse, as well as those interested in the grammatical/pragmatic nature of questions.

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