

# Theories of the Response Process

Interactionist approach  
Respondent motivation  
Dual-mode theories  
Processing stages

# Government spending questions

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I am going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. Are we spending too much money, too little money, or about the right amount of money on...

- National defense?
- Education?
- Health care?
- Aid to the poor?

# Survey motivations

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- # Surveyor: to obtain information
  - Be clear about the research question
  - Establish the range of uncertainty
- # Respondent
  - To cooperate
  - To provide accurate information
  - To furnish helpful answers
  - To minimize effort
  - To make a favorable impression

# Surveys as conversations

## # Pragmatics

- Grice's conversational maxims
  - Cooperation
  - Relevance
  - Nonredundancy
- Speculation about motivation

## # Social convention

- Conversation as a joint enterprise of creating meaning

# Dual mode theories

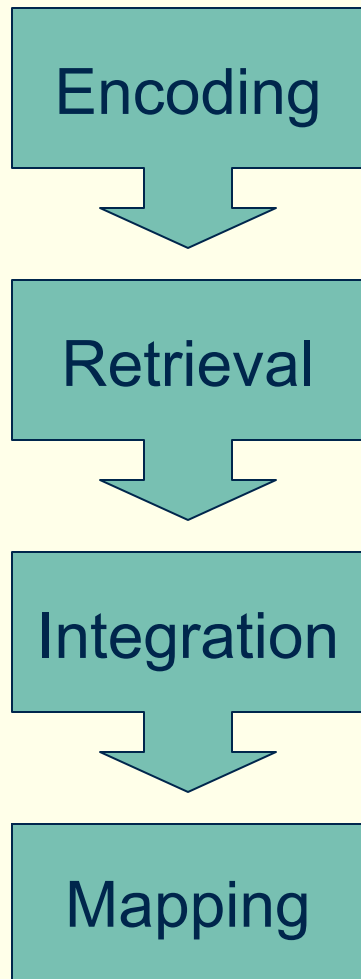
## # Optimal response strategy

- Careful attention to the question
- Complete memory search
- Full and equal consideration of all response options
- Careful integration of information according to optimal judgment strategy
- Considering each question independently

## # Satisfactory response strategy

- Understanding the gist of the question
- Retrieval of a few pieces of relevant information from memory
- Application of heuristics or other mental labor-saving devices
- Considering response options serially until a reasonably good one is encountered
- Using prior questions, or other features of the survey context, to interpret questions and/or choose reasonable responses

# Processing Stages In Survey Response



“Do you favor or oppose stricter gun control laws?”

“Stricter gun control laws” =  
private citizens cannot own handguns

Japan has gun control and low crime  
Rush Limbaugh opposes gun control

1 strong positive + 1 mild negative =  
slightly positive evaluation of gun control

“I favor stricter gun control laws”

# Linguistic understanding (Encoding)

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- # Mental representation
- # Lexical association
- # Syntactic comprehension
- # Inference

# Question problems

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## # Ambiguity

- Question is open to multiple interpretations

## # Complexity

- Cognitive burden

## # Specialized terminology

- Social science jargon

## # Vagueness

- Unclear if a certain object fits the term