

A Corpus-Based Approach to Interrogatives as a Pragmatic Strategy in Twitter(X) Children-Related Interactions

ABSTRACT:

Social media has become a veritable vanguard to raise awareness, activism, and shape public opinion, but how users employ linguistic devices to create awareness and amplify children's concerns has hitherto been less studied. This paper examines the use of interrogatives as a pragmatic strategy in X interactions about children, with the aim of identifying the predominant forms of interrogative use, the discourse issues they index, and their pragmatic functions within the affordance of the asynchronous discourse context. Data for the study were part of a larger project corpus of 285,015 tweets with 2,819,696 tokens collected between July 2023 and July 2024 using the Apify Twitter Scraper. The study adopted a mixed method of corpus-based methodologies and qualitative discourse analysis (QDA) as data were coded and sorted using Laurence Anthony's AntConc by identifying 22,299 interrogative sentences and subjected to pragma-discourse analysis using aspects of Mey's Pragmatic Act Theory. Findings reveal two main forms of interrogative in the discourse: open and closed interrogatives. These interrogative forms characterised security, indoctrination, and sex-related discourse issues through SSK, REF, REL, MPH, to express communicative functions such as condemning, indicting, and accusing. The study concludes that some X users strategically use question style to convey their emotionally driven intentions while expressing their opinions on children-related issues.

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Interrogative, Pragmatic
function, Asynchronous
discourse



Introduction

The experiences of children around the world frequently require different forms of advocacy to ensure systemic change. Children face overwhelming challenges: unprecedented levels of global hunger, war and living in conflict zones, disrupted education, child labour and abuse, high child mortality, trafficking, sex-related exploitation, and other adversities (Buhre, 2023; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011; Olajimbiti, 2022, 2025; UNICEF, 2023). These multifaceted threats position children as among the most vulnerable social groups globally. In the contemporary networked society, individuals, both as private citizens and via social media platforms, have entered a new phase of problem-solving around contentious social issues (Hodzi & Zihnioglu, 2024). The digital era allows for the rapid dissemination of ideas and awareness-raising efforts. Through this digital means, many people and organizations choose to raise awareness as a form of social movement to seek relief for children and to challenge unfair systems, practices, and structures affecting them (Earl et al., 2022). As Bimber et al. (2005) note, social

media enable individuals to express personal ideas about contentious issues and provide opportunities for others in the network to participate in activities tied to those issues.

From a theoretical communication standpoint, online interactions are considerably studied in the domain of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which bifurcates into synchronous and asynchronous communication. Synchronous communication involves real-time messaging and immediate feedback; asynchronous communication allows users to engage at their convenience and provides time for reflection but may also reduce immediacy and social cues. Research on asynchronous CMC (such as email or discussion forums) highlights that users may appreciate time to reflect and respond, but also may feel less immediacy, experience longer threads and lack non-verbal cues. In social media contexts, much interaction is asynchronous (tweets, retweets, comments) and, importantly for our study, children-related awareness posts tend to adopt the asynchronous mode: users post, the network reacts later, the conversation unfolds over time rather than live. Importantly, the rhetorical and pragmatic potential of social media posts (asynchronous) is distinct from face-to-face conversation. Messages can be crafted, edited, broadcast broadly, augmented by hashtags or links, and engage unknown audiences. The affordances of anonymity or distance may encourage more open sharing or advocacy. In the children-rights domain, social media campaigns provide a channel to amplify voices about children's issues, raise public awareness, prompt policy attention, and mobilize publics.

In the children-rights context, professional organizations using social media for advocacy, such as health-professionals using #putkids1st on X, demonstrate how digital advocacy can merge public policy goals and connective action (Wood et al., 2023). Sandberg et al. (2025) note the importance of treating children as rights-holders in the digital environment and exploring how policy changes impact their experiences. Another perspective is how digital media have become central in the terrain of children's welfare activism. In this vein, Kolawole (2024) demonstrates that social media users report child-rights content on platforms such as Facebook, X, and Instagram where awareness campaigns, mobilization efforts, and community-building for children's rights and welfare take place.

However, the linguistic dimension, particularly how questions are crafted and used in children-related digital discourse, remains under-explored. By focusing on interrogatives in asynchronous social media interactions on X, this study fills an important gap at the intersection

of pragmatics, digital communication, and children's rights advocacy. To this end, this paper examines the use of interrogatives in online children-related interactions on X, with the objectives of identifying the predominant interrogative forms in the sampled data, examining the discourse issues that these interrogatives index, and analyze their pragmatic functions within the affordances of asynchronous discourse context. Investigating this from a corpus-based perspective provides empirical grounding for understanding how questions function as pragmatic tools of advocacy, mobilization, and awareness in the digital children-rights domain.

Interrogatives as a Pragmatic Strategy in Discourse

The term interrogative relates to “the syntactic structure which typically performs the communicative function of questioning” (Ivanova, 2020, p.502). The use of interrogatives within discourse is a powerful pragmatic strategy. Linguistic and discourse-analytic research shows that interrogative sentences serve purposes beyond mere information-seeking: they can request confirmation, express suggestions, challenge assumptions, mobilize interlocutors, perform rhetorical functions, or index shared evaluation. Studies have claimed that interrogatives perform different functions subject to the speaker's intention in the speech event because different contextual factors determine the communicative intention of a speaker. In essence, interrogatives bridge the gap between grammatical form and communicative purpose.

In discourse analysis, Oyeleye and Ayodele (2012) note that interrogatives function as discursive strategies in institutional and political settings by operating in two main ways; as “elicitation and directive” (p. 125). In their view, interrogatives used as elicitation are primarily information-seeking, aimed at obtaining clarification, confirmation, or new knowledge from interlocutors. Conversely, when used as directives, interrogatives serve an action-seeking purpose, often compelling respondents to act, respond, or justify a position. Through these functions, interrogative utterances in institutional discourse become powerful tools for managing interaction, expressing dominance, and dictating the direction of communicative exchange.

Similarly, Mowarin and Oduaran (2014) undertake a contrastive investigation of wh-interrogatives in English and the Nigerian Pidgin, adopting Chomsky's Minimalist Program within transformational grammar as the theoretical framework. Their study employs a pedagogical approach to explore the syntactic and functional structures of wh-interrogatives in the two languages, with particular attention to the linguistic situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

The analysis identifies the various wh-words and phrases, as well as the constraints governing wh-movement in English and Nigerian Pidgin. The study concludes that that proficient speakers of Nigerian Pidgin often encounter challenges in acquiring English wh-interrogatives as a second language. Consequently, the authors emphasise contrastive analysis as a valuable pedagogical tool for addressing semi-literacy challenges in English within the Nigerian educational context. This underscores that interrogatives can serve pedagogical, persuasive, and rhetorical purposes, depending on the context and the participants intentions.

Huddleston (1994) and Ivanova (2020) identify two types of interrogatives: open and closed. Open interrogatives are formed with “wh” elements and allow a range of answers, whereas closed interrogatives are formed by placing the auxiliary (or adding a dummy auxiliary) before the subject (polar and alternative questions). Both open and closed interrogatives can be used to get either information or direction. This classification is adopted in the present study. The pragmatic role of interrogatives has been demonstrated using the speech act theory (Onea et al., 2019) because questions have become a prominent topic in discourse. Sultonqulova (2024) examined the pragmatic features of interrogative sentences and found out that they realise a variety of speech-acts (representative, directive, expressive) and function as strategic communicative moves. Rhetorical questions, for instance, convey the speaker’s attitude or stance. The same interrogative sentence may have different subtle interpretations. “Are you serious?” The real communicative intention is dependent on contexts (context-dependent pragmatic functions): creating emphasis, expressing attitudes, signaling doubt, asking question, caution, etc. Interrogatives can help to fill gaps in readers’ knowledge by urging them to obtain missing information (Ivanova, 2020).

Despite this body of work on interrogatives in spoken or educational discourse, there is a scarcity of research investigating how interrogative forms are employed in asynchronous digital social media settings, particularly around children-rights or children-welfare discourses. This is the focus of this study as it adopts Mey’s (2001) pragmatic act theory to account for the pragmatic functions of interrogatives in children-related interactions on X.

Theoretical orientation

This study is grounded in Mey’s (2001) pragmatic act theory which is also known as the Theory of Pragmeme. Pragmatic Act Theory (henceforth, PAT) was developed by Mey (2001) following his criticism of speech act theory for not being an action-based theory. The theory is,

therefore, an action-based theory that stresses the significance of context (socio-cultural and situational factors) in the construction and interpretation of meaning in discourse. Mey (2001) contends that every utterance performs a pragmatic act (pract) which is realised within a specific context.

Following Mey's conceptualization of PAT, Odebunmi et al (2010, p. 3) argue that PAT is "a theory of action which situates speech acts in their appropriate socio-cultural contexts, so that the acts become instantiated pragmatic acts". This implies that pragmatic act theory draws from the socio-cultural interactional pragmatics that "underscores the importance of allowing socio-cultural context into linguistic analysis" (Kecskes, 2010, p. 2889). PAT focuses on the environment or context of a speech event. A core concept in the PAT is *pragmeme* – speech acts in context which carry intentions and make discourse participants interpret the intentions appropriately (Capone & Graci, 2024, p. 3). An instance of *pragmeme* is called "*pract*". Mey (2001) proposes a model of PAT where the *pragmeme* is divided into two parts; activity and textual part with each having different optional components as seen below:

Figure 1. *Mey's Model of Pragmatic Act (Mey, 2001, p. 222)*

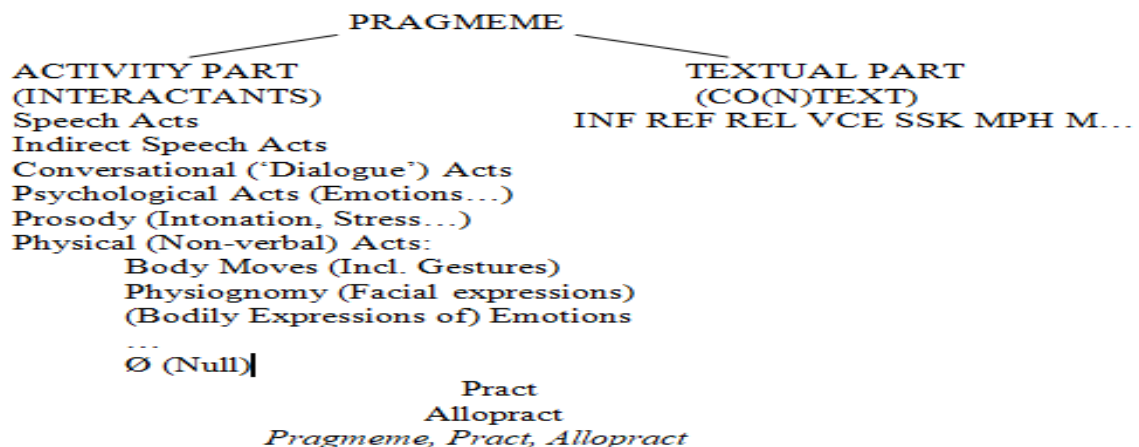


Figure 1 above indicates that the activity part offers language users a list of possible options to choose from in communicative encounters, while the textual part deals with the context or co-text of an utterance. PAT is considered useful to the analysis of interrogatives as a pragmatic strategy in Twitter(X) Children-related interactions because it offers us the affordances to appropriately

account for meaning based on the socio-cultural contexts of the interactions.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method research design: corpus-based quantitative techniques and qualitative pragma-discourse analysis. Specifically, the quantitative corpus approach provided frequency and distributional insights into interrogative forms, while the qualitative component offered an interpretive account of their communicative functions within the affordances of the asynchronous discourse context. Data for this study were part of a larger research corpus comprising 285,015 tweets containing 2,819,696 tokens, collected between July 2023 and July 2024. They were collected using the Apify Twitter Scraper, an automated web-based data extraction tool that allows for systematic retrieval of posts from the X platform through specified keywords and hashtags. All data were obtained from publicly accessible posts on X and to maintain ethical standards, usernames, personal identifiers, and metadata were anonymized in accordance with standard research protocols for social media data (Beninger et al., 2014). Tweets were filtered to ensure they were written in English, authored by active X-users, and contextually-related to children's issues; thereby realizing thematically coherent corpus suitable for both quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Through AntConc's search query and regular expression tools, 22,299 interrogative sentences were identified. The identification was based on both syntactic (containing interrogative markers such as *wh* elements and auxiliary inversion) and punctuation cues (question marks). Each instance was subsequently reviewed manually to ensure the exclusion of fragmentary forms that did not serve pragmatic interrogative functions. The interrogatives were then classified into two primary forms: open (*wh*-) interrogatives and closed (yes/no) interrogatives (Quirk et al., 1985; Culpeper & Kytö, 2010; Ivanova, 2020). This categorization formed the quantitative basis for subsequent frequency analysis and the qualitative interpretation of pragmatic use. The qualitative aspect was foregrounded by Mey's (2001) Pragmatic Act Theory (PAT). Using this framework, interrogatives were analyzed in terms of their activity types and pragmeme structures, with emphasis on inferential acts and the praxs realised through specific linguistic and contextual clues. Generally, the adopted approach enabled both statistical and contextual dimension to how X users strategically deploy interrogatives to index social concerns on issues affecting children.

Data Analysis and Findings

The analysis is ordered into two sections. The first section (4.1) addresses content analysis of interrogatives, the second (4.2) focuses on discourse issues and communicative functions of interrogatives.

Content analysis of interrogatives

Two forms of interrogatives identified in the corpus are open and closed interrogatives. Indicators of open interrogatives include what, how, who, why, when and where; while those of closed interrogatives are do, indirect questions (using a question mark at the end of a statement or declarative sentence, embedding, if-constructions and but-constructions), and modal auxiliary. These prominently featured in the keyword analysis of the corpus. The keyword of the data has 794 hits (cf. Figure 2), with “children” ranked third, with a target frequency of 67336, a keyness (likelihood) of 2330.454 and a keyness (effect) of 0.047. For reasons of space, only the keyness analysis of the indicators for interrogatives is presented in the following table.

Figure 2: *Keyword of the Corpus*

Type	Rank	Freq_Tar	Freq_Ref	Range_Tar	Range_Ref	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
19	their	19	14592	146	1	725.611	0.010
20	can	20	8044	10	1	725.385	0.006
21	trafficking	21	6533	0	1	665.120	0.005
22	like	22	6273	1	1	625.137	0.004
23	representation	23	7566	18	1	624.969	0.005
24	don	24	6134	0	1	624.455	0.004
25	what	25	7704	23	1	609.064	0.005
26	just	26	6093	1	1	606.851	0.004
27	victim	27	5933	0	1	603.971	0.004
28	how	28	6280	4	1	596.478	0.004
29	rape	29	5744	0	1	584.712	0.004
30	about	30	8385	42	1	576.956	0.006
31	peace	31	5789	2	1	565.424	0.004
32	kids	32	5003	0	1	509.217	0.004
33	my	33	4841	0	1	492.714	0.003
34	us	34	4827	0	1	491.288	0.003
35	will	35	8163	63	1	473.886	0.006

Table 1

Interrogative Indicators on the Keyword List

S/N	Word	Rank	Frequency Target	Frequency Reference	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
1	what	25	7704	23	609.064	0.047
2	how	28	6280	4	596.478	0.005

3	why	37	4424	0	450.240	0.003
4	do	65	6600	91	255.439	0.005
5	but	68	8261	146	244.874	0.006
6	did	93	2101	6	167.462	0.001
7	when	110	5018	89	147.959	0.004
8	is	362	35796	1554	53.774	0.025
9	who	548	3001	5	35.595	0.001
10	where	679	2009	3	157.235	0.001

Table 1 shows that these indicators are prominent words in the corpus, with keyness of “what” and “do” in each category indicated by their values. It is important to note that “if-construction” does not fall within the keyword in the corpus. The manual reading of the data and the KWIC further reveal that not all instances of the indicators fall within the focus of this study, that is, not all are used in the context of interrogation. These procedures further reveal actual instances where these indicators were used interrogatively and the statistics are shown in the table below.

Table 2

Corpus Findings of Interrogative Indicators in the Dataset

Open 72.5%	Indicator	Frequency	Percentage
	Who	2,500	15.5
	Why	3,907	24.2
	What	3,625	22.4
	Where	1,058	6.5
	How	2,627	16.3
	When	2,453	15.1
	Total	16,170	100

Closed 27.5 %	Do	1,107	18.1
	Indirect question	4,302	70.2
	Modal aux	720	11.7
	Total	6,129	100
	Ground Total	22,299	

Note. Percentages within the "Open" and "Closed" sub-categories are calculated relative to their respective sub-totals. Grand total reflects the complete volume of interrogative indicators analyzed across the corpus text.

Figure 3. Concordance Line of “why” Interrogatives

Target Corpus

Name: Twitter_corpus

Files: 1

Tokens: 2819696

Twitter 1.txt

Reference Corpus

Name: Child act UK

Files: 1

Tokens: 147081

Children Act UK.txt

KWIC

Plot

File View

Cluster

N-Gram

Collocate

Word

Keyword

Wordcloud

Total Hits: 4424

Page Size

100 hits

101 to 200 of 4424 hits

	File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
1	Twitter 1.txt	Nigel_Farage Good, hope they don't stop, about time,	Why	are you acting like this is the first time,
2	Twitter 1.txt	but tomorrow I may identify as a trans man. "@PeoplesMomentum	Why	are you against children being children? Unless you can
3	Twitter 1.txt	relocate to Nigeria with your family since Nigeria is working,	Why	are you and your children enjoying abroad in a
4	Twitter 1.txt	worst. "@ErikNelson5 @iFightForKids @JoeBiden Fetus is literally Latin for offspring,	Why	are you anti-children? Just another leftist eugenicist, https://
5	Twitter 1.txt	rafficking children My God you're disgusting POS" @NateBakerMO @TheRickWilson	Why	are you asking Rick? You should be asking tRump
6	Twitter 1.txt	you looking at, my dear daughter? -This is Ukraine. -And	why	are you crying? -I want to go back there. -
7	Twitter 1.txt	children well out of the way of sniffing Biden . Also	why	are you entertaining this degenerate at all . He's
8	Twitter 1.txt	cos there's a pandemic of horrible parents out there,	Why	are you fixing lashes on a child? Saw one
9	Twitter 1.txt	border to sex & or slave trafficking or Trump. @GavinNewsom	Why	are you forcing California schools to abuse children??? Isn'
10	Twitter 1.txt	his 4 wives and all children in the same house. @Waspapping_	Why	are you happy ? Let them continue looting their brothers
11	Twitter 1.txt	our country, the individual, & bad for the enemy. @wilderpatriot	WHY	ARE YOU HAVING CHILDREN YOU CANT RAISE OR TAKE
12	Twitter 1.txt	truth telling" on you covering up Alan Jones raping children,	Why	are you helping him - did he rape you, or
13	Twitter 1.txt	are in favor of lifting American children out of poverty,	why	are you in favor of Mexican cartels trafficking children
14	Twitter 1.txt	found in those who entered Uni at university?	Why	are you inciting on starting their academic careers? Prof

Search Query

☒ Words☐ Case☐ Regex

Results Set

All hits

Context Size

10 token(s)

why

Start

Adv Search

Note. This KWIC (Key Word in Context) concordance display illustrates the typical linguistic environments, syntactic positioning, and collocational patterns surrounding the interrogative "why" across the sample text dataset.

Figure 4. Concordance Line of “do” Interrogatives

Target Corpus

Name: Twitter_corpus

Files: 1

Tokens: 2819696

Twitter 1.txt

Reference Corpus

Name: Child act UK

Files: 1

Tokens: 147081

Children Act UK.txt

KWIC

Plot

File View

Cluster

N-Gram

Collocate

Word

Keyword

Wordcloud

Total Hits: 6600

Page Size

100 hits

201 to 300 of 6600 hits

	File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
43	Twitter 1.txt	slavery and s3x trafficking that never registered. And beside	do	you know what happened when europe brought in Philippines
44	Twitter 1.txt	into furnaces and disgusting white people violated in every possible.	Do	you know what the term genocidal rape is? "@Klayhamn_@
45	Twitter 1.txt	esn't. Try some empathy and compassion. Please!" @antiquemorals @greenhousemd	Do	you know what a youth goes through when they
46	Twitter 1.txt	school children in Nigeria. That's what bad governance causes.	Do	you know what kinda time bomb 18 million out of
47	Twitter 1.txt	important thing in the world right now is to #SAVETHECHILDREN.	Do	you know what has gone on with trafficking? Do
48	Twitter 1.txt	SAVETHECHILDREN. Do you know what has gone on with trafficking?	Do	you know what horrors children have been through? Please" "@
49	Twitter 1.txt	protection of vulnerable children. Have you got a trans child ?	Do	you know what the trans parent trap is? @amuse
50	Twitter 1.txt	kids #GeminifourthConcertD1 #เฒ่าในใจ https://t.co/lwbwAscgh" "	Do	you know what else happens in a nationwide blackout?
51	Twitter 1.txt	our Children. I'm doing fantastic. How about you, Governor?	Do	you know what a D transition or is? Do
52	Twitter 1.txt	Islamists 2704 Yezidis are still missing. https://t.co/7qUvm975a2" "	Do	you know what else we can do? Our strength
53	Twitter 1.txt	a river in arctic conditions killed her and her children.	Do	you know what murder is?" The heterosexual Ugandans are
54	Twitter 1.txt	by giving up the dollar SHE ADDRESSED TO HER COUNTRIES: ""	DO	YOU KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ALL OF US?
55	Twitter 1.txt	So strong. Tennessee Strong. Representation keeps eating its children, Muthoni	do	you know about the modern slavery accompanying those jobs
56	Twitter 1.txt	So strong. Tennessee Strong. Representation keeps eating its children, Muthoni	do	you know about the modern slavery accompanying those jobs

Search Query

☒ Words

☐ Case

☐ Regex

Results Set

All hits

Context Size

10 token(s)

Table 2 shows that X users employ more of open interrogatives to raise awareness and advocate for children around the world. In this context, the category of overt interrogatives accounts for 72.5% and 16,170 instances in the corpus. Also striking in this category is the highest frequency of “why” interrogatives with 3,907 instances and 24.2 %, while “where” interrogatives feature the lowest frequency. A deeper look into the KWIC of these indicators provides an interesting contextual dimension. In this case, the 'why' interrogative is deployed to raise awareness of the plight of children by attempting to uncover insights, clarify thoughts, advance understanding and ultimately query why crimes against children are morally justifiable, why children are neglected in war zones and why perpetrators are protected and supported. Some of these points are illustrated in the following examples.

1. Why are you confusing children? Let children be children.
2. Why are they not fighting to bring justice to children?
3. Why are you people so obsessed with trans kids?
4. Why are they sexually assaulting children?

By inference, these constructions are not intended to generate responses from interlocutors, but rather at asking questions and raising awareness that children are being confused, that justice for children is not a priority, matters of trans children are at stake, and other discourse issues. The predominant use of "why" in children-related interactions by X users shows how they express attitudes of concern and disapproval about unjust systems, practices and structures that affect them. Meanwhile, “what” question, on the other hand, draws attention to the plight of children through

rhetorical questions, concerns and morality. Pragmatically, “what”- interrogatives generally indicate how X- users raise awareness about issues affecting children and call on the institutions and individuals concerned to take urgent action and signal their desired changes. These are illustrated in the following examples.

5. What is happening to our children on the border? It is heartbreaking.

6. Didn’t think you would be defending children trafficking. What is your point to this?

Similarly, the “who” interrogative attempts to call to question two social actors: the perpetrators who commit crimes against children and individuals and agents/institutions on whom certain obligations to protect children are imposed. Examples:

7. Who are the owners of these NGOs trafficking children?

8. Who are these pedophiles? Keep our children away from them?

Rather than requesting information, these interrogatives presuppose that some NGOs are involved in trafficking children and that children should be kept away from paedophiles. These illustrate an indirect way of raising awareness of the problems of child trafficking and sexual abuse, which are among the challenges faced by children. Similarly, “where” interrogatives pose the concern of the whereabouts of missing children and location of criminals/perpetrators of crimes against children. Questions about the number of children victims of certain crimes such as missing children, killing, sexual abuse, etc., as well as procedures and strategies to curb such crimes are at the centre of the “how” interrogatives. Broadly speaking, the open interrogatives border on raising awareness of crimes against children and why, what, how, when, where, who and how these indicators are used in online interactions to raise concerns and advocate for children.

Close interrogatives, on the other hand, make up only 27.5 % of all interrogatives identified in the corpus. The outstanding pattern in this category is the indirect question with 4,302 and 70.2 %. Linguistically, the pattern shows the free methods that online participants employ to express their concern for children. Closed interrogatives primarily show how X- users deploy their discretion and freedom to express their feelings and opinions freely. They reflect how X users provide more contextual information in their tweets, revealing the pragmatic roles of seeking clarification, expressing disapproval and signalling doubt.

9. Killing innocent children and being happy about it? Does it make sense?

This section has shown the forms and contents of interrogatives identified in the corpus and

2	Sex-related	20	36.4%
3	Indoctrination	12	21.8%
	Total	55	100%

These discourse issues together with their communicative intentions are discussed below.

Security-related issue

Security-related issue relates to activities that deal with children's safety, privileges, rights, freedom and their overall survival. This issue impacts on the social, economic and political freedom and safety of children. It is categorized into three micro issues, namely missing children, child killing and child trafficking. Thirteen security-induced pacts are performed in the selected data. The pacts are: awareness amplifying, calling for action, disapproval, accusing, condemning, concern, seeking information, querying, complaining, seeking clarification, indicting, advising, and charging. Each of the identified micro issues is discussed below:

Missing children

Here, missing children in the society is represented as a worrisome issue that requires every person's attention, especially the government to ensure the safety and security of children. Excerpts 10, 11 and 12 below present how the interrogatives are used as pragmatic strategy in Twitter(X) children-related interactions to create awareness, accuse, condemn, express disapproval and call for action about missing children.

10. This is unacceptable. What is going on in Ohio with 1000 missing children and why isn't the FBI doing something?
11. "26 Days since Lahaina fires - where are the missing children and their parents?
12. Where are the missing children? Why isn't the media talking about this?
13. "Why is this not front page news everywhere in America? 2,000 MISSING CHILDREN!
Where is the outrage?!"

In Excerpt 10 above, the X-user employs a psychological act to express their strong disapproval of the missing of an outrageous number of children in Ohio. The psychological act is picked out by the word, "unacceptable" to indicate the magnitude of the user's grievance over the missing children. The tweeter also makes use of shared situational knowledge (SSK) when they

made reference (REF) to Ohio and FBI since they know that other X-users know Ohio and FBI as a state in the USA and a secret security agent they are referring to respectively. Through the interrogative marker, “what”, the X-user performs the pacts of amplifying awareness on the number of missing children in the state and also condemns such a situation. In “why isn’t the FBI doing something?”, the tweeter condemns the inaction of the secret police, FBI, for their inability to rescue the missing children and put the ugly situation to an end. The excerpt also illustrates the use of indirect speech act (ISA) to call for action from the relevant government agencies to swing into action in order to restore normalcy in the state.

In Excerpt 11, psychological act expresses surprise that “26 Days since Lahaina fires”, no concrete information has been heard about the missing children and their parents. Here, SSK is deployed to refer (REF) to Lahaina’s tragic wildfire incident of 2023 in which many people including children were reported missing. In this context, the X-user pragmatically expresses their concern about the whereabouts of the missing children and their parents.

Child killing

Killing in this study relates to the deliberate and unlawful termination of an individual’s life. The data show that interactants on Twitter (X) explore children killing as a micro issue of the macro context of security. This is aptly captured in Excerpts 13, 14 and 15 below:

14. Killing innocent children and being happy about it? Does it make sense?

15. Be under no illusion as to who and what Andy Heasman is. He's a far right anti-refugee bigot who thinks it's funny to laugh about being a drug dealer. How many children did he harm by supplying them with drugs? How many kids died as a result of his actions?

16. 15 Israel is killing children in Gaza at a rate 100x greater than that of Russia's killing of children in Ukraine. Will the media tell you this?"

In Excerpt 13 above, the X-user queries the rationale of “killing innocent children”; thereby performing a psychological act to express their deep-rooted shock and abhorrent for such an unimaginable evil perpetrated against innocent children. This is vividly captured in the interrogative, “Killing innocent children and being happy about it?” The close interrogative form, “Does it make sense?”, characterizes indirect speech act (ISA) with the intention to condemn the mindless killing of innocent children and call for a stop to it.

The questions in Excerpt 14 above are intended to project Andy Heasman as one who takes

delight in harming and killing of children. The questions pragmatically show the accused person, Andy Heasman as guilty of children killing through the supply of harmful drugs to children. Through the psychological act, the interactant reveals Andy Heasman's positive emotional disposition towards the death and suffering of children. Andy Heasman's psychological disposition is captured in the expression, "He's a far right anti-refugee bigot who thinks it's funny to laugh about being a drug dealer". This implies that he does not see anything wrong in being a drug dealer and taking hard drugs even though it harms children. The tweeter employs shared situational knowledge (SSK) to achieve the pragmatic acts of expressing concern and accusing when they make reference (REF) to the number of children he had harmed and killed through the supply of drugs to them. This is clearly presented in the last two interrogatives of the excerpt: "How many children did he harm by supplying them with drugs? How many kids died as a result of his actions?"

Excerpt 15 references (REF) the wars between Israel and Gaza on one hand and Russia and Ukraine on the other hand where many innocent children have become victims of different degrees including killing. Here, the writer alleges that the number of children killed by the Israel in Gaza is far more than number killed by Russia in Ukraine. The interrogative, "Will the media tell you this?" is used to accuse the media of bias in reporting the killing of children in Gaza by the Israeli military.

Child trafficking

Child trafficking is a modern form of child abuse that involves the forceful recruitment of children for forced labor, hence, denying them of their fundamental human rights. The United Nations describes child trafficking as the "recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receipt of a child". Such children are most times exploited and abused. Participants in X interactions through their interrogatives condemn, query and seek information about the increasing cases of child trafficking in the world. This is instantiated in excerpts 16, 17 and 18 below.

17. How about they use their talents to put a stop to abuse, trafficking and assault of the children by the miserable pigs in our own country? Then they can brag on themselves.
18. Who would oppose it? Seriously? Who doesn't want to expose pedophile rings that are sex trafficking children?!

19. How about dropping the junk fee crap and close the border. Stop the trafficking. Where are the 85,000+ missing children?

Excerpt 16 illustrates the condemnation of different kinds of crime against children – child abuse, trafficking and assault. It shows that these crimes are committed in the society, and through an indirect speech act (ISA) advises the people in authority to channel their ingenuity in stopping the crimes against children in the country. This illocutionary act is expressed in the interrogative, “How about they use their talents to put a stop to abuse, trafficking and assault of the children by the miserable pigs in our own country?” The tweet also employs metaphor (MHP) to achieve the pragmatic act of condemning. In most cultures including English, “pig” represents “something dirty” and consequently loathed. Therefore, the use of the pig metaphor here is a description of perpetrators of the crimes against children as criminals, dirty and societal misfits. The metaphor also touches on the writer’s negative feelings towards child abuse, trafficking and assault.

Similarly, the interactant in Excerpt 17 expresses the view that people generally support the condemnation of trafficking children for sex. Based on the shared situational knowledge (SSK) that people are against pedophiles, the tweeter seeks to know if any person would oppose exposing and possibly bringing pedophiles to justice. This is clearly captured in the interrogative, “Who doesn't want to expose pedophile rings that are sex trafficking children?!” The tweeter in Excerpt 18 deploys SSK to call for the closing of the border in order to checkmate child trafficking. The interactant refers (REF) to Joe Biden who was the president of the USA at the period and therefore, had the legitimate executive powers to close the borders as a way of checking trafficking in children. Combining SSK and REF, the interactant refers to the over 85, 000 missing children in the interrogative, “Where are the 85,000+ missing children?”. By this question, the interactant intends to make the president accountable as a leader.

Sex-related issue

Sexual abuse of children is a major concern in societies. This menace is a recurrent major discourse issue among X-users who orient to discussing it under three sub-themes: sexual assault, exposure of children to porn, and pedophile and grooming. These sub-themes are analyzed in turn.

Sexual assault

Sexual assault, in this context, is the forceful having of canal knowledge of any form – kissing, oral sex, vaginal penetration, among others with children. Such act has severe health,

psychological, social and cultural implications for the victims. These implications include depression, anxiety, suicide, isolation, and contraction of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). In X children-related interactions, sexual assault is explored to create more awareness and condemn the ugly situation as illustrated by the following excerpts.

20. Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières) said it has treated nearly 400 victims of sexual assault in the Darien Gap in 2023 alone. A generation of abused kids unable to trust and have normal relationships being created. The destruction of cultural values part of Biden plan? It is criminal!
21. So you're ok with employer abuse, sexual abuse of children, sexual assault of adult women, child prostitution and sex trafficking, pedophilia, and bribery.
22. How many were the victim of sexual assault?

Excerpt 19 above details the number of sexual assault victims in the Darien Gap in 2023 as recorded by Doctors without Borders. This kind of report brings sexual assault to the fore as a threatening societal evil. The prevalence of sexual abuses in the society makes the tweeter to paint a gloomy and scary picture of this generation by describing it as “a generation of abused kids unable to trust and have normal relationships being created”. The excerpt uses REF to project the number of sexual assault cases (400), the place (Darien Gap) and the year under review (2023) in order to amplify awareness of the evil. Through the pract of accusing, the tweeter accuses the former president of the United States of America, Joe Biden of intention to completely destroy the cultural values of the people. This is indexed in the interrogative, “The destruction of cultural values part of Biden plan?”. The tweeter here depends on the shared situational knowledge (SSK) that other interlocutors on the platform know “Biden” as the president of USA. Purportedly, the tweet indicts and condemns Biden’s plan and sexual abuse as “criminal”. This condemnation thrives on the psychological orientation of the tweeter towards sexual assaults.

In excerpt 20, the interactant raises concern the incessant and increasing rate of sexual abuse by questioning their interlocutor’s suspected endorsement of the crime. The tweet queries a person’s psychological disposition towards the different forms of sexual abuses perpetrated against women and children. The reference to some employers who abuse their employees presupposes the existence of such act and its outright condemnation by the tweeter. This is reflected in “So you're ok with employer abuse”. The interrogative in Excerpt 12, presupposes the existence of

sexual assault premised on the shared situational knowledge of such cases. Through SSK the tweet practs awareness of the perpetration of sexual assault against children.

Exposure of children to porn

The study reveals that children are exposed to obscene scenes that are inimical to them. The selected interactions indicate that participants in sex-related discourse on Twitter (X) condemn, disapprove, complain and create awareness about the exposure of minors to porn. Excerpts 13 and 14 below represent interactions that relate to the exposure of children to porn.

23. Sounds like you enjoy exposing yourself to minors then. You can go to a nude beach but you'd prefer to do it where children are? Disgusting and disturbing

24. Is this subjective to you? Could this have another interpretation I'm not aware of? Is this an ambiguous image that could be interpreted another way? No girl it's a very clear representation of a sexual act between two men that resembles porn, being shown in front of children <https://t.co/zoBnORn018>

Excerpts 22 and 23 above present interrogatives that bother on children's exposure to porn. The interactant in Excerpt 20 accuses @cspotweet of taking delight in exposing minors to obscene scenes by appearing naked in the beach before children. To articulate their pract of accusing and condemning, the interactant uses indirect speech act (ISA) to ask in disbelief, "You can go to a nude beach but you'd prefer to do it where children are?" The interactant unequivocally expresses disapproval and condemnation of children's exposure to porn in the expression, "Disgusting and disturbing." This expression of disapproval and condemnation exemplifies the utilisation of psychological act.

Excerpt 23 also reflects on exposure of children to porn. Here, the tweeter expresses their clear knowledge and understanding of porn through three interrogatives that are constructed in form of rhetorical questions to amplify concerns. The tweeter relies on the psychological act to express feeling of disbelief and disappointment at another X-user who feigned ignorance and misinterpretation of children's exposure to porn. In showing their firm understanding and condemnation of porn, the tweeter after the rhetorical questions asserts, "No girl it's a very clear representation of a sexual act between two men that resembles porn, being shown in front of children."

Pedophile and grooming

Participants on X explore the issue of deceptive and manipulative processes in which pedophiles prepare children for sexual abuse. Interrogatives under this category are used to express concern, seek clarification, complain about, and indict those involved in pedophile and grooming. Instances of pedophile and grooming interactions are cited in Excerpts 24 and 25 below:

25. Why is the Head of the #CIA meeting with a convicted pedophile who was in charge of an elite #childsextrafficking ring?

26. Who would oppose it? Seriously? Who doesn't want to expose pedophile rings that are sex trafficking children?

Excerpts 24 and 25 reveal that the X-users negotiate the issue of pedophile and grooming in the hope of achieving the pragmatic functions of expressing concern, seeking clarification, complaining, condemning, and indicting. These functions are achieved through the resources of pragmeme. In Excerpt 24, the tweeter queries why the head of criminal investigation agency (CIA) is meeting “with a convicted pedophile”. This illustrates the use of shared situational knowledge and reference. They refer to the “convicted pedophile” without clear mention of their name because they believe that the referred person would be able to figure out the “convicted pedophile” through shared situational knowledge. Similarly, three rhetorical questions to express their strong hatred and condemnation of pedophile in Excerpt 25. The relevance of these questions is to demonstrate that pedophile is condemned by everybody, hence, everybody would support the exposure of its perpetrators.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is a well-entrenched issue in X handle children-related interactions. The selected data indicate that children are forcefully introduced into certain beliefs such as transgender, sexuality, and lesbianism without much choice. Two main forms of indoctrinations analyzed in this study are LGBTQ and sexuality.

LGBTQ

LGBTQ is an abbreviation for Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. X users through their interrogatives condemn, seek clarification, call for action, create awareness, advise and charge the people about LGBTQ. This is illustrated in excerpts 26, 27 and 28 below.

27. Obviously transgenderism is an alteration in traditional thought as is having men in drag and devil horns reading books to children. Question is, why are we accepting this satanic alteration?

28. Then why are there pride signs at Disney theme parks? Then why are they putting LGBTQ representation in movies marketed towards children?

In Excerpt 26 vilifies transgenderism – the act of claiming a different gender identity from one’s biological sex. The X user claims that it is a strange and an align ideology that is being propagated by evil people who are also indoctrinating the children through “reading books” to them. In the interrogative sentence, “why are we accepting this satanic alteration?” the X user ostensibly condemns transgenderism through a psychological act that is picked out by the negative lexical items, “satanic alteration”. The description of transgenderism as “satanic alteration” shows clearly the X user’s abhorrence of the transgender. In the same vein, the X user, in Excerpt 27, advocates for the removal of transgender ideology from the educational system. They charge the public, especially parents and guardians to “wake up!” to challenge transgender indoctrination in schools. The excerpt illustrates the X user’s deployment of psychological act in their condemnation of transgender ideology, hence, they describe it as “insidious life destroying ideology”. Through indirect speech act, the X user performs the practs of calling for action and charging as they advise the people to ask “what your children are being taught” and “who is teaching them?” The ultimate intention of the X user in the interrogatives is to arouse the public’s awareness to fight against transgender indoctrination in schools.

The discourse of LGBTQ in X interactions is also reflected in excerpt 28 begins with an interrogative that seeks clarification on the reason for LGBTQ in public places such as parks. The opening interrogative is presented in a metaphor, “pride signs”. The fact that LGBTQ to depict the fact that LGBTQ is introduced in “Disney theme parks” where children are the main audience suggests a deliberate effort to indoctrinate the children, thus, the X user deploys the interrogative to seek not only clarification and justification the rationale behind the act, but to also create awareness about the indoctrination of children into LGBTQ. The second question in the excerpt, “then why are they putting LGBTQ representation in movies marketed towards children?” doubles as the pract of seeking clarification and an indirect speech act of condemnation. First, the X user seeks to know the reason for inclusion of “LGBTQ representation in movies marketed towards

children”. Second, the X user through the deployment of indirect speech act condemns the introduction of LGBTQ representation in children movies.

Sexuality

Sexuality deals with the experience and expression of sexual feelings or behavior. X users identify sexuality as a societal ill in modern societies. Their interactions among the X users portray sexuality as a social issue. Conversations relating to sexuality in X can be seen in Excerpts 29 and 30 below.

29. Why are children announcing their sexuality at such a young age? This has to be taught to them by an adult who sees them as sexual beings. Why can't children just be left alone to be children?

30. There is literally no LGBT children at all besides the ones who's parents wants them to be that, its quite cringe though, why u correlate sexuality with children? Are u mentally disabled or what?

In excerpt 29 above, the X user expresses worry about the indoctrination of children into sexual life. The tweet highlights deep concern and worry about how children are sexualized and express their sexual behaviors and feelings at early ages. In the second question of the excerpt, the X user indirectly accuses adults of indoctrinating children. Through psychological act, the X user expresses their strong emotion of disdain for children's indoctrination, thus, they ask in frustration, “Why can't children just be left alone to be children?” The implication of this question is that children are being destroyed by adults who introduce them into sex instead of allowing them to remain innocent until they become adults. In excerpt 30, the X user condemns the roles of adults, especially parents who allow their children to be sexualized. Through psychological act, the X user expresses their detest for and condemnation of children sexuality. The X user cannot come to terms with the fact that some adults approve and even encourage children sexuality. The X user's anger against children sexuality is captured vividly in the interrogative, “Are u mentally disabled or what?” directed at another interactant who seem to be approving children sexuality.

Conclusion

Interrogatives are crucial elements of human interactions used to achieve certain communicative goals such as clarification about something, raising awareness and concern, among others. In social media interactions, interlocutors employ interrogatives pragmatically to achieve

certain pragmatic intentions. This study unpacks the use of interrogatives as pragmatic strategies in X interactions concerning children's welfare and related social issues. It reveals that interrogatives on X predominantly occur in two forms: open and closed questions, which are strategically used to index social concerns about security, indoctrination, and sex-related issues involving children. Rather than serving their canonical information-seeking function, these interrogatives perform relatively complex pragmatic roles, functioning as acts of accusation, indictment, condemnation, and complaint. Through contextual cues such as Shared Situational Knowledge (SSK), Reference (REF), Relevance (REL), and Meta-pragmatic Information (MPH), X-users construct questions that subtly encode judgment, moral stance, and affective investment in children-related discourse. These findings accentuate the multi-functionality of interrogatives in digital communication, revealing how X-users strategically deploy question forms to express emotional intensity, moral outrage, and collective concern. Interrogatives thus emerge as powerful discursive tools for activism and social critique, serving as indirect strategy for drawing attention to children's vulnerability and the failures of societal institutions. The study concludes that interrogatives in X discourse are not simply syntactic devices for eliciting information; but pragmatic strategy of constructing meaning and advocacy for children's wellbeing.

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