4 Suspect stories: perspective-setting in an asymmetrical situation\(^1\)

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Human cognition and communication are always perspectivized and contextualized (Rommetveit, forthcoming); topics are always treated under some specific aspects. At the same time, communication is often understood as establishing common ground (Clark and Schaefer, 1989) or as achieving shared understanding of things talked about. Yet in many situations of real life, the mutuality of perspectives is only partial or superficial, and actors entertain different visions and versions of their world (Goodman, 1978). Our data from authentic interrogations will illustrate some cases in point.

We will discuss our data in terms of perspectives in discourse. The notion of perspective has been applied to human cognition and communication in many scholarly traditions, e.g. Husserl’s phenomenology, Mead’s social psychology and narrative theory (for an excellent overview, see Graumann, 1989). Basically, we conceive of a perspective as an orientation adopted by one of the dialogue participants or by both (all) of them jointly; it is typically partly implicit and involves starting from some abstract vantage point, building upon (usually taken for granted) background knowledge and developing the discourse topics in a certain direction, e.g. focusing on some aspects of things talked about, and trying to get certain points communicated and possibly also accepted. Though culturally infiltrated, perspectives are dependent on goals and purposes, concerns and commitments that actors entertain, whether consciously or not.

Perspectivization in dialogue and discourse involves both perspective-setting and perspective-taking (Graumann, 1989; 1990). Yet, in the literature, this process has often been discussed primarily in terms of actors’ mutual taking of each other’s
perspectives; one often seems to presuppose some situation in which actors have more or less equal opportunities, abilities and willingness to take each other’s perspectives. Furthermore, empirical studies of perspectives have been mostly studied in the contexts of experiments on comprehension and memory of texts (Graumann, 1989), and more on perspective-taking (as opposed to setting). By contrast, we will, in this study, attempt to look at perspective-setting (and taking) in authentic, i.e., non-experimental, discourse. We are dealing with an asymmetrical situation in which the parties arguably have quite different opportunities to set perspectives and varying obligations and abilities to take the other party’s perspective. Furthermore, we might expect the perspectives surfacing in a police interrogation to be rooted in rather different worlds, namely, the everyday-life world of the suspect, on the one hand, and the legal, professional or semiprofessional, framework of the police, on the other.

The policeman’s interview of the suspect is designed to shed light on some supposedly or possibly criminal acts in which the suspect has allegedly taken part; the suspect is supposed to account for this, preferably to ‘tell his story’. However, since the whole situation is dialogical, and the institutionalized task of the police is to produce a judicially relevant report, the stage is set for a potential clash between attempts to organize the substance of the story in different ways. In our analysis of this dynamic situation, we will draw upon theories of oral storytelling. Narration will be seen as a communicative event; stories must be studied as told and apprehended in the particular context in which they are told (Goodwin, 1982). Furthermore, we will assume that the same story (sequence of events) can be told in different ways, yielding different narratives, which organize the substance of the story so as to focus on different points and thus regard different aspects as important and relevant. In our analysis, perspectives will be identified not so much in the structure of micro-units such as individual sentences (Rommetveit, this volume, Chapter 10), but rather in the global patterns of narrative macro-structure, e.g. in the allocation of space to different aspects of contents. These, partially different, narratives can be said to voice different kinds of background knowledge and different interests and concerns.

Stories, and more generally discourses, are indeed often analysed in terms of the voices entering them. However, the recent, somewhat excessive use of the term ‘voice’ has pointed to several different (metaphorical) exploitations of its meaning potential. Apart from the various uses in grammar and narratology, Silverman and Torode (1980) have applied the term ‘voice’ to the philosophies and theories of scholars as different as Husserl, Wittgenstein, Sacks and Bernstein. Bakhtin (1968; see also Wertsch, 1991), with whom the term has recently been coupled, demonstrates how the same speaker (and listener) may assume, or move between, several identities in producing (and interpreting) discourse. In a somewhat different vein, Mishler (1984) (who builds upon Silverman and Torode) has analysed doctor-patient encounters in terms of two voices, those of the everyday-life world and the medical profession. In relation to Bakhtin’s ‘voices’, these would be generalized voices articulating perspectives and concerns that are prototypical of different traditions of thought and discourse in modern society. Characteristic of the voice of the life world would be the grounding of one’s problems, such as those of ill health or economic problems, in a wider range of life circumstances and socio-economic or psycho-social conditions than is usually referred to in various professionals’ attempts at coming to grips with their patients’ and clients’ problems, these attempts then often being subject to specialized relevance criteria. The two speaking subjects, in our case the police officer and the suspect, tend to express attitudes and identities which are socially and culturally constituted, thus transcending the speakers as individuals. The Mishlerian notion of voice is more or less equivalent to a prototypical perspective, or point of view, of a person who occupies a certain position, or role, in a given activity type, such as the police interrogation. We therefore prefer to speak about perspectives voiced (set) and adopted (taken) by the police and the suspects. Note, incidentally, that Silverman and Torode trace ‘voice’ back to the ‘perspective’ of Husserl’s phenomenology (see also Graumann, 1989). Since perspectives are different modes of speaking about approximately the same subject matters, we also come close to Wertsch’s (1991) notion of social language.

Stories told by delinquents in trials, probation interviews, police interrogations and other legal settings have received some, but still relatively little, attention in earlier discourse studies. A classical study is Cicourel (1968), which follows the construction of legal cases through the various stages (see also Soeffner, 1984, on German data). Cicourel could not, however, tape-record all the encounters involved and therefore was not able to micro-study the relation of dialogue to report. This, on the other hand, has been done by Spencer (1984; 1988) on probation interviews, and, to some extent, by Caesar-Wolf (1984) on judges’ summaries of witness testimonies in a civic court trial.
Some aspects of story-telling, including the authorization of accounts, in police interrogations (in murder cases) have been touched upon by Watson (forthcoming). Stories told in everyday life as well as in institutional settings typically involve accounts, i.e., ‘statements made to explain untoward behavior and bridge the gap between actions and expectations’ (Scott and Lyman, 1968, p. 46). Accounts are either justifications, in which the speaker accepts responsibility for the act in question, but tries to argue that it was the right thing to do, or excuses, in which the person admits that the act in question was bad, wrong or inappropriate, but provides mitigating circumstances, thus denying full responsibility. This dichotomy (from Scott and Lyman) has been developed by, among others, Schonbach (1980) and Cody and McLaughlin (1988). As regards stories and arguments typically brought up by delinquents, and their defence attorneys, probation officers and others, we find empirical studies by, e.g., Spencer (1984), Cody and McLaughlin (1988) (justifications, excuses, etc., in court) and O’Barr and Conley (1985) (litigants’ stories in small claims courts). Caesar-Wolf (1984), in her study of accounts in a West German civil court hearing, has noted that witnesses sometimes ‘organize their testimonies around factors different from those which are judicially relevant in the context of a lawsuit’ (p. 207). Likewise, in their paper on Swedish courtroom interaction, Adelswärd et al. (1988) have identified some features of defendants’ framing of the criminal court trial and their construction of legal meaning.

The data

Our data comprise thirty police interrogations with persons suspected of having committed some minor economic offence such as fraud, larceny and shop-lifting. The age span of the suspects was 16-73 years. Twenty-one were men, nine women. Seven police officers, all male, volunteered to participate. The interviewees’ consent was also secured; no one declined. The interrogations took place in a small office with only the police inspector and the suspect present. The interactional style of these ‘mild’ interrogations was quite informal and sometimes colloquial. In most cases, the interactions gave the impression of two parties cooperating on a joint task. In spite of this, there were clear differences in perspectives and understandings between police and suspects. The interrogations were tape-recorded, and after each interrogation the suspect was interviewed by one of the authors. The official police reports from the interrogations involved were provided by the police some time after the interrogations. (For a full description of the data corpus see Jönsson, 1988).

Police interrogations are highly institutionalized. Barring some minor variations, we could identify the following phase structure in the interrogations (optional phases within brackets):

Greetings
(Introductory small talk)
Identification/filling in a form with personal data
Presentation of the case/charge, etc.
Interrogation proper
(1. Preparatory interrogation)
(2. Report-oriented interrogation)
(3. Supplementary interrogation)

(Reading and approval of report)
(Concluding small talk)

Farewells

The central part of the whole encounter is the interrogation proper, in which the suspect is interviewed on the subject matter of the case, anything concerning the alleged offence or associated with it by at least one of the parties. In practice, this is brought up almost exclusively within one or several of the phases of the interrogation proper, and we will, in this paper, deal only with this (plus, to some extent, the written report). The interrogation proper is typically organized in three sub-phases, two of which are not obligatory. The first phase is a preparatory interrogation, in which the suspect is typically asked to tell his or her own story and does so rather freely without too many interventions from the police officer. However, this phase sometimes does not materialize, either because the policeman starts asking specific questions right at the outset, or because the suspect is not able or willing to provide a coherent account of his or her own. (In our corpus, twenty out of thirty interrogations contained at least some lengthy, narrative turns by the suspect.) The obligatory report-oriented phase is the main activity in the whole encounter. The major objective of the policeman is to provide a written report, which is supposed to sum up the relevant and important aspects of the criminal actions and their background. Toward this end the policeman will ask a number of more or less specific questions, and produce the report as he goes along, recording (and perhaps rephrasing)
some of the things said and omitting others. Some officers take notes with pen and paper, others record sentence by sentence on a tape-recorder.

In some cases the report-oriented phase is followed by a supplementary phase, where the policeman usually goes through what he has written down, or spoken on the tape, and asks for supplementary information and clarification here and there. The suspect can, of course, make corrections and additions too, although very few of our suspects made use of this opportunity.

The final report is then typed on a form consisting of two parts, one with very narrow slots where personal and administrative data are entered, and then a large space where a lengthy text can be written under the rubric of ‘story’ (Swedish berättelse). What is actually entered there is clearly a joint accomplishment by suspect and police officer. A quantitative measurement, in which the primary sources for the various pieces of information (each roughly corresponding to a sentence) in the report texts were traced (Jönsson, 1988), gave the following results: 36 per cent originated in suspects’ lengthy narrative turns, 18 per cent were given by suspects as answers to open but specific (wh- word) questions from the police, 29 per cent were simply confirmations (yes/no answers to closed-ended questions) and, finally, 17 per cent were statements with no basis in the interrogation (usually taken from documents available to the police).

Police interrogations are part of a more comprehensive judicial process. Though this must be taken into account in the discussion, it is important to remember that this study is concerned only with discourse in police interrogations and police reports. As such, however, these seem to provide a nearly ideal locus for studying different perspectives in story-telling, since the ‘same story’ is usually told several times, i.e. in the preparatory interrogation, in the report-oriented interrogation, and then, in written form, in the report itself, and all this takes place in a process in which a good many contextual factors remain constant.

Opportunities for perspective-setting

If we think of the boundary conditions of a police interrogation of the kind investigated here, we might say that the suspect is supposed to provide information about actions he has been involved in, and that the police officer’s responsibility is to sift through this information and to assign legal significance to some points and to leave other data aside. In the simplest case, one would then expect the suspect to contribute the story substance, while the policeman adds the perspective to the resulting narrative. In practice, this comes rather close to the truth, although to some degrees, but there are clearly other possibilities, as we will soon see.

First of all, it is quite clear that the police perspective is always present, and usually quite dominant, in the written reports. On the other hand, when it comes to the dialogical interaction in the interrogation, things are more complicated. True enough, the interviewee enters the interaction labelled as a ‘suspect’, something which in itself logically presupposes the priority of the perspective of the legal system. Furthermore, we find a strong institutional dominance in the identification phase, which usually occurs right at the beginning of the encounter. Here the police officer goes through the first part of the preprinted form, entering information from the suspect into the appropriate slots. The form thus functions as an external filter on the oral exchange of information. The questions are systematically narrow and designed to evoke a yes/no answer (to be ticked off in the blank) or a specific piece of information (name, profession, income, etc.). In Extract 4.1 we see part of the identification phase of an interrogation, in which the suspect, a recidivist who denies guilt of shop-lifting, tries to supply unsolicited information rather systematically (cf. the fragments italicized):

Extract 4.1

(P = police officer, S = suspect)

(…)
P: Profession, title, what do you usually call yourself?
S: Well I ah - am listed as a brick-layer
P: I see
S: It's a long time since I built, of course (P: Yes) but ...
P: Now, let's see, what shall we write as address of residence now?
S: Well, you see, I am waiting for an apartment, you see
P: Mm, but until then?
(…)
P: Nine years of ab primary school, right?
S: No, I only went seven, my mum died in connection with that so
I broke off
P: Employment at the moment?
S: Well, I ah had to get emergency public work now
account which you (p) knew that there was no cover for, huh? You were, it was perfectly clear to you?
S: Yes
P: Because that's what's decisive you see (S: yes) here. (p) And there were no (p) messengers or anything like that.
S: Mm.
P: Maybe you had a paper here. (puts on tape-recorder) (--) 'Ah she was made aware of the notification and the eh payment order from ah which was sent in from the post office. Full stop.' This is your signature which is written here?
S: Mm.
P: (speaks into tape-recorder) 'She eh indicates that she herself wrote the signature (p) on (p) this sheet and wrote the amount on it herself. Full stop. (p) She knew very well at the time that her account was eh overdrawn (p) Full stop. Eh she admits therefore (p) the offence. Full stop.' There isn't very much to say about that. Do you have anything to add about that?
S: No.

In cases like this there is no preparatory interrogation, and the police officer sets the perspective all the time, on an utterance-to-utterance basis, in almost every question and its answer. The police officer suggests what might have happened by asking closed questions, and the suspect just provides confirmatory responses; the police officer produces a report on-line by speaking into the tape recorder. In this case, and in other similar cases, the suspect never articulates a personal perspective. Yet, in the post-interview, this suspect did disclose another interest and perspective; she had wanted to talk about a wider set of circumstances surrounding the offence. This is quite typical of a majority of the interrogations in fraud cases; the police officer takes the written reports that have been given in to the police as his point of departure, and what then materializes is a series of quite specific questions, in which the only opportunities offered to the suspect are those of confirming or denying information already available. The existence of a structured file thus strongly determines the interview, something which seems quite typical of bureaucratic organizations.

The other extreme consists of cases in which two perspectives are indeed voiced. The suspect is both given and takes the chance of telling his or her own version of the story, and then the policeman takes the lead in a report-oriented interrogation. Of course, the report itself will be organized according to the police perspective; thus, the suspect perspective so clearly voiced in the dialogue is only sparsely represented there. It turned out that most of the suspects, who provided lengthy narratives of their own, belonged to the category of middle-aged first-time offenders
accused of shop-lifting. It is on these cases that most of our attention will be focused.

The suspect voice and the police voice in dialogue: two perspectives in interaction

The preparatory and report-oriented phases are quite different in dialogue participation structure. In the former, the suspect typically contributes long monological turns, while the police officer sticks to back-channel items, minimal responses, some second assessments, etc., and asks a few specific questions which, if avoided by the suspect, are rarely followed up. In the report-oriented phase, the interaction format and the distribution of discourse space (amount of speech) are quite different. The police officer typically asks specific questions, which are often closed in format and organized coherently, serving specific goals, thus arguably subject to a consistent professional perspective. The suspect is then expected to give short answers. If he or she should indulge in expanded responses, these are sometimes interrupted or just not followed up if they should digress too far from the judicially relevant aspects of the subject matter. Hence, it seems safe to say that while the suspect tells his or her version of the story in the preparatory phase, in the report-oriented phase the whole thing is recycled with the police officer in strict control. The professionally perspective-ized narrative then comes out still more unequivocally in the written report, although, in our data, the final reports are almost identical to what the police officer formulated in the later phases of the interrogation. Very little editing seems to be done afterwards.

To provide some illustration of the differences in dialogue form between phases, consider extracts 4.3 and 4.4 taken from an interrogation involving an elderly man accused of having taken some goods from a food store. Extract 4.3 is drawn from the beginning of the preparatory phase. The suspect has already told the police officer about his illnesses and how he gave himself the wrong kind of injection, and the police officer now comes to the 23rd of the month, the day of the shop-lifting.

**Extract 4.3**

P: OK, it happened ... it happened then on the 23rd, so it was ... 
S: And the consequence was that I woke up with this (P: Yes) and that I went down to the doctor in Forby, because all along the edge of my jaw here, and my tooth hurt here, y'know (P: Yes), and it swelled up, and they became agitated because I've had abnormal cells in my body (P: mm). And that day was okay (P: mm) anyway, but it hurt something terrible, and then I took a pain killer next morning, and then I took one at noon, 'cause it hurt so that (P: mm) I couldn't eat a berry cause it hurt, the whole gum down here (P: Yeah) it hurt like a tooth-ache (P: Yeah), so what happened was that I took a pain killer in the morning and then at lunch-time (P: Yeah), and then I went, then I drove to the doctor and then I got a referral to the hospital, and then it was maybe, yeah it was four or five days afterwards it got worse. So I came to the hospital and they went into the saliva gland here and they've taken four or five tests, and then they went in here y'know (suspect points to chin) (P: Yeah) and that got me into trouble so I wasn't a human being all that week (P: yeah, no, right) and I don't think it was such a good idea with that salubrine 'cause otherwise this wouldn't have happened. I hope that's got shot of it now and there are not any abnormal cells because they did it, they said, they did.

P: You injected something wrong of course, then it was clear that that could bring about of course ...
S: (new monological turn)

In this phase the suspect is allowed to talk at length, and he remains firmly in his life-world perspective most of the time. The police officer accepts this temporarily, and he does not contribute any substance to the talk; apart from some abortive attempts at cutting off and getting to the legally relevant matters, his interventions are mainly politely supporting utterances. Then, in the report-oriented phase, the police officer starts to ask fairly specific questions on how the actual shop-lifting was carried out. Here, the suspect has comparatively little to contribute, often limiting himself to quite short answers. Extract 4.4 deals with what happened when the suspect was stopped after having passed the check out counter without having paid for some articles:

**Extract 4.4**

(From report-oriented phase)

P: ( . . . ) An' then it was then that they saw that, that is, that you had (S: Yes) the goods on you?
S: Yes exactly (inaudible)
P: She went up there then?
S: Yes, right into the office.
P: 'And then he picked out some articles that he had in his pockets', right? Is that correct?
S: Yes, that's correct.

P: He paid for these articles afterwards at the check out counter. Right? (S: Yes) And it was these articles that it was all about, in other words it was two packages of bacon, one package of
One story - two narratives

There are quantitative indications that preparatory and report-oriented phases are quite separate activities, differing in terms of, among other things, distribution of discourse space and initiative-response structure. However, to show that the discourses also exhibit different perspectives, it is necessary to show that they are different in terms of content. We shall analyse these discourses further to show that we are faced with two narrative versions of the same story.

Modern narrative theory (Toulan, 1988) makes a distinction between story and narrative, where ‘story’ stands for the sequence of events forming the substantial basis of what is told, and ‘narrative’ refers to how (when, by whom) the story is told in a specific discourse situation; a narrative, then, would be a structured story. It is well-known that stories tend to be geared structurally to a certain overall pattern or schema. Labov and Waletsky (1967) have provided a model for (oral) narratives which we have reproduced and slightly modified in Figure 4.1. Simplifying matters a little (Figure 4.1, right-hand column), narratives have a Background, in which the teller introduces the actors and explains the circumstances that form the starting point for the complications to come. Then comes the Central Event (or Action) Sequence, a train of events leading to some critical incident, the climax, which is then somehow resolved, with a return to normal discourse. A third part, sometimes given at the end but sometimes inserted somewhere else or dispersed over the entire story, contains the Resulting Evaluation, which describes the teller’s or protagonist’s reactions or attitudes to what happened. This last part tries to establish the significance of the story told (or the point in telling it). At the same time, it provides an opportunity for explicating the return to normality.

Now, if we accept this account, we could imagine the same story given in different narratives, or, if you will, the same information structured, perspectivized and biased in divergent ways. For different tellers, or in different contexts, the same story would have, e.g. different climaxes and varying significances, and we might conjecture that these narratives would be different in terms of their respective perspectives. What parts of the story are displayed as important and relevant? What are the central, critical actions, what is the climax of the story, why is it told at all, what is the point, how is it to be evaluated? We will now subject suspects’ stories to these questions.

In order to get a rough overview of the differences between the suspect’s narrative, which the suspect tells orally, and the police narrative, the version most unambiguously given in the written report, we had a look at the discourse space allocated to three major topics, i.e. 1) background (including the suspect’s biography); 2) technical aspects of the criminal acts; and 3) attitudes towards the offence expressed by the suspect. These would roughly correspond to the general categories of Background, Central Event Sequence, and Resulting Evaluation respectively (Figure 4.1). It turns out that these occupy very different

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘what it is going to be about’</td>
<td>‘relevant background’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating action</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘something disturbing the normal’</td>
<td>‘establishing point (significance, contextual relevance, tellability)’</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climax</th>
<th>Central event sequence</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘turning-point resulting in:’</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Resulting evaluation’</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘returning to normality’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coda

‘that was it’

‘May occur at several places in the narration, but is often not appreciated until later.’

Figure 4.1. The structure of oral narratives (modified after Labov, 1972: ch IX)
portions of the two narratives. In Extract 4.3 more than 50 per cent of the suspect’s version is devoted to his illness story, whereas the police report uses 18 per cent of the space for this topical domain. On the other hand, 38 per cent of the report deals with technical aspects of the crime – details about how packages were put in pockets, how the suspect behaved while passing the cashier, etc. while only 7 per cent of the suspect’s words in the dialogue belong to this topic. Furthermore, these words are given in answers to specific questions by the policeman. The suspect talks extensively about what happened before he came to the food store, and here the police officer asks no questions and the suspect returns repeatedly to his cancer, his operation and his worries about what the new tissue samples might show. The crime as such, in his version, becomes somewhat peripheral and accidental, except that he expresses at length his repentance and contrition; 21 per cent of his words deal with the third major topic, attitudes to the offence, while the police officer devotes no less than 44 per cent to this. So when the suspect comes to the offence as such, thus approaching the police officer’s perspective, the focal point centres on his exculpation, his explanations and excuses, not on how the shop-lifting was technically accomplished.

What is the point of the story as told by the suspect and the police? What are their narratives about? We have seen that, in allotting rather varying amounts of space to different aspects of the story, the two parties assign different degrees of significance to them. The suspect’s own story is about complications he had had with his health, his mistake with the injection, the pain in his throat, the medication (taking pills to decrease the pain), all ending up in a state of confusion. All this is embedded in a more comprehensive illness history, where his worries about a new appearance of cancer are overwhelming. At the same time, of course, this provides the ground for excuses and ‘explanations’ of the shop-lifting incident. The latter event is, however, treated by the suspect as a minor side-effect of the above-mentioned unfortunate train of events, and the suspect has nothing to say about its technical details. He is, however, very much ashamed of having done what he did. For the police officer all this is backgrounded (except that he does include a substantial part about the suspect’s attitudes in his report), while the aspects magnified and emphasized are the technical details. It appears that, although the story substance is much the same, there are different narratives with different perspectives, climaxes, resolutions and major points.

Table 4.1 Discourse and text space allotted to different topics in three shop-lifting interrogations (percentages of all words devoted to the subject matter, i.e. the crime and its related circumstances, cf. text)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Report</th>
<th>Police</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elderly woman (see Extract 4.7)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical aspects</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions and attitudes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Depressed elderly widow (see Extract 4.6)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical aspects</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions and attitudes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>111 elderly man (see Extracts 4.3, 4.4, 4.5)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical aspects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactions and attitudes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td>81</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The percentages relate to the whole interrogations, not just the extracts quoted in the text.

This is far from an isolated case. As examples, we will briefly refer to a couple of partly similar stories (Table 4.1 gives some quantified data on the cases reviewed here). One suspect is an elderly woman, a widow for three years, who tells a story about illness (stomach pains, suspicion of cancer), depression and loneliness: a life situation which, in her version, lies behind her petty thefts. She tells the police that she has not been able to sleep for some time, and she is anxious that her children should not get to know about her shop-lifting. Thus, she conveys the impression of someone who is out of balance and needs to restore her self-respect, which cannot be done unless the offences are cleared up. These aspects, treated at length in the suspect’s
narrative, are given three sentences in the police officer's report (these sentences primarily dealing with the question of intent). Again, the police officer assigns importance to rather different story components. He asks and reports about some down to earth technical matters of the shop-lifting. What did the suspect's bag look like? When exactly were the goods transferred from the food-store carrier to her own bag? Did the suspect still keep the carrier as she passed through the check-out counter? Were the goods visible in the suspect's bag? (See Extract 4.6).

The case of another elderly woman accused of shop-lifting is fairly similar. From an outsider's point of view, the offence as such is certainly banal; the suspect was stopped by the main exit of a department store with a jar of Nescafé, a packet of hard bread, and two cans of shrimp salad and crayfish tails in doll under the waistband of her trousers. But the suspect tells a very elaborate story about morals and values, her brooding over what is right and wrong in society and over lonely people's misery, and her idea that 'if she performed a crime, some shop-lifting, she would both experience how it felt and she would in the end free herself of thoughts about guilt and punishment (see Extract 4.7 below). This story of her shop-lifting case is a story about anguish, suffering and relief, the latter partly brought about by talking with the policeman. In the police report a substantial amount of the suspect's story is, indeed, left, although as usual the report (and the underlying report-oriented interrogation phase) focuses on technical details about the shop-lifting as such, a topic to which the suspect contributes very little.

Local reflections of perspectivity conflicts

The everyday perspective and the police perspective sometimes invoke different meanings of one and the same expression. The term 'suspect' itself is a nice illustration. For the police, this is a technical legal term implying, among other things, that the person so designated has been informed that he or she is accused of having committed a certain crime and might therefore have to appear as defendant in a criminal case (which involves certain responsibilities and certain rights, e.g. right to a defence lawyer). For the layman, 'suspect' means that someone believes that the person involved has done something (untoward or maybe criminal). Belief, which implies at least some degree of uncertainty, is then an important ingredient, and if this compo-
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S: (p) It must have been on the way up the escalator I think (P: Yes) don’t remember. I think so.
P: (p) You took the articles from the shopping cart and put them in a bag of your own and this took place while you were on the escalator to the upper floor.
S: Mm.

Note that the uncertainty and vagueness of the suspect’s statement are eliminated in the police reformulation. Similarly, in Extract 4.7 the suspect has considerable difficulties in expressing her feelings, and nothing of this is reflected in the policeman’s rather abstractly formulated summary (in the last line of the excerpt):

**Extract 4.7**
(Elderly woman)
P: But finally...how long have you been sort of demonstrating against society here? You say that you’re sort of demonstrating against society here...
S: Yeah, demonstrating, I don’t know if you can say that, but anyway you feel that eh...
P: How shall we express...how shall we express this do you think?
S: Yeah eh that I with my upbringing I think that I read so much weird stuff you know (P:Mm) in the newspapers and like that you know (P: Yes) an ‘and eh’...
P: You think that society is kind of cock-eyed?
S: Yeah, I really think so (P: Yes) yes. (p) That the ones who eh are are honest they actually get (p) yes you could. ...if you say punished or what would you (P: Yes) say. (p) Get stuck in the middle anyway you know.
P: So you’ve more or...more or less come into conflict with society we could say here?

Extract 4.8 is drawn from an interrogation, in which the suspect tells a story about having been forced to rent some video recorders, and then sell them, in order to pay some debts. He claims that he was threatened physically before he agreed to enter the various video shops:

**Extract 4.8**
S: (−) and then they came here and said that now it’s time.
P: Now it’s time, Hjalmarsson, for you to pay or I’ll be damned, or what did they say?
S: Yes more or less, otherwise the way you look is going to change (−)
P: (into tape recorder) The person understood that he now had to pay back the debt unconditionally and as soon as possible. Was he the one who suggested that you should go and do this?
S: Well, I don’t know if he suggested it exactly but there was, well, he figured that I had some way I could pay (−)
P: (into tape recorder) The person from Bluetont somehow or

Perspective-setting in an asymmetrical situation

another instigated Hjalmarsson and suggested that there was after all a way of getting the money by renting video equipment and directly selling this so that Hjalmarsson could in this way free himself from debt.

Here, a lot of the dramatic real-life circumstances are eliminated in the neutrally reported sentences (e.g. ‘pay back the debt unconditionally and as soon as possible’), which could just as well have referred to much more peaceful events.

A police report is, of course, in a concrete sense a monological text, and it is indeed written by the police officer (for an example, see Table 4.1). Yet, each report in our material has been dialogically produced, and to some extent one can trace several voices in them; in Wertsch’s (1991) wording, they are hybrid constructions, the dialogicality of which is largely hidden.

Discrepant relevances: suspect versus police rationalities

The three examples reviewed in the previous sections belong to the category of middle-aged or elderly first-time offenders accused of shoplifting. It appears that, at least in our corpus, these interrogations provide some of the clearest examples of perspectivity conflicts. While there are many conceivable explanations why these suspects tend to provide a different perspective from the police, we may point to a couple of possibly relevant conditions. In the first place, the triviality of the legally crucial action - leaving a supermarket without paying for a few articles - may lead suspects to say little about it. Moreover, the majority of them admit the offence, which, from an everyday perspective, may mean that there is no point in wasting more words on that. On the other hand, it may seem natural that suspects want to provide explanations (Background) and to express their (genuine or simulated) contrition (Resulting Evaluation, Attitude).

At the same time, there is a clear rationality, firmly based in long traditions of professional practice, behind the perspective of the police as well. The task of the police is to take part in the investigation of an apparently case of law breaking, and to present evidence to be assessed by state prosecutors. There is an empiricist, almost behaviouristic, touch to the policemen’s concentration on technical details; actors’ behaviours are reported in ‘objective’ terms. Such ‘hard and fast facts’ seem to square well with what is otherwise accepted as legal evidence,
such as technical evidence like fingerprints, signatures, etc., and eye witnesses' testimonies (i.e. evidence ultimately based on direct sensory perception). In other words, the police perspective is a fairly narrow one, and for good reasons. It should be mentioned, though, that if we look at the judicial system as a whole, there are professionals who pay some, even considerable, attention to what we have termed Background and Resulting attitudes; probation officers, whose reports are read in court trials when the defendant's personal circumstances are reviewed, and defence lawyers, who, in the trials, use arguments based on such information. Thus, the judicial system at large is not totally indifferent to suspects' and defendants' life worlds.

Returning to the discrepant relevances in the police interrogation, we can say that when the police officer issues a general invitation for the suspect to tell his story (e.g. 'Tell me what happened?') or a request for explanation (e.g. 'Why did you do this?'), he would seem to be looking for an explanation in terms of criminal action. Some suspects do indeed comply with this, especially, of course, if they leave it to the policeman to ask specific questions. However, the middle-aged shop-lifters, in particular the three persons in focus here, approached the why question in a rather different way, as a moral issue. They took it to mean 'What circumstances in your life situation made you end up as a shop-lifter?', rather than, say, 'What intent did you have on this particular occasion?' or 'What made you commit this particular act of shop-lifting?'. The three apparently prepared stories in which they tried to explain their conduct as grounded in unhappy life circumstances (marginalization in society, illness, depression, etc.). In terms of accounts (cf. the first section), these three middle-aged or elderly shop-lifters produced excuses; they admitted guilt but provided mitigating background circumstances reducing their responsibility. Other shop-lifters provided no such excuses. Some of them just labelled their actions 'an impulse', 'an idiotic thing', 'don't know myself what made me do it', 'a bloody sick thing' (Swedish jätula sjuk pryld), i.e. they confessed without offering rational explanations (they appealed to irrational influences). A few shop-lifters made confessions that included rational explanations ('I wanted that record (i.e. gramophone record)'; 'I did not have enough money and decided to have a try'; but these too wanted to reduce their responsibility by emphasizing that everything happened suddenly and by impulse, when they were already in the supermarket. Both the last mentioned categories of suspects typically took the policeman's perspective in the interrogation, i.e. they simply answered specific questions, while they were sometimes quite talkative about matters unrelated to the case.

Concluding discussion

In verbal interaction, perspectives are set and taken by actors. In general, dialogue as such presupposes and brings about a certain degree of mutuality of perspectives, or else one could hardly talk about a joint discourse (Linell and Luckmann, this volume, Chapter 1). But mutuality may sometimes be only superficial or apparent; although the dialogue may proceed fairly smoothly, the interactants entertain different concerns about and understandings of the topics talked about. Sometimes this can be gleaned from a close study of the dialogue itself. In other cases, it becomes evident from a comparison of the dialogue with, e.g. what the actors say in post-interviews on the dialogue.

In those police interrogations from our corpus in which a real conflict between perspectives seemed to surface, e.g. some of the shop-lifting cases, the suspect's narrative is structured as follows. The background deals with psycho-social circumstances, some complications in the suspect's everyday world. Then comes a train of events in which these complications get condensed or aggravated. Some unlawful behaviour is part of this process, but it tends to be pictured only as a peripheral aspect. A fair amount of space is allotted to the resulting attitudes and emotional reactions (shame, guilt, contrition and finally relief). Together the major topics of Background and Resulting Evaluation deal with the prerequisites and consequences in the context of the suspect's life-world. The policeman's perspective is much more narrowly defined; here, most attention is paid to the central actions, i.e. the shop-lifting in objective terms, all climaxing in the technical completion of the offence (leaving the store with goods without paying for them). There is a background and a resulting evaluation in the policeman's narrative, too, but these tend to be rather strictly confined to the suspect's intention behind the offence and to his or her admission/denial and attitude (repentance) respectively. The climax of the story seems to be the technical completion of the offence in the policeman's professional world, but some abnormal state of confusion and desperation (with unhappy consequences) in the suspects' visions and versions.

Institutional encounters are special in many ways. First, they are asymmetric in that parties differ in responsibilities and the
use of background knowledge (professional versus lay perspectives). Professionals and lay persons locate the subject matter in rather different contexts; it is natural for the client to provide a personal ego perspective, and for the professional to adopt a more anonymizing case-type perspective. The layman knows his or her own life conditions, while it is the professional’s responsibility to adapt the individual case to the administrative categories available.

Second, as regards the dialogue participation structure, the professional is also the one who defines the conditions; he or she provides the client with opportunities for talking rather than the other way round. Therefore, when we discuss mutuality and shared understanding in actual discourse in social practices, issues of power and dominance must necessarily be introduced. We are then faced primarily with context-determined asymmetries, but there is also, and clearly so in the police interrogation, a margin for variation which is subject to the actors’ actual negotiation of topics and social participation (dialogue-produced asymmetries, cf. Linell and Luckmann, this volume, Chapter 1).

In the police interrogation the police officer asks questions and the suspect responds on the conditions set by the questions, but the suspect’s contributions, of course, also influence the police officer’s questioning strategies. On the whole, however, the policeman is the one who sets the overall perspective, and with this the suspect has to comply. The latter can occasionally set his or her own perspective, particularly in long monological turns, and the police officer may then temporarily accept this. Yet this will have limited influence on the final product, in our case the written report. The policeman’s responsibility for producing an account that is consistent and relevant for legal purposes implies that he selects certain pieces of information, that he integrates these into a coherent whole, and that he biases the entire narrative to fit the legal perspective. The professional party will ‘create a goal-oriented, factual interpretation of often rambling, incoherent, and highly fragmented remarks’ (Cicourel, 1981, p. 69). This characterization of Cicourel’s referred to another setting, doctor–patient interaction, but it is almost as appropriate for our case (see also Caesar-Wolf, 1984). Yet, as compared to legal professionals’ discourse in court, police interrogation practices, at least in our data corpus, allow for a fair amount of understanding on the part of the suspect. Even the reports contain some traces of this; they are sometimes written in a hybrid mode, in terms of both linguistic form and content (Jónsson and Linell, forthcoming). This is perhaps not very surprising, given that police interrogators are not full-blown legal professionals (see note 2).

The heading on the form on which the police reports in our study are typed suggests that it is the suspect’s story which is told there. However, our study, and similar studies on reporting procedures elsewhere in modern bureaucracies, shows that this is hardly the case. Rather, the report is the product of interaction between suspect and police officer, where the former is allowed to lay out his story only on the conditions defined by the latter’s directives. Furthermore, it is the policeman who writes the report and is responsible for it.

By way of summary, the present study has shown that, on the one hand, there is a dialogicality underlying the police report, and that, on the other hand, the perspective of the report is by and large that of the police. Both the dialogicality and the perspectivity are largely concealed. It is next to impossible to reconstruct a suspect’s perspective if, as is indeed the case in normal bureaucratic routines, the report is read without direct access to the underlying dialogical interrogations.

The written police report does not have the status of legal proof, according to the present Swedish code of judicial procedure; only evidence presented orally in court counts as evidence (see Bruzelius and Thelin, 1979, p. 140). Nevertheless, the police report plays a very important role in the subsequent treatment of the individual case by the legal bureaucracy. The prosecutor’s decision to pursue (or not pursue) the case in a lawsuit is often largely based upon his or her critical evaluation of the story told in the report, and in the actual court trials prosecutors often explicitly refer to statements found in police reports (e.g. Jónsson, 1988). Therefore, although the police report has no official, privileged status, it nevertheless legitimates decisions in the subsequent treatment of the case. Soeffner (1984), who analyses German data on the treatment of young delinquents (in police interrogations, etc.), suggests that if there is a clear order of actions and decisions in police reports, the order will be reconstructed in an even clearer way when or if state attorneys (in a prosecution) have to maintain or argue that a certain version is true (or at least plausible). In any case, the police report becomes something of an authorized version which stays on in bureaucracy’s files, representing, on a rather concrete level, society’s collective memory of the suspects’ past actions. As a whole, the police interrogation becomes an arena for the authorization of one version of the suspect’s alleged criminal conduct.
Notes

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2. In the case of police officers interrogating suspects, it should be pointed out that, relative to theories of professions and common definitions of professionalism (Parsons, 1964; Sarfatari-Larsson, 1977), they are not 'professional' in the strict sense, as are judges and lawyers. Rather, they are 'semi-professional' (Etzioni, 1969); they have received some formal education, often have a good deal of experience and are of course in various ways dependent in their practice on professional legal rationalities. Furthermore, they are, of course, commissioned by society to carry out their specific task in the judicial procedure.

3. Applied to the police interrogation, Mishlerian voice theory would distinguish between the professional voice of the legal system (or of the police) and the lay voice of the everyday life world of the suspect. A more Bakhtinian approach might find several voices in the discourse of both parties. For example, the suspect both voices (or plays) the role of suspect (complying with the conditions defined by the task of the police) and the role of a person with a complex life involving, perhaps, unhappy circumstances. Similarly, the police officer would voice the roles of both an interrogator and a fellow human being. Some individuals would be more multi-voiced in their discourses than others. In this paper, we will not pursue this line much further, and instead adopt a largely Mishlerian outlook.

4. In the extracts, utterances which are considered to be the listener’s back-channel items are given within parentheses inside the speaker’s turns. ( ) denotes a very short pause, (p) a somewhat longer pause. (—) indicates that some words or utterances have been omitted in the excerpt.

5. The distinction between story and narrative parallels that of _histoire_ versus _récit_ of Genette (1980), or story versus text of Rimmon-Kenan (1983). However, there are numerous terminological variations (see Toolan, 1988), which we will ignore here.

6. Of course, we do not know if the suspects’ versions in any of these cases are true. However, the issue of truth or veridicality is immaterial to our analysis, which is ‘only’ concerned with what is said and written in the spoken dialogue and in the written report.

References


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5 Obstruction and dominance: uncooperative moves and their effect on the course of conversation

Marie-Louise Käsermann

Let us initially define dominance as follows. Dominance occurs when A has access to resources at the expense of B (Linell and Luckmann, this volume, Chapter 1). This can occur in the following two ways. Although A and B may be equally able and willing to speak about topic X, A speaks more than B. Or, although A may be less able than B to speak about X, she/he speaks more than B. Speaking less on the part of B is but one of several possible effects of A’s dominance over B. Other effects are less easily identified, e.g. B may speak in a qualitatively different manner when A is present from when A is absent.

It is difficult, from the perspective of an observer, to determine with regard to the above examples whether or not A is dominating B when the latter’s contributions are qualitatively or quantitatively restricted in comparison to the former’s, for it is unclear whether B would or could contribute more if permitted to do so by A. In order to legitimately interpret a reduced contribution observed in B as an effect of A’s dominance, therefore, one has to find a way of making explicit the less directly observable preconditions of motivation and competence of B. This is the purpose of this chapter.

First, I wish to examine a case of reduced conversational participation that has been described elsewhere (Käsermann and Altorfer, 1989) and ask whether this phenomenon can be treated as an instance of dominance. In order to examine competence and willingness to speak I shall then apply the criteria derived from this first study to another corpus of conversational data. This presentation of selected material is thought to be an empirical substitute for an experimental treatment in a