Story generations:
From dialogical interviews to written reports in police interrogations

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Abstract

This paper discusses story generation processes in police interrogations and in the writing of police reports. Data consist of 30 interrogations with reports on charges of theft, shoplifting and fraud. Since most factors are kept constant, data permit of a close comparison of two versions of the 'same' story, one being told in the dialogue between the police officer and the suspect, and the other one produced as a monological report written by the police officer. There are a number of important differences between the spoken and written narratives. Apart from the difference in language varieties (conversational language vs. police report prose), we find that the monological text has a more clearly elaborated narrative structure and a legally relevant perspective. In addition, the transformation from spoken dialogue to written text involves changes from vagueness to precision, from relative incoherence to coherence and a clear chronology, from emotionality to an objectively identified sequence of events and actions etc. These processes are illustrated by a close analysis of one example interrogation. Results are discussed in terms of theories of orality vs. literacy, genre types (institutional routines, differences between lay and professional rationalities) and situated story-telling.

Keywords: communication, police interrogation, orality, literacy, story-telling, institutional discourse, everyday life perspective, legal rationality.

1. Introduction

In the last 10–15 years, we have witnessed a tremendous increase of interest in issues concerning the relationships between spoken and written language, between orality and literacy, between oral and literate strategies in story-telling etc. In this paper, we will contribute to the debate with a...
study of how the 'same' story may be differently organized and perspectivized when told twice within two phases of the same overall situation. In our corpus of police interrogations, we regularly find two generations of the same story about an alleged offence, one version being generated in the oral dialogue between the police officer and the suspect and the other version produced in a monological report written on-line by the police officer. Since many conditions are kept constant across the two story generations, these data present a nice, and naturally occurring, opportunity to probe issues of orality vs. literacy.

1.1. Speech and writing

Spoken and written discourse and texts can differ on many accounts. Apart from channel differences (multidimensional, with primacy for the acoustic channel, vs. unidimensional, i.e. optical), there are differences in linguistic form and content, in social and psychological preconditions and effects, in conditions of use etc. Some early commentators (Goody, 1977; Olson, 1977) were inclined to reduce most of all this to the grand division between just two linguistic forms of representation, i.e. speech vs. writing, which were assumed to be responsible to 'the great divide' between oral and literate cultures. Critics (e.g. Street, 1984) have argued that there are many different culture-specific orality and literacies, and that differences between genres are far more important than media differences. Genres are divergent along many dimensions, e.g. dialogical vs. monological production, and overall purpose (e.g. commenting in a piecemeal fashion, telling a coherent story, providing a logical argumentation of an issue, etc.), conditions of production etc. Thus, there is hardly only one form of language (speech) occurring in oral contexts and one form of language (writing) aligned with literacy. Tannen (1982a) speaks about oral vs. literate strategies in both speech and writing. Nevertheless, some linguistic and discoursal structures seem to be more closely associated with certain oral genres, and, correspondingly, other structures are typical of certain written genres. At the same time, some spoken discourses are distinctly 'literate' (e.g. inauguration speeches), and some written texts are quite 'oral' in character (e.g. graffiti at certain public places).

When spoken and written language have been opposed to each other on the most general level, reference is usually made, explicitly or (more often) implicitly, to (some kind of) informal, casual conversation vs. expository written prose (cf. Biber, 1986). Written language, as compared to spoken language, has often been characterized as

* more abstract and decontextualized,
* less personal and emotional (since, there are, for example, almost no counterparts to prosody and paralanguage).

Chafe (1982) discusses differences in terms of two dimensions, integration vs. fragmentation (presumably related to processing constraints; speakers have less time for production than writers) and detachment vs. involvement (related to situational characteristics; speakers interact with their audiences, writers do not). Integration is made manifest in (high degrees of) subordination, and many complement clauses, nominalizations, and adjectival attributes, whereas involvement would show up as (self-) references to the speakers and their mental processes, direct quotes, use of historical present, colloquial expressions, emphatic particles, monitoring devices, vagueness, hedges, evidentials (comments on source and validity of information), etc. (cf. also Redeker, 1984: 44).

In a comprehensive study, Biber (1986) applied multi-variate statistical analysis to forty-one variables in fifteen text types and came up with the following three factors:

* factor 1: high interactive involvement vs. considerable editing and explicitness (cf. dialogical interaction vs. monological distance to a fixed text),
* factor 2: detached formal vs. concrete colloquial style,
* factor 3: reporting, narrative text vs. descriptive, expository text.

In more recent studies, Biber (1988, cf. also Biber and Finegan, 1989) suggest three partly different dimensions: informational vs. involved production (which seems to have to do with both function [informational/phatic] and production constraints), elaborated vs. situation-dependent reference (i.e. explicit vs. non-specific), and abstract vs. nonabstract style (in the former, passives, past participles etc. give prominence to patient roles rather than agent roles).

It is notoriously difficult to test theories of the crucial differences between speech and writing. As Redeker (1984), and many others, point out, many conditions covary with the speech vs. writing distinction; e.g. amount of planning, conventionally expected level of formality, nature and size of audience, topic. In her study, she tried to keep constant degree of planning, formality and audience, while varying topic (two personal stories and two explanation topics were used) and medium (and genre?) (spoken narrative vs. informal letter). Fragmentation and integration features were found to discriminate between spoken and written discourse, and involvement, but not detachment (as defined by her), did so too.

In contrast to several of the studies reviewed, we are concerned here with an authentic situation, not with a made-up experiment. In addition,
the 'natural experiment' provided by the police interrogation with its report allows us to control quite a few factors, in fact more so than in some earlier studies of spoken vs. written narration. When, for example, Tannen (1982a) had the same persons tell about the same thing first in an oral context and then in writing, she could study some differences between oral and literate strategies. Yet, the oral and written versions were delivered on two occasions with a considerable time interval in between.

1.2. Some other theoretical perspectives

In recent years, the theory of narratology has developed rapidly (Genette, 1980; Rimmon-Kenan, 1983). Oral story-telling, whether monological or dialogically orchestrated, has been the topic of research in several traditions, e.g. Labov and Waletzky (1967), Sacks (1972), Goodwin (1982) and Gúlich and Quasthoff (1986). Another important field for research is that dealing with issues of how other people's utterances and thoughts are relayed in oral story-telling (theories of direct vs. indirect discourse, mimesis vs. diegesis etc), the modern locus classicus being Volosinov (1986). Important insights have been assembled by Tannen (1989), who argues forcefully that the reproduction of other people's utterances cannot be seen as a process of simple copying; it involves creative (re)construction on the part of the (re)teller. In general, stories must not be analyzed as static closed entities but must be seen as embedded within larger events and contexts. If stories are reported or retold, then we will have to consider not only the context of their first production but also premises of the reporting and retelling activity itself.

In our data, the 'same story' gets told several times, by different actors and in different forms. Of course, it is a matter of definition if we are entitled to speak of the 'same story' (Polanyi, 1981). Anyway, the versions will be different on several accounts. We will therefore talk about different generations of the same story, drawing upon a concept used by Aronsson (1991), who reviews the literature on the recycling of information through judicial bureaucracies. Obviously, this process often involves important reinterpretations, possibly leading to various forms of miscommunication (cf. Aronsson, 1991), when messages travel across sequences of communication situations, as do 'cases' in bureaucracies. Important links in such processes are cases of transformation from oral dialogue to written report; this occurs in many institutional encounters, e.g. police interrogations, doctor consultations, social work interviews etc. This process, from dialogue to report, has been studied by several researchers. Pioneering work was done by Cicourel (1968, on judicial contexts; 1981, on medical interactions), and other studies are those by Spencer (1984, on probation interviews), Soeffner (1984, on German police interrogations), and Frankel (1984, on doctor-patient interactions).

2. Data

2.1. The whole corpus

Our data comprise 30 police interrogations with persons suspected of having committed some minor economic offence (fraud, minor theft, shoplifting), plus the police reports assembled during these interrogations. There were twenty-one men and nine women among suspects, the age span being 16–73 years. The seven police officers serving as interrogators were all male. The interrogations took place in a small office with only the police inspector and the suspect present. The reports were produced on-line during (parts of) the interrogation, either by the police officer's taking notes with pen and paper, or by his recording sentence-by-sentence into a tape recorder. Very little editing was later done, before the final report was typed.

The atmosphere during interrogations was quite friendly or at least neutral, and the interactional style was informal and sometimes colloquial. In some cases, there were clear differences in perspectives and understandings between the parties, but the overall impression in the majority of cases was one of the two parties cooperating on a joint task.

A considerable number of variables that normally confound the speech vs. writing distinction, are kept more or less constant in our data:
— setting: the setting for the production of the oral and written versions is the same: same participants, same time and place (for each individual case),
— purpose: in most cases, among them the one (case 20) selected for illustration below, the suspects seem to accept the policeman's concern to deal with events talked about as a (possible) case of violating the law,
— topic: as long as both parties stick to the subject matter, they are dealing with the same events,
— time for planning: both the oral dialogue and the written report are produced on-line, presumably with rather little preparation before the encounter,
— monologicity: in case 20 and some other cases, the suspect is fairly talkative and tells his story in reasonably lengthy and coherent turns, without too many interventions from the policeman.

Naturally, some differences between the oral story told by the suspect
and the written story produced by the policeman remain, one of them being the difference in personal involvement (see below).

The data corpus has been subjected to a number of analyses in earlier studies by us. Jönsson (1988) investigated, among other things, the sources for the various units of information that were entered into the final reports. She found that 36 percent of these originated in suspects' lengthy narrative turns, 18 percent were given by suspects as answers to open but specific (wh-word) questions from the police, 29 percent were simply confirmations (yes/no-answers to closed-ended questions by the police, who thus, in this case, not only suggested but also formulated the information to be included), and finally 17 percent were statements with no basis in the interrogation (these were usually taken from documents available to the police; cf. Jönsson, 1988: 57). Thus, we can safely say that the police officer has played a major role in telling the 'suspect's story', as it appears when typed on the form.

Linell and Jönsson (1991) looked at some of the police interrogations and reports, in particular those involving middle-aged shoplifters (who tend to give long stories of their own), analyzing each of these as two differently perspectivized versions (narratives) of the same story. In many cases, it is possible to discern a suspect's perspective, grounded in his or her everyday-life world and surfacing (almost) only in the interview, and a police perspective, characterized by the rationalities of the legal institution and the police officer's task to produce a report that has to meet certain requirements. In the suspect's and the policeman's respective versions, the story will be differently structured: different significant points, different events portrayed as critical, etc.

In general, the police perspective is dominant in both interview and report, but it is most salient in the report. (This also holds in cases where, as judged from what is made manifest in discourse, perspectives are largely shared.) This is just what we could expect; we are dealing with a routinized encounter defined by legal rationality and controlled interactionally by the police. Moreover, the writing of a report is the overall objective of the whole interrogation, and the report is that which 'counts' in the subsequent processing of the case. On the other hand, the police reports, in our corpus at least, are produced on-line in the interrogation, with practically no editing work afterwards. On the whole, their structures follow the interrogation rather closely.

While Linell and Jönsson (1991) selected some cases where clear differences in perspectives were identifiable, there are also cases where suspect and policeman stay on topic collaboratively, concentrating on the subject matter, and where hardly any perspectival differences attributable to divergent concerns can be seen. Yet, differences between the spoken and

written story versions are clearly present also in such cases. This paper will deal in some detail with one such case.

2.2. Police interrogation case number 20

We will base our single case analysis on the story of Kent Olsson,² a young man, 18 years of age, who was accused of having attempted to steal a car stereo set from a car in a parking lot in the small town of Norrbys on the 7th of June. The police report produced during the interrogation has been translated into English, and runs as follows:

(i)² (Translation of police report written by police officer EE)

Case no. 20 (excerpt)

Kent Olsson admits to the appropriation of a car stereo from a car with the registration number QZW 931. Kent Olsson says that during the evening of 7th of June 1985, he was with a friend called Rolf Arnesson. The two of them drove to Norrbys where they intended to take part in a party that was to be held on the beach. The car they travelled in was an orange Peugeot with the registration number LKA 014. When they arrived at the beach, they established that there was no party. First, they considered proceeding home again, but drove to Norrbys instead. After some time, they found themselves out in Storgården. They established that they had very little petrol as well as being short of money to tank up. They started looking in parked cars to see if there was possibly a car where there was a petrol can. When they got to the car, a Volvo 145, registration number QZW 931, they established that there was a jerry can in it. The car was unlocked. They got into the car and established that the jerry can was empty. In connection with this, Olsson's friend, Arnesson, saw that there was a nice car stereo in the car. Together, they decided to try to appropriate the stereo. The stereo was lying unmounted in the car and the two friends helped in removing the cables. After they had removed the radio and were standing outside the car, they had been attended to by a person living in a house near by. This person shouted to Olsson and Arnesson to go away from the place. Olsson, who was holding the radio at the time, got frightened and put the radio down on the spot. Olsson and Arnesson then proceeded to Olsson's car and they drove home in the direction of Västerby. They ran out of petrol in Motorp. They left the car there and proceeded on foot the rest of the way home. There, they borrowed another car and drove back and fetched Olsson's car after having put some petrol in the tank.

Olsson, together with Arnesson, is willing to recompense the plaintiff
for the costs he may have had in connection with installing the radio in his car again.

End of interrogation: 10 a.m.

The suspect has listened to and approved of this recording on-line.

Underlying this report is an interview between the police officer and Kent Olsson. The story part of the interview took around 30 minutes (slightly below our average), and the transcript is given below in a rough English translation:

(2)⁴ (Police interrogation case no. 20: English translation of Swedish original, transcript somewhat abridged.)

P= police officer Erik Eriksson, around 50 years old
S= suspect Kent Olsson, 18 years old

(About 20 turns omitted)

(1) 1 P: so you can start telling me a bit what happened that evening and what the reason was ... for what you did

2 S: Mm. (2 seconds) Yeah. We were going to go down ... and check out. We had heard that there was a party going on there then ... on the beach in Norrby. (P: Mm) And so we drove out there. I think, but I don't remember whether it was a Thursday or what it was (2 seconds) I have an idea it was a weekday (P: Mm) (4 seconds) And ...

3 P: It was a Thursday, that's correct.

4 S: Mm. (3 seconds) And then ... we were up there for a time, I suppose. There weren't many people there then, but ... So we were going to drive home, (1 second) and ... the funny thing was that we had, it was ... we didn't have much petrol in the car (1 second) (P: Mm) And we didn't have much money, either of us, and so ... we didn't really know what to do then. And then ... eh ... the silly thing was that we ... we got the idea that we would go and look for petrol, then (P: Mm) ... if there was petrol can. (3 seconds) And: ... then we went to take a look up there in the area ... where it happened (P: Mm) (1 second) And then we came up to a 145 ... which ... there was a jerrycan in (5 seconds) and uh ... we tried the doors then and then ... it was open. Then we jumped in ... there and checked [inaudible] except that the petrol can was empty, then (P: yes) (2 seconds) but ... so (3 seconds) I don't remember, = it wasn't me who, = I don't remember whether ... 'cos then that guy came out ... on the balcony (P: mm) so he saw us then. (P: mm) And I don't really know if we ... (CLEARs THROAT) had with us 'cos we ... got the stupid idea of ... once we had got in, there was a tape-recorder in the car.

(1.5 seconds)

5 P: It was the same car, was it?

6 S: Yes

7 P: Mm

(3 seconds)

8 S: And I don't know if ... We took it out in any case, but I don't know if we ... 'cos we didn't have it with us when we went home, in any case.

(2 seconds) (P WRITES)

9 P: Well, it was found outside

10 S: = It was found ... Mm. (3 seconds) And then when he came out ... and told us to push off and then we did. (4 seconds) We took the car and went.

11 P: Who took out the tape-recorder?

(2 seconds)

12 S: Yes ... We must've both been doing it, = it was loose, so to say, all we had to do was take it away ... remove the cables and then ...

13 P: It wasn't mounted properly, then?

14 S: = No (2 seconds) there were only the cables that ...

15 P: Do you remember who did it, then?

16 S: Yes, I think we ... we both pulled it.

17 P: = I see.

(3 seconds)

18 S: We each sat in one of the seats. (P: mm) ... in front.

(P WRITES, 10 seconds)

19 P: So one could say that you helped each other to take it out?

20 S: Yes ... more or less ...

21 P: = But later it was found outside the car. = So someone must have thrown it there?

22 S: Yes.

23 P: Who was it, who did that?

24 S: It was me who ... left it behind.

25 P: Mm

(P WRITES, 15 seconds)

What what reason did you have for taking it out?= Was it in the beginning that you had thought of ... taking it with you?

26 S: Well, it's difficult to say ... = It happened so quickly = I suppose it probably was. (P: mm) since we took it out then (P: mm) to ...
it was uh I checked the petrol can and said uh there uh isn’t any petrol in it, I said. (CLEARS THROAT, 1.5 seconds) Ah, we have a cassette here, he said, a nice one (P: mm) and then ... we talked since we didn’t know whether we dared take it or not. (2 seconds) We thought, well, we’ll try to take it, then.

27 P: Mm. And then you were scared (M: yes) then? That was why you left it behind then?

28 S: Yes, it was, ’cos we ... had taken it out then (P: mm). Otherwise it’s quite possible we would’ve taken it with us.

29 P: Mm. (1 second) What happened after you had driven off? = Did you drive home or where did you go?

30 S: Yes, we drove home, directly home and then we ran out of petrol. (4 seconds) at Motorp. (P: hm) (2 seconds) and since it wasn’t so far from home, we walked home to fetch another car ... and towed it home.

(P WRITES, 7 seconds)

31 P: And the friend you talk about, it was this Rolf Arnesson?

32 S: Yes

33 P: What sort of party were you going to go to? = Was it a special party?

34 S: No, it was ... it wasn’t a private party or anything like that ... it was ... a mate of mine in my class, then, who said ... that there was ...

35 P: Party on the beach?

36 S: = Yes ... there was going to be a few people there ... and it was then that we thought about going there (P: mm)

(2 seconds)

37 P: We’ll see if we can get this directly on tape. = If I say something on the tape now when I’m recording that isn’t correct (M: mm), just interrupt at any time, right. (M: mm) Because then we’ll change it at once.

(P STARTS THE TAPE TWICE)

(P STARTS DICTATING; MOST OF THE RECORDING IS NOT INCLUDED IN THIS EXCERPT)

38 P: (3 seconds) So there was no special party on the beach?

39 S: No

40 P: So that’s why you drove into Norby?

41 S: Yes, exactly. Then we thought we’d go home.

42 P: (STARTS THE TAPE-RECODER) ‘When they arrived at the beach (…’) MOST OF THE DICTATION NOT INCLUDED)

‘There, they borrowed another car and drove back and fetched

Olsson’s car after having put some petrol in the tank. Full stop.’

(2 seconds) Is there anything else here, do you think?

43 S: No

3. Results

In spite of the factors kept constant (2.1), a comparison of Kent Olsson’s oral account and the police officer’s written report will reveal a number of interesting differences. Moreover, the same points are by and large corroborated in the whole corpus, even if we use only case for illustration here.

3.1. Linguistic differences

It would have been surprising if the oral and written story versions had been linguistically identical. Of course, they are different on several accounts; some data are summarized in Table 1. Most, if not all, of these differences between the oral dialogue and the written report would fit the predictions derivable from existing theories (cf. 1.1).

First of all, the report is almost three times shorter, in terms of number of words, than the corresponding dialogical story. (Yet, Olsson and Eriksson stick to the subject matter in their conversation, unlike in some other dyads where topics sometimes wander off.) Also, the level of information density is much higher in the report, as measured in terms of percentage of either content word tokens or content word types (Table 1, lines 3, 4). Note that both parties use almost the same number of content word tokens (line 3; the difference in number of different content word types (line 4) is natural, since the suspect produces more talk in total). If we take the relative number of finite verbs as an indicator of average clause length (the lower the percentage, the longer clauses), there is just a very small difference between dialogue and report (but again in the expected direction).

Furthermore, the dialogue, especially in the suspect’s turns, contains some interrupted and incomplete constructions (repetitions, restarts etc.; cf. Table 1, line 6). A close look at the conjunctions used reveals that the suspect has a very high incidence of ‘and’ (och), which seems to be an indicator of a narrating style simply coordinating story atoms, whereas the police officer, in both dialogue and report, has an even distribution of his four most frequent types (når ‘when’, och ‘and’, att ‘that’, som ‘who, which’).
Table 1. Some linguistic differences between oral dialogue and written report (Police interrogation no. 20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Police:</th>
<th>Both together:</th>
<th>Report:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Length</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Total number of running words</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Total number of content words*</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Information density</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Percentage** content words (tokens)</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Percentage** different content words (types)</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>29.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Clause structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Percentage** finite verbs</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Syntactic fragmentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Number of syntactically incomplete or interrupted constructions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Content words: nouns, verbs (except auxiliaries), adjectives, and adverbs derived from these.
** Percentage of X = number of X’s per 100 running words.

Other syntactic differences include the occurrence in the report of a few more complex noun phrases involving several prepositional phrases (e.g. tillgrepp av bilstereo ur personbilen ‘appropriation of car stereo set from the car’, tillsammans med en kamrat vid namn ‘together with a friend by the name of’) (there are just a couple of such phrases in the conversation, e.g. dåligt med bensin i bilen ‘out of petrol in the car’, and these are less close-knit), and of two participles in attributive use (e.g. parkerade bilar ‘parked cars’) (none of these in the conversation). Of course, there are also lexical differences (some lexical items appear only in the report, e.g. tillgrepp ‘appropriation’, färds ‘travel’, konsta ‘establish (as a fact)’), others only in the oral story, e.g. sticka ‘push off’) as well as morphological differences, e.g. among preterite forms (written standard forms ending in -de: e.g. ropade ‘shouted’, vs. colloquial forms with no ending: e.g. kolla ‘checked’). Yet, some colloquial expressions do appear in the report. On the whole, ‘our’ reports are often written in a peculiar style (which we assume to be typical of police prose), a hybrid mode of expression, mixing bureaucratic forms (that would never appear in spoken dialogue) with colloquialisms (which are most often drawn from the actual interviews), although case 20 is hardly extreme on this point. Since differences of language and linguistic style may be regarded as somewhat trivial, we will not further discuss them in this paper, unless they have a direct bearing on our major concerns. (For some comments on the use of citations, see below.)

3.2. Towards a more visible narrative structure

The oral story-telling in the dialogue is partly rambling and incoherent, with incidents not always told in a chronological order, and some parts repeated several times. Digressions from the main story track occur. Some ingredients are developed spontaneously by the suspect, while others are forthcoming only later as a result of specific questions by the police officer or through negotiation between the two parties. In the report, things are told only once, and irrelevant side-remarks are by and large eliminated. The story is basically organized according to chronological principles. While the production of the written report thus involves eliminating some material from the story, it also comprises some additions. The writer inserts some coherence-creating material, in order for the story to come out as more clearly structured and more visible (in more than one sense). It seems as if the police officer occasionally, and probably without being aware of it, tries to transform the story in the direction of prototypical narrative. An amusing case in point is the end of the written report of case 20: we recall that the whole story started with the complication that the boys went out of petrol. In prototypical stories, one usually resolves the problem somehow in the end, thus providing a ‘return to the normal’. Indeed, the police officer writes: ‘they ... fetched Olsson’s car after having put some petrol in the tank,’ and, yet, there is no basis for this piece of information in the interrogation; what Olsson says is just that the boys used the other car for towing their own car back home.

3.3. From vagueness to precision

Kent Olsson’s presentation is quite vague on several points; he is not sure what happened, in which order it happened, on whose initiatives. In the written report, the whole sequence of events comes out as more structured and more dependent on clear decisions on the part of the actors. A characteristic feature of the report of case no. 20 is the recurrent use of the verb konsta (‘ascertain’, ‘establish (as a fact)’); in (1) translated simply with establish. Clearly, this wording is the police offi-
cer's; Olsson never uses konstatera, and there is no basis in his accounting for attributing to him a series of different acts of 'establishing facts' or 'ascertaining' states of affairs.

The report provides another account of the causalties involved in the story told. The suspect tells his story of how the two, more or less suddenly and unintentionally, it seems, ended up in a situation which came to have some unfortunate consequences for them. Somehow, they were the victims of circumstances; something befell them. By contrast, the police report tells a story of rational and controlled actions based on clear decisions: 'then they did this, they established that ..., they decided to try to appropriate ...' etc.

These differences are arguably dependent on a shift of perspectives; for the police, it is important to be precise about things that might be legally relevant. If actions were carried out with intent, this must be stated clearly (see 3.5). The exact order of events is also important, and the vaguenesses of the oral account must be eliminated, if possible. Take, for example, P's turn 25: 'Was is it in the beginning that you had thought of taking it with you?', and S's subsequent attempt to answer, which rather shows that everything happened so quickly that it would be hard to fix a point in time, when the boys decided to take the stereo set.

While an increased degree of precision is necessary due to the particular purposes of the police report, such a transformation also squares well with what is commonly assumed to be typical of written texts as opposed to oral discourses. We will return to this issue in the discussion.

3.4. From emotionality to neutral tone

Olsson's delivery is characterized by frequent emotional expressions and evaluations of events told-about, including his own conduct (e.g. Swedish det lustiga, det durnna var etc; 'the funny thing', 'the silly thing was', 'we got the stupid idea'). There are also many markers of uncertainty (Swedish tror jag, väl jag kommer inte ihåg etc; 'I suppose', 'I think', 'I don't remember', 'I don't really know'), clear traces of difficulties in finding words, vacillations between, on the one hand, hesitations and pausing, and, on the other hand, accelerated passages, which presumably display both involvement and nervousness. The latter is perhaps most salient in that part of the suspect's longest turn (4), where he tries to explain what happened when the boys got into the car, i.e. the moments when the crime was on the verge of being consummated. At this point, the chronology of events gets confused in his story. Everything seemed to happen almost at once. We quote this passage of Olsson's story again:

(3) (...) Then we jumped in ... there and checked (inaudible) except that the petrol can was empty, then (2s) but ... so (3s) I don't remember, = it wasn't me who, = I don't remember if ... 'cos then that guy came out ... on the balcony so he saw us then. And I don't really know if we ... (CLEAR THROAT) had with us 'cos we ... got the stupid idea of ... once we had got in, there was a tape-recorder in the car.

(3 short turns omitted)

S: And I don't know if ... We took it out in any case, but I don't know if we ... 'cos we didn't have it with us when we went home, in any case.

This short passage, which is pronounced very rapidly, contains five instances of 'I don't know' or 'I don't remember' and many interruptions and hesitations. (Cf. also similar features in turn 26.) It is only after some specific questions by the police officer that Olsson recalls that the stereo set had been left outside the car and that the two boys probably had intended to steal it, had they not been disturbed by the man on the balcony. These incidents are reported by the police as follows (excerpt from (1)):

(4) (...) They got into the car and established that the jerrycan was empty. In connection with this, Olsson's friend, Arnesson, saw that there was a nice car stereo in the car. Together, they decided to try to appropriate the stereo. The stereo was lying unmounted in the car and the two friends helped in removing the cables. After they had removed the radio and were standing outside the car, they had been attended to by a person living in a house nearby. This person shouted to Olsson and Arnesson to go away from the place. Olsson, who was holding the radio at the time, got frightened and put the radio down on the spot.

Here, the emotional and value-ridden features of the oral account are absent; the written report is kept in a neutral tone. There are no indications that the boys were mostly undecisive of what to do, or that Kent Olsson obviously does not feel emotionally indifferent to what happened. The differences between the two stories are, on this point, obviously dependent on the fact that Olsson is the individual personally involved, while the police officer is writing in his capacity of a bureaucrat. (Yet, in the dialogue, he acts as a friendly and seemingly sympathetic partner.) At the same time, however, there is a more general point to be made; the written medium, with its relative lack of direct counterparts to
prosody and paralanguage, is bound to work in the direction of objectification and de-emotionalization.

3.5. Shifts in perspective

Although Kent Olson's story is emotional, it would be an exaggeration to claim that he presents it in a very personal mode. The discourse of the first person is by and large characterized by a shared perspective; Kent Olson does not deviate much from the task of telling about that which stands out as the 'subject matter' for the police. In fact, his story-telling is already a bit oriented towards a 'report' mode (cf. Gürlich and Quashtoff, 1986), i.e. enumerating events without making an explicit point. Yet, the police perspective is undeniably more chiselled out in the report than in the dialogue. The police rationality underlies the structure of the written narrative: the actions involved are first labelled as a special category of unlawful behaviour ('appropriation of a car stereo set'), the admission by the suspect is stated, then follows a descriptive account which is supposed to support the claim (and admission) that the label is warranted. The train of events involved are portrayed as a series of rational and planned actions. At the same time, features of the oral account, which serve to make visible alternative interpretations and attitudes (also) entertained by the suspect, are absent; Olson's explanation in terms of being the victim of circumstances (3.3), and his emotional reactions (3.4).

3.6. The blurring of source distinctions

What transpires in a dialogue is a collective construction by the dialogue participants; what gets said in a given contribution by one person is dependent on the partner's prior contributions and his or her projected forthcoming reactions. Nevertheless, if we listen to the recorded interview or if we read the transcript, it is often possible to trace individual pieces of information to particular sources. For example, in a police interrogation, one piece may be more or less spontaneously introduced by the suspect in a narrative turn, while another may be introduced through a question or suggestion from the police officer, and only then confirmed (or, sometimes, modified or denied) by the suspect. Such differences between sources are systematically blurred in the reports; one cannot know from reading the reports under what conditions a given piece of information has been introduced. Some reports have a high incidence of *verba dicendi* ('he says ...', 'Andersson maintains ...', 'she adds that') and expressions within citation marks, but both these devices turn out to be very misleadingly used in our corpus. In no way do they point to how the suspect, specifically, expressed himself or herself; rather, they seem to belong to the policeman's stylistic repertory of means for varying and adorning his written text (Jönsson, 1988)."*8*

For some reason, the report of case no. 20 happens to contain no *verba dicendi* or citations of the kinds just mentioned. Yet, this report fits the general pattern that a reader cannot tease out the varying sources of the information provided (just compare carefully the dialogue and the report text). Is this a feature which in some sense inheres in the written genre? As usual, we are inclined to say 'to some extent', but it seems to us that the decisive factor is here the fact that the report is a second-generation text produced by (essentially) one person. There is something general going on here: any 'secondary' (re)production of prior discourse is a complex process involving active (re)construction by the producer who will insert features resulting from this creative work; it is next to impossible to act as a reproducer who just repeats what was said in the 'original' discourse (Tannen, 1989). The problem of specifying who contributed which pieces of information is further enhanced when one party is faced with the task of reporting in a monological, integrated and coherent text what has earlier transpired in dialogical (and hence, at some levels, less 'coherent') communication between the reporter and other persons.

**Discussion**

We are dealing with a corpus of authentic discourse, in which stories are told in two versions which lend themselves to comparison; first an oral version, where some turns are fairly monological though of course the whole discourse is produced in a dialogical face-to-face situation, and then a written version, which is monological (in a basic sense) but is still produced on-line in the same face-to-face situation.

Our analyses have shown that, although there are no absolute differences, a number of discrepancies distinguish the two versions, in spite of their similar production conditions and situational constraints. There are characteristic alterations occurring in the transformation from spoken interview to written report. In general, these alterations fit the predictions derivable from current theories of speech vs. writing, orality vs. literacy. Yet, we would like to bring up two important considerations that seem to reduce the importance of the speech vs. writing distinction *per se*. We may call these points genre-specificity and generation differences.
4.1. Genre-specificity

Differences between speech and writing have been attributed to both processing constraints (real-time production vs. opportunities for extensive editing) and situational characteristics (the interaction between author and audience, vs. between the author and the unfolding text). As we have pointed out, many — though by no means all — aspects of these groups of phenomena are common to both story generations in our data (and particularly so in some individual cases, such as case no. 20 used in this paper). There are, however, some important differences in the suspect's and the police officer's predicaments. The suspect, who is after all the primary source and the main oral teller, is morally and emotionally involved in the subject matter, and may even feel threatened, while the reporter, the police officer, is only marginally emotionally involved and acts out of a position of professional neutrality. In writing the report, he retells someone else's story, although he has been very active in co-constructing it. In addition, there is evidently a difference in level of education between the two tellers.

We would argue, however, that neither of these conditions would suffice as explanations of the differences that in fact appear between story versions. Rather, one would invoke cultural conventions tied to (informal) interviewing versus (police) report writing. Such conventions may be partly of a general nature, i.e. tend to appear across genres of speech vs. writing, or at least across genres of interviewing vs. reporting, but many are clearly even more genre-specific. In other words, police reporting belongs to a particular bureaucratic routine, subject to specific institutionalized legal rationalities.

Interrogating suspects in criminal cases is part of a bureaucratic judicial set of procedures extending far beyond the interrogation itself. The report is 'future-oriented' in a rather obvious sense; the police officer knows that it will be used by state attorneys (prosecutors) to decide whether (and how) to pursue the case further, possibly to court. Therefore, reports must be perspicacious in such a way that legally relevant features stand out clearly; otherwise, they would be useless for legitimating decisions (in either direction, i.e. to prosecute or to abstain from it). We have seen that police reports tend to portray events as an ordered sequence of decisions and actions, while the suspects' own stories are often more messy. Soffeiner (1984) has argued that if the police report stories with a fairly clear structure as regards their legal relevance, prosecutors can be expected to reconstruct an even clearer structure, when or if they will have to argue (in court) that a certain version is true, or at least plausible.

Yet, having underscored the importance of legal rationalities, a small rider should be added. It is possible that the transformation from vagueness to increased precision reflects something more general too. It might have to do with the basic premises of communication in speech vs. writing. An oral story-telling will not have the same requirements on and opportunities for planning a logically coherent narrative. If the oral version is told in dialogue, the partner may ask questions if he or she cannot follow the teller, and, conversely, the speaker need not, and may not be allowed to, lay out a story without interruptions and digressions sparked off by the interaction with the co-conversationalist. A writer is forced to provide a sufficiently elaborated version that can be understood by an absent, and perhaps unknown, reader. Paul Drew (pers. comm.) has pointed out that, as compared to an oral version, there is often an over-determined description of events and actions in writing. Instead of, say, just stating that 'I parked the car under the tree', there may be some tendency towards something like 'I took the car and parked it under the tree', thus treating decision (intention) and action (performance) as separate things.

4.2. Differences between message generations

The second point deals with reported and reporting discourse in general. As Bakhtin (1986), Volosinov (1986), and after them, among others, Tannen (1989) have pointed out, reports of what has been said and meant by people in discourse reported about cannot be facsimiles of the latter first-generation discourses; rather, the reporting discourse, the second generation, will display features derived from the conditions and purposes, rationalities and perspectives, of the reporting activity itself. Recontextualization, refitting utterances into a new context, will alter the identity of those utterances. Even if we were indeed to encounter a 'copy' (in some sense), it would constitute a new event in the new context, acquiring some new meaning, and it would be voiced in a different way (cf. Clark and Gerrig, 1990, on the myth of the 'verbatim reproduction' assumption). Normally, as in our case, the reporting involves the creative (re)construction of both meaning and form. When somebody tries to report (in speech or writing) what was uttered at an earlier occasion (even if, as in our case, that earlier occasion occurred immediately prior to writing down the notes), the message structure will be changed in fundamental ways. Tannen (1989: 110; the current authors' interpolations are in square brackets) argues that 'in many, perhaps most, cases, (...) material represented as dialogue [or utterances spoken by one particular dialogue participant] was never spoken by anyone (...) in a form resembling that constructed, if at all. Rather, casting ideas as dialogue rather than
statements [e.g. statements made by the reporter in the report itself] is a discourse strategy for framing information in a way that communicates effectively and creates involvement.' Tannen bases her assertion mostly on data from informal everyday conversations and literary discourse, but we see it here confirmed on data from institutional discourse.

Accordingly, we suggest that the basic transition from a prior to a later generation of a message, such as a story, would account for some of the observed discrepancies between the oral, dialogical story and the written report. Blurring of source distinctions is a natural tendency in secondary renditions. The style shift from the emotional, rambling and incoherent style to the more neutral, integrated and coherent one may well be another such feature. Incidentally, studies of dialogue interpreting, that is, when an interpreter produces secondary renditions in another language of originals uttered by other people in a dialogue, have shown that interpreters' renditions tend to be more coherent and 'literate' than originals; false starts, repetitions, hedges and emotional expressions, among other things, are regularly eliminated (Linell et al., 1990; Berker-Seligson, 1990). Interpreters, like reporters, are not so much engaged in a primary verbalization of content as in a survey and coherent recycling of topical substance already presented.

However, the last point that second, or later, generations of messages, more or less irrespectively of media, naturally tend to be more integrated and coherent than the spontaneous verbalizations of the first generation, brings the argument back full-circle to speech vs. writing. It is commonly assumed that one of the processing constraints usually distinguishing writing from speaking is that written texts are not produced impromptu on the spot. They have been prepared for, and their form and content have been recycled and rehearsed. In other words, we would simply argue that written products look the way they do largely because they are not genuine first generation messages.

Note

* Work on this paper was supported by grants from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation (RJ 83/137 awarded to Karin Aronsson and Per Linell) and the Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (F 402/87 awarded to Per Linell). This paper was presented at the International Pragmatics Conference in Barcelona, July 1990.

1. This was confirmed in post-interrogation interviews with the suspects and in informal interviews with police officers.

2. All names, dates, personal data etc appearing in the extracts published here are fictional.

3. The Swedish originals are available on request from Department of Communication Studies, University of Linköping, S-581 83 Linköping, Sweden.

4. Some transcription conventions: underlings: simultaneous (overlapping) talk; italics: locally stressed items; := utterance unit latched onto the previous unit without any intervening pause whatsoever;

5. Some transcription conventions: (P:mm): back-channel (listener's, i.e. P's support) item placed approximately at the point in speaker's utterance where it occurs.

6. See Jönsson (1988) for Swedish examples of this mixed style.

7. In other words, we are faced with some nice examples of the social construction of past events, 'collective remembering' (Middleton and Edwards, 1990, see Jönsson et al., 1991).

8. While, on the one hand, we would argue that second-generation discourse can never be equivalent to its source (first-generation) discourse, we would still contend that in the judicial and bureaucratic contexts under consideration in this study, the rationalities are different from everyday discourse, and that, accordingly, the somewhat sloppy citation techniques so often observed should be rectified. However, we cannot here pursue the issue of recommendations for police reporting practice. See Jönsson (1988).

References


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