

Quantitative and Qualitative Analyses of Police Interviews with Canadian Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Suspects¹

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Abstract

This study employs quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the differences in discourse strategies between three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal suspects during investigative police interviews in Western Canada. Quantitatively, we find that the ratio of investigator to suspect speaking during interviews is higher with Aboriginal suspects than it is with non-Aboriginals; the frequency of second person pronouns of all types shows that non-Aboriginal suspects are more confrontational with the investigator than Aboriginals; and Aboriginal suspects use more hedges than non-Aboriginals. Qualitatively, we see a strong tendency for Aboriginal suspects to deny police assertions, volunteering little or no information, whereas non-Aboriginal suspects dispute assertions, offering alternative accounts of alleged details and events. As well, non-Aboriginal suspects often provide unsolicited evaluations of themselves, others, and the investigation itself. Aboriginal suspects do not. Combined, all of these features indicate that non-Aboriginal suspects challenge the institutional boundary that separates them from investigators in this setting, while Aboriginal suspects' discourse behavior appears to maintain institutional boundaries.

1 Introduction

At various stages of most police investigations, it is common practice for police officers to interview people who they believe to have been involved in an illegal act, assuming of course that the suspects do not invoke their right to remain silent. This study focuses on investigative interviews with suspects who are questioned for their alleged involvement in a crime. More specifically, I address key discourse differences between two cultural groups in Western Canada—Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

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Police interviews belong to a conversational genre called institutional discourse. Other types of institutional discourse include classroom interaction, service or commercial exchanges, courtroom discourse, etc. To distinguish institutional discourse from casual conversation, Levinson (1992) identifies three properties of the former, each of which is helpful in describing features of police interviews. First, institutional discourse is goal oriented. In the case of police interviews, the goal of the investigating officer or officers is to uncover information about events from a suspect or witness. The goal of many suspects, quite contrarily, is to conceal as much information as possible about his or her involvement in the events in question. Second, the institutional context places constraints on the appropriate or allowable contributions that participants may make. In investigative interviews, the investigator performs the asking, asserting, and consequently, topic selection, whereas the suspect's appropriate contribution is expected to be relevant response. Third, inferential frameworks may be in place in institutional discourse, specific to the context at hand. In a police interview, investigators, bestowed with institutional power and suspects who have none, interpret each other's input accordingly. Suspects may produce turns that maintain or resist their powerless roles in this setting.

The notion of power asymmetry in police interviews alluded to above is well documented (Ainsworth, 1993; Haworth, 2006; Heydon, 2004; 2005; Newbury & Johnson, 2006; Thornborrow, 2002). The investigator holds the power, both institutionally, and conversationally, and the suspect, little or none. The power imbalance in this context, as in many institutional contexts, grants the interviewing officer license to select the topics and steer the suspect's input with questions, thereby leaving the suspect in a position of responding. While the suspect may resist questioning through various means (see especially Haworth, 2006, and Johnson & Newbury, 2006), the power asymmetry generally holds.

Police interviews with Aboriginal suspects in North America have not yet attracted attention in the linguistic literature. In Australia, however, where many Aboriginal people speak a dialect of English quite distinct from the standard variety, a wealth of studies have concluded that a mismatch of conversational norms and inferences arises when members of the dominant cultural group (Anglo) and the non-dominant cultural group (Aboriginal) come together at all stages of the legal process (Cooke, 1996, Eades², 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1995b, 1997, 2000; Mildren, 1999). The outcome of this interactional mismatch between people of culturally and linguistically dissimilar backgrounds is the misinterpretation of Aboriginal suspects' and defendants' accounts at every stage of the legal process.

The data explored in this chapter demonstrate that Canadian Aboriginal suspects' discourse behaviour could be misinterpreted by those who do not share particular discourse features typical of the varieties of English spoken by Aboriginal people.³ The Aboriginal suspects in this study are all from Canada's west coast, and as such are uniformly characteristic of the Aboriginal English found in the Pacific Northwest. While

² Eades groundbreaking and extensive work on this topic in the Australian system should inform any comparable North American study.

³ Aboriginal English in Canada is certainly not assumed to be the same or even similar to that of Australia, and it is assumed as well, that there are varieties of Aboriginal English that vary from region to region as a result of First Nations' cultural and linguistic differences.

it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an overview of the slight phonological and syntactic differences that exist between Aboriginal English and standard Western Canadian English, some discourse features appear to have bearing on the linguistic performance of Aboriginal speakers in the context of police interviews. In particular, in many Aboriginal speech communities there exists a high tolerance for silence, and an appreciation for brevity⁴ (Ball et al., 2006; Dannenberg, 2002; Leap, 1993; Pye, 1985 (cited in Leap, 1993); Phillips, 1983; Tarpent, 1982; Mulder, 1982.)

The remainder of this chapter will proceed as follows: Section 2 will provide a word on the integrative methodology used in this study; Section 3 will introduce the corpus upon which the study is based; Sections 4 and 5 report on the quantitative and qualitative results respectively; and Section 6 offers a discussion and concluding remarks.

2 A Dual Approach to the Research Goal

The aim of this chapter is to provide both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on discourse phenomena, comparing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal suspects. The coupling of quantitative and qualitative analyses to present a dual view of discourse has been successfully employed in a number of discourse studies of various genres (for example, De Fina, 1995; Schiffrin, 2002; Sillars et al. 1992; Van de Mierop 2005, 2006;). Biber et al. (1998), and Schegloff (1993) have also commented on the complementarity of the two approaches. The unique benefit of this integrated approach offers the generalizing, quantificational power that comes from consulting a corpus as well as the drill-down, descriptive power afforded by discourse analysis.

3 The Corpus

This study is based on video recorded interviews conducted by the Vancouver Police Department and the New Westminster Police Department between 2003 and 2005. Extracts are drawn from six interviews with three Aboriginal suspects and three non-Aboriginal suspects.⁵ The table below summarizes the subjects, their ages, and the crime for which they were questioned by police.

Group	Suspect ID	Sex	Age	Charge
Aboriginal	Ab-1	male	56	sexual assault
	Ab-2	male	50s	sexual assault
	Ab-3	female	20s	public mischief
Non-Aboriginal	nAb-1	female	19	child abuse
	nAb-2	male	34	child abuse
	nAb-3	male	31	sexual assaults, robberies

⁴ Other characteristics which are not further addressed in this study are quieter, slower speech, less eye contact, and narratives with conceptual rather than temporal organization.

⁵ The term "non-Aboriginal" was chosen because two of the non-Aboriginal suspects are Caucasian, and one is a Canadian born and raised South East Asian, who is monolingual and who speaks standard western Canadian English.

A few words on the suspects are in order to help clarify extracts in later sections. Three males are questioned for sexual assault. The first two, Ab-1 and Ab-2, are questioned for the sexual assault of young women, the third, nAb-3, was accused of the assault of several women over several days, and concurrent robberies. The two suspects questioned for child abuse are a common law couple whose 5-month-old child suffered a fractured skull and internal bleeding. Medical examination concluded that there had been a severe blunt force trauma consistent with being thrown. Based on questioning by police, it was clear that the male was suspected of committing the assault, and the female was questioned for her possible involvement or for her withholding information about it. The woman questioned for public mischief, Ab-3, was accused of making a false sexual assault complaint against a man with whom she had had a one night affair that she wished to conceal from her husband. All Aboriginal suspects confessed, as did the third non-Aboriginal suspect.

Police interviews in this corpus are divided into three phases.⁶ During the opening phase, the investigator collects demographic information about the suspect and often makes small talk. The investigator usually transitions to the second phase by asking the suspect if he or she knows why they are of interest to police. The questioning during this phase pertains almost exclusively to the charge or charges, and is noticeably more aggressive than questioning during the first phase. It is the second phase which is of concern in this study. In the closing phase the investigator concludes the interview and the suspect is taken back to his or her cell.

4 Quantitative Results

In a dataset such as this which spans several hours of spoken dialogue, key conversational features can be accounted for by quantificational means. In this section, three quantitative analyses are presented, illustrating marked differences between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal suspect groups. The features to be described in quantified terms are the investigator to suspect speaking ratio, the frequency of second person pronouns as a measure of confrontation, and the use of hedges.

4.1 Investigator to suspect speaking ratio

Figure 1 illustrates the difference in the amount of speech produced by investigators in relation to that which is produced by suspects during the questioning phase of each interview.

⁶ Police interviews in general are noted to consist of three parts. See especially Heydon (2005) for discussion.

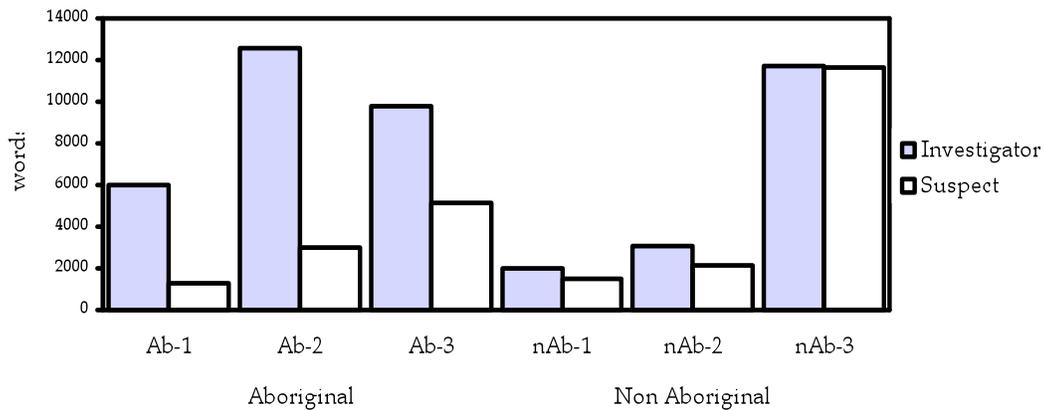


Figure 1: Investigator to suspect speaking ratio

In all three cases, Aboriginal suspects produce considerably fewer words overall than investigators. The most talkative of the three, Ab-3, does only slightly more than half of the talking. The other two, Ab-1 and Ab-2, produce just fewer than one word to every four produced by the investigator. The non-Aboriginal suspects, on the other hand, talk more than their Aboriginal counterparts, in the case of Ab-3 the ratio very closely approaches one to one.

The amount of talk produced by each party is of importance because the topics discussed in police interviews largely center around events which are alleged to concern the suspect. If the investigator is doing the majority of the talking, then the majority of the details surrounding the events in question are created by him or her, rather than the suspect. Heydon (2005) discusses how the investigator's best case scenario would see the suspect generating all information relevant to the events in question without prompting by police. However, police prompting is almost always necessary to lead the suspect to talk and this prompting comes in the form of questions and assertions that contain many of the details which police have gathered from sources other than the suspect.

By producing less talk, Aboriginal suspects are allowing more of the story to be constructed by someone other than himself or herself, while the non-Aboriginal suspects are producing more of the story in their own defense. I return to this point in Section 5 when qualitative features are discussed.

4.2 Second person pronoun reference

The frequency of second person pronouns in suspects' speech demonstrates how frequently suspects directly address the investigator. Because the power hierarchy in which both parties are situated dictates that the investigator does the asking and topic selection and the suspect is in a position of responding, a turn in which the suspect directly addresses the investigator is one that might reasonably be construed as a

challenge to the hierarchy, how ever successful or unsuccessful. Figure 2 illustrates the number of second person references per 1000 words ⁷

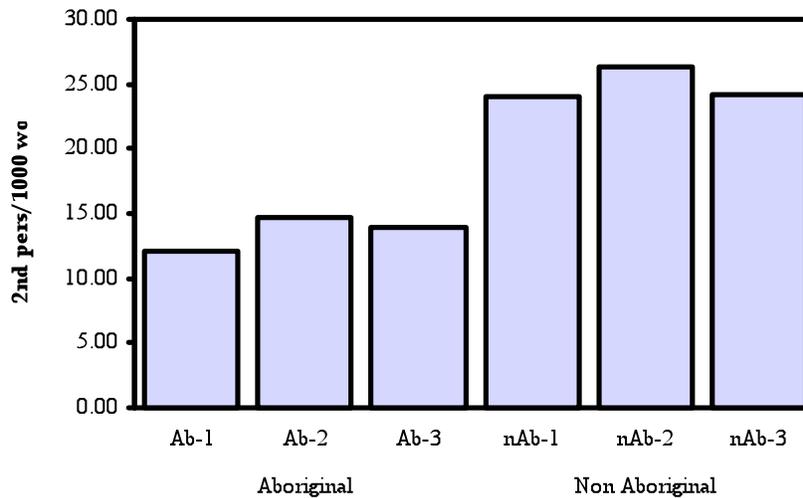


Figure 2: Second person references per thousand words by suspect

The figure above makes it clear that Aboriginal suspects in this data make fewer references to the second person, and hence address the investigator between 12 and 15 times per 1000 words. Non-Aboriginal suspects, on the other hand, directly address the investigator approximately twice as often, approximately 25 times per 1000 words. Upon closer inspection of the data, it appears that second person references differ with respect to the degree to which they are confrontational. For example, second person references can be role challenging as in extracts 01 and 02:

Extract 01 (nAb-02)

- I We're not- this isn't making you out to be a bad person.
 S Then why are you asking me if I did anything?

Extract 02 (nAb-03)

- I No, you were gonna be put there anyway. *(Regarding the suspect's location in relation to a sexual assault where he confesses to having stolen a car.)*
 S Prove I raped her.⁸ Where's the DNA? You don't have fucking DNA. You got no pubic hair, you've got no- Prove it!

Extracts 01 and 02 are confrontational and very typical of what is found in the interviews with non-Aboriginal suspects. These suspects appear to be pushing the institutional boundary that separates the contextually appropriate roles played by each investigator

⁷ Taking into account that interviews are of differing lengths, the data are normed to number of tokens per 1000 words. See Biber *et al.* (1998) for discussion of this technique.

⁸ As second person references were counted automatically, imperatives were not included in this study.

and suspect. In the first case, the suspect poses a challenging Wh-question prefaced by the discourse marker *then* linking the suspect's question to the investigator's attempt to ease the suspect's defensiveness. In the second extract, the suspect asserts that pertinent evidence from his body was not collected from the crime scene, challenging the investigator to indicate otherwise.

Second person references can be much less confrontational than those shown in Extracts 01 and 02, and are typical of those found in interviews with Aboriginal suspects. While resisting investigators' assertions, the following extracts do not have the same confrontational tone projected in the previous extracts. As such, there is less of a challenge to institutional roles:

Extract 03 (Ab-1)

I Right. So when she had too much to drink and she was lying in front of you, you were tempted. There's nothing you can do. It's biological. [SUSPECT]⁹? It happened that way, didn't it.

S Whatever way you want to put it.

Extract 04 (Ab-2)

I Ok. But that's not what happened. This is what happened. And I told you ok? You came down and you checked on her, ok? What is a man to do, ok? Listen. I know guys who just bump into another girl and get aroused. You went and you touched her, flesh to flesh, and you were aroused.

S If you say so then.

In both extracts above, the suspects neither confirm nor deny the investigators' asserted information, opting instead to resist in a less challenging manner, as described in Johnson and Newbury (2006).

While both groups of suspects address the investigator using second person pronouns, non-Aboriginal suspects do so more often and when they do, present a challenge the power hierarchy that separates the institutionally defined roles played by investigators and suspects. Aboriginal suspects address investigators less often, and in a manner which presents less of a challenge to the hierarchy.

4.3 Use of Hedges

Hedges in speech are generally agreed to have a softening effect on the message that they accompany. Compare for example:

Extract 05 (Ab-1)

I Ok. Now let's-and then now, did she take off her pants or did you?

S I think she probably did herself.

⁹ Suspects', witness' and victims' names are all anonymized in the data, and are labeled in SMALL CAPS.

Extract 05a, without hedges

- I Ok. Now let's-and then now, did she take off her pants or did you?
S She did herself.

In extract 05 above the hedges *I think* and *probably* signal a tentative proposition rather than an assertive one, like the hypothetical example in Extract 05a. In institutional settings, the use of hedges confirms the lack of institutional power (Johnstone, 2002) held by the layperson using the hedge in conversation with the professional. In this corpus, the number of hedges used by Aboriginal suspects is considerably higher than that of non-Aboriginal suspects. Figure 3 illustrates the number of hedges per turn.

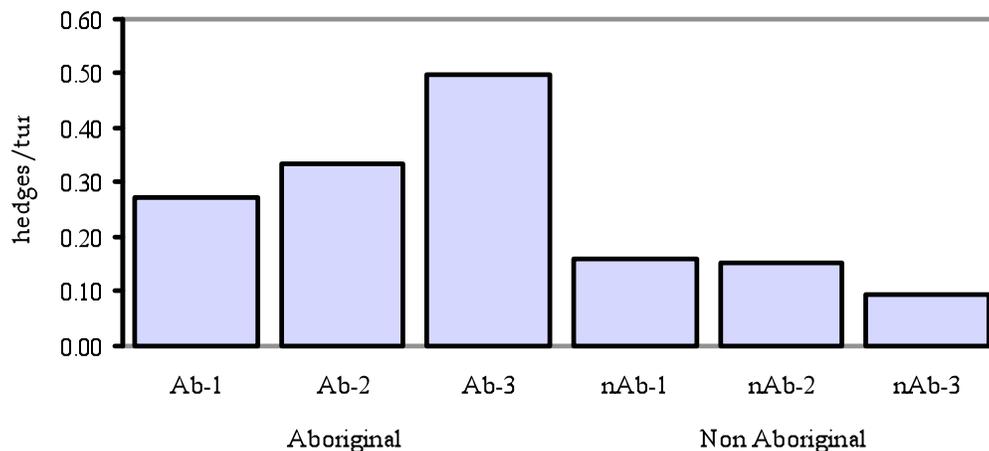


Figure 3: Number of hedges per turn by suspect

Aboriginal suspects are shown to use considerably more hedges per turn in all cases than non-Aboriginals. In the most extreme case, Aboriginal suspect Ab-3, produced on average one hedge for every two turns. On the opposite end, the non-aboriginal suspects produced one hedge for every 10 to 15 turns. The more hedges a suspect produces, the less assertive the message. The cumulative effect of multiple hedges throughout an interview present an image of a suspect who appears less committed overall to the content of what he or she is saying, leaving more room for doubt.

The use of hedges in this context is bound to have a detrimental effect on the suspects who use them the most. Weakening one's utterances instills little or no confidence in the suspects' commitment to their utterance, to investigators and if submitted as evidence, to jury members as well.

5 Qualitative Results

In Section 4 it was shown that Aboriginal suspects talk considerably less than their non-Aboriginal counterparts in relation to the amount of speech produced by the investigators. In this section, I present qualitative descriptions of discourse strategies that

contribute significantly to the difference between groups in the amount of speaking each produces. First, is a comparison between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal suspects' handling of questions and assertions from investigators: Aboriginal suspects deny details, while non-Aboriginals dispute them. Second, it is shown that non-Aboriginal suspects produce unsolicited evaluations of themselves, others, and the interview process and Aboriginal suspects do not.

5.1 Denials and Disputes

The most apparent difference between the two groups of suspects in this corpus is how much or how little information is given when faced with questions and assertions put forth by investigators. In the examples that follow, chosen for their being typically representative of what takes place throughout the interviews, it will be shown that aboriginal suspects put forth very little in the way of details to counter that which is alleged by police and that non-Aboriginal suspects offer competing details.

In the two extracts below, investigators build a scenario to which the suspect is expected to respond, and in both cases, a general rejection is offered without addressing any specific details.

Extract 06 (Ab-1)

- I The bottom line here is that here is a young lady, she is at your place, she is drunk, she's being flirty, she's already had sex with somebody because everybody's horny because that's what alcohol makes you do, the old lady's not around, everybody's asleep, and here she is, laying there and you're thinking ok, I've got the in, I'm gonna take the chance, and then you you did, ok? And there's no doubt in my mind that you did that.
- S Yeah whatever (sarcastic).

In Extract 06, the investigator claims that the suspect was in a position which would make it easy for him to take sexual advantage of the youth who has been visiting his daughter at their home. He alleges that the victim was drunk, sexually active, presenting herself as available, and with the suspect's wife out of the home, the suspect would attempt to have sex with her. The suspect responds to the entire scenario sarcastically, without addressing any of the specific details. While some details are not necessarily disputable, the investigator's presuming to know what the suspect is thinking would be a reasonable point to dispute when the suspect has heretofore claimed innocence.

In the following extract, again, the investigator creates a detailed story, after which the suspect offers an unspecified denial.

Extract 07 (Ab-3)

- I Ok, you have memories of that night. You know what you have done, ok? Now, when you realized it, maybe in the spur of the moment, you have a few drinks right? When we have a

few drinks it removes our inhibitions. I know, I've been drunk before. In that moment of weakness, you have to make up a story to tell your husband, ok?

S No.

The investigator asserts that despite her claiming to have been drugged and suffering memory loss, the suspect remembers having had a sexual encounter with a man whom she met in a bar, and that her having been drinking would cause her to become uninhibited. He offers the sympathetic understanding that being intoxicated causes people to do things they would not ordinarily do. Upon going home to her husband, he suggests that she would have to conceal her affair by telling him that she had been drugged and assaulted. He appends tag questions to his points, providing openings for affirmative response, and she only responds no after the last point. It is unclear whether she is negating the last detail the investigator provides, or the entire scenario.

In both Extracts 06 and 07, the investigator paints a detailed picture to which the suspect could respond to any number of details and he or she does not. This is quite typical among the Aboriginal suspects in this data set. Extract 08 is similar, with the suspect offering a rejection of only the final detail asserted by the investigator.

Extract 08 (Ab-2)

I SUSPECT, ok, listen to me ok? You didn't hear what I said before SUSPECT and- and- and I think you need to understand, that um, you know, you woke up, and you decided that you were going go out there and try and have sex with her with this girl, alright, against her will and you went out there and you did it, and you tried to pull her pants down and she said no and there was a lot of screamin and yellin and you bailed.

S No she only screamed once.

In Extract 08, much like 06 and 07, the investigator builds a scenario composed of several details, starting with the suspect waking, deciding to have sex with the young woman, and leaving his bedroom to approach her. He tried to remove her pants, she protested, and he left the room. The only point contested by the suspect is the detail about the screaming. At other stages of the interview, before and after this exchange, he contested all of the other points, but nowhere did he offer a narrative account of what happened from his point of view, taking into account the scenario provided by the investigator.

In none of the examples above, and very seldom during their interviews do Aboriginal suspects produce a competing scenario in their own words. This trait is consistent with the notion that in maintaining institutional boundaries, the investigator introduces topics and the suspects do not. When confronted with a scenario posed by investigators, non-Aboriginal suspects behave quite differently. Rather than produce unspecified denials, or denials of a small subset of the information presented by investigators, non-Aboriginal suspects in this data set frequently offer a competing scenario.

Extract 09 (nAb-1)

- I And don't make this a mistake, don't make this mistake that because the baby has a fractured skull, don't make this mistake that that makes you a bad parent or a bad person. You're not.
- S I didn't do it.
- I No but even if you did do it you're not a bad person.
- S I didn't do it.
- I That doesn't make you a bad person.
- S Oh yeah?
- I It doesn't.
- S Yeah.
- I No it doesn't. It makes you somebody who's succumbed to stress like millions and millions of other people in this world.
- S But not- I would never hurt my kid even if the world is on my shoulders. No I just can't see myself doing that. You know, I was- I was- my dad used to beat me up because you know, he thought I was a- a bad kid or whatever, and I promised myself God I would never do this to my kid. Ever. Cause I know the pain. He's a baby, how much [inaudible], a helpless kid that needs me, I would hurt? God no. If it was an accident why would I keep it secret? I'm not scared of anyone, I'm not here sitting in front of you, trying to please you, because I'm scared to tell you it was an accident. There was nothing, no accident. I didn't do anything intentionally. No, nothing.

In the extract above, spanning several turns, the investigator builds a scenario which suggests that the suspect could have been responsible for her child's injury. He indicates that the stress of daily life would push her to her breaking point, no differently than anyone else, suggesting that she is a victim of day to day stressful living. She counters this assertion by saying that she would be incapable of causing harm, linking to the investigator's topic, and then introducing a new topic regarding her background as an abused child as a means of saying that she herself would not be an abuser. Another strategy this suspect uses that Aboriginal suspects do not is repetition. She repeats that no accident had occurred and had one occurred, she would own up to it.

In Extract 10 below, taken from the interview of the previous suspect's common-law husband, the investigator disputes his account of the injury sustained by their child wherein the child was reported to have wiggled out of his seat and fell to the floor while the suspect was in the bathroom.

Extract 10 (nAb-2)

- I But it didn't happen as you tell me. There had to be a blunt force trauma to the side of the head for that kind of an injury. It didn't happen from the chair and I'll tell you what else, like a four

month, five month old baby isn't able to move too much. And you're suggesting he wiggled out of the seat.

- S No no no, I swear to God, if you guys were I mean we could, we could do this, like, I mean, I don't know if we can take a staff member's time, but he has this thing where he goes like this (*mimics wiggling back and forth*). And he can slide. His grandmother has seen it, [WITNESS]'s mother. You know, but I wouldn't have left him if he was sort of energetic and doing that action. He was he was calm.

Besides a rejection of the investigator's claim that a baby of five months could indeed remove himself from a child seat, the suspect suggests that as part of the investigation, they demonstrate that the child is capable of moving side to side to slide out of his seat. He offers justification for this course of action and evidence of his credibility by claiming that others have seen the child accomplish this feat. He finishes his response by saying that had the child seemed mobile at the time, he would not have left him alone in his seat. Like the extract above, the suspect offers unsolicited information in an attempt to direct the topic in a more favourable direction for himself when confronted with the investigators' disbelief.

In the extract below, the investigator presents a simple assertion that a woman has reported a sexual assault, one for which the suspect is now being questioned.

Extract 11 (nAb-3)

- I But the bottom line is, as we said before, it's just as- as, they say on the news that it's a sexual assault and you say it's not a sexual assault so that's why I want to hear your side of that.
- S Prove it.
- I But what you've got is a woman who says she's been sexually assaulted.
- S What? When she was unconscious? She's been sexually assaulted? Let's get serious. I wanted her car. That's what I'm thinking. I want the fuckin car, I'm going out cruisin.

The suspect presents two challenges in the form of an incredulous *What?* and the clause *When she was unconscious?*, followed by the echo question *She's been sexually assaulted?* He attempts to trivialize the victim's report by suggesting it lacks seriousness. He concedes that a crime is committed, namely that he stole her car and offered the motivation that he intended to go for a joy ride, a much less serious crime than a sexual assault. Like nAb-1 in Extract 09, he uses repetition to make clear his intention.

Extracts 06 to 08 demonstrate the short answers typically produced when Aboriginal suspects are presented with allegations. By allowing investigators to 'author' events and actions, and by introducing no topics or details of their own, they maintain the power hierarchy. Extracts 09 to 11 show the opposite, where non- Aboriginal suspects are verbose and present competing scenarios which challenge the power hierarchy in attempts to defend themselves.

5.2 Providing evaluative comment

In addition to offering competing scenarios of events and actions, non- Aboriginal suspects also produce unsolicited evaluative comments throughout the interview. Aboriginal suspects, on the other hand, do not. Evaluative comments can be centered around the self, other people, and the interview or interviewer. In Extract 12, the suspect takes the opportunity to extol his own virtues.

Extract 12 (nAb-3)

- I When you think of the media, the media's gonna say what the media's gonna say. Where this tape is going, this is what the evidence is that goes to court. Your side of the evidence that goes to court.
- S It's not just my side, it's their side. (*Referring to victims*)
- I Yeah, they're gonna get their side.
- S Yeah. But I just want everyone to know right now that- that- that never in my fucking life, when I've dealt with the cops, when I've done something, I've always owned it. I own what I say and I own what I do.
- one minute later, a few turns about his past convictions*
- S If I did it, I'll own it. I'll do the time.

The investigator reminds the suspect that his recorded interview would be submitted in evidence, at which point he offers unsolicited information about his character, specifically, that he is always willing to own up to his deeds. Again, repetition appears to be a means of emphasizing his self-evaluation. The same suspect offers the following negative evaluation of another individual, one of many he produced during the interview.

Extract 13 (nAb-3)

- I Where was that? (*Regarding where the suspect stole a vehicle*).
- S Downtown. I went and got a bunch of dope, cus there's a guy down there, drug dealer right? Thinks he's big right? And I don't like the guy to begin with so I said fuck it, I'm gonna rob him.
- I Ok.
- S So I went and punched his face in in the alley.
- I That night?
- S Yeah, that night.
- I What's his name?
- S Aah, it doesn't matter what his name is.
- I It is. It is kind of important what his name is because he's probably, he has probably made a complaint against you that, that uh, I don't know about yet.
- S He's a drug dealer! Come on man! I'm well sure, they're fuckin rats man. Look at the heads on them!

In the extract above the suspect indicates that he does not like the drug dealer he refers to, the dealer's name is not worth reporting, and that drug dealers are rat-like, an ironic assessment coming from a self-admitted rapist. It has been suggested (Fadden, 2007) that negative evaluations of others attributes and actions are a means of doing damage control during an interview, as a strategy to divert attention from the suspect's own negative actions and attributes to someone else's.

Suspects can also provide evaluations of the interview process itself. In Extract 14, the investigator has proposed that the suspect undergo a polygraph examination.

Extract 14 (nAb-1)

- I So I'm gonna know whether you're telling the truth, and when I ask the machine, or we ask you a question the machine or the instrument immediately comes back and says truth or a lie, it's black and white.
- S It's not. It's not accurate.
- I It's very accurate.
- S Well, 98% accurate
- I It's very accurate, ok? So I ask you this, I'm gonna put you on this as a hypothetical, you're hooked up to the instrument, I say to you, did you accidentally or intentionally cause that injury to your son on DATE?
- S That's- that's not a very good question.

In response to the proposed polygraph, the suspect provides the opinion that polygraph exams are not accurate. When the investigator disputes that claim, she concedes that the exam would be 98% accurate, but not straying far from her original opinion. The investigator then asks whether she would be found to be lying when asked about her son's injury. She dodges the question with another evaluative comment, this time indicating that the investigator's question is flawed.

Only one unsolicited opinion was found in the Aboriginal suspects' interviews, reproduced in Extract 15:

Extract 15 (Ab-1)

- I I'm starting to think that maybe what you're telling me is not true.
- S It is true.
- I I'm starting to think that maybe there's more to this.
- S Bullshit.

It is difficult to determine whether the suspect's response in the last line is a rejection of the prior assertions that the suspect is being untruthful and that he is withholding information, or that he is commenting on the investigator's manner.

The previous examples in which non- Aboriginal suspects allow themselves to provide opinions where they are not solicited demonstrate the manner in which they attempt to control certain topics and introduce others as a means of managing their otherwise powerless role. Aboriginal suspects do not use this strategy with any regularity.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter has explored quantitatively and qualitatively some features of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal suspects' discourse behaviour in the context of police interviews. By no means are these three Aboriginal and three non-Aboriginal suspects intended to be representative of all suspects of those groups, and the author recognizes the limits to any conclusions to be drawn herein. However, the two groups behave differently enough to warrant further investigation on this topic.

Given the power hierarchy in effect in institutional discourse, and in particular in police interviews, the study makes clear the notion that Aboriginal suspects' discourse behaviour does little or nothing to challenge the boundaries by virtue of the fact that they say very little, are non-confrontational on the infrequent occasions where they directly address the investigator, and use an abundance of hedges which contributes to a perceived lack of commitment to their message. When faced with allegations from investigators, Aboriginal suspects offer short denials and nothing in the way of alternative accounts in their own words, and they very seldom offer unsolicited opinions of themselves, others, or the investigation. Non-Aboriginal suspects are shown push the institutional boundaries by being considerably more verbose, they are directly confrontational with the investigator, and use fewer hedges which would soften their assertions, resulting in the appearance of a stronger commitment to their words.

Discourse behaviour typical of Canadian Aboriginal speakers, namely the preference for being short on words, may give police and later on juries, the impression that aboriginal suspects are not defending themselves or that they unwittingly appear untrustworthy, or have information they wish to conceal, when instead, their discourse strategies do not align with a set of expected behaviors in the interview room. Such expected behaviours would include taking the opportunity to promote the suspect's account of what happened, signaling strong commitment to one's own account through the use of repetition, a lack of hedging, offering unsolicited opinions and taking license to advance topics not introduced by the investigator.

It is reasonable to assume that if legal professionals and jury members are not aware of Aboriginal speakers' dispreference for verbosity, then Aboriginal suspects will be at a greater disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal suspects in an investigation. If for example a portion of an interview is shown during a trial and the defendant is shown disputing only one of several details, as was the case in Extract 08, or giving an unspecified denial as in 07, the benefit of the doubt would not likely be afforded the suspect on the basis of such evidence.

The results of a study such as this may inform Canadian agencies that are taking steps to incorporate cultural knowledge into legal practice at various stages from investigation through to trial. The contributions of linguists and anthropologists therefore, should be taken into serious consideration.

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