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“IT’s the Devil”: Responsibility Allocation And Negotiations In Police-suspect Interrogations In Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Suspects employ diverse strategies to take or deny the responsibility of committing a particular crime for which they are interrogated. This paper examined how responsibilities are negotiated, to identify the strategies used to responsabilise and deresponsibilise crimes. Levinson’s Activity type and Caffi’s concepts of responsabilisation and deresponsibilisation serve as the theoretical anchors for the study. Interrogation sessions which included different case types were conducted at the Oyo State Criminal Investigation Department, *Iyaganku*, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Nine strategies for (de)responsibilisation and six speech acts were identified. Suspects (de)responsibilise during interrogation to achieve personal goals of accepting or rejecting culpability.

KEYWORDS

(De)responsibilisation;
police-suspect interrogation;
conversational maxims

Introduction

Interrogation is vital to exposing secrets and pieces of information behind criminal acts; this essential tool is heavily dependent on language which is employed by both the interrogating police officer (henceforth IPO) and the suspect. Both discourse participants get engaged in a bid to achieve their personal goals. Rock (2010) provides a clear summary of the two main participants in the police interview/interrogation. One, the interviewers (the police officers), who will undertake a wide range of activities, which may include listening, devising questions, delivering questions, reacting to given answers, writing notes or points for clarification, writing a statement, keeping in mind prior utterances, imagining and framing the context of a crime, reading of texts produced by them and other person(s) whether before or (and) during the process of interview. Additionally, they will take part in a variety of identity-related activities, like empathizing with and promoting disclosure, as well as procedural tasks, such making sure the interview adheres to legal standards for its length. Two, the interviewees, who may listen and reply to questions, provide narratives, write or draw (for instance, by mapping a crime scene), and engage in a variety of short- and long-term memory

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