Evaluation of the Impact of Power on Police and Suspects Dialogue

Walsh, D. and Fogarty, K.
Department of Law, Al-Qalam University, Katsina, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

The essence of language in communication cannot be over-emphasized. As a matter of fact, the use of language for the expression of one's feelings, ideas and thoughts is an attribute that humans do not share with any creature. However, the use of language in human communication encounters is determined by a number of factors, one of which is power. Hence, this study examined the influence of power on turn-taking in police-suspect dialogue. Taking turns to talk is essential to conversation, as well as to other speech-exchange systems. In conversation, participants take turns in interaction as they interact on a moment-by-moment and turn-by-turn basis. This is to say that the next turn provides evidence of the party's orientation to the prior turn, there and then. Nonetheless, Police-suspect interaction is such that depicts asymmetrical distribution of power between police officers and suspects. Using descriptive method based on Conversation Analysis approach, the paper explored the relationship between power and turn-taking in Police-Suspect dialogue.

Keywords:Power, Police, Suspect, Dialogue, Impact

INTRODUCTION

During dialogue, humans make effort to abide by a "one-at-a-time" approach. Often times, emotions and the stance people take towards each other control turn taking behaviour. But contrary to the dynamic turn-taking behaviour in human conversation, turn-taking behaviour in current natural dialogue systems is often restricted by a "one-at-a-time'' rule. Literature on theoretical frameworks of and results from conversation analysis on turn-taking in police dialogues provides some suggestions on which factors influence turn-taking behaviour in police dialogues. [1] demonstrated that police officers interrupt suspects to prevent them from turn completion. These deliberate interruptions are considered signs of assertion of power [2]. Due to the asymmetric question/answer adjacency pairing, a police dialogue is structured to provide the officer with control over the conversation [3]. [4] claimed that power is under constant negotiation and reported recognition interrupts, minimal responses, taking extended turns, and interruptions of question as techniques used by suspects to access control in police interviews.

Rapport is regarded as a critical step in eliciting trust and building a relationship in professional interaction and therefore a stipulation for techniques used in police interviews, e.g., to get cooperation from the interviewee. Suspects tend to talk more openly in harmonious interactions and cooperation and agreement are increased. Discomfort –considered a lack of rapport– is displayed by stretches, fillers and pauses in the speech of the suspect [5]. In turn-taking, consideration is given to the terminology put forward by [6], differentiating two silences: gap and pause, two overlaps: between and within speaker, and bridged turn transitions: a smooth transition with no discernable silence (less than 0.18s). The type of question can influence the perception of an utterance. For example, a question directly addressing the suspect requires a response while this is not necessary for a statement. Also, an open-ended question is expected to be followed by an extensive response while yes or no are satisfactory responses for a closed question [7]. The type of question asked is related to the function of a question, e.g., information seeking for open-ended questions and conformation seeking for closed questions [8]. Moreover, case-related question may be more sensitive than small talk. Hence, this paper intends to x-ray the relation between turn-taking

behaviour and power in Police – suspect dialogue.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on the theory of Conversation Analysis. A "Conversation may be taken to be that well-known major kind of talk in which two or more partakers freely alternate in speaking, which usually occurs within specific institutional settings like law courts, classrooms and the likes [8]. Conversation Analysis (CA) has its primary focus on the chronological organization of any interaction. [9], explains that 'the focal point of CA is to describe the orderliness, structure, and sequential patterns of interactions, either in institutional or casual conversations.' One vital notion about Conversation Analysis is speaking in turn. In CA, it takes two people to have a turn-taking; still turn taking is more than just defining property of conversation activity. While the talk that participants in any conversation do is quite variably distributed among participants, the relevant orderliness their talk's distribution exhibits is the taking of turns at talk.

Turns consist of units known as turn constructional units. These units are variety of grammatical units: words, phrase, clauses and sentences. These are regarded as TCU. [10], state that the compositions of these units are highly context dependent. According to RobbinWooffitt, turn constructional components or turn constructional unit is basically the design a turn has as its structure which could be in terms of syntactic structure, prosody or generally the peculiar context the turn are constructed in. Also, in turn allocation, there are two basic ways in which a speaker can have a turn at talk: either the current speaker selects the next speaker or a next speaker may self-select. There are also other components that are important to CA: they are overlapping, adjacency pair, repairs and sequence expansion. Overlapping is an interaction phenomenon which is produced by speakers together. It occurs when a current speaker continues talking beyond the transition relevant places (TRP). It occurs when the beginning of a speaker's statement coincides with the ending of another speaker [11]. Overlapping is simply seen as a case of where more than one speaker speaks simultaneously. For some purposes, it can be useful to distinguish two specific simultaneous talk .At places where overlap occurs, transition space seems not to exist.

A further central concept to Conversational Analysis is adjacency pair. Conversational actions tend to occur in pairs. Many conversational actions call for a particular kind of conversational response in return. The basic idea is that turns minimally come in pairs and the first of a pair create certain expectations which constrain the possibilities for a second. Some of the examples of adjacency pairs are: questions/answers, complaint/apology, greetings/greetings, accusation/denial etc. Adjacency pair can further be characterized by the occurrence of the preference organization. The phenomena of adjacency pairs in talk also form the basis for the concept of sequential implicativeness; that is, each talk in a conversation is essentially a response to the preceding talk and an anticipation of the kind of talk to follow. In formulating their present turn, speakers show their understanding of the previous turn and reveal their expectations about the next turn to come [12]. Repair is another important concept in conversation analysis. Repairs are the things done to fix a conversational breakdown and restore alignment. Repair organization describes how parties in conversation deal with problems in speaking, hearing or understanding. Repair segments are classified by who initiates repair (self or other), by who resolves the problem (self or other), and by how it unfolds within a turn or a sequence of turns. It is a self-righting mechanism in social interaction [13]. Sequences are constructed of two turns at a talk; an FPP (first pair part) and SPP (second pair part).Sequence expansion allows talk which is made up of more than a single adjacency pair to be constructed and understood as performing the same

basic action and the various additional elements are seen as doing interactional work related to the basic action underway. According to Meyr, sequence expansion can occur prior to the base FPP, between the base and the FPP and SPP and following the base SPP. With this therefore, sequence expansion is of three types: pre-expansion, insertion expansion and post-expansion.

Pre-expansion serves as a prelude to some other action. It is preliminary to the main course of action. Pre-sequence comes in two basic kinds: generic pre-sequence which are used with any form of following talk and type-specific pre-sequences, which are designed to lead to some particular kind of base sequence. The generic pre-sequence is not designed with reference to the nature of action to which it is prior, but rather it is used to launch a sort of next talk. This is normally summon-answer sequence. [14]. Insertion expansion has to do with sequences which can occur between two turns of an adjacency pair, breaking the continuity turns. These sequences do not challenge the place of the adjacency pair as the basic organizational unit of the sequences to which it belongs. The person towards whom the first part of an adjacency pair has been directed may want to undertake some preliminary action before responding with the second part.

Post-expansion is a turn or adjacency pair that comes after, but is still tied to the base adjacency pair. This is of two types: minimal and non- minimal. Minimal expansion is also termed sequence closing thirds, because it is a single turn after the base SPP (hence third) that does not project any further talk beyond their turn (hence closing) [15].

Literature Review

The Nigerian Police

The Nigerian police play important roles in the Nigerian society without which the sustenance of order may be difficult. The Nigeria Police Force is a centralized and federally administered institution [16]. It is headed by an Inspector General appointed by and accountable to the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria vests the overall operational control of the force in the hands of the President.

Power Relationship in Police Cross-examination

The centrality of language to human communication cannot be over-emphasized. In fact, the use of language for the expression of one's feelings, ideas and thoughts is an attribute that humans do not share with any creature. However, the use of language in human communication encounters is determined by a number of factors. For instance, the power difference between interlocutors, more often than not, is determined by their social standing which constrains what each interactant contributes or says in interpersonal communication situations. This is more so in a communication encounter that involves unequal interlocutors, example, Police–Suspect interrogations. Such communication situations demonstrate the connection between Language and Power.

[17] explores various dimensions of the relation of power and language. He focuses on two major aspects of the power language relationship: Power in discourse and Power behind discourse. Power in discourse has to do with powerful participants controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants. Fairclough believes that this constraint rests on three factors which are (i) contents (on what is said or done); (ii) relations (the social relations people enter into in discourse); (iii) subjects (the subject positions people can occupy). Power in discourse has to do with asymmetrical relationships. One group will be able to control the other group. So power can feature the ability of one person being able to control and enforce the other. Power also has to do with the ability of one person being able to assert his/her influence and will on the other. According to [18], the exercise of power shows that one affects or coerces another person in a manner contrary to another person's interest. Thus, the discourses of unequal encounter such as-between teacher and student, doctor and

patient, police and suspect, lawyer and witness, where the power relationship is overt and institutionalized are all examples of power in discourse. Furthermore, casual conversation such as radio-talk, family discourse, discourse and gender where power is covert and usually contested, also belong to power in discourse. Power behind discourse on the other hand does not belong to face-to-face discourse such as all the examples above. This kind of power is a hidden power. Power behind discourse, according to [19] is the idea that the whole social order of discourse is put together and held together as a hidden effect of power. Institutionalized discourse such as legal discourse, doctor/patient talk, and police-suspect talk are all examples of discourses where power is highly prominent. But the power behind the conventions of these discourses does not belong to these institutions themselves but to the power holders in the institutions. These power-holders are also responsible to some powerful group of people who control and dictate to them. A group of people are behind the scene pulling the strings of power. However, since this study is based on face-to-face discourse, and language can only be analysed on power in discourse, the focus of this study will be on power in discourse.

[20] defines social power as control and holds that groups have power if they are able to control the acts and minds of other groups. Different types of power may be distinguished in accordance with the different resources employed to exercise power. Members of more powerful social groups have the precedence to access and also control, over some public discourse. Thus, professors control scholarly discourse, teachers-educational discourse, Journalists-media discourse, Judges and lawyers-legal discourse, and politicians-policy and other public political discourse [21]. [22] gives the following premises on which power is based which summarise power in all its ramifications:

(1)   Power is exercised by individuals and therefore involves choice, agency and intention.

(2)   The interests of the powerful and less powerful are likely to differ and therefore, the exercise of power may lead to conflict, resistance, and coercion.

(3)   On the other hand, individuals involved in power relations may not always be aware of the power they wield or are subjected to.

(4)   Although power can be seen as productive, enabling, and as a positive capacity for achieving social ends, it is very often used negatively, and the literature on language and power has primarily concentrated on this negative aspect and how the powerful exploit the less powerful.

Power can be found in any conversation of everyday life. Ideal dialogue (as coined by scholars such as [12] which is supposed to be exempted from power is believed to be unattainable and unrealistic. "Power is coherent in all dialogues, whether in casual conversations or in institutional settings" [8]. Although, the degree of power manifested in different contexts differs greatly. [11] equally hold the opinion that the relation between form and content is not arbitrary or conventional, but form signifies content. This apparently denotes that language is a social activity and it is ideologically motivated.

Power is always a key factor in discourse interaction. This is more so in institutional discourses like teacher-student, doctor-patient, barrister-witness, police-suspect etc. [10] substantiates this view with findings from a study he carried out on speech rights manipulation in Nigerian magistrate court talk. He discovers that participants who occupy + HIGHER role and MIDHIGHER role initiate three-slot exchanges in dyadic and triadic speech events in the courtroom. The magistrates occupy the + HIGHER role, the lawyers and the investigating police officers occupy the MIDHIGHER role while the suspects and witnesses occupy the – HIGHER role. The foregoing presents courtroom speech right as grossly asymmetrical. Power is not socially predetermined prior to interaction, but is potentially residing within language, forming part of the interaction.

Asymmetry and Power Relations

Empirical analysis has repeatedly revealed fundamental ways in which institutional forms of discourse indeed exhibit systematic asymmetries that mark them out from ordinary conversation. To take an example, in medical encounters, which have been the subject of a vast amount of research documenting asymmetries in institutional interaction [7], one way of tracing the power relationship between doctors and their patients is by counting the number of questions that are asked by each participant, looking at the type of questions asked by doctors and patients, and/or counting the number of times a doctor interrupts a patient and vice versa. Large-scale asymmetries emerge from such exercises from which it may be concluded that doctors exert control over the concerns expressed within the consultation, and patients defer to the authority of the doctor by refraining from battling for such control themselves. In the same vein, police officers exhibit some measures of power and it is this that helps them in the discharge of their duties. However, some tend to abuse the power bestowed on them as a result of their 'weapons of war'.

Linguistic Perspectives on Police Dialogue

Like the courtroom [5] and the news interview [19], the context of the police dialogue is one in which there are clearly defined and unequal roles for the participants: broadly speaking, the interviewer asks questions, and the interviewee answers them, and the interviewer also has the authority to decide what counts as a legitimate answer. Thus, it is generally the interviewer who controls the interaction, possessing as they do the authority, invested in them by the institution they represent, to constrain interviewees' type and length of turn, and to control the topics that are discussed. Up until recently, however, the police doalogue context was somewhat neglected as an area of study and the recent increase in publications in the area has for the most part focused on suspect interviews e.g. [6] adopts a critical approach to police/suspect dialogues, in which her

starting point, as with the current study, is Conversation Analysis (CA) – the type of 'micro analysis' generally regarded as paying little heed to social structure and patterns of inequality. On the basis of this micro analysis, however, she goes on to demonstrate that underlying beliefs held by the police institution are manifested discursively. Furthermore her findings reflect those of Wodak's analysis of doctor-patient interactions, in that suspects were routinely expected to conform to institutional norms with which they had little familiarity, resulting in a conflict of expectations between themselves and interviewing officers.

Question Form

According to the turn-taking model of conversation [1], a question requires an answer. In institutional settings, the types of allowable turn are often pre-allocated [6]. Thus, questioning as a mechanism of interactional control is a resource that, for the most part, is only available to powerful participants. According to Drew & Heritage, the question-and-answer sequence gives members of institutions "a measure of control over the introduction of topics and hence of the 'agenda' for the occasion" (1992). Interactions in legal contexts such as police interviews and courtroom trials are of such a nature that many turns on the part of the questioner can be said to function as a question, regardless of their syntactic form [20]. Different syntactic forms exert different degrees of constraints on their responses, and questioners in these contexts often make strategic use of their options. Because of the pre-allocation of turn types, a respondent will usually be powerless to refute any propositions contained within questions, or to elaborate when question form calls for a minimal response. As Matoesian said of the cross examination of a rape victim, put simply; the differential design of question types operates to limit her ability to talk (1993). Question form in legal contexts has received a great deal of academic attention, and accounts for a significant proportion of the advice given in police interview training, that can broadly be described as 'linguistic'. In legal contexts, it has been suggested that

there are two main functions of questions; "a genuine process of elicitation of information... [and] to obtain conformation of a particular version of events that the questioner has in mind" [5]. For example, while the appropriate response to a declarative question – such as 'you were interested in him as a person?' would be a minimal confirmation or a denial of the proposition contained within it, a WH- question like 'who were you there with?' requires the interviewee to provide new information, and is thus less constraining [14]. Newbury & Johnson scale information-seeking questions according to the *amount* of information they request, and confirmation-seeking questions in terms of 'the extent to which they coerce the participant to agree with the proposition contained in the question. [9] analysis of a high profile rape trial in the United States takes question form as one of its key areas of focus, particularly the ways in which defense attorneys make strategic use of question form to register impressions about victims' evidence in the minds of the jury: 'as a result of manipulation of syntactic question form, the jury may register not just the facts, but also the presuppositions and blame implicative imputations'. Thus, all the power to construct the telling of events lies with the attorney, 'the power to define the situation, to define what counts as reality, in sum, the power to make one's account count'. Able to draw on resources inaccessible to the witness,

attorneys can successfully manipulate not only the witness herself, but more importantly the 'overhearing audience' – the jury.

There is a large body of literature dealing with the functions of questions prefaced by various discourse markers in institutional language, including '*and*' [8] '*well*' and '*okay*' [12] and '*so*' [16]. In other contexts, '*so*' is generally treated as a marker that is employed when hearers are being offered turn at talk and/or an opportunity to change the topic [4]. However, as [2] notes, Schiffrin and others have neglected to discuss *so* within the specialised context of question and answer sequences. In police interview contexts, Johnson observes two major functions of *so*-prefaced questions. With adult defendants, she presents evidence to suggest that *so* functions to evaluate and challenge prior utterances, often to narrow the focus on to specific evidential details and to direct the interviewee into reformulations of earlier turns. With child witnesses, on the other hand, *so* is a means by which the discourse is supported and rearranged to form a coherent narrative. As such, as well as contributing to a controlling tone in the interaction, *so-* functions, in some environments, as an essentially empowering device. *So*-prefaced questions often simultaneously function as a third-turn strategy to summarize prior talk – that is, as a formulation.

CONCLUSION

The above reveals that the constructional components of turn-taking is basically syntactic structures, and the sequential structure of the interaction is adjacency pairs which is expanded to long talk through insertion sequence and are further elongated in breaks. The various forms of Turn-taking cues and allocation procedures observed in the interaction between police and suspect have been highlighted and analysed. From the data, structural components of the interactions show them as highly institutionalized and power centric. This study has also revealed that the act of police interaction is slanted in favour of the police interrogators. Also discovered is that, there is power asymmetry between the IPO and the suspect, the parties in the conversation.

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