A FORENSIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF POLICE-ACCUSED CONVERSATIONS IN SELECTED POLICE STATIONS IN ZARIA

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Abstract

This study examines the language use and discourse strategies employed by police officers and accused individuals in police-accused conversations in selected police stations in Zaria, Nigeria. Using a forensic discourse analysis approach, this research investigates the linguistic and discursive features of these conversations, with a focus on the power dynamics, cultural factors, and individual characteristics that influence language use. The study analyses 2 police-accused conversations, using manual note-taking to capture the conversations and transcribed from selected police stations in Zaria. The findings reveal that Police officers often employ coercive language strategies, including leading questions, interruptions, and confrontational tone, to exert power and control over the accused. In contrast, accused individuals frequently use defensive language strategies, such as denials, justifications, and appeals to authority, to negotiate their position and challenge the police officer's dominance. In addition, the findings highlighted that different act forms have been used by both the accused and the police. The study reveals that to a great extent, elicitation and reply/informative are largely used by accused persons and investigating police officers. The reason for these are that the IPO uses elicitation as a linguistic act form to secure information from the accused person and the later in turn uses reply/informative linguistic act form to supply the information requested throughout the interrogation, concerning the case under investigation.

Key words: Forensic, Discourse, Analysis, Police-accused, Conversations, Police stations, Zaria.

Introduction

Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA) is a relatively new field of study that combines the methods of discourse analysis with the insights of forensic linguistics to examine language used in legal and law enforcement contexts. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest on the use of forensic discourse analysis to understand the linguistic features of police-accused conversations. This is because such conversations are often fraught with power dynamics and ethical issues, which can impact the outcome of the investigation. There is a growing body of literature that suggests that the way in which police officers interact with suspects can influence the outcome of the case.

The criminal justice system in Nigeria has faced numerous challenges, including allegations of human rights violations, false confessions, and miscarriages of justice (Human Right Watch 2019). The police force, responsible for investigating crimes and gathering evidence, has been criticized for its interrogation practices, which have led to call for reform. (Amnesty International, 2020).

Effective communication is crucial in police investigations, particularly in conversations between police officers and accused individuals. This conversations can significantly impact the outcome of investigations and subsequent criminal proceedings. However, the language and communication dynamics in these interactions can be complexed and influenced by various factors, including power imbalances, linguistic and cultural barriers, and coercive techniques.

Forensic Discourse Analysis, a multidisciplinary approach that combines linguistics, sociology, psychology and law, offers a valuable framework for examining language evidence in police investigations. By analysing the language and communication strategies employed in police-accused conversations, researchers can identify potential biases, coercive techniques, and linguistic factors that may impact the reliability of evidence.

Zaria, a city in northern Nigeria, provides a unique context for these study due to its cultural and linguistic diversity. The Police station

selected for this study serves a diverse population, and the conversations analysed will likely reflect the complex language dynamics at play.

Forensic Discourse Analysis is novel to linguistic research, people have enormous issues detecting the technicalities of the forensic sector of Police accused conversations. There is a dearth of scholarly research in the area of Forensic Discourse Analysis within the Nigerian setting to authenticate written statements of accused and detect fabrications. It is from this angle that the present research forensically analyse the conversation that takes place between Police and accused person during crime investigation.

This study examines the language use of police-accused conversations in selected police stations in Zaria, with a focus on forensic discourse analysis, aimed at identifying fabrications and determining the Act forms used in this Conversations, in order to detect and analyse the linguistic elements of police-accused conversations and their potential impact on criminal investigations.

Review of Previous Studies

Oyebanji Akindele and Adegoke Bukola (2015) in their research paper titled "Language Use in Police Interviews and Interrogations in Nigeria: A Review." The review aimed to provide an overview of the current state of knowledge in this area and identity gaps for future research. The researchers analysed studies published between 2010 and 2014, focusing on the linguistic features of police-accused conversations, the power dynamics at play, and the ethical and legal implications of conducting research on this topic. The researchers employed a qualitative approach, conducting a thematic analysis of the selected studies. They identified key themes, including the use of Nigerian Pidgin English, the power dynamics between police officers and accused individuals. The researchers found out that Nigerian Pidgin English is widely used in police interviews and Interrogations, often leading to misunderstandings and miscommunications. However, this differs from the present research. The present research employs a

forensic discourse analysis approach, focusing on the linguistic and discursive strategies used by police officers and accused individuals.

Fourie Marius and Van Wyk Nicolette (2017) in their research paper titled " Communication Skills of Police officers: A Global Review." In this article, the researchers conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on the communication skills of police officers globally. They examined various studies that investigated the importance of effective communication in police-accused conversations, highlighting the need for training and education in this area. The researchers used a systematic review method, searching multiple databases and selecting studies that met specific inclusion criteria. They analysed the findings of 25 studies, identifying key themes and gaps in the existing research. Their findings indicates that effective communication is crucial in police-accused conversations, as it can impact the outcome of investigations and the likelihood of false confessions. They also found out that police officers often lack the necessary training and skills to communicate effectively and accused individuals. However, this review does not focus specifically on the forensic discourse analysis of police-accused conversations in Nigeria.

Levanon Yardena and Lital Levy (2013) in their research paper titled " Language Barriers in Police Interrogations: A Review of the Literature." The researchers conducted a comprehensive review of the literature on the use of English as a second language in police interviews and Interrogations. They examined various studies that investigated the challenges faced by non-native speakers of English in these contexts. The researchers used a systematic review method, searching multiple databases and selecting studies that met specific inclusion criteria. They analysed the findings of 20 studies, identifying key themes and gaps in the existing research. Their findings indicates that non-native speakers of English often face significant challenges in police interviews and Interrogations, including difficulties with understanding and using legal terminology, navigating complex questioning, and managing power dynamics.

Okenwa Peace Ngozi (2015) in her research paper titled "Exploring the Dynamics of Language Use in Police-accused Conversations in Nigeria." The researcher conducted a qualitative study to investigate the use of language in police-accused conversations in Nigeria, The researcher collected data from 25 police-accused conversations, which she transcribed and analysed using NVivo Software. In her findings, it was observed that the use of English in police-accused conversations in Nigeria can lead to significant challenges, including misunderstandings, miscommunication, and false confessions. In contrast to Okenwa's study, the present research aims to focus on the discourse strategies employed by police officers and accused individuals.

Umoru Obehi and Adewunmi Adegbite (2012) in their research paper titled "Language Use in Police Interviews in Abuja, Nigeria: A Sociolinguistic Analysis." The researchers conducted a study on the use of English in Police Interviews in Abuja, Nigeria, which revealed significant limitations in the use of Standard English. The study found out that Nigerian Pidgin English was frequently used, and some police officers struggled to understand the English used by suspects, leading to potential misunderstandings. While this study contributes to our understanding of language use in police interviews, it has several limitations. Firstly, it fails to examine the impact of individual characteristics, such as language proficiency and cultural background, of language use in police interviews. Secondly, it does not employ forensic discourse analysis, which could provide a more nuanced understanding of the language use in this contexts.

The present research provides new insights into police-accused conversations in Nigeria. Contributing to the development of more effective and fair communication practices in the criminal justice system.

Theoretical Framework

The framework chosen for the analysis of this study is Dell Hymes Ethnography of communication first introduced in 1962. Hymes is among many scholars who opines communicative competence

takes precedence over linguistic competence and to this end Hymes proposes what he calls Ethnographic Framework which accounts for the various factors that are involved in speaking. In his opinion, ethnography of communication describes all the factors that are relevant in understanding how a particular communicative event achieve its goals. Perhaps for convenience. Hymes captures his proposition with the acronym SPEAKING.

S stands for: The setting or scene (context) of speech, which has to do with the time, place the physical circumstances surrounding speech, the psychological circumstances and cultural definition of the speech event.

P stands for: Participants- the speaker-listener, addressor-addresser, as well as their specific roles in a speech event.

E stands for: End that is the general and specific expectations of the individuals involved in a speech event.

A stand for: The actual form and content of the utterance.
K stands for: Key; that is the tone, manner and spirit with which what is said and the accompanying gestures.

I stands for: Instrumentalities, which have to do with the medium through which a speech is made – language, dialect, orally, writing etc.

N stands for: Norms of interaction and interpretation of speech.

G stands for: Genre that refers to clearly demarcated type of category of utterances, namely proverbs, poem, sermon and interrogation etc.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design. A total of two (2) Police divisions were randomly selected. The divisions includes: PZ Police Station and Samaru Police Station. In all a total number of two investigations were recorded one from each police station. The observational evaluation method was adopted in collecting the data for the study. During data collection, the researcher assumed the role of a

participant observer, taking detailed notes on the dialogue exchanged between the police and the accused during the interrogation session. Due to restrictions on audio recording, the researcher relied on manual note-taking to capture the conversations. Both the police and the accused were aware of the researcher's presence and observation, allowing for a transparent and informed data collection. The data gathered were transcribed into texts and for those conversations that took place in pidgin and Hausa, efforts were made to transcribe them into English language.

Table 1 Presentation of Data on Interrogation of the first Accused Person by the Investigating Police Officer, PZ police station Zaria.

SPEAKER	UTTERANCE	ACT FORMS
Police officer	What is your name	Elicitation
Suspect	My name is Solo	Reply/Informative
Police officer	Where are you from	Elicitation
Suspect	I am from Kaduna State and I came to school in Zaria	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	I will like to know your relationship between you and the person who's items are stolen	Elicitation
Suspect	He is my roommate	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	How long have you known him?	Elicitation
Suspect	For one semester and it was when we moved in together to stay in the hostel.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Have you been stealing gadgets like that from other people?	Elicitation

Suspect	No, This is my first time and I did it to solve some financial problems.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Where were you planning to sell the stuffs and gadgets?	Elicitation
Suspect	I was planning to make a small notification poster and find a buyer.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Do you know the actual price for the things you stole?	Elicitation
Suspect	No. I just want to sell it and get what I will us to solve the problem I have which cost about twenty thousand naira so anything that I can get that will make that money.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Do you have any accomplices or are you alone?	Elicitation
Suspect	I did it alone and I regret it.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	You will be questioned for further interrogations	Elicitation

Analysis of Data on the first Accused person by the investigating police officer, PZ police station Zaria
Setting

The setting of these interactions is between the IPOs. The suspects and the complainants were at the interrogation room. An open hall-like room that contained not less than seven to eight police officers. Apart from the officers who were the primary occupants of this hall-like office. The hall usually witnessed comings-in and goings -out of some other officers who might have one or two things to do therein. Even

when interrogations were going on. There were tables, chairs, benches and heaps of case files in and on the filing cabinets put in the hall.

Participants

In Case 1, three participants were involved. While the IPO and the suspect were the active participants in the Discourse, the complainant assumed the position of a passive participant. The IPO initiated the interaction by throwing a question at the suspect. With the powerful status assumed by the IPO in the interaction, he controlled the Discourse floor with the series of questions put across to him. The suspect being the less powerful participant here could not go outside the 'Discourse frame' that has been created by the IPO.

Ends

In Case 1, the bone of contention is also on theft a guy stole his roommate's laptop and other belongings in order to solve some financial challenges but in the process of selling this stolen items he was caught and the case was handed to the Police.

Acts Sequence

The typical act sequence of police-suspect interaction is that of question (interrogation) and answer. Accusation and exoneration acts are found in police-suspect interaction. The police will sometimes sound accusatory to put the suspect on the spot and the suspect. In the bit to clear (exonerate) him/herself would have to make explanations to counter the accusation of the police.

Key

The tone of interaction in police-suspect Discourse is very serious, tense and formal. Usually. There is no form of greetings or feeling of familiarity. There is hardly any time for jokes or laughter especially if the suspect appears to be a common 'citizen'. This is evident in Case 1 where the IPO did not give room for any informality between him and the suspect .For example:

Police Officer: What is your name?
Suspect: Solo.
Police Officer: Where are you from?
Suspect: I am from Kaduna State and I came to school in Zaria.

Instrumentality

The interaction between IPOs and suspects in the observed station is usually verbal. In the observed cases, the medium of communication was largely English language, perhaps because the IPOs, the complainants and the suspects were of conversant with English language. For example:

Police Officer: I will like to know the relationship between you and the person whose items were stolen
Suspect: He is my roommate.

Norms

Norms address how interactants treat each other's responses and it also includes the interpretation of norms within the cultural belief systems. Based on the language used to interrogate the suspect which is English language, there is no sign of culture or norms used. The IPO used the same authoritative language not minding whether they are young or old.

Genre

Police-suspect Discourse is mainly interrogative in nature. The lPOs ask (intimidating) questions to which the suspects are obliged to respond to. The language is strictly formal.

Table 2 Presentation of Data on Interrogation of the second Accused Person by the Investigating Police Officer, Samaru Police Station Zaria

SPEAKER	UTTERANCE	ACT FORM
Police Officer	What is your name?	Elicitation
Criminal	My name is Salisu.	Reply/Informative

Police Officer	Where did you come from?	Elicita
Criminal	I came from a neighbouring Village	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Have you come here to steal before?	Elicitation
Criminal	No I haven't but I have been passing this area for some days now.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	What prompted you to steal from this particular place we caught you	Elicitation
Criminal	I don't have money and food and that why I decided to steal even though I didn't know what they had in the house.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	So you stopped to just steal anything valuable	Elicitation
Criminal	y-e-s sir	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Is there any particular where you sell all the valuable things you steal?	Elicitation
Criminal	No I just sell it at anywhere that they buy those kind of things.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Have you been stealing and selling things for a long time?	Elicitation
Criminal	y-e-s. Since I was younger but it's only when I don't have any money to use.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Do you work alone or you have a group that you operate with.	Elicitation
Criminal	Sometimes I do it alone and sometimes I operate with a group of three.	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	Do you know where we can find all of them?	Elicitation
Criminal	No I don't	Reply/Informative
Police Officer	If you don't tell us we will lock you for a very long time and you will smoke more than you are smoking now.	Elicitation
Criminal	Okay I will take you to the locations.	Reply/Informative

Analysis of Data on the second Accused Person by the Investigating Police Officer, Samaru Police Station Zaria
Setting

The setting of these interactions is between the IPOs. The suspects and the complainants were at the interrogation room. An open hall-like room that contained not less than seven to eight police officers. Apart from the officers who were the primary occupants of this hall-like office. The hall usually witnessed comings-in and goings - out of some other officers who might have one or two things to do therein. Even when interrogations were going on. There were tables, chairs, benches and heaps of case files in and on the filing cabinets put in the hall.

Participants

In Case 2, three participants were involved. While the IPO and the suspect were the active participants in the Discourse, the complainant assumed the position of a passive participant. The IPO initiated the interaction by throwing a question at the suspect. With the powerful status assumed by the IPO in the interaction, he controlled the Discourse floor with the series of questions put across to him. The suspect being the less powerful participant here could not go outside the 'Discourse frame' that has been created by the IPO.

Ends

In Case 2, the bone of contention is on theft four guys broke into a house and made way with some home appliances. In the process of selling the items, one of them was caught and taken to the police station for proper interrogation, which led to the arrest of the other three.

Acts Sequence

As shown in Case 1, the typical act sequence of police-suspect interaction is that of question (interrogation) and answer. Accusation and exoneration acts are found in police-suspect interaction. The police

will sometimes sound accusatory to put the suspect on the spot and the suspect. In the bit to clear (exonerate) him/herself would have to make explanations to counter the accusation of the police.

Key

The tone of interaction in police-suspect Discourse is very serious, tense and formal. Usually. There is no form of greetings or feeling of familiarity. There is hardly any time for jokes or laughter especially if the suspect appears to be a common 'citizen'. This is evident in Case 1 where the IPO did not give room for any informality between him and the suspect. For example:

Police Officer: What is your name?

Suspect: Salisu.

Police Officer: Where did you come from?

Suspect: I came from a neighbouring village.

Instrumentality

The interaction between IPOs and suspects in the observed station is usually verbal. In the observed cases, the medium of communication was largely English language, perhaps because the IPOs, the complainants and the suspects were of conversant with English language. For example:

Police Officer: Have you come here to steal before?

Suspect: No I haven't but I have been passing this area for some days now.

Norms

Norms address how interactants treat each other's responses and it also includes the interpretation of norms within the cultural belief systems. Based on the language used to interrogate the suspect which is English language, there is no sign of culture or norms used. The IPO used the same authoritative language not minding whether they are young or old.

Genre

Police-suspect Discourse is mainly interrogative in nature. The lPOs ask (intimidating) questions to which the suspects are obliged to respond to. The language is strictly formal.

Discussion of Findings

Drawing from the data above, it is evident that Police-Accused Discourse is such that depicts asymmetrical distribution of power between Police Officers and suspects. This phenomenon has been looked at by the various existing works from the Discourse Analysis point of view. This study however approaches Police-Accused interaction from the perspective of Ethnography of communication as proposed by Dell Hymes.

Forensic Discourse reveals some features of fabrications. The study indicates that the Police and the accused fabricate information at certain point in time. The police sometimes fabricate information to get the accused to bring out information. The accused also fabricate to cover up the crime he/she has committed.

The findings have indicated that different act forms have been used by both the accused and the police. The study reveals that to a great extent, elicitation and reply/informative are largely used by accused persons and investigating police officers. The reasons for these are that the IPO uses elicitation as a linguistic act form to secure information from the accused person and the latter in turn uses reply/informative linguistic act to supply the information requested throughout the interrogation, concerning the case under investigation.

The suspect/accused person is always at the receiving end during interrogation and crime investigation. The major linguistic acts used by the accused person for self-defence mechanism are reply/informative and excuse act forms.

Conclusion

Forensic discourse analysis has provided a comprehensive examination of the language use and discourse strategies employed in

police-accused conversations in selected police stations in Zaria, Nigeria. The study's findings have significant implications for the criminal justice system, highlighting the need for improved communication practices and trainings for police officers. Ultimately, this research demonstrates the critical role of language and discourse in shaping the outcomes of police-accused conversations, highlighting the need for a more informed and evidence based approach to interrogation practices.

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