

The use of image restoration strategies in police field interrogations

In everyday interaction contradicting an account of another's actions is a face-threatening act. For police officers interviewing suspects prior to making an arrest this imposition is a necessary part of the field interrogation (see example 1). However, protecting the face of a suspect is an essential feature of police-suspect interactions and exists alongside the exercise of coercive force. In this paper, I survey image restoration strategies used by the police during field interrogations; I argue that these are employed for the purposes of eliciting incriminating evidence and making a peaceable arrest.

A typical account sequence often appears in police-suspect interactions and can be outlined as follows: (a) suspect's offense, (b) officer's accusation, (c) suspect's account; and (d) officer's evaluation of the account (including acceptance or rejection). An accusation of wrongdoing will often result in an exculpatory account of events in the form of denials, excuses, or justifications. This face-saving tactic is to be expected (cf. Benoit 1995; McLaughlin, Cody, and French 1990; Scott and Lyman 1968). In line with the account sequence, an officer will evaluate the suspect's statement, often attempting to refute a claim of innocence. What is unexpected but common in officers' evaluative utterances and newly generated challenges is the incorporation of image restoration strategies. In example (1) below, the police officer (P) believes the suspect (S) has marijuana in his car. The officer's goal is to get S to admit to this and tell him where it is.

- (1) 1 P: You don't have any weed or anything on you tonight do you?
2 S: No, this is the first time I drove the car.
3 P: Okay
4 S: Since I got caught. And, I got caught again.
5 P: Okay. Alright.
→ 6 S: You sure there's nothing in there that we need to know about?
...
12 S: There might be some weed.
13 P: Okay.
14 S: Matter of fact, yeah there is some weed.

In line 1, P uses a negative question and allows for the possibility of denial as a second part of the question-answer sequence (Auburn, Drake & Willig 1995: 364). S denies the offense in line 2 and expands on his response in line 4; P accepts his account in lines 3 and 5. In line 6, P again broaches the topic. However, by inquiring as to whether S 'is sure' there's nothing in the car, he suggests that perhaps S has inadvertently forgotten or was lacking sufficient information when he denied possession of drugs in the preceding account. This references a strategy for excuse-making described as 'defeasibility' (Scott & Lyman 1968; Benoit 1995) in which the accused may claim that "a lack of information...or ability" frees him or her from the burden of full responsibility (Benoit 1995: 76). In this case, P is offering S the opportunity to confess to a crime without having to further damage his face by admitting that his initial denial was a lie. In lines 12 and 14, we see that the strategy successfully results in an admission of guilt, with S building on P's proffered excuse first by formulating an account that allows for the possibility of drugs in his car (line 12) and then amending this to express certainty (line 14).

This paper is part of a larger argument on the intersubjective construction of face in discourse and is meant to contribute not only to theories of face (Goffman 1967; Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987), but also to the analysis of talk-in-interaction (Drew & Heritage 1992; Schegloff 1991), the intersection of power and politeness (Holtgraves 1994; Ng & Bradac, 1993) and the analysis of institutional discourse (Drew & Heritage 1992).

The use of image restoration strategies in police field interrogations

- Auburn, Timothy, Drake, Sue, and Willig, Carla. 1995. "You punched him, didn't you?" Versions of violence in accusatory interviews. *Discourse and Society* 6:353-386.
- Benoit, William L. 1995. *Accounts, excuses, and apologies: A theory of image restoration strategies*: SUNY series in speech communication. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, Penelope, and Levinson, Stephen. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Drew, Paul, and Heritage, John. 1992. Analyzing talk at work. In *Talk at work*, eds. P. Drew and John Heritage, 3-65. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Holtgraves, Thomas. 1994. Communication in context: The effects of speaker status on the comprehension of indirect requests. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 20:1205-1218.
- McLaughlin, Margaret L., Cody, Michael J., and French, Kathryn J. 1990. Account-giving and the attribution of responsibility: Impressions of traffic offenders. In *The psychology of tactical communication*, eds. Michael J. Cody and Margaret L. McLaughlin, 244-267. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Ng, Sik Hung, and Bradac, James J. 1993. *Power in language: Verbal communication and social influence*: Language and language behaviors, Vol. 3. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. 1991. Reflections on talk and social structure. In *Talk and social structure: Studies in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis*, eds. Deirdre Boden and Don H. Zimmerman, 44-70. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Scott, Marvin and Lyman, Stanford. 1968. Accounts. *American Sociological Review*. 31: 46-62.