

## **Police Genre: Interruption and its Classification as a Sign of Asymmetry in Police Interview/Interrogation**

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### **Abstract**

Generic knowledge is, in part, knowledge of what texts and their constituents do. Since this knowledge creates infrastructure for different kinds of talk like legal talk, police genre as a branch of legal talk is born. As Gibbons (2003:130) says (quoting Swales 1990), genres are 'prototypes' that can be followed or modified. The most usual feature of police genre is questioning. Questioning is done under powerful relation between police officer [interviewer] and culprit [interviewee]. This asymmetrical relation cause police officer easily interrupts his interviewee. In order to explain and analyze the police genre, all signs should be identified. Therefore, the author concentrates on interruption and its types. Having gathered data in Iranian courts and Bureau of Police Investigation, the author found nine different types of interruption with aims of getting information, cooperation, etc.

### **1- Introduction**

Legal language is a widespread issue in forensic area, which covers the language of police, language of lawyers, language of judges and prosecutors, language of witness etc. Cao (2010) says: "legal language refers to the language of law and its relation to law and legal process. This includes language of the law, language about law, and language used in legal communicative situations (cf. Kurzon 1997, 1998a, who distinguishes language of the law and legal language which is language about law). Legal language is a variety of language appropriate to different legal occasions and legal situations of use. Legal texts refer to the texts produced or used for legal purposes in legal settings." Police interview embedded in police genre is a sub-branch of legal talk. As we see there are some linguistic features in legal talk, it is also expected to see some linguistic features in police interview. The author aims at clarifying one of the linguistic features of police interview: interruption and its types. Having observed more than 50 real cases in courts and Bureau of Police Investigation, the author found different nine types of interruption in police interview<sup>2</sup>. After stating methodology, it is incumbent on me to start with context in order to examine the police interview precisely.

### **2- Methodology**

The author intends to examine interruption in police interview (a sign in police genre). Therefore, she referred to different places including courts and Bureau of Police Investigation. Gathering data was conducted in Iran. Since forensic linguistics is brand new in Iran, gathering data was very hard. On the other hand, many judges and police officers (high ranking and low ranking) do not trust to give information. Some cases are secret too. The

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<sup>2</sup> The author uses IR for interviewer and IE for interviewee. 'abil' is used to show interruption. The sign '?!' is used for question which has another aim too like showing surprise or objection.

author tried to gather data so comprehensive that covers different police interviews and different crimes like larceny, murder, fraud... On this process, there were many limitations; for example, police officer and culprit were both somehow influenced by the presence of the author. (Police interview is not recorded in Iran, and the author had to get lawful permission to do so.) Age, sex, criminal background etc. were interfering variables which were uncontrollable. However, the author tried to alleviate the negative effects by doing a comprehensive research. Above all, the author can claim her PhD dissertation about forensic linguistics is the first fieldwork in Iran and the resulted articles and very this one are among the first work too. Finally, having observed more than real 50 cases in courts and Bureau of Police Investigation, the author classified interruption.

## 2.1-Context in Judicial Process

One of the important and common elements in analyzing discourse is context. Context is usually referred to as conditions in which language is used. Role of context is so important that many discourse analysts believe that meanings of words are formed in the context. Cutting (2002: 2) quoted from Yule (1996) and Stillwell Peccei (1999) that analysts interpret different texts, focusing on the meanings resulted from physical, social worlds, psychosocial factors and knowledge of time and place of articulation of words as well. Yule and Brown (1989: 38-39) quoted from Hymes (1964) that context has got different elements including addressor (mainly speaker or writer), addressee (mainly hearer or reader), audience (overhearers may contribute to the specification of the speech event), topic (what the participants are speaking about), setting (both in terms of where the event is situated in place and time), channel (how is contact between the participants in the event being maintained- by the speech writing, singing, smoke signals), Code (what language, dialect or style of language is being used), message-form (what form is intended- chat, debate, sermon, fairy-tale, sonnet, love-letter, etc), event (the nature of the communicative event within which a genre may be embedded- thus a sermon or prayer may be part of the larger event, a church service), key (which involves evaluation-was it a good sermon, a pathetic explanation, etc.), purpose (what did the participants intend should come about as a result of the communicative event). Schiffrin (1994:365) claims context is regarded as knowledge; on the other hand, police station is a social institution with a special context. In order to rebuild police interview we should resort to social and linguistic tools, in this research we focus on the latter. Johnson and Coulthard (2010) say: "context is dynamic and socially constructed through and by discourse – both in linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic modes – and we know that the legal world is context-rich. It is peopled by a hierarchical mini-nation of judges, lawyers, police and law-enforcement officers and then the common man and woman, who walk, like Adam and Eve, unknowing, through this strange world. Its texts are also richly layered with meanings; its language has evolved over many centuries and its peculiar form is a result of this history and specialized use."

Many texts which are to be read by judges have been produced in advance. However, the text and its elements are at the heart of legal context. Knowing about lexicon, syntax, socio-pragmatics, law codes, etc, can be brightening to get some hidden points. As Coulthard and Johnson (2007) say: "The judicial process is influenced by a whole range of prior texts and contexts (police interviews, statement making and taking, meetings with lawyers), both written and spoken, all of which center on the law." They also continue "when creating texts, the producer's lexical choice is a direct consequence of their communicative activity and purpose. This assertion makes register and genre inter-related aspects of textualisation. Lexical and grammatical choices, such as the use of a restricted set of reporting verbs in police statements and notes (said, replied), inclusive phrases and lists in legal texts (using *and* and *or*), passive constructions with *by* and phrases that contain the verbs *including* or *provided* in contracts, are made because of what needs to be communicated." Naturally, the

judges or interrogators who are not present while questioning in police interview and do not have access to recorded interview, they lose some aspects including linguistic ones which can be considered.

### **3-Legal Language**

In judicial process, different persons are involved with each other like judges, interrogators, lawyers, police officers etc. In the process of interaction, the legal language is born. Legal language has its unique features, so it is center of different studies. Holt and Johnson (2010) say: "Central to the nature of legal talk is the system of turn-taking that participants adopt...there are rules concerning who can talk and when (Atkinson and Drew 1979). The same may be said of police interviews where there are rules that dictate a police officer should begin and end the proceedings, and will invite the suspect to give his version of events and then ask a series of questions which the interviewee may or may not answer (Heydon 2005; Benneworth; Haworth; 2010)." They continue that legal talk is also remarkably complex in terms of syntax and structure. However, it is more remarkable for what it does; it has specialized institutional functions and pragmatic effects, or as Tiersma (1999: 145) says the courtroom gives 'legal language in its most dramatic setting'.

For legal talk, Cao (2010) also mentions some key lexical and syntactical features; words such as 'aforementioned', 'hereinafter', 'hereinabove', 'hereunder', 'said', 'such' etc. Syntactical features are like passive structures with phrases such as 'shall be forthwith terminated', 'written notice be given' and 'indemnity is sought of'. There are also numerous features for legal writing. Johnson and Coulthard (2010) found some linguistic features of legal writing like Binominal expressions and listing (by and with, write, edit, print or publish, act or omission), Cohesion (textual mapping), Complex prepositions (in respect of, for the purpose of, by virtue of), Modality (may, shall and must as frequent modal verbs), Specialized, distinctive and technical legal lexis (frequency of any, impersonal nouns: the parties, any person, legal lexis: defendant, mens rea, recognisance, testator). We expect to see some features in police interview, as it is embedded in legal talk.

### **4- Police Interview**

Police force has specialized duties in each country. However, interrogation is on his shoulder; for example, in Iran police has duty of arresting culprit and questioning him. This branch of legal talk seems to be different in countries around the world. 'Interview' is preferred term in some countries like UK, but 'interrogation' seems to be an appropriate term in other countries like Iran and United states.<sup>3</sup> Whether interrogation or interview, questioning is a shared feature. Holt and Jonson (2010) also state: "Probably the most distinctive and most widespread linguistic feature of legal talk is the question – in both interrogative and declarative form and across a range of forensic settings: emergency calls to the police (Drew and Walker, 2010), police interviews (Aldrige; Benneworth; 2010), lawyer and client interactions (Kozin, 2008) and examination and cross-examination in court (Ehrlich; Felton Rosulek; Heffer; 2010)."

Questioning bears some features. Holt and Johnson (2006) note four recurrent features of the design of these questions: 1. they are often so-prefaced; 2. grammatically they are not built as questions; 3. they repeat elements of the interviewee's testimony, often bringing several elements together; 4. they invite confirmation. Brennan (1994) also outlines a whole range of linguistic features of cross-examination questions, including: use of negative; juxtaposition of topics that are not overtly related; nominalisations; multifaceted

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<sup>3</sup> Johnson and Coulthard (2010) admit that 'interview' is a proffered term in UK and 'interrogation' is more usual in U.S.A.

questions; unclear questions; embedding and much more. All these features in a branch of legal talk [police interview/police interrogation] remind us that there is a social and linguistic knowledge behind it. Combination of all these knowledge lead us to conclude there is a genre entitled with police genre.

## 5- Police Genre

Coulthard and Johnson (2007) define 'genre' as: "conventional, repeated and distinctive features of texts that arise from its communicative purpose. Another way is to say that a text is an example of a particular genre." They continue that genres are stable entities that are repeated and understood through conventions and regularities that are consistent across texts, but they do not occur in identical form in each textual realization. Social and linguistic knowledge are incorporated with each other to form genre. This inter-related scope with its constructive elements in judicial process should be studied to analyze the offence as Gibbons (2003: 130) asserts that knowledge of genre is critical to both the construction and the comprehension of discourse. Generic knowledge is knowledge that involves the use of 'interpretive framework'.

Coulthard and Johnson (2007) say: "What is also evident here is an attempt to elicit storytelling and this narrative genre underlies the second of the three phases of the police interview genre, what Gibbons (2003) calls the *secondary reality core*, which involves orientation to the offence and questioning. This questioning phase is both preceded and followed by *primary reality framing*: at the beginning of the interview there are introductions and the reading of the caution and at the end of the interview there is closure and an explicit reference to the recording procedures." So, the author believes the interruption can be considered as a sign of police talk which should be decoded precisely.

## 6- Prominent feature in Police Interview; Asymmetry

As mentioned before turn-taking is imposed by powerful party in legal interactions. Powerful parties win more chances to talk. The chances are more in hands of judges, interrogators, police officers and lawyers. However, judges stand at top. It is defined by rule of asymmetry. Johnson and Coulthard (2010) put: "Asymmetry in dialogue is defined by Linell and Luckmann (1994: 4) in terms of 'inequivalences' rather than inequalities, since they say they 'prefer to use that term for various background... conditions for dialogue, such as (differences in the distribution of ) knowledge and social positions'. Asymmetry includes both global patterns of dominance and local properties such as 'the allocation of speaker versus listener roles'. According to Linell and luckmann (1991: 9) asymmetries are multidimensional and can contain four types of dominance:"

-Quantitative dominance concerns the relation between the parties in terms of amount of talk...(words spoken)

-Interactional dominance has to do with the distribution of 'strong' versus 'weak' interactional moves...

-Semantic dominance [relates to who determines] topics sustained in the discourse, and impos[es] the interpretive perspectives on things talked about.

-Strategic dominance involve[s who] contribute[es] the strategically most important inventions.

(Linel and Luckmann 1991:9)

Johnson and Coulthard quoted from Linell and Luckmann (1991: 2-3) that “in thinking about asymmetries it helps to consider what symmetrical discourse is like in order to consider where the balance of roles is different. Symmetrical discourse presupposes conditions such as:

- *commonality* (or sharedness) of knowledge (etc.) between people;
- *mutuality* (of knowledge and assumptions) of common ground;
- *reciprocity* in the circumstances, so that in the co-presence of others, any act by one actor is an act with respect to the other and with the expectation that the other will do something in return.”

## 7- Role of Audience in Asymmetric Legal Context

Audience is one the constructive elements of context in Police Genre. Police Genre is integrated with power; therefore, we expect power is divided between parties; police officer and his audience. As the author aims at clarifying interruption in police interview between police officer and culprit, police officer stands at powerful place. Police officer easily interrupts culprits for different aims. On the other hand future audiences; judges, jury and prosecutors will read the written police interrogation. But some linguistic signs like interruptions are veiled. About audience, Johnson and Coulthard (2010) say: “who is speaking and to whom is important in relation to the symmetrical/asymmetrical balance; Linell and Luckmann (1991:9) talk of ‘roles tied to professions’ and the power such roles give to institutional speakers (e.g. police interviewers and prosecuting barristers), but even greater power is derived from their knowledge and orientation to the conduct and design of their talk for the future audience.”

## 8- Different Types of Interruption in Police Interview

Johnson and Coulthard (2010) say that the IE [here culprit] in a police interview is much less aware of the future co-present audience than is the television IE. This adds to the asymmetrical power of the police interviewer and the dominance of the legal context. About context, they continue that asymmetries are contextualized in the ‘endogenous and exogenous conditions’ of talk (Linell and Luckmann 1991: 10), that is in ever widening circles, first within the dialogue, then outside the talk itself in the institutional context and then further out in the wider social context. All these let the police officer interrupts the culprit for different aims. These are as follow:

### 8-1-interrogative interruption

This kind of interruption is used to get information; this interruption is in fact a question. For example:

IE: yeki æz ranænde ha xab bud.

One of the drivers was asleep.

IR: xob.

Ok.

IE: sære pit] ?umæd ba ?in yeki [ax be [ax zædæn ?un hæm **abil- bæ?d ?unvæqt**  
**þoma nætunestid kontorol konid?**

*The cars took the curve too harshly **abil- then you could not control your car?***

IE: bæle. ma hæm faselæmun kæm bud, baruni ham bud hæva, æz þo[ft xordim be yeki]un.

Yes. There was a little distance between the cars, it was also raining, we hit one of the cars from the back.

IR: xob.

Ok.

IE: ke ?in **abil-kodum sæmte maʃin xesaræt did?**

It was *abil-which part of your car was damaged?*

IE: kollæn ʃoloye maʃin.

The whole front part.

### 8-2- confirmative interruption

The second kind of interruption happens when the police interviewer makes a question but not for the sake of getting information; it is for getting confirmation from the culprit (IE). For example:

IR: *babat mo?tade?*

Is your father addicted?

IE: næ **abil- feʃari ke be ʃoma vared ʃod biʃtær æz feʃari bud ke be pedæret vared ʃod?!**

No. *abil- you were under strain more than your father?!*

IE: næ. sæd dær sæd.

No. Definitely.

IR: pæs tʃera ?un mo?tad næʃod?

So, why did not your father become addicted?

IE: silence

### 8-3- non-confirmative/informative interruption

This kind of interruption is solely used to threaten or insult; generally it has non-confirmative or non-informative aim. Sometimes, this interruption is accompanied by an imperative or interrogative mood. For example:

(1)

IR: pæs, to ro be hesabe lat ha mizarim, tʃon ye tæræfe hærfat doruqe.

So, you are considered as a mob, because some of your words are lie.

IE: *aqaye ræ?is mæn sære karæm abil- xodeto be xengi mizæni ya vaqe?æn xengi?! han?!*

Sir, I am at work. *abil- you are pretending to be an idiot or you are really an idiot?! Which one?!*

IE: *aqaye ræ?is mæn biʃtære moqe ha sære karæm.*

I am often at work, sir.

IR: ʃoma tʃizi bename hes dari?

Do you have any sort of feeling?

IE: sæd dær sæd.

Definitely.

IR: xob, ?un hes be ʃoma mifæhmune ke ?ina dozdæn.

So, this feeling tells that these are thieves.

(2)

IR: ʃomare telefone ?æsæl<sup>4</sup> ?o bede.

Give me Asal's telephone number.

IE: nædaræm be xoda

I don't have, I swear to God.

IR: ?æge ?ævordæmeʃ goft tʃi bud qæziye tʃi?

If I bring her here and she tells the whole story, what will you do?

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<sup>4</sup> Asal is a female name.

IE: ?æslæn bebinid **abil-guʃ kon pesær ʃun, mæn ?o dige ʃenaxti, mæn ?o nemituni gul bezaeni, fæhmidi?**

Look *abil-Hey, listen to me, you know me, you cannot deceive me got it?*

IE: ʃenab særvan be ʃune bæʃæm ?æge yek kæm ?invær ?o ?unvær begæm  
Captain, I don't lie, I swear to my child.

(3)

IE: ʃenab særvan, mæn næqʃi nædaʃtæm tu koʃtæneʃ be ʃune bæʃæm. mæn næqʃi nædaʃtæm.

Captain, I didn't play any role in killing her, I swear to my son. I didn't play any role.

IR: ma ?æz ?in hærfæ ziyad ʃenidim.

We hear these kinds of words too much.

IE: næ, næ. dær tævanæm bud ke biyam diye?æʃ ?o bedæm. ?æmma mærd bud, ?æz sæd ta ?æz ?in mærdæ ke **abil-?æz zænet hæm mærd tær bud?!**

No, no. I could afford to give her blood money. However, she was brave like a man, braver than many men who *abil- braver than your wife even?!*

IE: ʃayæd ?æz zæne xodæm hæm mærd tær bud.

Perhaps, she was braver than my own wife.

#### 8-4- information-objection interruption

This kind of interruption aims to get information. The form of interruption utterance is not a question; it is an objection utterance. For example:

IR: ʃælvar miduzi?

Do you sew trousers?

IE: bæle.

Yes.

IR: kodum qesmæte ʃælvar ?o miduzi?

Which part of trousers do you sew?

IE: mæn biʃtær zigzal mizænæm. karhaye xordekariʃo mikonæm tʃon dæstam **abil- ?!ʃan ke dige zigzali voʃud nædare, tʃæsb mizænæn.**

I often make loop. I do small jobs because my hands *abil- There is no job like making loop, trailers fasten not make loop.*

IE: næ. zigzal mizænæn.

No. They make loop.

IR: ?!ʃan, zigzal mizæni?

Now, you make loop?

IE: Yes.

bæle.

IR: tʃæsb nemizæni?

You don't fasten?

IE: ?ætrafe ʃib, læbe, dæmpa, zigzal mizænæn.

Around pocket, hem, cuff, they make loop.

IR: dæmpa, tʃæsb nemizæni?

Cuff? You don't fasten?

IE: næ.

No.

IR: motmæ?eni?

Are you sure?

IE: bæle

Yep.

### 8-5- declarative- informative interruption

This kind of interruption has low frequency. In this kind of interruption, the police officer himself gives the culprit some information in order to pump the culprit for more information. It differs from the first kind in its mood (the first kind has interrogative mood and this kind has declarative mood.). It is also different with the fourth kind in its aim; it aims to get information not in form of objection but in form of declarative mood.

IR: ?uni ke bæqæle dæstʃu?i ha tu ?Azim Mæneʃ garaʃe kampiyuter mifruʃe dæste mærdom, ?un tʃiye?

Who is that person selling computers in Azim Manesh garage next to rest rooms? Tell me about it.

IE: bæqæle koʃa?

Next to where?

IR: dæstʃu?i ha.

Rest rooms.

IE: garaʃe ?Azim Mæneʃ **abil-?entehaye dæstʃu?i ha.**

Azim Manesh garage *abil-Along down the rest rooms.*

IR: ?unʃa ?æslæn dæstʃu?i nædare garaʃe ?Azim Mæneʃ.

There are no rest rooms in Azim Manesh garage there.

### 8-6- non information-objection interruption

This kind of interruption is in fact an objection but not with the aim of getting information. So, it is different with the fourth kind. This interruption can be accompanied with an imperative mood.

(1)

IE: pæs ?æz koʃa bayæd ?in malo tæhiye mikærdænd?

So, where do they provide this product?

IR: ?æz koʃa? ?æz kompani... pæs ʃoma tezet ?ine ke male dozdi ra bayæd dozdid, xærid, tæhvil dad.

Where? From company...so you think you should steal the goods, buy stolen goods and deliver to each other.

IE: dæste dovvom **abil- qeyr ?az ?in nist, hæq ba ʃomast . pæs ?yne neveʃtæto mizaræm tu kasæt....**

Second hand *abil-that's it, you are right. So, I write down your sayings in your case for judge....*

(2)

IR: ?un zæmani ke ?æz halæte tæbi?i ræfte budi birun.

That day when you drank like a fish and you were not normal

IE: næ...**abil- sohbæt nækon væqti daræm bahat sohbæt mikonæm**

No... *abil-don't speak when I am talking to you.*

IR: zæmani ke ?æz halæte tæbi?i ræfte budi birun, bolænd ʃodi be ?æsæl dastan ?o tæ?rif kærði.

That day when you drank like a fish and you were not normal, you told Asal the whole story.



### 8-7- confess interruption

Another interruption which occurs in police talk derives from his presupposition or from culprit's previous confession.

IR: *begu tʃænd ta serqæt dari?*

Say, how many crimes of stealing do you have?

IE: *tʃænd taʃo ke goftæm.*

I said some of them.

IR: *?eyb nædare dobare darim bahæm sohbat mikonim.*

No problem. We are speaking to each other again.

IE: *dæh dævazdæh ta*

ten, twelve ones

IR: *næ dæh dævazdæh nægofti*

No, you didn't say ten or twelve ones.

IE: *goftim hala ʃoma abil- tʃænd ta serqæt gofti daræm?*

I said, now you *abil- how many crimes of stealing did you say?*

IE: *ʃoma hala goftid abil- næ be mæn begu tʃænd ta serqæt gofti daræm mæn?*

You now said *abil- No. Tell me how many crimes of stealing did you say?*

IE: *goftæm yadæm nist, ʃoma gofti abil- hodudæn tʃænd ta?*

I said I cannot remember, you said *abil-about how many?*

IE: *hodudæn holo hoʃe bista*

Almost twenty ones.

### 8-8- cooperative interruption

This kind of interruption occurs when the police officer wants to cooperate with culprit. He does not necessarily aim to get information; however, he might get some.

IR: *bimariye pustit ?esmeʃ tʃiye?*

What is your skin problem?

IE: *petoriyalism.*

Petoriyalism.

IR: *dæva dærmun nædare?*

Is there any cure for that?

IE: *tʃera. goft bayæd zæng bezænid qorseto biyare, diʃæb doktor goft abil- bimariye meʔdæt tʃiye?*

Yea. Last night doctor told me to call my family to bring my tablet *abil-what is your stomach problem?*

IE: *xunrizi meʔdeh.*

Stomach-bleed.

### 8-9- corrective interruption

This is another interruption which occurs when a police officer wants to correct his own words.

IR: *to migi hæme ʃeytunæn pæs xodet ?emamzadeh?i dige. hæme doruq migæn.*

You say all are evil; therefore, you, just yourself, are an angel. All lie.

IE: mæn fæqæt ?æsæl ?o migæm.  
I said just Asal is a liar.

IR: ?ælan ?in hæm dare miɟi doruɟ miɟe.  
Now, you are saying this person is lying too.

IE: ki? **abil- ?æli sohrabi.**  
Who? **abil- Ali Sohrabi.**

IE: ?æli sohrabi, miɟæm t[arta?i ?umædæn....  
Ali Sohrabi, I said four persons....

## 9-Conclusion

The judicial process is influenced by a whole range of prior texts and contexts (police interviews, statement making and taking, meetings with lawyers), both written and spoken, all of which center on the law. In this process legal language is born, in which police interview is embedded. Rock (2010) mentions one key feature for all kinds of police interview; that is, instant interpersonal interaction between a police officer and lay person. He believes police interview probably centered on two main participants, one seeking to elicit information from the other. In legal context there is asymmetrical relation. In police interview, police officer is the winner to get more turns for talking. To get more turns, police officer even interrupts culprit frequently. In this article, the author concentrates on relation between police officer and culprit and believes identification of police interview with all constructive elements like interruption and its types can leave effect on more precise judgment. The results showed nine different interruptions with different aims including getting information, threatening, cooperation, and correction.

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