Book Review

Carter, Elizabeth. 2011. *Analysing Police Interviews: Laughter, Confessions and the Tape*. London: Continuum
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The central ambition of this 2011 book is to provide a detailed analysis of police interviews of suspects that were conducted in England between 1993 and 1996 in one police organization, just after a major training initiative had been introduced. This new approach (called 'PEACE' by the police), in contrast to the 'traditional' accusatory/oppressive methods employed in many countries, emphasizes trying to gather information from suspects that can then be assessed/analyzed (e.g. by the author of this book). The analyses presented focus largely on the possible influences of laughter, silence, 'minimization' and knowledge claims (by interviewers).

The introduction to police interviewing research, though to some extent comprehensive, is rather outdated, especially regarding published research concerning 'real-life' interviews with suspects (e.g. work by Cherryman, Feld, Repucci, and Soukara; see also work by Walsh). Though possible effects of 'the presence of the tape' are importantly mentioned, the relevant work by Lassiter (albeit regarding video recordings) is also not mentioned. Worthwhile points are made about police training but, at least in England (where the interviews analyzed in subsequent chapters were conducted), it has for several years *not* been the case that "...there is a lack of standardized, evidence-based interview training..." (p. 12).

An informative overview of Conversation Analysis is then presented, as is some information regarding the tapes analyzed in subsequent chapters. Crucially, the relative rarity of interviews in which suspects move from denial to admission/confession is noted.

Next is presented an innovative analysis of laughter which exemplifies that interviewers may use it to comment on suspects' versions of events and suspects to do so regarding what the police officer asserts. In part, such analyses are performed under the assumption that "The suspect...is typically understood not to be in a position of power" (p. 41). However, the 'transfer of control' instruction in modern police interviewer training is designed to empower interviewees to provide comprehensive accounts. Nevertheless, the author's chosen examples are interesting. She also correctly points out that the interviewing of suspects differs from ordinary conversation but seems not to comment on whether analytic procedures devised for ordinary talk can be fully appropriate for use on police interviews. Also not adequately covered is the topic of whether one author's interpretations of the functions and meanings of laughter, silence and so on are inevitably subjective. Her analyses, however, do suggest to me that more objective research may be worthwhile.

Then are presented some chapters regarding silence which, in part, are claimed to "...investigate how the presence of the tape recorder in the police interview affects the interaction it is used to record" (p. 69).

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However, without comparative analyses available from non-tape recorded police interviews with suspects it is difficult to imagine how such an investigation is actually possible. The author rightly points out that silence in police interviews is an “under-explored” topic (p. 70), but does not inform the reader that in modern police interview training the appropriate use of silences is encouraged. Chapter six focuses on the hypothesized role of silences regarding the ‘legal’ requirements in such interviews. Some readers may arrive at the view that most of this chapter could be ‘making a mountain out of a molehill.’ At its end it is claimed that the analyses presented provide insights concerning the difficulties faced by interviewers when, for example, appropriately administering the legally required ‘caution’ — however, very limited evidence is produced to justify this claim. Also missing from this chapter is reference to the several highly relevant studies published by others.

The third part of the book is concerned with confessions. Here the analyses are clearly of interest but they are not related in depth to the theories widely available for years in the literature relating to various types of confessions. Furthermore, the number of interviews containing confessions was small, at only seven (see Bull and Soukara’s analyses of 40 such interviews, plus the high quality research by Holmberg and Christianson, 2002). Nevertheless, some valuable information concerning possible relationships between what the interviewer does and a suspect confessing are presented, though the claims for ‘elicitation’/causation may not be justified. A focus on ‘minimization’ is warranted as such a technique is currently trained/used in some countries (e.g. the USA) but its use in England is nowadays non-existent (Soukara, Bull, Vrij, Turner and Cherryman, 2009).

At the end of each major section of the book concluding chapters are presented. These largely repeat what has already been said and thus could have been omitted.

The final chapters make a number of recommendations which would indeed be of some use in countries where the training of police to interview suspects is still of poor quality. Here, at last, mentioned is made of the highly relevant ‘PEACE’ initiative commenced in England and Wales 20 years ago which has transformed investigative interviewing and been adopted in several other countries.

Understandably, investigative/surveillance organizations such as the police typically are not willing to pass on to independent researchers details of their activities. Dr Carter is to be commended for the efforts she put in to obtain the interviews that she analyzes in this book. However, due to the fact that in England (especially) and elsewhere since 1996 huge steps have been taken to further improve the interviewing of suspects (e.g. see Bull, and Milne, 2004; Soukara, Bull, Vrij, Turner and Cherryman, 2009; van der Sleen, 2009; Walsh and Bull, 2010) her findings are probably nowadays of limited relevance.

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