

# Participation frameworks, discourse features and embedded requests in police V.A.T.E. interviews with children

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*This paper examines training interviews conducted as a part of the Video and Audio Taping of Evidence (VATE) project run by the Victorian Police Force. Transcriptions of seven video-taped interviews between police officers and children aged eight to eleven years formed the corpus of data for this study. Adopting an Interactional Sociolinguistics framework in order to examine certain discourse features of the interviews, it was found that the data could not be classified as typical of police institutional discourse such as that described by Auburn, Drake and Willig (1995:384) and Thomas (1989:137). Features such as frames and participant roles in the interviews as well as discursal indicators (Thomas 1989) indicate an asymmetrical discourse structure said to be typical of institutional talk. However, other features of the data such as receipt markers (Atkinson 1992) were found to be indicative of a less formal style of discourse where such asymmetry is less common. Thus it was concluded that the notion of institutional discourse as asymmetrical discourse with asymmetrical patterns is problematized by data such as that analyzed here.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Police institutional discourse

As a form of institutional discourse, the language of police evidentiary interviews has generally been viewed in terms of its asymmetrical distribution of power and status between the dominant police participant and the subordinate witness participant (eg. Auburn, Drake and Willig 1995:384; Thomas 1989:137). It might be expected therefore that when the witness is a young child, the difference in participant status would be clearly demonstrated through the prominence of features of asymmetrical institutional discourse. For instance, the use of discursal indicators (Thomas 1989) and asymmetrical naming rituals (Lakoff 1990) by the dominant participants to maintain control over the discourse would be expected features of interviews between police officers and children.

Heydon (1997), however, finds that in certain discourse contexts it is not possible to make such predictions about the data based on our assumptions about the nature of police institutional discourse, because such assumptions would be based on the notion of police institutional discourse as having as requisite features those aspects which relate to asymmetrical power relations. In the interviews which are analysed here, features such as those described

above are identified in the data, however their role in enabling the asymmetry normally associated with police institutional discourse is challenged by the presence of features not normally associated with such asymmetry. These latter features are largely those which indicate the caring attitude of the police officer and a genuine concern for the comfort of the child, both by the interviewing officer and by the institution as a whole. Informal naming rituals and receipt markers (Atkinson 1992) are examples of such features. The complexity of the type of discourse found in the data for this study reflects the unusual circumstances of its context.

Adopting a theoretical framework which facilitates the negotiation of meaning as achieved interactionally is an important consideration, given the nature of the data. By focussing on the use of frames (Goffman 1974a:10-11) and participation frameworks (Goffman 1974b:517) to describe the data, as well as the use of discursal indicators (Thomas 1989) and receipt markers (Atkinson 1992) this paper describes how Interactional Sociolinguistics can be usefully employed to describe the way in which participants' goals are realised through their use of language in these interviews. The analysis of the use of discursal indicators and receipt markers shows the initial development in the study of the problematizing of the notion of institutional discourse as necessarily

asymmetrical. A more detailed discussion of these features and their relationship to institutional discourse can be found in Heydon (1997: 94-112).

### 1.2. The VATE project

The interviews transcribed for analysis in the present study were conducted as a part of the Victorian Police Department's Video and Audio Taping of Evidence (VATE) project which has been in operation since 1993, and provides an alternative to the traumatic experience of testifying in court for vulnerable witnesses and victims of crimes, such as children. Instead of a court appearance, children under eighteen years and the mentally handicapped may give their evidence in the form of an interview with a police officer trained to elicit a narrative from the witness in a form acceptable to the court.

Part of the training for police officers involved in the VATE project involves conducting a video-taped interview with a child or mentally handicapped person. The object of the exercise is for the police officer to elicit as many details as possible about some, wholly innocuous, "event" which the subject has recently witnessed. As these "events" are set up in advance by the VATE project coordinators, the information elicited can be tested for accuracy against what was known to have happened.

Fourteen such training interviews were conducted at the Melbourne Police Centre in May 1997, and the video-taped recordings of seven of those interviews formed the basis for the data used in this study. The seven child participants were aged between eight and eleven years and were all students at a rural ballet school. The "event" arranged by the researcher which they all witnessed (hereafter referred to as "the Event") involved a man unknown to the children interrupting their ballet class and conducting a survey about after-school activities. (For a full description of the methodology employed in the study, see Heydon 1997:20-28.)

## 2. Summary of results of the analysis of the data

In analysing the data, this study identified several linguistic features which can be described as features of institutional discourse, such as the dominance of a question/answer structure, the fact that the goals of the interaction may not be apparent to the lay participants and the fact that there are constraints on displays of emotion (eg. surprise, sympathy etc.) by the professional

participants (Drew and Heritage 1992:22-23). The tripartite structural view of the three parts of the VATE interview (the Opening, the Information Gathering and the Closure, see also Appendix II) had linguistic implications and frame transitional utterances (Coupland, Robinson and Coupland 1994:93-94) were identified in each interview. These utterances marked the turn at which the interview moved from one part to the next (ie. from the Opening to the Information Gathering, or from the Information Gathering to the Closure). The frame (Goffman 1974a) and participation framework (Goffman 1974b) analysis of the Opening and the Closure of the interviews found further evidence of police institutional discourse features, such as the roles of *principal* and *author* of the police officer's utterances in the Opening being assigned to the police institution rather than the speaker, the shifts in footing used in most of the interview Closures through which police officers were able to maintain a neutral stance during the review of the child's narrative, and the prevalence of discursal indicators (Thomas 1989). These features and their implications for the power dynamics of the interviews will be discussed below. Two other features, discursal indicators (Thomas 1989) and receipt markers (Atkinson 1992), which were identified in the data will be discussed below in relation to issues of power, status and institutional discourse.

The interviews were further subjected to analysis in terms of the question forms being used by police officers to elicit information from the children. It was found that embedded requests for information of the form *Can you...?* and *Do you...?* (referred to as CY? and DY? respectively) had particularly high frequency in the Information Gathering part of the interview, although their presence in the Opening and Closure was also noted and analyzed. Further analysis revealed that these embedded requests occurred with a narrow range of verb types and the various combinations of request form and verb type could also be analyzed in terms of the types of response they elicited. It was found that the response types ranged across several categories, two of which, the substantive and the yes/no responses, indicated the two possible interpretations of the request: as a request for information in the case of the former, or as a question regarding ability in the case of the latter. The implications of this analysis for the functions of the requests and the issues of power and status mentioned above will be discussed below.

### 3. Features of police institutional discourse in VATE interviews

#### 3.1. Participation frameworks of the tri-partite interview

In analysing the data it was found that the participation framework of the police on-record interview frame invoked at the commencement of the interview had an unusual distribution of participant roles. In their opening statements, the police officers switch from speaking for themselves in the first utterance (eg. INT3<sup>1</sup>: 1: PO4 *You ready to go?...OK...this is a video taped statement at the Victoria Police Centre on Sunday the twenty-fifth of May 1997 and my name is Senior Constable (FN, SN)*) to speaking for another when they introduce the child (eg. INT3: 1: PO4 *and with me is (FN) who I'm gonna be speaking to*). According to Goffman (1974b:517) an *animator* is the person who physically produces talk, thus in the opening statement, the police officer is the *animator* of the identification process. It was also noted in Goffman (1974b:517) that a *figure* is a person being spoken of, so we can see that by introducing the child at the end of the opening statement, the police officer assigns the role of *figure* to the child as the child is being spoken of.

The roles of *principal* and *author*, however, can be shown to belong to neither participant. In Goffman (1974b:517) the *principal* was described as the person responsible for talk and the *author* was described as the person who creates talk. In the case of the opening statements, it is possible to argue that in making their statements to camera, the police officers themselves are only *animators* of a scripted statement which has been written by a third party representing the police force as an institution. If we consider Extract 1 below, we can see that in the first line of turn 1, PO1 states that she is *going to be reading from something*.

Extract 1  
INT6

1. PO1: Here we go..(sits) OK..now I'm going to be reading from something. all right? so um. just bear with me. all right this is a video taped statement at the ah Melbourne Community Policing Squad today's um Sunday the twenty-fifth of May?. 1997?. can you tell the time (FN)?. have you got a wa- oh very good can you tell me what the time is by your watch?
2. CH3: Um. one past eleven?

3. PO1: So is mine. that's good. all right the time is one past eleven. my name is Senior Constable (FN, SN) and I'm with (FN). (FN) could you tell me what your full name is?

This mention of *reading from something* clearly indicates that the statement made by PO1 is not speech created by her, but rather a scripted statement created by someone representing the police force as an institution. Thus PO1 is not the *author* of the statement and as the statements made by the other police officers at the commencement of their interviews are almost identical to this one, it would seem reasonable to postulate that none of the police officers occupy the role of *author* of this statement.

As to the role of *principal* of the statement, we must consider whether or not the police officer, as an individual, can be "held responsible for having wilfully taken up the position to which the meaning of the utterance attests" (Goffman 1974b:517). When we consider how a person could be held responsible for taking up the "position to which the meaning of an utterance attests" if that utterance is a quote (ie. the *author* of the utterance is someone other than its *animator*), we find that, since the form of the utterance is prescribed by its *author*, the only aspects of the utterance available to the speaker for adjustment are the decision to use the quote and the decision as to where the quote is used in relation to the rest of the discourse in which the speaker is involved. Having already established that the opening statement made by the police officers has been written by another, and that the statement is a standard feature of each interview transcription, it seems reasonable to assume that making the statement at the beginning of the interview is a requirement of carrying out the interview. Therefore, the police officer is not responsible for deciding whether or not to make the statement nor when it should be made and therefore cannot be considered responsible for any of the decisions which would place her/him in the role of *principal* of the statement.

From the above discussion we can see that the participation framework of the police on-record interview frame is one in which the speaker, the police officer, is assigned the role of *animator* of the utterances while the roles of *principal* and *author* seem to be assigned to an unknown third party which represents police protocol.

In discussing the Closure of the interviews, two different approaches to the participation framework were analysed

and the first few turns of the Closures of the two interviews in question - INT4 and INT7 - are reproduced in Extracts 2 and 3 below.

Extract 2  
INT7

149. PO6: Right. OK. certainly sounds very interesting. we'll stop the ah the tape there. but um just so I make sure I've got this right. so last Thursday you went to ballet?
150. CH7: Yeah

Extract 3  
INT4

67. PO7: OK. I'm just going to go through what you've told me about this man OK and um I'd like you to just to make sure that I've got it right and if there's anything you want to add to what I've said you can just. interrupt me and add
68. CH4: Yep
69. PO7: Or um if there's something that's wrong that I've said you can just tell me if I've got anything wrong. OK you said that at ballet school on Thursday at about six o'clock?
70. CH4: Yeah

We see in the above extracts that PO7 in INT4 made explicit to CH4 the purpose of the Closure and the roles to be taken up by the participants - that she would be reviewing the things said to her by CH4 and that CH4 was to feel that she could correct or affirm PO7's assertions at any time. By comparison, PO6 in the Closure of INT7 did not mention the roles to be played, only that he wanted to *make sure I've got this right*. If we compare this to the way in which a "preferred version" is negotiated in police interviews with suspects (Auburn *et al.* 1995: 363-365) we may find some similarities, which might indicate that the approach of PO6 is closer to the approach recognised as police institutional discourse.

The effect of this recognition of CH4's role in the Closure by PO7 in INT4, seems to be that CH4 feels encouraged to make adjustments and additions to her narrative, such as in INT4; 76: CH4 where PO7's *circus* in the previous turn is adjusted to *[circus] dance* or in INT4; 86: CH4 where CH4 adds to the description of the man as wearing *an old top* (turn 85) with *kind of like a T shirt or something*.

If we compare this to the Closure of INT7 we notice that CH7 does not add to or adjust any of the information presented by PO6 (see INT7; 149-59). This is in spite of the fact that PO6 fails to mention many details which CH7 had supplied, such as the type and colour of the coat that the "inspector" was wearing (see INT7; 118-24) and that he brought a video camera (see INT7; CH7: 140).

Clayman (1992) discusses shifts in footing used by media interviewers to maintain neutrality and shows how assertions are attributed to a source other than the interviewer as a means of distancing the speaker from such assertions. Thus we could argue that PO7 in INT4 has maintained a neutral stance regarding the content of CH4's narrative by not taking personal responsibility for the utterances and referring to them only as things said by CH4. PO6, on the other hand, appears to align himself more strongly with the content of CH7's narrative by not attributing his assertions about the Event to CH7.

This examination of the Closure of INT4 and INT7 indicates that when the police officer assumes the role of *animator* of the child's utterances, as in INT4, the child feels more able to adjust, if not actually challenge, the content of those utterances. By contrast, in not making the participation framework explicit, PO6 in INT7 appears to have appropriated the child's narrative and reduced the possibility of CH7 offering any adjustment to his assertions.

In considering the participation frameworks of both the Opening and the Closure in terms of police institutional discourse we need to take into account the relationship between the police officer as an individual producing utterances which may be classed as police institutional discourse, and the institution represented by such discourse. It seems reasonable to assume that in their daily work, police officers are considered to be carrying out a duty and representing the police force as an institution, rather than representing themselves as individuals, and that this would be somehow incorporated as a feature of police institutional discourse.

We could therefore speculate that the distribution of roles in the participation framework of the Opening (i.e., the police officer as *animator* of utterances attributable to the police institution) and the neutralistic stance taken up by PO7 through the shift of footing which places her in the role of *animator* of CH4's utterances, both conform to a notion of the police officer as a functionary of the

police institution. Before discussing this issue further, we shall consider what influence discorsal indicators have on the nature of the institutional discourse being discussed here.

### 3.2. Discorsal indicators

If we now consider the use of discorsal indicators (Thomas 1989) by police officers we find that this feature is employed to delineate the parameters of the discourse and restrict the allowable contributions of the child to within those boundaries. For instance, by stating at the commencement of the Information Gathering that *I want to talk to you about ballet class, um, on Thursday* (see INT4, PO7; 15), the police officer has restricted the topic of the subsequent conversation to one particular ballet class on one particular day.

Furthermore, when the police officers use the discorsal indicators to describe the boundaries of the discourse to follow, they often place themselves in the position of speaker: INT3, PO4; 19: *...I'm going to be speaking to you...*; INT1, PO2; 41: *...I'd like to talk to you...*; INT4, PO7; 15: *...I want to talk to you...*; INT2, PO3; 7: *...I'll be speaking to you...* In INT5-7 the police officers do not overtly place themselves in the position of speaker in this way but rather indicate that they will be asking the child questions, which is another form of discorsal indicator (see INT5, PO5; 17; INT6, PO1; 11; and INT7, PO6; 27 and 31).

Given that these discorsal indicators are used by dominant participants, their use by the police officers at the transitional points of the interview would seem to indicate that the police officers are reiterating their dominance in the interview at these crucial moments presumably as a way of guiding the structure of the interview. This would seem to be a feature of police interview discourse, and perhaps police institutional discourse as a whole<sup>2</sup>, where it is the responsibility of the interviewing officer to maintain the relevance of the interviewee's contributions. As such, the police officer would have need of discorsal indicators to guide the interviewee so that each contribution by the interviewee adds to the narrative in a meaningful way.

Thus we have established that discorsal indicators may be considered another feature of police institutional discourse and that their function in these interviews is to maintain the police officer's dominance such that contributions made by the interview subject will be kept within the boundaries of what is deemed relevant by the police officer.

In the following section, we shall explore the methods used by the police officers to balance their dominant role in the discourse with the need for the child to express herself freely and not feel restricted in her narrative.

## 4. Features of informal institutional discourse in VATE interviews

### 4.1. Naming rituals

One feature of the interviews which has been mentioned but not yet analysed is the use of naming rituals, particularly in the Opening. It can be seen from the data that it is a necessary part of the opening statement to camera that the police officer states her/his name and rank (see Extract 4 below).

#### Extract 4

##### INT2

1. PO3: OK this is a video taped statement at the ah. Victoria Police Centre? on Sunday the twenty-fifth of May 1997 and the time now is eleven thirty one in the morning. my name's Senior Constable (FN. SN)? and with me today is (FN)?. (FN) can you tell me your full name please.
2. CH2: Um. (FN. MN. SN)

We can see from this extract that as a part of the opening statement, the police officer is required to name her/himself and introduce the child. If we examine turn 1 of Extract 4, we notice an inequality in the status assigned to the participants through the naming ritual. While PO3 is identified by a title which denotes a position within the police institution as well as by his first name (FN) and surname (SN), CH2 is referred to only by her first name. Inequality in naming rituals is identified by Lakoff (1990) as a part of the doctor-patient relationship and can be seen as representative of the "necessary asymmetry" of institutional discourse. Furthermore, CH2 is given a subordinate position relative to PO3 through the use of the utterance *and with me today* is preceding her first name, which implies not only that PO3 is the dominant participant *accompanied* by the child, but that CH2 is one of many children that PO3 has spoken to and just happens to be his interview subject *today*. This latter issue is indicative of institutional discourse where the lay person's experiences which are unusual and unique to them, are treated as one case of many that the professional participant has cause to deal with (see Drew and Heritage 1992:50-51). Thus it seems that the naming ritual taking place in the police officer's opening

statement is part of the set of features which comprise several other forms of institutional discourse.

However, this picture of the VATE interview as a form of institutional discourse containing the same features as other forms of institutional discourse is incomplete. It does not take into account several features which can be shown to distinguish the VATE interview at least from other types of police interview. For instance, we have just considered the naming ritual found in the police officer's opening statement as representative of asymmetry in institutional discourse. But can the same be said about the remainder of the Opening, or indeed the remainder of the interview as a whole? To start with, the use of the police officer's full name and rank is dropped by the police officer almost immediately following the opening statement. Consider PO3's statement highlighted in turn 11 shown in Extract 5 below.

Extract 5  
INT2

11. PO3: we'll be asking questions. now also. if when I'm asking questions. if I ask a question and you don't understand it? just say hey I don't understand (FN) can you ask me that question again or can you ask it in another way? also if you don't know the answer just say I don't know.
12. CH2: Mm

Here PO3 is instructing CH2 to indicate if she does not understand a question. In order to make himself clear, PO3 animates the sort of statement he expects CH2 to make in case of such a misunderstanding: *hey I don't understand* and then adds his own first name to the end of the animated statement (FN). Here then PO3 has clearly demonstrated to CH2 that she is to address him using his first name. Similarly in INT3, INT6 and INT7, the police officers use the same device, explicitly demonstrating to the child that she is to address the interviewing officer by her/his first name (see INT3, PO4; 13; INT6, PO1; 19; and INT7, PO6; 23).

This alternative naming ritual is supported as the dominant paradigm for naming in the interview procedure as a whole by the fact that all of the interviewing officers and children wore large name tags on which was written only the first name of the wearer.

Thus in the interviews we have evidence of two different naming rituals which seem to correspond to two separate

forms of institutional discourse. One of these is represented as the normal police institutional discourse style and contains features such as an asymmetry in the naming ritual. The other seems to be connected to a more empathetic discourse style and has at least one feature of equality which is the use of first names by both participants.

The use of receipt markers by the police officers as a way of acknowledging the child's contributions was also found to be a feature of the interview data. In light of the above discussion about the type of discourse being employed by the police officers, this feature and its implications for the way we define the discourse of the interviews will be discussed in the following section.

#### 4.2. Receipt markers

The use of an utterance such as *OK, certainly, or right* was found to be very common in the interviews as a way of acknowledging receipt of the child's response to a question. It was noted that this feature is identified by Atkinson (1992) as a receipt marker used by arbitrators in informal court proceedings. Atkinson (1992) compares this strategy to those employed in other types of court proceedings such as cross-examination, where a response to one question is frequently given no acknowledgment and is immediately followed by another question. This technique is found to disorient and distress witnesses being so examined because there is no indication of how their response has been received. Atkinson notes that:

By contrast, the arbitrator's practice of acknowledging receipt before going on to the next question may be one way of helping to reduce or mitigate the kind of uncertainty that is involved in situations where the only acknowledgment an answer receives is an unpre-faced next question. (1992: 202)

That such a device is so prominent in the data for this study indicates that while the police officers may occupy a dominant participant role in the discourse, they are aware of the need to reduce the uncertainty that the children may feel in the interview. Furthermore, this device, as Atkinson notes, does not signify the user's opinion of the response being acknowledged, only that the response has been heard and understood. This is an important aspect of the VATE interviews where police officers are required to maintain a neutral position in regard to the child's narrative and not make judgemental remarks about the quality or

content of the information elicited (see Powell and Thompson 1994: 207).

While we are restricted to the data available in this study and we do not have data from police interviews with adults for comparison, it seems reasonable to speculate that the use of receipt markers to aid the comfort of the interviewee would not be a feature of "standard" police interviews with adults. Certainly Atkinson (1992) notes that it is not a feature of usual court proceedings (see above), but rather indicates a less formal style of discourse.

So far we have seen that the VATE interviews contain features of both formal and informal institutional discourse. The participation framework of the police on-record interview frame was shown to be a feature of formal police institutional discourse, where the police officer takes up the position of a functionary representing the police force and assumes only the role of *animator* of utterances scripted by the police institution. Further, the use of discursal indicators to restrict contributions made by the subordinate participant was also shown to be a feature of police institutional discourse, as was the asymmetrical naming ritual contained in the opening statement of the interview.

On the other hand, the widespread use of first names by both participants and the use of receipt markers by the police officers were both found to be features of a less formal discourse.

This study included a detailed discussion concerning the use of embedded requests for information in the Information Gathering part of the interviews. In section 5 below, we will consider this discussion in relation to the issues of asymmetry and status in the discourse described above.

## 5. Embedded requests as indicators of duality in the discourse of the VATE interview

### 5.1. Functions of embedded requests

In the analysis of the data, the two main forms of embedded requests found in the interview, *Can you \_\_\_\_\_?* (CY?) and *Do you \_\_\_\_\_?* (DY?) requests were considered according to their distribution, the verbs which occurred with them and the types of responses they elicited. Extract 6, below, contains some examples of these request forms being used in the Opening. Regarding the types of responses elicited by the different request

forms, it was noted that police officers would be most likely to expect substantive responses as these types of request are primarily requests for information. Departures from substantive responses, in particular yes/no responses, indicated that the child may have interpreted the request as a question regarding ability and thus the request had not fulfilled its function of eliciting information.

Of the CY? requests, it was found that those used with the verb *remember* were most likely to elicit a yes/no response, while those with *tell me* or *describe to/for me* were the least likely to elicit a yes/no response. Further, it was suggested that the use of a verb which implied talk of some kind with the personal pronoun *me*, such as in *can you tell me...?* acted to encourage the child, reassuring her that the information she gave was of personal importance to the police officer. This may have partially explained the effectiveness of these types of response in eliciting substantive responses.

The DY? requests were found to occur with two verbs, *know* and *remember* in 97% of cases (see Heydon 1997, Table 4.9, p 85). Of the occurrences with these two verbs it was found that DY? requests with *know* were more likely to elicit yes/no responses than DY? requests with *remember* and furthermore, there was no evidence to suggest that the DY? *remember* requests were being interpreted by the children as questions regarding ability as they were never given an affirmative yes/no response. The DY? *know* requests, however, elicited several affirmative yes/no responses indicating that the children felt the request could be responded to as a question regarding knowledge/ability and could be responded to with an agreement token.

One aspect of the interviews which demonstrates quite clearly the difference between the various request forms and their possible interpretations is their function in the Opening of the interviews. As mentioned above, the Opening consists of a statement by the police officer followed by requests for the child's full name and date of birth. To obtain the child's date of birth, many of the police officers asked the child to give their age first and then their birthday (See Extract 6 below).

#### Extract 6 INT2

1. PO3: OK this is a video taped statement at the ah. Victoria Police Centre? on Sunday the twenty-fifth of May 1997 and the time now is eleven thirty one in the morning. my name's Senior

- Constable (FN. SN)? and with me today is (FN)?  
(FN) can you tell me your full name please.
2. CH2: Um. (FN. MN. SN)
  3. PO3: OK? now. can you tell me how old you are please (FN)
  4. CH2: I'm nine.
  5. PO3: And do you know when your birthday is?
  6. CH2: Yeah. the (date) of (month)

What is noticeable about each of these Opening requests, is that while a *CY? tell me* request can be used to obtain any of the pieces of information mentioned above, the *DY? know* request can only be used to elicit the child's birthday, and is never used to elicit the child's age or full name. Often a direct request is used to elicit the child's age (eg. INT7, PO6; 7: *And how old are you (FN)*) but never to elicit the child's birthday; here an embedded request is always used and it is most commonly a *DY? know* request. (See INT1, PO2; 9; INT2, PO3; 5; INT4, PO7; 5; INT7, PO6; 9). *DY? remember* and *CY? remember* requests are never used in this part of the Opening.

What we can see from this is that *Do you know your full name?* or *Do you know how old you are?* are not appropriate requests for children of this age because they imply that they may not know their full name or their age and this is very unlikely. *Can you tell me your full name?* has none of these implications in the interviews and receives a substantive response every time it is uttered with no agreement token which might indicate that it has been interpreted as a question regarding ability.

It seems then, that the *CY? tell me* requests can be used in situations where the child's ability to answer the question is not at stake because they are more likely to be interpreted as requests for information. Conversely, the *DY? know* requests are more likely to be used in situations where the child's ability to answer the question may not be taken for granted, such as in requests for the child's date of birth or birthday. (The data show that many of the child participants did not know the year of their birth, though they were all able to give their birthday.) Furthermore, the *DY? know* requests cannot be used in situations where the child is reasonably certain to be able to answer the question because they are more likely to be interpreted as questions regarding ability/knowledge which would be inappropriate when requesting a ten year old's full name, for instance.

Thus the first few turns in the Opening of the interviews reveal some definite differences in the functions of *CY? tell me* and *DY? know* requests. While the former functions most strongly as a request for information, the latter can easily function as both a question regarding ability and a request for information. This difference is recognized by the police officers who avoid the use of *DY? know* requests when no question regarding ability is to be implied. This finding strongly suggests that the more yes/no responses an embedded response elicits, the more likely it is to be functioning both as a request for information and as a question regarding ability, such as was found to be the case with the *DY? know* requests. The *CY? tell me* requests, which were more successful in eliciting substantive responses, do so because they function more strongly as requests for information.

While Ledbetter and Dent (1988:232) classified both *CY? tell me* and *DY? know* requests as embedded requests for information and noted that they may be interpreted as questions regarding ability by young children, they did not differentiate between the forms of request within this classification in terms of the responses they may elicit. This study finds that at least these two different types of embedded request can be ordered according to the likelihood of their being interpreted as questions regarding ability.

If we now consider the other types of embedded request found in the data, we may be able to find where they fit in terms of a hierarchy such as that mentioned above. It was found in the analysis of the data that *CY? remember* requests elicited three yes/no responses out of a total number of six occurrences of the request, and that one of these was an affirmative response, whereas of the two instances of *CY? describe to/for me* request both were found to elicit substantive responses. We can therefore place the *CY? remember* requests closer to the *DY? know* requests in the hierarchy and *CY? describe to/for me* requests closer to the *CY? tell me* requests. *DY? remember* requests were found to be much less likely to elicit a yes/no response than *DY? know* requests, and never elicited an affirmative response. Therefore *DY? remember* requests could be placed nearer to the *CY? tell me* requests. Ignoring the *DY? answer* and *DY? see* requests since there was only one token of each, our hierarchy would then look something like the following:

Least likely to be interpreted as a question regarding ability

CY? describe to/for me

CY? tell me

DY? remember

CY? remember

Most likely to be interpreted as a question regarding ability

DY? know

The CY? describe requests can be considered least likely to be interpreted as questions regarding ability as they only elicited substantive responses. CY? tell me requests have been placed above DY? remember requests because of the use of the former in the Opening, as described above, which strongly suggests that they are seen to function primarily as requests for information by the speaker. Additionally, CY? tell me requests elicited fewer yes/no responses than DY? remember requests. DY? know requests are considered most likely to be interpreted as questions regarding ability because of the high number of yes/no responses which they elicited in the interviews. Their use in the Opening as questions regarding ability (see above) also contributes to their position in the hierarchy.

Having established the relevance of such a hierarchy, we might now consider another type of hierarchy which describes the way in which responses are elicited by different types of illocutions. Thomas (1989: 152) asserts that some illocutions are more obligating than others and postulates a hierarchy of obligatingness. At the top of the hierarchy, Thomas places illocutions such as greetings, summonses, naming addressee, direct questions and direct requests. These are considered to be more obligating because they are more likely to require a response from the addressee. Those illocutions which are considered minimally obligating and therefore less likely to require a response from the addressee are assertions about events and phatic communication. Thomas considers the type of response as a gauge of the obligatingness of an illocution. If we consider the responses to the question types mentioned above in terms of the obligatingness of the illocution, we could perhaps establish a hierarchy of obligatingness between these five types of embedded request. Given that all the requests in the data were of a type which elicited some kind of response, to establish a hierarchy of obligatingness it is necessary to consider the type of response elicited by each CY? or DY? request and whether it was a substantive response or an agreement token. As the previous hierarchy, that of the likelihood of the request being

interpreted as a question regarding ability, was based in part on the number of substantive responses elicited by the request, a hierarchy of obligatingness places the requests in the same order.

Highly obligating

CY? describe to/for me

CY? tell me

DY? remember

CY? remember

Minimally obligating

DY? know

In conclusion, what we have been able to establish here is that some types of embedded request are more obligating and more likely to elicit a substantive response than others. As was mentioned earlier, those types of embedded request which occupy the highest positions in both the hierarchies discussed above, CY? describe to/for me and CY? tell me, have two features in common: they both mention talk (tell/describe) and they both include some mention of who the talk is for (me). It was further suggested that the latter of these features functions to reassure the child that the police officer is personally interested in the child's responses. Both these requests can therefore be seen to explicitly direct the child to talk and to confirm that the interviewer is receptive to this talk. If we consider this in the light of the hierarchies constructed above, we can postulate that those requests which contain these two features will be more successful in eliciting substantive responses than those which do not.

### 5.2. Duality in the functions of embedded requests

Thus we have established that the embedded requests which enjoyed the most success in eliciting information were those which were considered highly obligating and which combined two functions: to explicitly direct the child to talk and to confirm that the interviewer is receptive to this talk. What we notice about these two functions of the more obligating requests is that they correspond almost exactly to two of the features described above as indicating different styles of discourse. In the first instance, the direction to the child to talk can be seen as a form of discursal indicator, an utterance which overtly guides the response of the interviewee, and as such could be considered a part of police institutional discourse (see section 3.2). But the aspect of the request form which functions to confirm that the speaker is receptive to the respondent has similarities with another feature discussed above, the receipt marker,

which functions to reassure the respondent that her/his response has been heard and understood (see section 4.2). Thus the request form in question also belongs to a less formal institutional discourse which is more concerned with the comfort of the lay participant than is usual in police institutional discourse.

What we have shown here is that the request form which is found to be most effective in eliciting information happens to be one which combines aspects of both a formal and an informal style of institutional discourse. Considered in light of the fact that we previously identified several features common to the VATE interviews which were diverse in the style of discourse to which they belong, this last finding is a most interesting development. Given that the interviews are, above all, information seeking, a request form which functions efficiently to elicit information might be considered as a fundamental element of the VATE interview. The fact that the features which make this request form so effective display a combination of discourse styles being used would tend to indicate that the duality of discourse is itself fundamental to the VATE interviews.

This last assertion is supported by the context in which the VATE interviews take place. While the transcripts used as data in this study were made from interviews conducted as a part of a training course, in terms of the skills displayed and the approach used by the police officers these training exercises are assessed by the VATE course supervisors as though the interview were a genuine evidentiary interview. Thus, if the training scheme is successful, it is reasonable to assume that the same features which are identified by this study would appear in a genuine evidentiary interview with a child witness. In such a context, the regular police interview discourse features, such as those displayed in the opening statements, would be a necessary requirement if the interview is to be used in court where accurate and reliable identification of participants is vital to the evidence being considered admissible.

On the other hand, the ultimate purpose of the VATE interview is to reduce the stress on the child normally associated with a court appearance. Thus it would be redundant in the extreme if the interview were to conform exactly with normal police procedure, which would no doubt be just as confrontational and confusing to the child witness as the proceedings of the court are considered to be. Instead the VATE interview is designed to increase the

child's level of comfort and trust in the police officer, so the importance of the police officer appearing to take a personal interest in the child's story is a very real consideration as well as being one not normally associated with police institutional behaviour. As we mentioned earlier, it is more usual for police officers as individuals to display a minimal amount of personal interest in an interview subject as their personal interests are considered secondary to the interests of the institution they represent.

## 6. Conclusion

In this discussion, we have drawn together the results of the data analyses contained in the original study, and we have found that the features identified in those earlier chapters are representative of two forms of discourse. By considering this in relation to the context of the VATE interviews, we have been able to conclude that the apparent duality of styles represents the intersection of the requirements of the court as expressed by the police force as an institution, and the needs of the child witness being interviewed under the VATE system.

Future study in this area might be applied to police training and VATE interview techniques as well as to a review of the VATE interview structure and it is hoped that the data obtained and analysed in this study will be useful as a springboard for these types of applications. Finally, the findings of this study might reopen discussions about the asymmetrical nature of police institutional discourse and institutional discourse in general.

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Pause	
Long	...
Medium	..
Short	.
Pitch	
Rising terminal pitch	?
Transcriber's perspective	
Researcher's comment	( )

Codes used for confidentiality of participants	
Police Officers code	PO#
Child code	CH#
First name	(FN)
Middle name	(MN)
Second middle name	(SMN)
Surname	(SN)
Name of month (in DOB)	(month)
Day of month (in DOB)	(date)

**Endnotes**

1. Extracts from interviews contained in the text are preceded by a code including the Interview number, Turn number and Participant number. See Appendix I for a list of transcription conventions and codes used in the study. For the full transcriptions of the seven interviews see Appendix II Heydon (1997).
2. See for instance Thomas (1989), who discusses the use of discursal indicators in a disciplinary interview between two police officers of unequal rank. This is a different form of discourse from that of a police interview with a non-member of the police force, however the same feature is being used.

**Appendix I: Transcription Conventions**

Adapted from DuBois (1991)

Units	
Turn	{ carriage return }
Word	{ space }
Truncated word	-
Speakers	
Speaker identity/turn start	:
Speech overlap	[ ]

**Appendix II: Excerpt From VATE Course Material  
Tri-Partite Interview Technique**

<p><b>1. OPENING</b></p> <p>I. RAPPORT DEVELOPMENT</p> <p>II. DEVELOPMENTAL ASSESSMENT</p>
<p><b>2. INFORMATION GATHERING</b></p> <p>III. ESTABLISHING ANCHOR</p> <p>IV. OPEN ENDED NARRATIVE</p> <p>V. OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS</p> <p>VI. CLOSED QUESTIONS</p>
<p><b>3. CLOSURE</b></p> <p>VII. REVIEW</p> <p>VIII. TERMINATING THE INTERVIEW</p>

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