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EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

The language of police reports: A quest for precision or a bureaucratic exercise of language degradation

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Abstract. The language of the members of law enforcement has been widely studied mostly in terms of investigating various aspects of police interview discourse. However, our aim here is to examine the language of police reports as a sample of written language of the police outside the context of police-suspect encounters and to describe some of its distinctive linguistic features which function as more or less effective means for achieving maximum clarity and precision. An intimate relationship between the language of legal documents and the language of police reports has been established with respect to style and specific language choices that characterize both registers. Nevertheless, we have observed some peculiar features of police written language that seem to be originating from a compelling need to be as accurate and all-inclusive as possible and to fully conform to conventional standards of report writing.
Keywords: police reports, legal language, precision, institutional discourse.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines some of the linguistic features of police written language, i.e. the language of police reports in English and its grammatical and lexical features which justify its description as a specific type of register and which distinguish it from the "general language" used in everyday communication. Police discourse in general refers here to the distinct manner of speaking and writing that has been developed by the police instutution in English-speaking countries. We discuss the nature, linguistic characteristics and intended meaning of the lexical units prefered in

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this registre, their occurrence and frequency and compare these findings with the data of two large corpora of English, the British spoken corpus and a corpus of newspapers taken from the Collins WordBanks Online.

When analyzing a certain type of register, we attempt to establish the representative linguistic features and their distribution in a corpus of related texts. Biber (1995:1) points out that register is "a general cover term for situationally defined varieties [...] associated with particular contexts or purposes" which depend on their users' language communities (Ure, 1982: 5). Halliday (1988: 162) defines register as "a cluster of associated features having a greater-than-random...tendency to co-occur". The analysis of a register features is necessarily quantitative since "the associated register distinctions are based on differences of relative distribution of linguistic features" (Biber, 1995: 29). As far as police written discourse is concerned, we find that it represents a highly conventionalized and institutionally driven pattern of language use. The "institutional gatekeepers" (Berk-Seligson, 2009: 14) are higly committed to the linguistic patterns approved by the law enforcement institution they duly represent.

Despite the fact that all of the police reports which constitute our corpus represent personal experience narratives written by the initial investigating officers who made the report, their language is extremely formal, exhibiting a strong tendency to provide all the necessary details which might be considered important at any point of the investigative process. Berg et al. (2012: 12) consider that a well-written incident report summarizes the officer's actions and observations chronologically, gives a detailed account of the crime scene, the testimony of witnesses, and descriptions of the evidence.

The implications of police reports are far-reaching and an officer is aware of their importance. Describing the critical importance of effective police writing skills as well as different purposes of police reports, Scaramella (2012: 49) finds that the report writing may be affected by a number of variables, such as "supervisory likes and dislikes; formal education; […] and the ability of the field training officer to instill in young officers the importance of the written report at the very beginning of their career". The people outside the police institution rely on the details provided in the reports; the prosecutor needs to understand the full range of the event simply by reading the police report and afterwards he/she will have to decide whether all of the elements of the crime have been properly presented, in order to provide solid grounds for a lawsuit, and eventually prove the case. In addition to the prosecutor, judges, other lawyers and juries will have to rely on specific information recorded in police reports to reach a decision about the guilt or innocence of the parties involved in the reported event.

2. Data and methodology

This paper presents some of the results of a broader study of police written discourse. The research has been carried out on a corpus of police reports in English containing 96 police reports made between 2001 and 2008. These reports were made by British and Irish police officers (62 British and 34 Irish reports) and they are all partially

anonymized so that the names of the participants, towns, police stations and other relevant details which could jeopardize their anonymity are hidden, usually by using the capitalized words NAME, ACCUSED, TOWN etc. The cultural differences have not significantly influenced the most prominent syntactic and lexical choices of the two sources. The reports generally contain information about the particular methods by which a crime has been carried out, the specific injuries or property damages sustained by a victim and all the different actions an officer took to investigate the crime. The reports vary in their length, but a typical report contains between 450 and 620 words.

A general incident report represents the actual account of a crime. The initial investigating officers are the first responding officers at the scene of an incident. It is extremely important for officers "to accurately and descriptively record short-lived evidence" (Redwine, 2003: 2), i.e. the who, why, what, when and how. The focus of this paper is primarily the analysis of the influence legal English has on police written discourse style as well as the communicative purposes such linguistic choices are meant to serve. Legal English is restricted here to the language of written statutes, a norm establishing written type of genre, which often implies communication that "lay readers cannot readily comprehend" (Oates & Enquist, 2009, p.127). On the other hand, some features of police written language which will also be discussed in this paper are specific for this type of register and cannot be found in legal documents.

Stylistic analysis which strives to identify patterns of usage in speech and writing constitute the main framework of this research. A descriptive approach is adopted as a method of the analysis supported by a quantitative study of the data and the comparison of the frequency of distribution of particular language features found in the police reports with their distribution in the two different corpora – British spoken corpus and a corpus of articles from British newspapers. Tiersma (2006) observes that "although most rules governing ordinary conversation also apply to legal language, the language of law is in many important respects quite different from ordinary speech". These include technical vocabulary, archaic, formal or unusual terminology, impersonal and passive constructions, nominalisations, long and complex sentences as well as wordiness and redundancy. Tiersma also notes that this list shows a considerable overlap with features that linguists have associated with written language in general (Tiersma, 2006: 44-50). For this reason, we have also included the corpus of newspaper texts for a comparative analysis of the features of police written reports. Also, we presume that journalists have a similar need for clarity of expression and disambiguation of meaning. Generally, we are concerned with the effect an author of a report tries to communicate to the reader by choosing certain lexical devices over another.

3. Police language as a variety of legal language

According to Coulthard (2007: 78) "speaking and writing like a police officer (or in police register) is something we can recognize stylistically and statements by the police have their own distinctive style, motivated by the need for precision and accuracy." The language of the police has been the subject of many studies

focusing primarily on different aspects of interrogations of suspects and witnesses in police stations (Haworth 2002; Cotteril 2007; Shuy, 1998, 2005; Rock, 2008 and many others). However, the majority of these studies dealt with the language of police interviews, especially the issues related to different linguistic strategies employed by the police officers during interviews and the asymmetry of power between the participants in the institutional context. This paper, on the other hand, investigates certain linguistic features of the written police reports which are produced outside the context of police-suspects interaction. However, it can be argued that such texts are usually produced in the same settings and by the same groups of people as is the case with spoken discourse which police officers use during interviews so that written and oral communication are connected in many ways.

Hall (2008: 67-68) claims that "the language used by police in the execution of their duties[…] can be thought of not just as a set of clichés, formulas and boilerplate, but rather as the particular set of them perceived to be appropriate to police work as a context of use by the officers who carry out that police work". Analyzing participant categories in legal-lay communication, Rock, Heffer and Conley (2013: 5-6) state that "one could restrict legal to those with the law degree and a professional legal qualification that allows them to practice in the profession", but add that "observing the interaction between legal professionals (lawyers and judges) and police officers in court[…] it is quite clear that they do not belong to the same community of practice nor share the same education, training, or interactional style. At the same time, those working in professions relating to the law are heavily influenced by the law in their interactional practice". In that respect, police register is closely related to legal discourse in terms of its overly bureaucratic nature distinctive for a high level of formality, complex sentence structure, use of archaisms and technical vocabulary. Crystal (1969: 194) claims that the language of law is the least communicative of all uses of language and far removed from "informal spontaneous conversation". In this paper we will try to give an insight into some of the basic similarities between the police and the legal style, but also some of the peculiarities of the police register itself by which it diverges from ordinary English.

4. The search for precision

Linguistic behavior of police officers is distinguished by a strong inclination toward making unambiguous and precise statements. This highlights the need for using many different linguistic devices that serve the purpose. Every aspect of a legal document needs to be accurately formulated in order to prevent undesirable accidental or intentional misinterpretations. Hunt (2002: 114) claims that "ambiguity [is] `the most serious disease of language and nowhere is the absence of this disease more important than in legislation". Butt and Castle (2006: 22) define ambiguity as "the admission of more than one meaning; of being understood in more than one way; or of referring to more than one thing at the same time". The

imperative to avoid ambiguity and be as explicit as possible is exactly the same with regard to police written language because police reports represent important evidence in criminal proceedings. As we have mentioned before, report writing is regarded in such a way that legally relevant details stand out most clearly. Otherwise, they would be ineffective for making future legitimate decisions. The findings of this study foreshadow that a police officer is obliged to be as accurate as possible (Jetmore, 2008; Scarry, 2008) and for that purpose he/she usually chooses linguistic devices conventionally employed in legal writing.

4.1. Avoiding pronouns

Using nouns instead of corresponding pronouns is a distinctive feature of both legal and police language. Tiersma (1999: 72) claims that, at least in written legal language, the legal profession tends to shy away from using pronouns. Avoiding pronouns is regarded as an important instrument for achieving precision and clarity. It is likely that police officers repeat lexical items instead of using personal pronouns in their narratives in order to avoid ambiguity of any kind. The following passage represents an example from the corpus of police reports:

> **R. No54**: As I approached the laneway on North Av I saw Garda [A member of the Irish police force] NAME and Student Garda NAME talking to *a youth*. I got out of the Patrol Car and approached them. I saw that *this youth* was soaking wet, he had black hair, approx. 18-19 yrs., slim build. Garda NAME arrested *this youth* on suspicion of having committed Aggravated Burglary at NAME STREET. *This youth* gave his name as NAME, ADDRESS. We placed *this youth* into the rear of the Patrol Car. The time of arrest was 4.30 am.

In the above example we observe the repetitive phrase *this youth* in cases where the personal/object pronoun he/him would be sufficient in the context. Being very cautious about possible misunderstandings, the police officer repeats the noun even if the antecedent is quite evident. As a result, such sentences can be rather tedious, but this fact apparently does not present a matter of concern for police officers. The practice of avoiding personal pronouns is inherent to legal language and the pattern is highly consistent throughout the corpus of police reports with the exception of the first person pronoun. In the above report, the pattern holds true even when the police officer eventually name "the youth" in question:

> I was also present when *ACCUSED NAME* was being interviewed, and noted details of these conversations in my notebook. I also noted that *ACCUSED NAME's* underpants had blood stains on them when he took off his jeans in the Garda Station, as they were being taken as evidential items. As the morning progressed I noticed that *ACCUSED NAME's* conversation became more lucid, and not as erratic and rambling as it had been earlier that morning. I requested *ACCUSED NAME* to shake loose from his hair some particles which I had noticed suspended in his hair, and he did so.

As we can see, the police officer does not deviate from the strategic means to avoid pronouns and he instead keeps repeating the accused name throughout the text

although other people are not introduced in the context and the fear of being misinterpreted would be rather unjustified. The name of the accused is repeated steadily until the final part of the last sentence where we find the corresponding pronoun instead. Shuy (1998: 118) points out that "such repetition runs counter to the natural principles of discourse organization". Our argument here is that by restrictive use of cohesive devices, police officers disregard implicit connections between sentences and ignore pronouns as linguistic means for achieving cohesion of the overall text. Stein (2015: 52) claims that in this case, the rules of interpretation and inference "appear to be pragmatic rules that apply to legal language only […] (which) are not just negative in the sense of the absence of grammatical structures, but they are part of genre competence".

In addition to avoiding personal pronouns, police officers choose obsolete lexical items such as *said* and *aforesaid* functioning as articles or demonstrative pronouns. Tiersma (1999: 90) claims that these words are almost certainly literal translations from legal Latin or French substituting foreign words "which referred back to a person or thing that had been more fully introduced earlier in the text". Here is an example from the corpus:

> Upon arrival, I drove along NAME Street in an effort to locate *the said* premises.

Apart from compound prepositions and prepositional phrases which also abundantly pervade police written language and are also "a fertile source of surplus words" (Wydick 1978: 731), we find the word *said* in the above example used in its archaic, legal meaning of a demonstrative pronoun. Using KWIC Concordance software we have been able to find 68 citations of the word *said* in the corpus of which 20 of the occurrences represent demonstrative pronoun. Table 1 represents the excerpt of the relevant KWIC lines from the corpus:

Tabla 1. KWIC lines for said used as a demonstrative pronoun from the corpus of police reports

retained the LABEL NO CIGARETTE BUTT from the	*Said*	bin. I then noted a statement from witness NAME w
person or persons to drop down through and into the	*Said*	livery. The livery itself was also viewed by ours
him under caution, as to the circumstances of the	*Said*	collision. About TIME hours same date, accompanied
the nearside kerb. As such, I followed after the	*Said*	vehicle, which was seen by us as pulling in and s
rbance between a male and female, coming from the	*Said*	address. We attended immediately. Upon arrival a
me of NAME (witness), earlier that morning at the	*Said*	address. Accompanied by Police witness NAME, I du
his time both accused were observed to also enter	*Said*	street. Upon doing so both accused proceeded to p
unch and kick at both victims within a doorway of	*Said*	locus before attempting to evade police dispatched
fers), in which the suspect NAME has provided the	*Said*	number as belonging to him. TYPE ENTRY AS ABOVE
rove along NAME Street in an effort to locate the	*Said*	premises. Having continued along the road for app
olice vehicle about and started to make after the	*Said*	car, again informing the control room that the ve
the roadway, who was shouting and swearing at the	*Said*	officers. I further observed the said COLOUR NAME

ring at the said officers. I further observed the *Said* COLOUR NAME motor car registration number
ssession of a substantial amount of heroin at the *Said* address. Prior to leaving POLICE STATION. I was a
itness NAME at this time. We also attended at the *Said* garage with witness NAME. at which time I observe
tated that ACCUSED was still in possession of the *Said* car keys and her house keys, and at this time ACC
house keys, and at this time ACCUSED produced the *Said* sets of keys from his person. These were confirmed
. TOWN, in response to the female occupant of the *Said* address (witness NAME. reporting that her next do
sed with his signature. I thereafter measured the *Said* piece of wood, and found this to measure LENGTH
my, fails the physical portion and is terminated. *Said* individual then goes and hires a lawyer to sue the

In the above examples we can see that the word *said* is used instead of the definite article or the demonstrative pronouns *this/these* (*that/those*) modifying the noun that it precedes. *Aforesaid*, which is essentially a longer variant of *said*, is much less frequent in police reports and we have found only three examples of its usage in the corpus. These archaic words are probably used to add the air of seriousness and loftiness to a report which will be presented as evidence to the legal audience. It seems that police officers follow the legal style even when making personal experience narratives which are naturally more relaxed and less formal in other registers. Heydon (2005: 154) observes that "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".

4.2. Pronominal adverbs

Another legalism common in the police reports is the usage of archaic pronominal adverbs such as *thereafter, therein, wherein, herein* etc. These adverbs are commonly used in legal documents for the purpose of avoiding the repetition of nouns designating personal names, objects and other in a document or to refer to a certain legal document. In terms of ordinary usage, these adverbs are extremely rare with the exception of *therefore* for which there are 22, 976 instances found in BNC, the 100 million word collection of written and spoken language. The pronominal adverb *thereafter* can be found in 93 citations in British Spoken Corpus containing 41, 5 million words while in the corpus of newspaper articles containing 6 million words it occurs 63 times. When compared to our corpus of police reports containing around 50,000 words with 31 occurrences of *thereafter*, it is easy to observe that this particular adverb makes a distinctive feature of the police prose. The following extract from a police report represents a prime example of the frequency of this particular pronominal adverb in police written discourse:

> **R. No 34**: I *thereafter* carried out a TYPE check on the accused details which revealed that the accused was currently on bail set at NAME Court on DATE that he must reside at ADDRESS TOWN. I *thereafter* informed the accused that there was a current bail condition in force that he must reside at ADDRESS in

> TOWN… and I *thereafter* conveyed the accused to POLICE STATION where he was processed through the Custody Management Suite as an arrested person and informed of his rights… The accused was then placed in a police cell and I *thereafter* discussed the incident with RANK NAME (non-witness). I *thereafter* spoke with witness NAME who had taken the initial phone call…. I *thereafter* submitted an additional police report (NUMBER refers) in relation to this vandalism.

The adverb *thereafter* occurs in this excerpt exclusively in the post-subject position just as is the case with its more contemporary variant, the temporal adverb *then*, whose post-subject (medial) position in police register has been widely researched and proven as one of the most distinguishable features of "policespeak" (see Fox, 1993; Coulthard, 2006; Hall, 2008).

The adverb *then* is placed immediately after the subject in 175 out of 198 citations from the corpus of this study. In 103 instances it is preceded by a personal pronoun and in 33 instances by a noun, noun phrase or personal name as well as relative pronouns *which* or *where*. Also, we have found 37 citations of the adverb *then* placed between an auxiliary verb (*be, have* and *will*) and the lexical verb (*the procedure is then to alert, arrangements were then made, I was then aware, we'll then be escorting you, I have then observed* etc.) which also represents the medial position of this adverb. Here is an excerpt from our corpus:

> **R. No.16**: This immediately resulted in him stopping to kick out, and handcuffs were *then* able to be applied to him by Police witness NAME. ACCUSED NAME was *then* lodged in the rear of a marked Police van, with him continuing to be abusive towards me throughout. Police witness NAME and I were *then* requested to attend at the home address of witness NAME regarding the damage which had been caused to his garage and vehicle which had been parked inside same.

Yet, there is only one example of final position of this adverb in the whole corpus (*I tried to make a sensible decision then* – R. No 52), and 22 instances of its initial position in a clause which represent, for the most part, the language of a person being interviewed in the police station recorded in a report.

Biber et al. (2002: 372) note that "medial position of a time adverbial indicates that an adverbial has scope over only a particular part of the clause and that the placement of the adverbial highlights its relevance to the following word". However, as shown in Fox (1993: 186), the placement of the adverb *then* immediately after the subject is atypical of ordinary language use. Also, the corpus of police reports provides examples of post-subject position of other temporal adverbs such as *subsequently*, *at first* and *later* or adverbs of manner such as *again* and *continually* used in this position commonly for emphatic purposes. When it comes to *thereafter*, it can only be found in initial or final positions in the two large corpora of spoken British English and newspaper texts, so that its post-subject position in the police reports may be considered as a conspicuous feature of police register at least when compared to spoken English and newspaper texts. Another study may be useful for providing information on how this specific feature compares with other bureaucratic written registers.

Formal pronominal adverb *therein*, meaning *in that (place)*, can occasionally be found in the corpus of police reports. Tiersma (1999: 94) admits that *herein* and *therein* may sometimes lead to economy of expression in legal documents replacing longer phrases *in this document* or *in that clause*. *Therein* is found usually in passive constructions in the police reports as in the following example:

R. No. 27: A member of the NAME Council will be sited *therein.* This will be the single point of contact for the duration of the event. The senior Police Stationer present will locate within the Community Centre. An event log will be maintained *therein*.

In everyday communication *therein* is usually found in the meaning *in this particular respect* (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2011) or as a part of the phrase *therein lies*… (*the danger, the strength, the problem, the difference*...), so that the meaning *in that place* would be strange to a common speaker. In the British spoken corpus there were only nine instances of *therein*, mostly collocating with the verb *lie* as shown in the following sample:

Tabla 2. The use of therein in the British spoken corpus

Corpus: preloaded/wbo-english.conf

Hits: 9

Query word,[word="(?i)therein"|lemma="(?i)therein"]

Brspok	...suddenly you′re thinking under pressure.	*Therein*	lies the excitement, which can be quite ...
Brspok	<F0X/> Yeah. <M01/> <ZGY/>. Yeah I mean	*therein*	lies the interesting question that you
Brspok	word to a fairly devastating advantage and	*therein*	I think lies the danger. Now misguided
Brspok	heavily dominated by the United States. And	*therein*	lies the continuing difficulty in American
Brspok	the outside world, that is the essence and	*therein*	Soviet people do not differ. President
Brspok	seeing the light of day there each year	*therein*	lies a thorny problem for the Vatican′s
Brspok	job by other means, an essential	*therein*	being his undoubted loyalties to the KGB
Brspok	while scores of others have been closed.	*therein*	lies one of the most bitter points of dispute
Brspok	influence in your life over the next forty years	*therein*	after. So it does I think illustrate the

As far as pronominal adverbs are concerned, the combinations of *there* and a preposition are prevalent in the police reports. The adverbial *whereby* also occurs in the corpus, but we have noted that it is used in an unusual way. The basic meaning of this formal pronominal adverb is *by which* but police officers commonly use it as a formal equivalent of *where* or *in which* as in the following examples:

R.No. 70: I accompanied him into the toilet *whereby* he urinated in the plastic beaker.

R. No. 24: This male was involved in an attack on a female Police Officer attempting to arrest him *whereby* he strangled the officer to the point of unconsciousness with CS Spray having no effect at that time.

Whereby cannot be found in this meaning in modern English dictionaries. Actually, such usage is usually considered to be non-standard and inaccurate in spoken and written language. Apparently, the only acceptable usage of this formal adverb is in the sense *by (through) which*, *because of which* (*the means whereby he took his life*) or the archaic meaning *how*, *by what means* (*whereby does he recognize me?) (Collins English Dictionary Online)*. In the spoken British English corpus we have found 443 instances of *whereby* and only 53 in the corpus of newspaper texts, but in all of these instances, the adverb is used in its standard meaning.

4.3. The use of passive and nominalization in police reports

Research on comprehension and grammatical structure carried by the supporters of The plain English movement show that the dominance of active voice in everyday speech makes understanding easier and less complicated. However, it is a fact that passive is sometimes practically the only option if we wish to avoid ambiguity and prevent arbitrary inferences, especially with respect to legal documents since "it is clear that the active and passive have some distinctive functions of their own" (Hiltunen, 1990: 80).

Bhatia (1993: 188) points out that legislative writing is highly impersonal and decontextualized, in the sense that its illocutionary force holds independently of whoever is the "speaker" (originator) or the "hearer" (reader) of the document. Therefore, passive constructions are far more common in legal discourse than in many other less formal registers. Arguably, attempting to be as objective and impersonal as possible, police officers also prefer passives instead of using generic subjects in sentences like the following: *The police were called and a search was commenced*.

Our point here is not to argue that active or passive is generally better or worse but that there are contexts in which one or the other is more appropriate. There are many examples of unnatural clauses in the police reports which do not help understanding but unnecessarily complicate the sentence structure exhibiting the pervading tendency of police officers to avoid active wherever possible. Here is an excerpt from a police report:

> **R. No 2**: *This was seen as being accessed* from going up a flight of stairs in the barn, and over to a concealed area in among the rafters which was directly above the livery. *The flooring was seen as having been pulled up*, leaving a hole behind which would be adequate enough for a person or persons to drop down through and into the said livery.

By using the impersonal construction *this / the flooring was seen as* the police officer carefully states his own impressions based on what he saw at the crime scene, deliberately allowing for the possibility of different opinions or evidence which could appear during further investigation. We can feel a sense of uncertainty in this kind of reporting about an event. Although we may disagree with the

bureaucratic style of reporting in the above example, we can understand that the initial investigating officer leaves the final conclusions about what actually happened to the more competent experts and investigators. However, the following examples of sentences containing the same phrase can be rightfully considered inappropriate in the context of their use. There is no reason to doubt the facts that the police officer is reporting about, since no further evidence could change those facts:

R. No. 12: *He was seen as having* obvious swelling to both sides of his face, and finding it uncomfortable to speak.

R. No.45: *This was seen as being* behind a stone wall which was directly at the water's edge, and about 3 feet in height.

R. No.47: No medical treatment was requested by him in respect of these marks, which *were seen as being* standard handcuff application marks. ACCUSED *was also seen as having* reddening to right eye and scratches to his shoulder and chest area.

The adjective *obvious* in report No.12, in "obvious swelling to both sides of his face" confirms that what the officer saw was evident to everyone else present. The same thing applies to the situation presented in the rest of the examples: an object was definitely behind a stone wall since nothing in the context of this sentence (report No. 45) or in the rest of the report suggests otherwise – the officers found it right there, and in report No. 47 the accused did have injuries as described. We may argue that the verb *see* is used here in the impersonal passive construction to preclude giving personal opinions or evaluations by the writer who leaves it to the experts to make final decisions and conclusions and possibly confirm such observations. Nevertheless, this kind of overuse of passive voice can be regarded as highly bureaucratic and the sentences tend to be wordy, circumlocutory and simply unnatural. Simplification of the sentence structure by using active voice with the verb *see* would not change the meaning of the message communicated or create risk of being imprecise or ambiguous so that there is no plausible reason for using passive especially when it adds complexity and affects understanding.

Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1428) distinguish between two types of passives, namely long and short passives. Long passives contain the so-called "internalized complement", i.e. *by* phrase which serves to emphasize the importance of the agent by placing it in the rhematic part of the sentence which gives new information. Short passive is also called "agentless" (Biber et al.1999: 475) because it occurs without an overtly expressed agent. There are 526 occurrences of long passives in the corpus of police reports which contains 2,500 sentences. The number of passive sentences containing *by* phrase clearly shows that police officers prefer to state explicitly who the agent of the passive sentence is, but still choose the passive voice variant contrary to the fact that active would be more appropriate when the doer is of some importance. Here are some of the examples from the corpus:

R. No.7: Arrangements were put in place to have the ACCUSED medically examined later that day *by the on-duty Force Medical Examiner (Dr NAME - witness).*

R. No.29: ACCUSED was taken to an interview room at 10.28 *by Detective Constable NAME*.

R. No.21: These remarks were not made as a response to being cautioned and were not elicited in any way *by either myself or police witness NAME.*

The use of passive in the above examples enables the agents (*the-on-duty Force Medical Examiner (Dr NAME-witness), Detective Constable NAME* and *myself or police witness NAME*) to be placed in the rhematic part of the sentence giving the comment or new information. Generally, given information is placed at the beginning of the clause and new information at the end. Biber at al. (1999: 940) claim that the syntactic complexity of the agent argument is one of the main reasons for choosing the passive over the active. A possible reason why police officers prefer to place complex phrases towards the right periphery of the clause (principle of end-weight) may be because it makes it easier for the reader to process the information and remember it.

However, it is often the case that long passives create odd sentences, confused writing and indirect statements as is the case with the following:

R. No.4: As such, we followed after the said vehicle, *which was seen by us as* pulling in and stopping at the service station on NAME Road, TOWN.

R. No. 35: *ACCUSED was conveyed by us* to POLICE STATION where upon arrival he was processed as a detained person and afforded his legal rights.

R. No.2: […]she intimated that a cigarette end which she had discovered within her horse wagon and was alien to there, *had been placed by her* in a bin on the farm.

R. No. 14 The passenger (ACCUSED NAME) was detained by Police witnesses NAME and NAME and *conveyed by them* to POLICE STATION.

R. No. 47 *No medical treatment was requested by him* in respect of these marks, which were seen as being standard handcuff application marks.

Apart from embedding awkward passive relative clauses, the above examples illustrate a very unusual way of adding unnecessary *by* phrase and incorporating object pronouns as agents when it is completely redundant given the fact that the agents are self-evident from the context. Such unnaturally created passive constructions can hardly be found in other formal registers which would more likely choose their active counterparts (*we saw the vehicle / we conveyed him / she had placed the cigarette end / Police Witnesses (Names) detained the passenger and conveyed him to police station / he requested no medical treatment*). There are 25 instances of *by* phrases containing object pronouns in our corpus. Along with the total number of long passive sentences in a relatively small corpus of texts, this might be an indicator of the strong preference for passive voice in police written discourse, often at the expense of economy of expression.

Nominalization as a means of achieving condensation is also very common in the police reports, especially with the verbs *arrange* and *attend* as in the following example:

R. No. 34 I was aware *arrangements were being made* by Police Constable NUMBER, NAME (non-witness) *who was in attendance* to have a joiner from TOWN Council attend to secure the flat.

By nominalizing the verb *arrange* and turning reified concept into agent, the full meaning of this particular activity becomes available exclusively to the members of the police profession. Condensation of the complex process allowed by the noun excludes mentioning of all the different activities that the process of *arranging* includes, which could at some point present a problem with regard to their appropriateness and justification. Also, by deleting agency the nominalized phrase has the function of avoiding the need to attribute personal responsibility. Tiersma (1999: 75) claims that using passives and nominalizations actually obscure or at least downplay the identity of the actor and consequently reduce precision.

Same as with the passive, police officers find nominalization most appropriate for this type of reporting. Consider the following excerpts:

R. No. 24: *A reliable sighting* of a male person NAME B. DATE was made around TIME DATE at PLACE TOWN. *The sighting was made by* a source who knows the target personally and states he arrived in an CAR DESCRIPTION (RNFD) accompanied by a COLOUR haired female by the name of NAME.

R. No. 44: However, *enquiry was made* with all of the premises, which failed to secure any CCTV footage, *due to the passage of time which had passed* since the phone being topped up in the premises, and the details being forwarded onto Police.

Although the writer is presumably familiar with what is meant by "reliable sighting" in example 21, this type of metaphorical discourse seems unnecessarily complicated. In example 22 we have an awkward clause "due to the passage of time which has passed" which simply does not make much sense. There are many nominalized verbs in the police reports preceded by the preposition *due to* which occurs 43 times in the corpus and is one of the most popular complex prepositions in police written language. Prepositions *upon*, used exclusively in the sense *after* (47 occurrences in the corpus of police reports), and *prior to* (32) are also followed by nouns. When compared to spoken English, there are no examples of *upon* meaning *after* in the British Spoken Corpus containing 40 million words. Instead, it appears only in its spatial meaning, as an equivalent of the preposition *on*, or after verbs which are normally followed by *up(on*) such as *depend (up)on* or *look up(on)*. The same corpus lists only 138 citations of *prior to*.

5. Reflexive pronouns in police reports

Reflexive pronouns as agents of passive sentences are also unusually frequent in the police reports (15 citations in the corpus). This refers to the first person reflexive pronouns only.

R.No. 2: The livery itself was also viewed *by ourselves* at this time

R.No. 40: He was informed *by myself* to desist from his abusive language however he paid no heed to the warning and repeatedly shouted…

R.No. 41: About TIME hours, DATE the accused NAME was interviewed under caution *by myself*, in the presence of Police witness NAME.

According to Pollard & Sag (1992: 261–303) the use of reflexives with discourse antecedents (logophors) is allowed in some contexts but is generally limited to positions where a reflexive does not have a co-argument (e.g. *John felt himself slide away*). In the examples above, the subject of the sentence and the by phrase are not co-arguments and the locality condition of anaphora is violated so that the anaphoric relation is generally considered ungrammatical (Katalin 1991: 252).

There are also examples of placing reflexive pronouns after a preposition of direction *to / toward* and *at* instead of object pronouns which is considered nonstandard and incorrect and avoided by careful English writers and speakers. Consider the following examples from the corpus:

R.No. 41: I am investigating racial breach of the peace *reported to ourselves* having allegedly occurred within the hospitality stand area…

R.No. 38: I was assured that the medical reports would be *submitted direct to yourselves* however…

R.No.52: She was "shooing" the children on *towards myself*… The corridor was then empty with the exception of myself and my son and a female.

In these examples reflexive pronouns are used without their local antecedents to refer to discourse participants or people already referenced in a discourse – in most cases the narrators themselves. Their position agrees with the general tendency in English to place heavily stressed elements (in this case, the emphatic reflexive pronoun) late in the clause (Biber et al. 1999: 347). However, as Reinhart and Reuland (1991: 311) point out "it would be wrong to conclude from such examples that first person reflexives are simply deictic expressions, finding their reference in the discourse situation and exempt, therefore, from the binding conditions, since in other cases they behave as standard anaphors". We examined the combining of reflexive pronoun *myself* with the preposition *to* in the WordBanks Online corpus of spoken British English. The results show that the most natural use of the phrase "*to myself*"" is in the meaning "*for me only and for nobody else*" (e.g. *I had a room all to myself*) except when it is found after the verbs such as *think*, *say* or the expression *draw attention to myself*. There are no other examples of using the reflexive after prepositions of direction in this corpus. Also, the phrase *by myself* is exclusively found in the sense "*alone*" (*without anyone else or with no help from other people*).

Leech & Svartvik (2003: 242) claim that reflexive pronouns are used as prepositional complements when they have the same referents as the subject of the clause or sentence. They also suggest that reflexive pronouns are sometimes used as alternatives to *me*, *us* etc. after *as for, like, but (for), except (for)* and in coordinated noun phrases. Reflexives are also used in imperatives and non-finite constructions where they point back to the element which is understood to be the subject of the verb (*Make yourself at home!*) (Leech & Svartvik, 2003: 242). However, our corpus is abundant with examples of a different usage (85 citations in the police reports), as is the case with the following sentences in which the reflexive pronoun refer to an implied entity:

R. No. 5: ACCUSED at this time became aggressive *towards myself*, stating that I was "A VIGILANTE" and had "FORCED MY WAY INTO HIS HOUSE"

R. No. 16: Upon Police witness NAME walking away, ACCUSED NAME started to *swear at myself*, shouting such phrases as "YOU'S ARE ALL [EXPLETIVE] [EXPLETIVE] ANYWAY!"

Most instances of self-forms in the corpus do not find their antecedents in the same clause but outside the verbal context. Büring (2005: 5) postulates that one of the preliminary binding conditions is that a reflexive pronoun must have an antecedent within its local clause. However, the only cases where a reflexive is preceded by its antecedent in the police reports are the clauses with the verbs which are obligatorily followed by a reflexive pronoun, such as *acquaint oneself*, *introduce oneself*, *commit oneself to* etc.

6. Discussion

The higher frequency of different linguistic means for achieving precision in police reports occurs ostensibly because accuracy is an extremely important part of police procedure and discourse. Taking into account that this type of writing has a much different purpose than many other formal registers, police officers repeat nouns in their reports instead of using personal pronouns, even when the meaning seems perfectly clear. The dense use of nouns in this register agrees with the high degree of precision of its communication of information. Also, the archaic lexical items such as *said* often function as demonstrative pronouns. Apart from achieving more precise references, these words are examples of legal jargon and are used to add legal aroma to police writing.

However, when choosing to avoid redundant nouns or while referring to certain legal documents, police officers often use pronominal adverbs to achieve the desirable degree of accurate reporting and avoid culpable imprecision.

Long passives and nominalizations in legal texts are considered by many legal experts to be the most effective ways to place a higher value on precision and explicitness. In ordinary conversation, using long passives instead of corresponding active clauses when the doer is of some importance would not only be superfluous, but it would also need more processing and slow down the dynamic of the conversation in progress.

Reflexive pronouns *myself* and *ourselves* are found in most unexpected places in the police reports, i.e. they denote agents of long passive clauses or they are objects of prepositions, lacking their true antecedents in both cases. There are 85 citations of logophoric, locally-free self-forms in the corpus, so that their atypical frequency in non-standard positions can rightfully be regarded as one of the salient register markers of police written discourse. Police officers use them in a way which deviates from the rules of standard language use in which case they are devoid of their reflexive meaning.

7. Conclusion

Police officers certainly feel a large amount of pressure when writing a report bearing in mind the requirements of the audience. The fact is that different people both inside and outside the criminal justice system can get access to police reports and, accordingly, draw conclusions about the choices a police officer made while dealing with a particular situation. As Scaramella (2012: 54) points out "an omission of critical details cannot later be added to a report without doubting its veracity". Being constantly aware of the rigorous scrutiny of different legal representatives in terms of accuracy, thoroughness and objectivity of their reporting, police officers employ different linguistic means to create most informative and most detached statements, often repeating the same information over and over again.

It is a longstanding practice of many police agencies in Britain to use overly formal language distinguished by excessive verbiage, complicated sentences and overuse of passive voice. The official police reports we have studied here often include many long and unwieldy sentences which are in some cases not only grammatically incorrect but also hard to follow. On the other hand, the language of these reports is expected to be concise and clear and effectively convey the necessary information. The conflict between the need to provide unambiguous information and cover all the possible interpretations on one hand, and effective and concise reporting on the other in police reports seems to be resolved in such a manner that the priority is exclusively given to the former. The risk of being imprecise or ambiguous is too high, so that the style usually suffers under the dominance of all-inclusive information. In some cases, however, we find that police officers make linguistic choices which can hardly be explained by the search for the most informative type of expression, but probably by adopting awkward ways of expressing their thoughts in writing as acceptable and even desirable.

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