

## Topic Change as a Conversational Strategy in Police-Suspect Interaction in Ibadan, Nigeria

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### **Abstract**

*Police-Suspect interaction, henceforth PSI, is a form of forensic discourse. It is a relatively new area in language study. Existing studies have illuminated police discourse from the non-linguistic perspective. Such studies have not investigated the import of topic change in police interrogation. Studies on police interrogation, from the linguistic angle, still beg scholarly attention. To extend the frontiers of existing linguistic engagement of police interrogation, this study examines the significance of topic change as conversational strategy in police-suspect interaction with a view to uncovering the motivation for topic change and its implication on the interrogation process. Using conversational analysis as its theoretical anchor, interrogation sessions on burglary and stealing, murder, physical abuse, felony, robbery and malicious damage were tape-recorded at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Ìyágànkú, Ibadan, Oyo State. The non-participant observation technique was adopted. Interrogating police officers, henceforth IPOs, and suspects change interrogation topics through the deployment of interrogatives, the bridge technique, making reference to earlier topics, summoning, deflection and giving compliments and seeking advice. Apart from serving pedagogical significance, the discourse analytical approach to police interrogation provokes a better understanding of how PSI works. The study reveals that topic change remains a viable tool for stamping the motivations of IPOs and suspects during interrogation sessions. A study of topic management in PSI reveals how power is enacted and managed in PSI.*

**Key words:** *topic change, conversational strategy, conversational analysis, police-suspect, interrogation power*

### **Introduction**

Discourse provides a veritable platform for representing social structures. Conversational analysis, henceforth CA, thrives on how social actions are negotiated in conversations. Conversations are organised into turns. When a speaker speaks, he takes a turn. Interlocutors alternate between active speakership and active listenership in an attempt to manage the conversation and achieve

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organisation of interaction (Zimmerman and West, 1975). (Sack et al., 1974) observe that conversations form the analytical unit in CA. In CA, 'topic' represents an important constituent in the organisation of talk. Interlocutors negotiate interaction, using topic as an indispensable tool of asserting their ideologies. (Osisanwo, 2003) describes topic negotiation as an attention-catching device usually embarked upon by a participant, who wants to pave way for the introduction of his own topic of discourse. From Osisanwo's submission, one could infer that it is speakers or listeners who have topics, not texts.

In institutional settings, interlocutors frame topics to achieve their interactional goals. The practice is geared towards foregrounding the ideologies of the speakers. In PSI, for example, IPOs and suspect negotiate interaction, using topic as a narrative strategy. In such interaction, the social actors (IPO and suspect) are conscious of framing their contributions towards achieving their institutional goals. While IPOs are committed to incriminating suspects, suspects, on the other hand, are conscious of establishing their innocence. Unequal power relations exist between IPOs and suspects in PSI. IPOs hold and control power through turn allocation during interaction with suspects. Suspects also change interrogation topics in a bid to pursue their interests during interrogation sessions. IPOs legitimise power by virtue of their membership of the Force and their vast knowledge of the law. The peculiar manner in which IPOs and suspect manage talk during interaction results in power relations. The notion of 'topic' in such interaction is conceived in terms of differential distribution of the discursive resources between the social actors. These discursive resources enable them to achieve interactional effects. Topic control and organisation are examples of discursive resources that place constraints on IPOs and suspects during interrogation sessions.

The State Criminal Investigation Department, Ìyágànkú, Ibadan is a section of the Nigeria Police in Oyo State Command devoted for crime investigation. It is a unit to which all serious criminal cases in different Police Headquarters in Oyo State are referred. Specially trained police officers are saddled with the technical task of probing and interrogating suspects' involvement in crimes. In the Interrogation Room, IPOs and suspects manipulate topics of interrogation to achieve certain ends. Topic becomes a useful discourse tool for stamping their motivations towards the subject of interrogation. This explains why this paper uses conversational

analysis to unpack the motivations of IPOs and suspects towards topic change in their interaction.

### **Literature Review**

PSI, as a form of forensic discourse, has been researched by scholars from the stylistic perspectives. Such studies have examined forms of interrogative constructions in PSI. Studies in these areas include those of (Goody, 1978; Luchjenbroers 1997; Rigney, 1999; Koshik, 2003; Farinde, 2010; Opeibi, 2010; Edu-Buandoh and Ahialey, 2013; Akinrinlola and Ajayi, 2016; Akinrinlola, 2017; and Akinrinlola, 2018). Although these studies have interrogated the discursive functions of interrogatives and other lexical markers in PSI, the significance of topic change as it affects meaning in PSI remains outstanding. There is need to investigate the resourcefulness of topic change and its implication in PSI. The goal of this study is to identify how IPOs and suspect change interrogation topics to achieve their institutional goals during interaction. Dearth of studies in this direction has prevented an understanding of how topic change in PSI expresses unequal power relations in such interaction.

A study of this nature is significant for a number of reasons. Apart from extending the frontiers of knowledge in forensic discourse studies, the study will provide a useful resource material for teaching conversational analysis in institutional setting, like PSI. Besides, it will enhance an understanding of how discursive linguistic resources influence meaning in such discourse. The study will provoke an understanding of how the notion of 'topic' is negotiated and how topicalisation drives ideology in PSI. The finding of the study would contribute significantly in improving criminal justice system in Nigeria.

Some scholarly works have been done on police discourse. (Luchjenbroers, 1997) investigates the resourcefulness of interrogatives in trial sessions. To her, questions are meant to encourage the interlocutors to continue the action, initiate exchanges, signal cooperation, make request and so on. From the same perspective, (Koshik, 2003) observes that questions are used in institutional settings to express participants' orientation to institutional goals, norms and roles, showing how the roles can be enacted and accomplished. Commenting on the nature of interaction in the courtroom, (Luchjenbroers, 1997) argues that such discourse is institutionally organised in adjacency pairs, one part of which is labeled a question and the other an answer. (Opeibi, 2010) studies interrogatives in courtroom discourse in Nigeria. He studies the

nature and roles of questioning. He posits that such questions are used as elicitation strategies. (Thornborrow, 2007) argues that the police-suspect narrative functions to structure the production of opposing opinion and stances.

On courtroom discourse, (Farinde, 2010) submits that courtroom professionals enact power with the use of questions. Such questions, according to him, serve persuasive purposes. Rigney (1999) is of the view that questions in PSI represent power. He explains that such questions are usually rendered in adjacency pair. From similar perspective, Akinrinlola (2017) investigates the import of interrogatives in PSI in Ibadan, Nigeria. Using recorded police interrogation from cases such as rape, robbery, burglary and stealing, defamation of character and arson, he observes that IPOs frame questions during interrogation to manipulate, coerce and commit suspects to the subject of interrogation. Considering the subject from a pragmatic point of view, Akinrinlola and Ajayi (2016) investigate the import of hedges in PSI, in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study posits that IPOs and suspects make recourse to hedges during interrogation. They maintain that suspects adopt hedges to exclude and withdraw themselves from the subject of interrogation while IPOs employ hedges to restrict the scope of suspects' responses.

Considering the discursive roles of turn in PSI, Akinrinlola (2018) engages turn management strategies in PSI in Ibadan, Nigeria. He surmises that IPOs, in a bid to elicit confessional statements from suspects, resort to the use of Current Speaker Self Selects (CSSS), Current Speaker Selects Next Speaker (CSSNS), and interruption. Suspects, in an attempt to escape incrimination, resort to Current Speaker Continues (CSC) and silence. From the foregoing, it is clear that existing investigations have engaged PSI. The studies are laudable in exposing how power is enacted between the social actors during interrogation. Akinrinlola (2017) and Akinrinlola and Ajayi (2016) studies are commendable for the premium placed on how the contributions of IPOs and suspects are managed through discourse resources. However, the subject of 'topic' and its implication on interrogation process is not given attention. The studies do not investigate the discursive dynamics of topic change and how it influences meaning in such institutional discourse. This explains why this study investigates topic change as an invaluable discourse tool for negotiating institutional goals in PSI. The study examines how topic change is instantiated and negotiated, and how such topical negotiation creates power relations in such interaction.

Police interrogation sessions were tape-recorded at the State Criminal Investigation Department, Ìyágànkú, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. It is a section of the Force that is saddled with crime investigation. Approval to collect data was sought for, and obtained from relevant authorities. Fifty sessions of interrogations were randomly tape-recorded. Interrogations on cases such as burglary and stealing, murder, physical abuse, felony, robbery and malicious damage were tape-recorded. The non-participant observation technique was adopted. IPOs explained the rationale behind the presence of the persons doing the recording to the suspects. The suspects were briefed that the interrogation process will be observed for research purposes. They were reliably informed that the research of the police-suspect interrogation was for academic purpose, and that the results of such research would only be kept in the library for teaching and further research. The purpose of informing and educating the suspects was to address the bias that might arise as a result of the presence of non-police officers and a recording device at the venue of the interrogation. To further enhance objectivity in the entire interrogation process, only police officers were near the interrogation point so as to ensure that the presence of a recording device did not influence the entire interrogation process; the observation was done from a safe distance.

As instructed by the Commissioner of Police of Oyo State, visual recording of the interrogation was not done. For ethical reasons, the permission of the suspects was sought orally and documented by the IPOs. The names and locations of the suspects were also coded. However, twenty cases were purposively selected because of their relative manifestation of turn devices in the interaction. Emphasis was on the manifestation of topic change in the interaction. IPOs and suspects contributions were studied closely, and points of topic negotiations were identified. Having done that, the discursive functions of the strategies of negotiating topic change were identified and described, using the tenets of CA. Instances of topic change in the interaction were identified and described in terms of how such change influences the motivations of the social actors. The data collected were transcribed into text, and for conversations in Yoruba and Pidgin, efforts were made to translate them into the English language. The translation process follows a one-to-one process to ensure that meaning is not distorted in the analysis.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Considerations in Conversation Analysis and Topic Representation**

CA is a product of the research of Harvey Sacks. (Sacks, 1992) maintains that CA examines how social actions are mediated in interaction. He views talk as an organised and ordered text. CA studies how turns are distributed in conversation (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973:289; Sert and Seehouse, 2011). CA describes talk as a basic feature of human social life (Sidnell, 2010). It grew out of ethnomethodology, as developed by (Garfinkel, 1964). (Liddicoat, 2002) describes CA as an action that emerges through talk. He affirms that contributions are context-dependent and context-renewing. This presupposes that contributions cannot be understood except is situated in environment in which it is used. (Hutchby and Wooffitt, 2008) submit that turn-taking is central to CA. They describe it as talk that is rendered in adjacency pairs. Talk, they maintain, is way of negotiating the social world. To them, turn-taking varies from culture to culture, and turns signal turn-taking with respect to the function of tone choice. (Drew and Heritage, 1992) maintain that CA concerns that contextual sensitivity of language use with a focus on talk as a vehicle for social action. They assert that in CA, the analysis is beyond the speech; it focuses on the underlying structures that help to understand what is being said.

‘Topic’ is an important constituent in the organisation of talk. Speakers control interaction through the device of topic. The notion of ‘topic’ was first proposed by (Sacks, 1974) to be organised procedures that seek to ensure that topics flow into one another. Although (Drew and Heritage, 1992) argue that topic boundaries are difficult to ascertain in interaction, they assert that it is a gradual process and to gain control over topic shift, a speaker takes a response from the other speaker’s following turn. They opine that a change of topic enables the speaker to evolve new topics. They submit that the person who controls the topic controls the entire interaction. (Thornborrow, 2007) surmises that discourse markers are used by interlocutors to influence meaning in interaction. (Brown and Yule, 1983) draw a line of distinction between sentential topic and discourse topic. They affirm that sentential topic is associated with description of sentence in terms of topic and comment. Discourse topic, on the other hand, does not relate to the simple NP (noun phrase) at the level of subject, but a proposition, about which a claim is made. From the foregoing, topic change could be described as a device of initiating new thoughts in conversation. In institutional setting like PSI, topics are selected and changed in an asymmetrical

fashion, depending context of the subjects involved. (Heydon, 2005) notes that in PSI, IPOs and suspects confine themselves to producing turns that are minimally recognisable as questions and answers; IPOs produce the first pair, suspects produce the second. Other types of sequence, such as topic shift, opening or closing are initiated by the IPOs. There is need to investigate how IPOs and suspect employ topic change as a conversational tool during police interrogation. A study of this nature is timely and needful as it would describe how the notion of 'topic' functions as an institutional controlling device in PSI.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

Data analysis reveals that IPOs and suspect engaged topic change devices such as interrogation, the bridge, deflection, summon (a physical act), reference to earlier topics and giving compliments and seeking advice in a bid to achieve institutional effects in the interaction. Each of these devices is described with particular attention to their specific discursive effects in the interaction.

### **Interrogatives**

PSI, as form of institutional discourse, thrives on the use of interrogatives. During interrogation, IPOs manipulated interrogatives to achieve conversational goals. They controlled suspects' responses and allocated turns through the deployment of interrogatives. Suspects, on the hand, weaved their responses to render invalid the manipulative skills of IPOs. Suspects crafted their turns to escape being trapped by IPOs. Interrogative construction was adopted as a topic management strategy by IPOs to incriminate suspects. Interrogative constructions, in their context of use, are laden with pragmatic import. In PSI, interrogatives are wired to ascertain desired conversational ends. Question constructions reveal the intentions of the speaker at a particular point in time (Hobbs, 2003; Opeibi, 2008; Cossin, 2009; Heffer, 2010 and Gordon, 2012). In other words, interrogatives express the illocutionary force in the statements of IPOs. Questions in such interaction may be asked to make a request, prove a claim, refute an idea, assert an opinion or seek information. IPOs' questions are aimed at performing a number of acts in the interaction. Farinde (2008) observes that questions are asked to fight for narrative during police-suspect interaction. As he rightly observed, certain questions produce certain responses. In our data, IPOs resorted to the use of interrogatives to perform a number of conversational acts. The excerpt below presents an example:

**Excerpt 1**

- 1.P: Oníomọkùnrinègbón rẹni.  
(You said he is your nephew.)
- 2.S: Bèèni, ọgá.  
(Yes, sir.)
- 3.P: Ta lón tọjú ọmọdekùnrin náà tẹlè?  
(Who was taking care of the boy before?)
- 4.S: Àbúrò mi obìnrin ni.  
(It was my younger sister.)
- 5.P: Èyàn méló lón gbé nílẹ̀ yín?  
(How many people live in your house?)
- 6.S: Èmi nìkan lón gbé pẹ̀lú ọmọdekùnrin náà.  
(Am the only one living with the boy.)
- 7.P: Kílódé tóo fi ọmọdekùnrin náà nìkan sí yàrà?  
(Why did you keep the boy alone in a room?)
- 8.S: Ìdí nipé ọmọdekùnrin náà jẹ oníwàhálà.  
(The reason is that the boy is too troublesome.)
- 9.P: Oníwàhálà ? Báwo ni ose n ba sọrọ tí ó bá sìwàhù?  
(Troublesome? How do you deal with him anytime he misbehaves?)
- 10.S: Mo n ba sọrọ, ọgá. Nígbà tí mo lọ kí àntí mi nílẹ̀ lójósí, wón ní àjẹ ni ọmọdekùnrin náà.  
(I warn him, sir. The last time I visited my sister in the village, she said the boy is a witch.)
- 11.P: Kílódé tóo dá àpá sárarẹ̀  
(Why did you inflict these bruises on him?)
- 12.S: Mi ò dá àpá sárarẹ̀, ọgá.  
(I did not, sir.)

Excerpt 1 presents a case of physical abuse. One Mrs. XX was arrested for manhandling her nephew. The manhandled boy, who is just ten years old, was perpetually put in a separate room and beaten mercilessly. The suspect inflicted bruises on the said boy, and subjected him to series of untold physical torture. One day, a concerned neighbour heard the cry of the boy and alerted police officers, who eventually came to arrest the suspect. In the interaction, the IPO exploits interrogatives to sustain his turns. His choice of questions words like *who*, *how* and *why*, as seen in lines 3, 5, 7, 9 and 11 are instances of the use of question markers to change the course of the questioning, and sustain his turns in the interaction. In line 3 for example, the IPO resorts to the use of the interrogative, ‘Who was taking care of the boy before?’ to select the

next speaker. The use of such question marker is meant to elicit response from the suspect. The conversational import of the use of *who* in this context is to trace the history of care the boy had received before and ascertain if the suspect had housed the boy for a long time. However in line 5, the IPO changes the interrogative to ascertain the number of people living in the suspect's house. The use of *how many* is intended to reveal the numerical strength of the inhabitants of the house. The IPO could also confirm the stories of the suspect from the inhabitants of the house.

The question on the number of people living in the house elicits the response, 'Am the only one living with the boy' from the suspect'. Such question, which is used as a form of Current Speaker Selects Next Speaker (CSSNS), is laden with conversational import. In the first instance, it presupposes that the suspect actually manhandled the victim because there is no one that could restrict or checkmate such cruelty. A question word, 'Why' is also adopted in line 7 to manipulate the topic of the interrogation. The use of such word is not intended to change the entire topic of the interrogation, but to change the focus of the questioning. The IPO demands an explanation on why the suspect chooses to keep the victim in a lone apartment. Such question enables the IPO to probe the motivation behind the nefarious acts of the suspect. The suspect's response in line 8, 'The reason is that the boy is too troublesome' appears weak and untenable considering the degree injury inflicted on the victim. In a bid to sustain his turn in line 9, the IPO veers into the mechanism adopted by the suspect in meting out punishment to the victim. The conversational goal of the IPO is to establish the suspect's guilt with the least effort. This explains why he demands to know the suspect's means of administering punishment. The IPO's use of 'How do you deal with him anytime he misbehaves?' is geared towards adjudging whether the suspect's mode of punishment is acceptable within the confines of the law. The suspect's response in line 10, 'I warn him, sir. The last time I visited my sister in the village, she said the boy is a witch' reveals a sharp contrast between his claims and the evidence before the IPO. Asked why he perpetrated such inhumanity in line 11, the suspect denies her actions. In the interaction above, the IPO adopts the use question words to manipulate the conversational topic with the goal of establishing the suspect's guilt. Interrogative markers as topic change devices are used in this context by the IPO to manipulate the focus of the interrogation. In other words, the use of *who*, *why*, *how* in the interaction serve different conversational significance. While

Akinrinlola (2017) holds that interrogative constructions in PSI manifest in various forms, the study does not describe how interrogative function as a weapon of topic management in PSI. This paper holds that questions are means of topic control and it serves a means of dominance by IPOs in PSI.

### **The Bridge**

IPOs manipulated suspects using series of strategies to achieve confession during interrogation. One of such strategies was to slightly change the topic of the interrogation by dousing the enormity of crimes committed and promising to be of assistance to suspects, though with the condition that suspect would confess. Wagenaar (1993) sees this strategy as a means of committing suspects to the subject of interrogation. He posits that IPOs read riot act to suspects. In other words, the punitive consequences of suspects' crimes are spelt out, but IPOs also introduce a mild aspect of the interrogation; he promises suspects of safety and release from custody if suspects cooperate and tell the truth. This strategy is termed the bridge.. Our data yield instances of this strategy. A case of stealing presented below captures an instance of the bridge:

### **Excerpt 2**

- 1.P: Sé o ti jalè rí?  
(Have you been involved in a case of theft before?)
- 2.S: Rárá, ògá.  
(No sir.)
- 3.P: Kíni isẹ to on se?  
(What do you for a living?)
- 4.S: Ọlọkadà nimí.  
(I am a motorcyclist.)
- 5.P: Sergeant XX ni ó múọ lójọ náà ní agbègbẹ Ring Road.  
(You were caught on that fateful day by Sergeant XX at Ring Road.)
- 6.S: Ọgá, bèèni sùgbón...  
(Sir, yes, but...)
- 7.P: Ẹ mú ọgbẹni XX, ẹsìgba ọkadàrè. Ódámilójú pé ìwọ nìkan kó ló se isẹ náà.  
(You accosted Mr. XX and dispossessed him of his motorcycle. I am sure you did not carry out this act alone. Did you?)
- 8.S: Ọgá, mi ò monkan tí mò lè sọ, sùgbón mò mọ̀n...  
(Sir, I don't even know what to say, but I know...)

- 9.P: O mon ḱíni? Oní láti sọ òdodo.  
(You know what? You have to tell the truth.)
- 10.S: Bẹ̀ni ọ̀gá. Ọ̀rọ̀ ilú yí tí sùmi. Nígbàmiràn, èniyàn á súnkògiri.  
Àwon ohun tó yíyànká máa  
jẹ́kí èniyàn dẹ̀sẹ̀. Mora ọ̀kadà méjì ní ọ̀dún tó kọ́já wónsì jilọ.  
Ebí tin pa ẹbí mi látìgbà náà.  
(Yes sir. I am even tired of this country. Sometimes, one is  
pushed to the wall.  
Circumstances around one push one to commit sin. Sir, I  
bought two motorcycles last year, and I was dispossessed of  
the two motorcycles. My family has been miserable since  
then).
- 11.P: Ìse rẹ́ mú iyà lówọ̀ sùgbón, aáwánkan sesi. Sé oní iwé ọ̀kadà  
méjì náà? (Your actions are punishable, but something can be  
done. Do you have the particulars of the stolen motorcycles?)
- 12.S: Bẹ̀ni ọ̀gá. Wón wà lówọ̀ mi. Mo sì fí ẹ́jọ̀ sùn ní àgọ̀ ọ̀lọ́pàá.  
(Yes sir. They are with me, and I reported at the Police  
Station.)
- 13.P: Maa rí adarí àgọ̀ ọ̀lọ́pàá nípa ọ̀rọ̀ rẹ́ sùgbón o níláti sọ òdodo.  
(I will see the Station Officer on your behalf, but you have to  
tell the truth.)
- 14.S: Maa sọ òdodo, ọ̀gá.  
(I will, sir.)
- 15.P: Púpọ̀ nínú àwon ọ̀lọ́kadà oníjibìtì niwón, sùgbón a sìrí  
ọ̀mọ̀lúàbí nínú yín. (Some of the motorcyclists are very  
dubious, but there are still good ones among you.)
- 16.S: Ọ̀gá , mo jẹ́kan lára won. Miò jalẹ̀ rí láyẹ́ mi.  
(Sir, I am one of the good ones. I have never stolen in my life.)

The suspect in the case above was arrested in connection with stealing. He accosted one Mr. CC, a motorcyclist, on a fateful day and dispossessed him of his motorcycle. He was arrested and subsequently detained. In the interaction, the IPO reaffirms the suspect's guilt with the use of 'You were caught on that fateful day by Sergeant XX at Ring Road' in line 5. This is a form of repetition in conversation to register the superior position of a social actor, as noted by Fairclough, (2001). As a conversational tool, the IPO takes his turn by reaffirming the status of the suspect as a rogue, who is deserves to be prosecuted. The IPO's turn has the conversational import of eliciting response from the suspect immediately. This explains why the suspect is thrown into disillusionment with the response, 'Sir, yes, but...' in line 6. His response portrays his inability to achieve calmness and coordination during the interrogation.

Using Current Speaker Continues (CSC) in line 7, the IPO reiterates how the suspect's criminal act is carried out with the use of 'You accosted Mr. XX and dispossessed him of his motorcycle. I am sure you did not carry out this act alone. Did you?' The conversational effect the IPO intends to achieve here is to stamp the suspect's crime so as to reel out the appropriate legal actions against him. The first instance of topic change identified in the interaction is the use of the tag, Did you' by the IPO to probe other accomplices in the crime. The use of the tag informs the suspect's response in line 8. Instead of answering the question posed by the IPO, he appeals to ignorance. Having identified the suspect's guilt in line 7, the IPO introduces the bridge as a form of conversational strategy to douse the already built-up tension. In line 9, the IPO uses Current Speaker Selects Next Speaker (CSSNS) to appeal to the suspect to tell the truth so as to lessen the burden of his task. The IPO's appeal falls on deaf ears, as the suspect engages his turn with use of Current Speaker Continues (CSC).

He expresses his depression and disillusionment by blaming the horrible situation in Nigeria as the reason behind his acts. He resorts to self-justification in line 10 as an alibi for committing crime. He replies the IPO thus: 'Yes sir. Oga, I am even tired of this country. Sometimes, one is pushed to the wall. Circumstances around one push one to commit sin. Oga, last year, I bought two motorcyclists, and I was dispossessed of the two motorcycles. My family has been hungry since then'. However in line 11, the IPO threads a subtle path by assuring the suspect of fair treatment. Though he condemns the actions of the suspect, he assures him of favourable outcome. He affirms that 'Your actions are punishable, but something can be done. Do you have the particulars of the stolen motorcycles?' The IPO's supposed fair treatment continues in line 13 with the use of 'I will see the Station Officer on your behalf, but you have to tell the truth'. With such promise of intervention, the IPO expects cooperation which will eventually leads to confession from the suspect. To further pitch his tent with the suspect, the IPO introduces the fact that 'Some of the motorcyclists are very dubious, but there are still good ones among you'.

The IPO's statement presupposes that the suspect being interrogated is one of the good motorcyclists. The interaction above shows that the IPO uses the bridge as a form of topic change to shy away from the legal implications of the crimes committed by suspects, and introduces friendly relations with suspects. This study differs

slightly in approach from that of Opeibi (2010) which submits that questions are geared towards eliciting confession from suspects. This study establishes that though interrogations are geared towards eliciting confessions from suspects, IPOs and suspect slightly change interrogations topics by striking a balance during interrogation; IPOs rebukes suspects, and also appeal to them to confess to crime.

### **Deflection**

In the course of interrogation, both IPOs and suspects sustain their turns by introducing extraneous details in their responses and testimonies. Deflection is a communicative strategy in which a current speaker veers into some other details, which are extraneous with the goal of achieving effects in communicative encounters. It is a gimmick used in sustaining and holding the floor and seeking attention or registering one's presence during communication. Suspects adopted this strategy when IPOs confronted them with myriads of questions in the interrogation room. They deflected in their responses to achieve a number of interactional goals. An example from our data is described below:

#### **Excerpt 3**

- 1.S: Onísòwò nimí.  
(I am a business man.)
- 2.P: Kínítúmo onísòwò?  
(What do you mean by business man?)
- 3.S: Mon ta eporòbì fún àwon onísòwò kékèké.  
(I sell crude oil to retailers.)
- 4.P: Njé òwò yén bá òfin mu?  
(Is that a legal business?)
- 5.P: Kíló sún ẹ dé ìdí olè?  
(What led you to stealing?)
- 6.S: Ọ́gá , oníwàpèlẹ ọkùnrin nimí. Miò jalèrí láyémi.  
(Sir, I am a gentleman. I have never been involved in any crime before.)
- 7.S: Ní agbègbè yen, ọ̀pọ̀lọ̀pọ̀ iséláabi ni àwon ènìyàn se.  
(Along that area, so many people perpetrate series of crime.)
- 8.P: Njé o tirí won rí?  
(Have you seen them before?)
- 9.S: Bèèni ọ́gá. Mo lè múyín lọ́sì ibití wón fojúpamá sí.  
(Yes sir. I can even take you to their hideouts.)
- 10.P: Olódodo ènìyàn nié. Maa sọ fún ọ́gá mi nípa iwà dáadáa ẹ.  
(You are an honest person. I will tell my boss about your cooperation.)

11. S: Mo gbó, ògá.  
(Okay, sir.)
12. P: Ìgbà wo ni àwon ìgára olósà yén máan sesé láabi won?  
(Those at the crime spot, when do they carry out this act?)
13. S: Ìròlẹ sátidé àti alẹ ojórú  
(On Saturday evenings and Wednesday nights.)
14. P: A máa lọ síbè láìpẹ. Fún tìẹ, màá rí ògá mi láti sètò àtijáde rẹ.  
(We may need to go there in few hours' time. And as for you, I will see my boss and arrange how to prepare your bail.)

The case above is that of stealing. The suspect was arrested for engaging in illegal crude oil business. He was part of the gang that carried out the destruction of a particular pipeline. He was subsequently arrested and subjected to interrogation. In the interaction above, the suspect, in a bid to respond to the questions asked, sustains the interaction and holds the floor by creating stories that are extraneous to engage the attention of the IPO. Asked about what led him to the crime in line 5, he frames deflection to express innocence with the response, 'Sir, I am a gentleman. I have never been involved in any crime before'. There is a conscious use of attempt by the suspect to change the topic of the interrogation in line 5 by refocusing the subject of the interrogation. He continues in line 6 by educating the IPO about series of crimes being perpetrated along the area where he was caught.

The introduction of the subject by the suspect is meant to engage the IPO, and present the suspect as being cooperative and repentant. The suspect adopts deflection to mitigate the severity of his case, and appeals to the conscience of the IPO. The IPO's use of 'Have you seen them before?' in line 8 is a device to select next speaker, and engage the suspect so as to the identities of the perpetrators of the crime along the identified axis. The question in line 8 yields the suspect's response in line 9, 'Yes sir. I can even take you to their hideouts'. The suspect's response in line 9 expresses commitment and willingness to the subject of interrogation. This explains why the IPO acknowledges his cooperation and promises to inform his boss about the suspect's persistent co-operation., 'You are an honest person. I will tell my boss about your cooperation'. The suspect's co-operation continues in lines 11 and 12. He expresses his readiness to assist the IPO to arrest the perpetrators of the crime. The IPO promises to inform his boss about the suspect's co-operation and assistance, and subsequently arrange his release from custody. In the interaction, the suspect resorts to deflection to engage the IPO and lessen the severity of this crime.

The interaction tilts towards trailing other perpetrators of the crime while the suspect's crime is not adequately investigated. The suspect engages deflection as a form of topic change strategy to control the floor in a bid to achieve his goals in the interrogation session. This study is in agreement with (Koshik, 2013), who surmises that questions are asked during police interrogation to reveal the orientation of the participants towards the subject of interrogation.

### Summoning

Our data revealed that during interrogation session, suspects engaged in series of physical acts that have far-reaching effects on the entire interrogation session. Suspects used summon, a form of physical act, to drive home their concerns and interests during interrogation. Summon refers to an act performed during communicative interaction which involves the current speaker calling the name of current speaker before introducing a new topic. (Osisanwo, 2003) sees this device as a form attention catching strategy used by communicators during interaction. (Nicola, 2012) conceives of summon as a kind of physical move by communicators to achieve some ends during interaction. It could include physical acts such as banging the table or talking or making a loud noise to seek attention during interaction. An instance of such strategy in a robbery case is presented below:

### Excerpt 4

- 1.P: I advise you sey make you no lie again.  
(You are again advised to stop lying.)
- 2.S: I no lie sir.  
(I am not lying, sir.)
3. P: You dey part of them. XX mention your name and the thing  
wey you do.  
(You are part of the gang. XX mentioned your name and the  
role you played.)
- 4.S: Sir.. sir...sir...
- 5.P: (*Shouts at the suspect*) Na Sunday evening. You go rob Mr.  
DD with four people.  
(*Shouts at the suspect*) (It was on a Sunday evening. You went  
with four others and robbed Mr DD.)
- 6.S: (*Bangs the table to call another IPO*) You don hear sey I no  
dey part of them from CC? (*Bangs the table to call another  
IPO*) (Have you confirmed my innocence from CC?)
- 7.P: Listen! I go make the case. Leave sergeant AA for this one o

- (Listen! I will handle the case. Leave Sergeant AA out of it.)
- 8.S: Oga, ask corporal if WW no be him shoot the person.  
(Oga Corporal, ask (*pointing another IPO*) if WW was not the one that shot his (the victim's) brother)
- 9.P: Make you just co-operate. Tell me wetin you do that evening.  
(Just cooperate with him. Tell me what you did that evening.)
- 10.S: I no do anything oga.  
(I did not do anything, sir.)
- 11.P: But you dey the crime place now.  
(But you were present at the scene of the crime.)
- 12.S: (*Faces one of the suspects*) EE, you no plan to implicate me?  
Remember sey I no be part of you o. (*Faces one of the suspects*) EE, didn't you plan to implicate me? Remember I was not part of you.)

The robbery case above presents the suspect alongside four others, who are being interrogated for robbery. The gang robbed a man at XX area. The police investigated the case for about two months before arrest was made. In the interaction, the suspect introduces summon as a form of topic change technique. The IPO starts the interrogation session by alleging the suspect and quoting testimonies against him in line 3, 'You are part of the gang. XX mentioned your name and the role you played'. The essence of this is to incriminate the suspect, and strip him of defensive mechanisms he could come up with as the interrogation progresses. It also presents the IPO as the tower of power, who initiates and directs the path of questioning in the interrogation room. Besides, the IPO's allegation in line 3 is a form of Current Speaker Selects Next Speaker strategy. It is meant to elicit responses from the suspect as per the case being investigated. The IPO reaffirms his stance in line 5 by describing how the crime was carried out, 'It was on a Sunday evening. You went with four others and robbed Mr DD'. In a bid to put up defense against the IPO's allegation, the suspect summons another IPO, who is investigating another suspect involved in the same crime by banging the table to sustain the IPO's attention. This form of attention seeking strategy is done by the suspect to ascertain whether the other IPO has confirmed his innocence from the other suspect.

In line 6, the suspect says, (*Bangs the table to call another IPO*) 'Have you confirmed my innocence from CC?'. CC is another suspect who is being interrogated for the same crime. The suspect introduces summon to change the topic of the interrogation. Instead of

responding to the questions of the IPO, he suddenly engages in physical act (banging the table) to call the attention of another IPO, who does not know the pace of the (suspect's) the interrogation. The IPO informs him to respond to his interrogation questions, and leave the other IPO out of the case in line 7, 'Listen! I will handle the case. Leave Sergeant AA out of it'. The suspect also uses summon in lines 8 and 12 when he calls on another IPO to confirm his innocence, 'Oga, ask corporal if WW no be him shoot the person/ Corporal, ask (*pointing another IPO*) if WW was not the one that shot his (the victim's) brother' and in line 12, 'EE, didn't you plan to implicate me? Remember I was not part of you'. These forms of physical acts used by the suspect are meant to change the topic of the interrogation and confirm his innocence. Summon, as used by the suspect, achieves the communicative effect of distracting and seeking the attention of the IPO. Although (Luchjenbroers, 1997) holds that interrogations encourage interlocutors to continue the action, he does not emphasise the role of physical acts in such interrogation. This study maintains that physical acts are deployed to achieve interactive goals during PSI

### **Reference to Earlier Topic**

Making recourse to earlier events and topics was common in the turns of suspects during the interrogation sessions. In a bid to hold the floor and exercise subtle control on interrogation, IPOs made quick references to earlier topics to establish suspects' guilt. Our data feature the use of recourse to earlier topic as a form of topic change during interrogation. The case of stealing below is an example:

**Excerpt 5**

- 1.P: Sé tòsi ilé ọgbèni XX lon gbé?  
(Do you live close Mr. XX's house?)
- 2.S: Bèni ọgá ,alábágbé dárádára niwón.  
(Yes sir, and we have been good neighbours.)
- 3.P: Sé ẹ ti jà rí?  
(Have you had issues?)
- 4.S: Rára ọgá, àyàfi lóri ọrọ ilú.  
(No sir, except on community issues.)
- 5.P: Wón ní o jí egbérún mēwàá nílérè.  
(You were alleged to have stolen the sum of ten thousand naira in his house.)
- 6.S: Iróni, ọgá.  
(That is not true, sir.)
- 7.P: Mo rántí pé wónmú ẹ pé o jalè ní osù mēta sáyìn.  
(I remember you were arrested last three months in relation to a case of theft.)
- 8.S: Ọgá , wón parọ mámi ní o.  
(Sir, I was wrongly accused then.)
- 9.P: (*Calling another police officer*) Ẹwo ọmọkùnrin yìi tóo se ìwádí ẹjọ̀rè lẹ́jọ̀sì.  
(Imagine this man that you investigated his case last time.)

Excerpt 6 presents a case of stealing. The suspect was arrested for stealing the sum of ten thousand naira in Mr. AA's house. He was arrested and subjected to interrogation. In the course of the interrogation, the suspect affirms that he and the man in question are good neighbours, as seen in line 2 of the excerpt. His statement establishes the fact that close affinity exists between them. The suspect's turn tilt towards the path of exoneration. The IPO, on the other hand, is curious to channel his turns towards incriminating the suspect. He (the IPO) asks if there has been any issue between the suspect and the victim in line 3, 'Have you had issues?'. The goal of the IPO's question is to ascertain the crime history of the suspect, and investigate if the current crime has a link with the past ones.

Having responded in the negative, the IPO went ahead to spell out the nature and enormity of the present crime to the suspect in a bid to incriminate him. Instead of admitting to guilt, the suspect expresses denial to render invalid the claims of the IPO. The suspect's denial prompts the IPO to make recourse to earlier topic as a means of changing the topic and course of the interrogation. The

use of, 'I remember you were arrested last three months in relation a case of theft' by the IPO serves some conversational purposes. It is used as a form of turn sustaining mechanism to hold the floor and negotiate certain discourse acts. Apart from establishing the fact the suspect is a criminal, it portrays the suspect as someone who has the tendency to perpetrate criminal act again. Also, it is a device to invalidate any defensive strategy the suspect may put up later as the interrogation progresses. To further confirm that the suspect has been on their crime watch, the IPO alerts another IPO to affirm same as he, (*Calling another police officer*) says, 'Imagine this man that you investigated his case last time'. In the interrogation, the IPO uses recourse to earlier topic as a strategy of engaging his turns in the interaction. Instead of investigating the case at hand, he veers into the past of the suspect to establish a case against him in the present. This confirms that during police interrogation, investigation dwells not only on case being investigated. Antecedent cases also help to illuminate certain grey areas during police interrogation. Reference to earlier topics in PSI conforms to Akinrinlola and Ajayi's (2016) study on the role of narration in PSI.

## Giving Compliment and Seeking Advice

### Excerpt 6

- 1.P: Police don arrest you before?  
(Have been arrested by the police before?)
- 2.S: No, oga.  
(No, sir.)
- 3.P: Why you enter Mr. SSs' farm self?  
(Why did you encroach into Mr. SSs' farm?)
- 4.S: No be sey I do am like that o.  
(I did not do it intentionally, sir.)
- P: Na everything wey dey for the farm you spoil. E good like that?  
(You destroyed virtually everything on the farm. Is that good?)
- 5.S: Oga mi sir, I know self. Somebody sey make I do am.  
Sir, I know. I was asked to do it.)
- 6.P: Who tell you self?  
(Who instructed you?)
- 7.S: (*Smiles*) Chief AA. My oga on top! Gallant mopol!  
(Chief AA. My senior man! Gallant Officer.)
- 8.P: Na malicious damage be that o, and you go get punishment under the law.

- (That is malicious damage, and it is punishable under the law.)
- 9.S: My boss, I dey sorry.  
(My boss, am sorry.)
- 10.P: You no get right to go spoil person property like that o.  
(You do not have the rights to destroy someone else's property.)
- 11.S: Officer, I go do anything wey you sey make I do. How I go comot for this mess now?  
(Officer, I will do whatever you want me to do. How will I get out this mess now?)
- 12.P: You go face the punishment now.  
(You will face the music).
- 13.S: My officer, wetin you won make I do to get of this trouble? Na your mercy fit help me o. I need your help.  
(My officer, please what do you want me to do to get out of this problem?  
I am at your mercy, and I need your help.)

As part of topic change strategy in the interaction, suspects resorted to giving compliments and seeking IPOs' pieces of advice. Suspect showered praises with the use of honorific terms like *Sir*, *Oga*, *My Boss* to express loyalty to IPOs. Suspects deliberately used these terms to seek the favours of IPOs and develop relations with them. A case of malicious damage above established this fact. In the interaction, one Mr. DD stormed Mr. SSs' farm and destroyed the crops on the farm. The suspect was arrested and interrogated. In an attempt to sustain his turns and endears himself with the IPO, the suspect resorts to the use of honorifics in lines 2, 4 and 6 of the excerpt. The use of 'Boss', 'Oga', 'Gallant Mopol', 'My Senior Man', 'Gallant Officer' and 'Sir' are instances of the manifestation of theses honorifics. The suspect also seeks the IPO's advice on how to be exonerated. He appeals to the sympathy and mercy of the IPO, and resorts to begging the police officer to devise escape route for him, not minding the dictates of the law. The suspect expresses his readiness to do whatever that is required to be exonerated. He affirms in line 11 that, 'Officer, I will do whatever you want me to do. How will help me to get out this mess now?'. In line 13, the suspect he says, 'My officer, please what do you want me to do to get out of this problem? I am at your mercy and I need your help'. The suspect's expression of compliments and his quest for the IPO's advice are means through which the topic of the interaction is influenced to achieve the desired conversational ends.

### **Topic Change Strategy and its Implications for Interrogation Process**

Topic change, as used in the interrogations in question, have far reaching effects on the motivations of the participants involved in the interrogation. While IPOs are keen on incriminating suspects, suspects on the other hand, are eager to devise series of strategies to escape incrimination. The participants (IPOs and suspects) employed topic as a means to an end. Question constructions in the interrogation serve as a topic control mechanism, aimed at restricting the scope of suspects' responses to the subject of interrogation. Topic control mechanism in the interrogation also express the enormity of the powers wield by IPOs. Topics are changed through turn allocation in the interrogation to register unequal power relations between IPOs and suspects. The IPOs hold power and control the entire interaction while suspects only responded to questions framed IPOs. Topic control functions as an institutional control device employed by IPOs to douse the enormity of suspects' crime in a bid to achieve confession. Although suspects engaged topic change in the interaction by giving summon and compliments, IPOs used topic to negotiate the subject and goals of interrogation. It could be safely said that topic management in PSI reveals the role and status of IPOs and suspects.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has investigated the topic change as discourse device in PSI. The paper submits that topic remains an essential conversational matrix used by IPOs and suspects in negotiating interrogation sessions. Such negotiations are predicated on how IPOs and suspects take their turns to register their acts in such interaction. Since the social actors work at cross purposes, they resort to turn allocation to devise series of strategies to pursue their goals. Through the deployment of different shades of turns, IPOs and suspects, within the context of the discourse, influence a great deal of control on the topic of the interrogation. IPOs hold power and exert a great of control on topic during interrogation sessions. Although by virtue of their membership of the Force and their knowledge of the law, power is erected at the doorstep of IPOs, suspects equally influence topic of interrogation, but such influence is minimal. This paper holds that 'topic' is the spine of meaning in PSI. Topic of discourse in PSI could be changed completely or partially, depending on the nature of the case being investigated. Sometimes, IPOs and suspects are unconscious of such slight changes in the topics of interrogation. Discourse devices are manipulated to effect changes in

topics of interrogation, and this creates a great of influence on the entire interrogation process.

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