LANGUAGE DECEPTION: ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATION OF MALE AND FEMALE CRIMINALS

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ABSTRACT

Deception in the form of lying has become a tool to achieve one's goal, be it in a formal or informal setting. The ability to lie is not as crucial as to successfully lying one's way out in a police interview or investigation with a possibility of life sentences. Despite gaining interest among researchers, to date, most studies have investigated this issue from psychological and sociological perspectives. Meanwhile, studies from the linguistic perspective are very limited. To fill this gap, this study was conducted to investigate the linguistic features of lying utilised in the conversation of a male and female criminal during police interrogation sessions. The conversation data of Chris Watts and Jennifer Pan was accessed via Youtube which presented legitimate police interviews in its natural setting. Using a mixed-method approach, the data was analysed by utilising Bachenko et al. (2008) Linguistic Indicator of Deception which covers two major aspects 1) lack of commitment to a statement or declaration and 2) preference for negative expressions in word choice, syntactic structure and semantics. The findings were able to accentuate the differences and similarities between male and female criminals in their use of language to deceive the police investigators to avoid conviction and punishment. This study also reveals the importance of identifying other peculiar variables in deceptive communication to further enhance the understanding of deception and its methods.

KEYWORDS: linguistic features, deception, criminals, police investigation.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a role in deceptive communication and is often underestimated. The linguistic cues embedded in language chosen by liars may disclose a lot about their underlying cognitive state (Choudhury, 2014), challenging the belief that deception is easily concealed. Zuckerman et al. (1981) have identified factors that can distinguish between true and false statements: emotions, cognitive processes, behaviour management strategies. Emotionally, deception elicits guilt, enthusiasm and anxiety (Ekman, 2009), influencing their language and demeanor, leading to the increment of negation (Vrij, 2000). Cognitively, deceiving demands more effort (Gombos, 2006) as it results in making errors, speaking slower and producing direct and simpler statements. Self-representation, as noted by DePaulo et al. (2003), involves liars adopting indirect communication styles with fewer details. Various studies have supported these notions, one of which by Hauch et al.'s (2015) meta analysis drawn from 44 studies, consistently exhibits more second and third-person pronouns, fewer first-person pronouns, shorter sentences, increased use of negative emotion words, lesser vocabulary diversity, lower complexity aside from frequent overgeneralization, negation and concrete language. However, Newman et al. (2003) argued that liars avoid using negation to prevent accidental leakage. Aside from that, Hancock et al. (2008) also found that liars produced sense terms during lying.

Importantly, the ability to lie is not confined to a particular group, rather it spans to all kinds of speakers across gender, race and such. Deceptive behaviour is a common conduct among both genders, hence they may exhibit different deceptive behaviour despite the belief that only men lie while women are truthful.

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the linguistic elements of language deception in criminal conversations, specifically during police interrogation between male and female criminals. While deception is common among human interaction, it becomes particularly significant in high-stakes situations such as police interrogations, with their life at stake. Previous research has primarily focused on the sociology and psychology of deception (Galasinski, 2000), often using experimental studies that may not fully replicate 'high stakes' situations in real life (Adams, 2002). Additionally, there has been limited exploration of the relationship between gender and deceptive behavior. This research seeks to address these gaps by analyzing linguistic cues in criminal dialogues during police interviews produced by both genders, contributing to a deeper understanding of deception in authentic forensic contexts.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-method approach to investigate deception in criminal police interrogations, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The sampling method for this study was purposive sampling. The sample selected is based on murder case from a male and female representative each. The reason for choosing murder cases is because these types of cases require the offender to provide strong alibis, thus any contradiction to the story is apparent and easier to be examined. The selected male representative is Chris Watt, who committed a crime in 2018 in which he murdered his wife and two daughters. The location of the bodies were found at Chris's worksite where his daughters were dumped in oil tanks while his wife was buried on the nearby ground. The selected female representative is Jennifer Pann, who was convicted of first degree murder in 2010 against her parents where her mother died while her father survived. These videos were accessed via Youtube whereby only the first day of the interview was selected for analysis in order to obtain the criminal's first version of narrative regarding the case. The analysis was done when there was a discrepancy between the initial version of the story told by the criminal and the official chronology of the case, thus the inconsistencies are categorised based on Bachenko et al (2008) markers of deception: 1) "Lack of commitment to a statement or declaration" (Bachenko et al., 2008, p. 43) and 2) "Preference for negative expressions" (Bachenko et al., 2008, p. 43) as well as other "additional uncategorised markers of deception" (Choudhury, 2014, p. 81).

FINDINGS

1. Lack of commitment to a statement

TABLE 1
Total number of specificity reduction for male

Specificity Reduction	Male	No. of occurences
Indefinite Noun Phrase	"If she took them **anywhere**" "**Nothing**" ""I really thought maybe she was at **somebody**'s house" "If **someone** took her" "There's no sign of **anything**" "She was just taking a breath **somewhere**" "Even though **everything** in the	94

	house"	
	• "It feels **more** the **other** direction"	
	• "She's not talking to **anybody**"	
	• "Like **one** of her best friends"	
	• "One of them would have said **something**"	
	• "**None** of them know anything"	
	• "If she had **any** cash on her"	
	• "She doesn't usually carry **much** cash"	
	• "**Sometimes** that happens"	
	• "But with **all** this going on"	

TABLE 2
Total number of specificity reduction for female

Specificity Reduction	Female	No. of occurences
Indefinite Noun Phrase	• "**None** that I could make out" • "I still hadn't heard **anything**" • "I don't remember **any** of his clothing" • "I think **some** of them" • "He is the **one** that had" • "**Someone** else brought him a shoelaces"	46

Based on Table 1 and Table 2, it can be observed that Chris exhibited a higher frequency of indefinite nouns, reflecting a deliberate strategy of generalization, likely to divert suspicion from himself by asserting the involvement of unspecified individuals in maintaining his innocent stance. Jennifer, on the other hand, employed fewer indefinite noun phrases, given her direct involvement in the crime necessitated a more detailed fabricated narrative. This may have been challenging since excessive vagueness would raise suspicion as Jennifer had first hand sensory experiences at the scene where she was found with her parents, which made it difficult to feign ignorance. These findings align with DePaulo et al. (2003) which indicates that liars tend to be less direct than truth-tellers.

2. Preference for negative expressions

TABLE 3
Total number of negation for male

Negation	Male	No. of occurences
Contracted negation	• "I **hadn't** heard from Shan'ann" • "She **doesn't** get back to me" • "She **hasn't** get back with them" • "She **isn't** quite there yet" • "I **don't** know"	59

	● "I **wouldn't** know who they are" ● "That I **haven't** talked to in like a year" ● "I **didn't** think all that was going to happen" ● "It **won't** say when it's shut" ● "She **couldn'**t get anything" ● "I **can't** really say" ● "It **wasn't** in the last 5 weeks"	

TABLE 4
Total number of negation for female

Negation	Female	No. of occurences
Contracted negation	● "I **didn't** want her to get hurt" ● "I **couldn't** hear" ● "I **can't** definitely say"	51

Table 3 and Table 4 revealed that both Chris and Jennifer utilized a similar amount of negations in their deceptive narratives. They both employed negation to divert attention from the actual events and instead emphasized what did not happen or what they did not do. Chris, for instance, denied any knowledge of his family's disappearance, using negation to conceal his involvement. This contradicts Newman's (2003) argument that suggests liars tend to avoid negation to prevent revealing inconsistencies. While there were no significant gender differences in the frequency of negation, these findings align with the observations of Vrij (2000) and Hauch et al. (2023), indicating that deceivers often incorporate negation into their deceptive narratives.

   3.   Additional markers of deception
   A.

TABLE 5
Total number of sense words for male

Sense Words	Male	No. of occurences
Sight	● "I haven't **seen** her in the house" ● "Everything that I **saw** there" ● "I didn't **see** anything after that" ● "**Switching** back and forth"	5
Hearing	● "She **says** she was gonna take the kids" ● "I hadn't **heard** from Shan'ann" ● "She **called** me today" ● "She didn't **tell** me" ● "She t**old** me"	13
Feeling	● "It's **freaking** me out" ● "It's making me **lean** the other direction" ● "It **feels** more the other direction"	28

	• "That's what **driving me nuts**" • "That's very **strange**" • "I got so **emotiona**l right there" • "It **doesn't surprise** me" • "I can't really say- like if I'm **worried** about anybody right now" • "I think like- with that **deep concern**" • "I would **never harm** my kids" • "Like the passion- I **didn't feel** it in my heart anymore" • "I mean the **love** for these girls" • "I'll **do anything** for those girls" • "I'll **step in front of bullets**, **step in front of the train** for those girls"	
Touch	-	
	Total no. of occurrences:	**46**

TABLE 6
Total number of sense words for female

Sense Words	Female	No. of occurences
Sight	• "All I **saw** was that number one had gloves in his hand" • "It **looks** more like a hand gun" • "I can't **see** the front door"	58
Hearing	• "I **heard** my parents going downstairs" • "It's all a **mumble**" • "two **pops**" • "And **ask** me whether the money was there"	70
Feeling	• "I was **scared** and I couldn't move" • "I can still move but I was **afraid** to because that one guy had that gun" • "I was just a **distress**"	4
Touch	• "He had pulled really really **tight**"	5
	Total no. of occurrences:	**137**

Referring to Table 5 and Table 6, Jennifer produced a higher amount of sensory words as compared to Chris. These differences can be attributed to their status of involvement during the initial phases of the respective cases. Chris was initially perceived as absent from his house during his family's disappearance, which shaped his narrative. He primarily focused on expressing his emotions and baseless assumptions regarding his family's whereabouts, limiting his use of sensory words. In contrast, Jennifer was present in her house when the murder occurred, thus she utilized sensory words, particularly hearing since she claimed that the house was in dark to provide specific details in her

attempt to cooperate and convince her story, aligning with Hancock et al. (2008) on the usage of sensory words in liar's narratives.

B.

TABLE 7
Total number of references for male

Male	Other-oriented references	Self-oriented references
Pronouns	She (x99) Her (x38) Those (x6) These (x8) Them (x16) Someone (x9) Somebody (x9) Anybody (x3) Everybody (x1) They (x5) Their (x4) One (x4) You (x23) Your (x6)	I/I'm (x201) We (x14) My (x18) Me (x37) Mine (x1) Us (x1) Our (x1)
Nouns/Noun Phrases	Shan'ann (x5) Bella (x4) Cece/Celeste (x4) The kids/kids (x17) Nicole (x3) Two girls (x2) Mom (x1) Dad (x1) Two beautiful girls (x2) Beautiful wife (x1) Wife (x11) Family (x1) Friends (x4) Sir (x3) Two kids (x1) Two (x1)	
	Total no. of occurrences: 292	**Total no. of occurrences: 273**

TABLE 8
Total number of references for female

Female	Other-oriented references	Self-oriented references
Pronouns	He (x80) They (x47) She (x3) His (x25) Her (x9) Him (x7) Them (x11)	I/I'm (x191) Mine (x1) My (x64) Me (x43)

	One (x22) Someone (x1) Other (x1) No one (x1) None (x1) You (x1) Those (x1)	
Nouns/Noun Phrases	Gentleman (x2) Number one (x15) Number two (x7) Number three (x3) Third guy (x2) Other guy (x1) Mom/Mother (x13) Father/Dad (x18) A guy/The guy/Guy (x3) Other guy (x2) Parents (x4) Men (x1) Three males (x1) Other officer (x1) Second person (x1) Other person (x1) First guy (x1) The medium build (x1)	
	Total no. of occurrences: 287	**Total no. of occurrences: 299**

Based on Table 7 and Table 8, Crhris used other-oriented references higher than Jennifer, which is consistent with Hauch et al.'s (2023) findings, where liars tend to employ more second and third-person pronouns. His repeated use of the word 'she' highlighted his wife's role in the family's disappearance, suggesting an attempt to distance himself from suspicion by implying others might have assisted her. In contrast, Jennifer used self-oriented reference more, deviating from the hypothesis. This possibly due to her position as a key witness, thus using more self-oriented references to convey what she heard and saw, demonstrating her cooperation and readiness to provide details to alleviate suspicion.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the male criminal demonstrated a higher amount of specificity reduction while the female criminal utilized a higher frequency of sensory words in her narratives. However, only slight differences can be seen in the use of negation as well as other-oriented references. Overall, the findings provided additional support for the notions made by earlier scholars.

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