

LANGUAGE DECEPTION: ANALYSIS OF CONVERSATION OF MALE & FEMALE CRIMINALS

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INTRODUCTION

- ❑ The study of deception falls under forensic linguistics, which is a relatively new worldwide as the pioneers of deceptive research are from the scientific fields.
- ❑ Deception or lying can be defined as the transmission of a message with the intention to induce a false belief and misinformation.
- ❑ Deception is considered as 'goal-driven'
 - to appear trustworthy
 - to lessen receiver's suspicion
 - to reduce their involvement for the deception
 - to avoid unpleasant repercussion if discovered
(Buller & Burgoon, 1969 cited in Humphreys, 2010)

PROBLEM STATEMENT

- ❑ The study on detection of lies often focused on the psychological and sociological aspects (Galasinski, 2000)
- ❑ Research on deceptions have been studying non-criminal situations where:
 - the findings less are applicable to real-life situations
 - It is often conducted in a controlled laboratory setting which does not represent a realistic version of deception in 'high stakes situations'(Adams, 2002; Choudhury,2014; Newman,et.al, 2003; Smith,2001).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

- ❑ To this day, research on deception is mainly devoted on investigating non-verbal cues (Schafer, 2007 cited in Choudhury, 2014).
- ❑ There is not much research done in studying the relation between gender and lying behaviour (Kadva, 2010).
- ❑ This paper aims to examine the linguistic elements of language deception, specifically criminal conversation, during police interrogation of male and female criminals.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE & RESEARCH QUESTION

1 To study the linguistic features of lying utilised in the conversation of male and female criminals

1 What are the linguistic features of lying employed in criminal conversation of male and female criminals?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Art of Lying / Deceiving

- In lying, the differences between true and false statements may be linked to:
 - ✓ Emotions felt by the liars
 - ✓ Mental processes occurred during lying
 - ✓ Strategies employed to manage their behaviour (Zuckerman et al., 1981)

- Emotional approach: can **evoke feelings** like enthusiasm, **anxiety, guilt, remorse** (Ekman, 2003)
 - ✓ Can influence their demeanor and language
 - ✓ Eg: Increase in the **use of negation** (Vrij, 2000)
- Cognitive approach: lying demands more cognitive effort (Gombos, 2006)
 - ✓ Reflected in the way liars talk (eg. speaking more slowly, making errors)
 - ✓ Also produced uncomplicated and shorter statements in false statements.
- Self-presentation approach: tend to be less direct (DePaulo et al., 2003)
 - ✓ Liars **distance themselves** from the lies and **provide fewer details.**

- These assumptions have been supported by numerous studies, including a meta-analysis conducted by Hauch et al. (2015).
- The results showed that:
 - ✓ Fewer self-references (first-person pronouns)
 - ✓ More other-references (second and third-person pronouns)
 - ✓ Greater number of negative emotion words
 - ✓ Shorter words and sentences
 - ✓ Less elaborated (fewer different words)
 - ✓ Less complex (fewer exclusive words)
- Some studies in Hauch et al. (2015) also indicated that liars may utilize **more negation**, over-generalization and statements tend to be less abstract.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

BACHENKO ET AL. (2008) LINGUISTIC INDICATORS OF DECEPTION

- 1 “Lack of commitment to a statement or declaration”
(equivocation, **specificity reduction**)
- 2 “Preference for negative expressions in word choice, syntactic structure and semantics”
(**negation**, negative emotion words and lack of memory)
- 3 **CHoudary (2014) SENSE WORD FEATURES**

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

- ❑ Mixed-method approach
- ❑ Qualitative approach:
 - Categorisation of data into respective categories based on Bachenko et al. (2008) linguistic markers
- ❑ Quantitative approach:
 - Calculation of the frequency of occurrences in each category of the analysed data for both genders

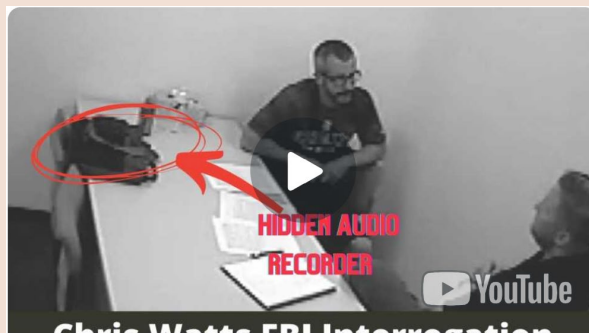
METHODOLOGY

DATA COLLECTION

- ❑ Chris Watt's and Jennifer Pann's police interrogation interviews posted on Youtube.
- ❑ Criteria: 1) Murder case 2) Victims were family members 3) Found guilty
- ❑ Both videos were transcribed whereby only the first day of the interviews were selected for analysis in order to obtain the criminal's first version of narrative regarding the case.

METHODOLOGY

- ❑ Chris Watt
 - A 33-years-old man who murdered his wife, Shan'ann and their two daughters in 2018.
 - The location of the bodies were found at Chris's worksite where his daughters were dumped in oil tanks while his wife was buried at the nearby ground.
 - The reason for the murder - he was having a marital affair.



Chris Watts FBI Interrogation
FBI Interrogation of Chris Watts (BEST AUDIO)

8-14-18 FBI Interview with Chris Watts regarding
youtube.com

https://youtu.be/l2CNNxFoNsc?si=tuDjkw8suX5o3vU_

METHODOLOGY

- ❑ Jennifer Pann
 - A 24-year-old Vietnamese-Canadian woman convicted with a first-degree murder for the killing of her immigrant parents where her mother died, while her father survived.
 - The reason - she could not fulfil her parents' expectations. Thus, she had been fabricating her academic achievements for years, eventually leading to her plan of killing her parents by hiring hit men.



Jennifer Pan 1 — Police interrogation of girl who hired hitmen to target her parents | Pa...
Incredible police interrogation of Jennifer Pan, 24
youtube.com

https://youtu.be/CfnEO-6Ca7U?si=_ogb2-O_X3J7hK-m

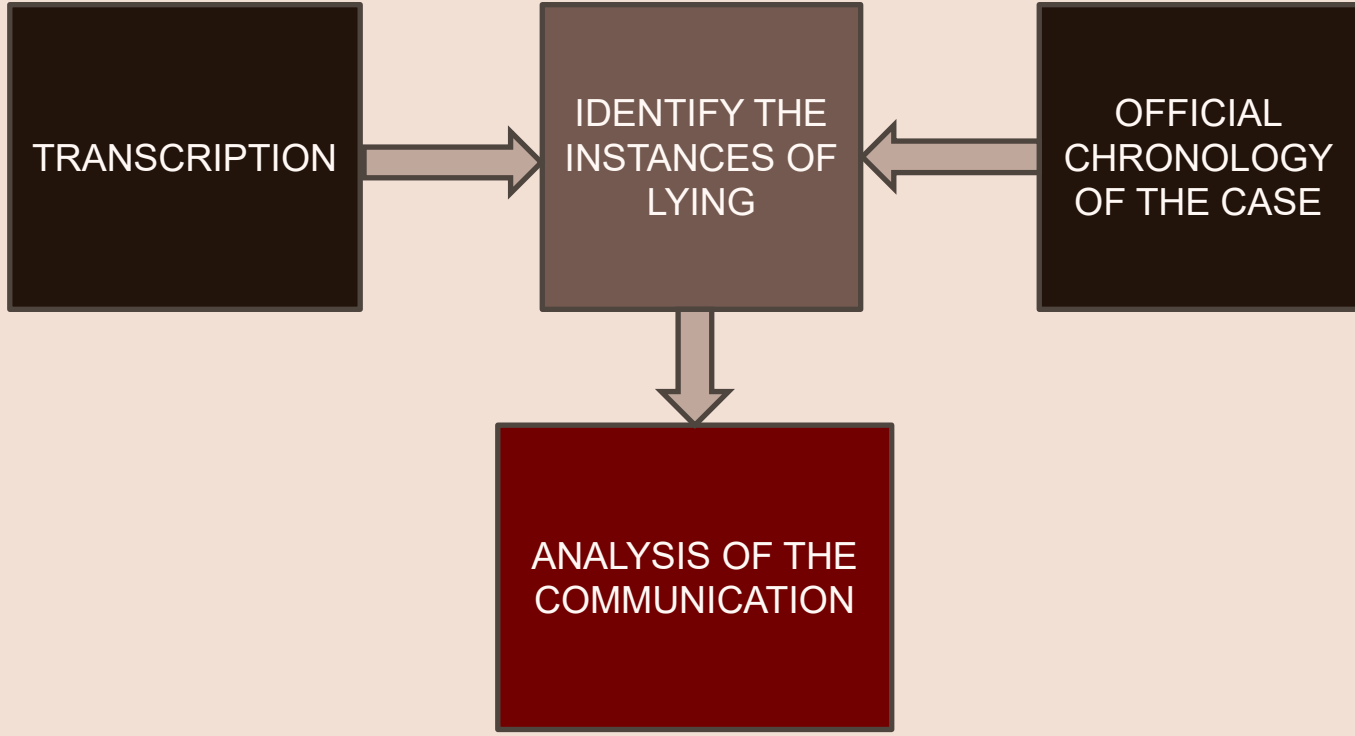
METHODOLOGY

DATA ANALYSIS

- ❑ Using discourse analysis
 - allows for an in-depth examination of language that goes beyond semantics and syntax, often used in analysing interviews.

- ❑ The analysis was done when there is a discrepancy between the initial version of the story told by the criminal as compared to the official chronology of the case

- ❑ The inconsistencies are categorised based on Bachenko et al (2008) markers of deception and Choudhury's (2014) sense words.



FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

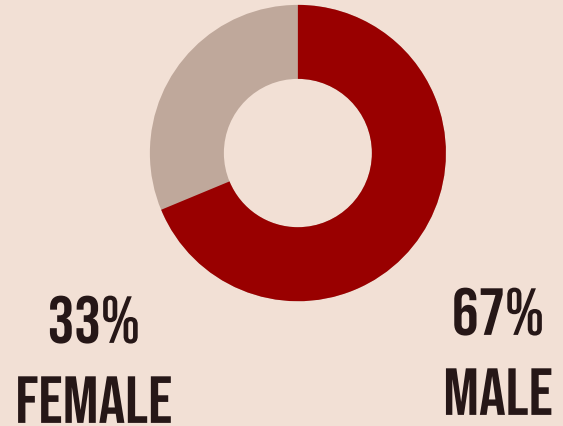
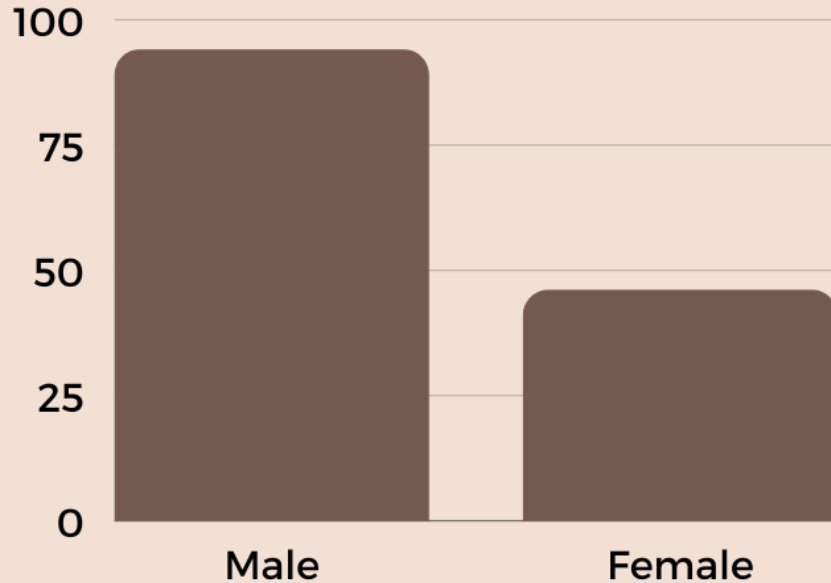
FINDINGS 1

1 “Lack of commitment to a statement or declaration” (equivocation, **specificity reduction**)

Linguistic devices	Examples
i) Linguistic hedges (non-factive verbs, indefinite noun phrases & nominals)	NFV = <i>think, believe</i> Indefinite Noun Phrase = anybody, anything, somebody
ii) Qualified assertions (which leave open whether an act was performed)	<i>I need to get my inhaler</i>
iii) Unexplained lapses of time	<i>later that day</i>
iv) Overzealous expressions	<i>I swear to God</i>
v) Rationalisation of an action	<i>I was unfamiliar with the road</i>

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

SPECIFICITY REDUCTION



DISCUSSION

1. Lack of commitment to a statement or declaration

- Indefinite nouns
 - ✓ E.g: *somewhere, anywhere, some, one, anything, anybody etc*
- The utilisation of vague words and specificity reduction contents is commonly found in deceptive communication:
 - Allows them to **manipulate the level of details present** (Fuller, 2012)
 - **Withholds the truth** (Burgoon, 1996)

Specificity Reduction	Male	No. of occurrences
Indefinite Noun Phrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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 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” 	94

Specificity Reduction	Female	No. of occurrences
Indefinite Noun Phrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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

- Indefinite nouns

- ✓ Indefinite noun phrase is used since it takes away the specificity of the subject in which it does not tell the specific referent of the matter
- ✓ Both criminals use indefinite nouns to **replace the person**, things and place, thus the **statement becomes less factual**.

- Chris used a higher number of indefinite nouns which serves as generalisation.
 - ✓ Could possibly be due to his claim of **not being present** during the missing of his family
 - ✓ Using indefinite nouns such as someone or anywhere helps to direct the suspicion and create more suspects
 - ✓ Asserting that other people might have taken his wife since he has to maintain his stance of not knowing anything thus giving out non-factive type of statement.
- Jennifer's use of indefinite noun phrases is lower than Chris since she had to adjust this method to be parallel with her observation as **she was in the house** when the murder took place.
 - ✓ Using the word some and one in her statement helps her to avoid describing the person involved in detail, thus producing a more generalised statement

- A possible explanation is that since lies is a madeup version of a story in one's head, thus the subject did not experience it in real life.
 - ✓ It is difficult to be memorised and often being quickly forgotten as lying requires consistent cognitive process to keep with the lies.
 - ✓ Although one might have prepared the lie in advance, it is difficult to maintain the story, hence the uncertainty and lack of precise information on their account (Tovmasyan, 2020).
 - ✓ In contrast to Chris, Jennifer had to fabricate a narrative that diverged from the real events. This placed a heavier responsibility on her to remember specific details, as she had first-hand sensory experiences since she was discovered at the same location as her parents' lifeless bodies.
 - ✓ This was unlike Chris, who was found alone and separated from his family

- It is also possible that producing too many vague statements might trigger suspicion, especially when she couldn't easily assert her innocence or claim ignorance about the event, given her presence at the same location as her parents when the police arrived.
 - ✓ Thus, the reason for the lower number of indefinite nouns used.
- This finding concurs with the revelation made by DePaulo et al. (2003) that liars tend to be less direct as compared to truth-tellers.

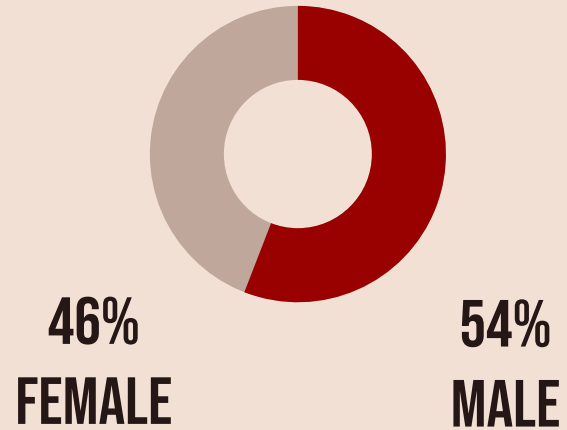
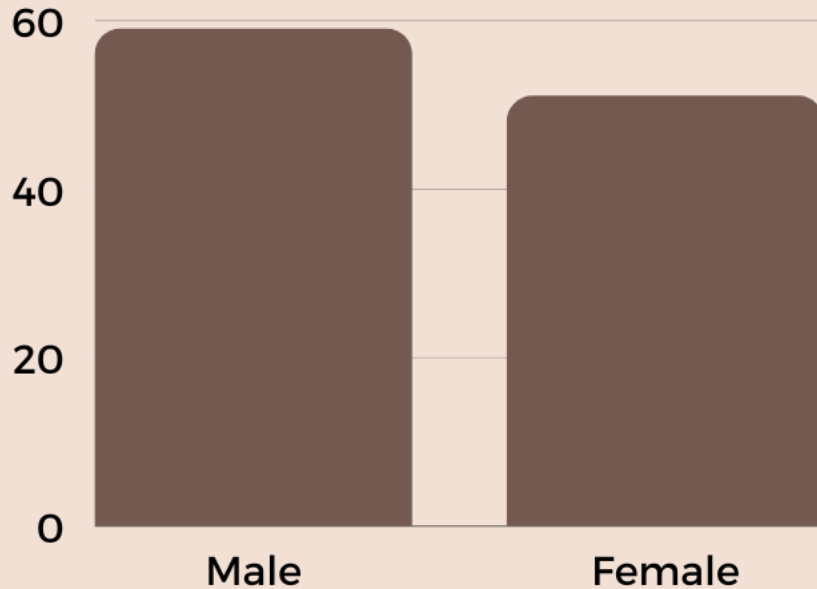
FINDINGS 2

2 Preference for negative expressions in word choice, syntactic structure and semantics

Linguistic devices	Examples
i) Negation forms	Negative word = <i>never</i> Negative morphemes = <u><i>inconceivable</i></u> <i>Contracted negation = wouldn't</i>
ii) Negative emotions	<i>I was a nervous wreck</i>
iii) Memory loss	<i>I forget</i>

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

NEGATION



DISCUSSION

2. Preference for negative expressions

- Liars often incorporate negation by which they focus on things that “did not happen, rather than what did happen” (Adams, 2002, p. 4)..
 - ✓ It conveys that this type of narratives “replaces direct and explicit discourse by failing to report a specific action” (Adams, 2002, p. 4)

Negation	Male	No. of occurrences
Contracted negation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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” ● “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” 	59

Negation	Female	No. of occurrences
Contracted negation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I didn’t want her to get hurt” ● “I couldn’t hear” ● “I can’t definitely say” 	51

- The data shows that both criminals produced almost similar number of negations.
- Jennifer used negations to **omit the detail** on the event that happened, for example, “I didn’t hear his voice, I didn’t get to see much of his face”
- Chris **uses negation** to deny his involvement by claiming his family disappearance is out of his knowledge, and thus **focusing on things that did not happen** .
 - ✓ For instance, the line *I hadn’t heard* from Shan’ann conveys his denial of hearing any updates from his wife which shows his lie, however it also conveys the omitted truth in which he did not hear anything from his wife as she was already dead

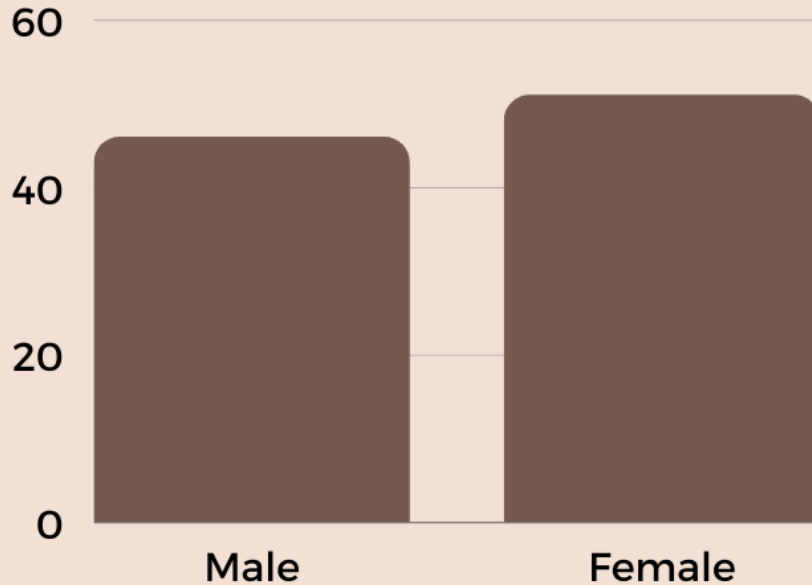
FINDING 3

3 CHoudary (2014) SENSE WORD FEATURES

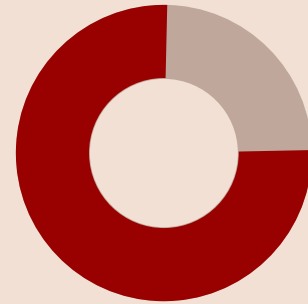


ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

SENSE WORDS



75%
FEMALE



25%
MALE



Sense Words	Male	No. of occurrences
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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 told me” 	13
Feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “It’s freaking me out” ● “It’s making me lean the other direction“ ● “It feels more the other direction” ● “That’s what driving me nuts” ● “That’s very strange” ● “I got so emotional 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” 	28
Touch	-	
	Total no. of occurrences:	46

Sense Words	Female	No. of occurrences
Sight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “I heard my parents going downstairs” ● “It’s all a mumble” ● “two pops” ● “And ask me whether the money was there” 	70
Feeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “He had pulled really really tight” 	5
	Total no. of occurrences:	137

DISCUSSION

- Sense words are believed to be used by deceivers “to make the story appear more credible” (Hancock et al., 2008, as cited in Choudhury, 2014, p. 87).
- It depends on their status of involvement during the initial or early phase of the case.
 - ✓ Chris was initially regarded as not present in the house during the disappearance of his family while Jennifer was already in the house when the murder happened along with her family when the police arrived.

- Jennifer 's statement provided details of her surrounding when the murder took place, hence she employs a lot of sense words, particularly hearing since she claims that the house was dark when it happens.
- This method allows Jennifer to persuade the officer by **describing the things** she heard, saw, felt and touch.
 - ✓ Helps to appear more truthful as she is able to provide small details and thus taking away the suspicion on her (Hancock et al., 2008)
 - ✓ It also demonstrates their engagement in the topic at hand
- Chris's usage of sense words focuses more on the aspect of **his feelings**.
 - ✓ His claim prevents him from utilising other aspects of sense words, thus only centered around his feeling towards his kids and his baseless assumption against the missing of his family.
 - ✓ (kait dgn Zuckerman)

CONCLUSIONS

1. Both criminals used indefinite nouns to replace for the person, things and place to make their statements less factual.
2. Both criminals used negation for different purposes. Jennifer used it to omit details while Chris used to report things that did not happen.
3. Both criminals used sensory words to appear trustworthy and to reduce suspicion. However, Jennifer used them to describe things around her, while Chris focused more on his feelings.

Generally, both criminals' usage of the analysed linguistic features depends on their presence or absence at the crime scene.