Police language: evaluating sources and status of information

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Research into police language has primarily focused on situations where the police institutional participant is in a position of power over a lay participant, often a criminal suspect, particularly the situation of police interviewing (e.g. Stokoe and Edwards 2008). This however neglects much of the police role and their interactions with members of the public, who the police are accountable to as well as in a structural position of power over. This relationship is a crucial part of police identity negotiation between being a 'service' and being a 'force' (Reiner 2010).

This paper explores police language in interactions with members of the public in a context where accountability is highlighted - a corpus of 50 letters by Scottish police forces in final response to public complaints. The analysis focuses on police use of epistemic stance markers (Conrad and Biber 2000). The attitudes police writers display towards the sources of information and the authority of that information through these markers is discussed in relation to police identity and the negotiation between being a powerful institution and one that seeks public perception of its legitimacy.

References

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