

Voices of Justice: Transforming Communication in Policing and Criminal Justice Settings



16-17th September 2026

**British Academy, 10–11 Carlton House Terrace,
London, SW1Y 5AH**

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Conference Summary

Voices of Justice: Transforming Communication in Policing and Criminal Justice Settings is a two-day hybrid conference bringing together researchers and practitioners to explore how communication can improve governance, build public trust, and amplify marginalised voices. Spanning the full journey from initial contact, through everyday policing, investigations, prosecutions, judgement and post-conviction, the event will showcase cutting-edge research and practical innovations from across the globe. With a strong focus on interdisciplinary dialogue and real-world impact, the conference aims to foster collaboration, inform policy, and support justice reform. Join us to help shape the future of forensic communication and contribute to a more transparent, inclusive, and effective policing and criminal justice system.

Conference Convenors

- **Dr Alexandra Kent, Keele University**
- **Dr Sarah Atkins, Aston University**
- **Dr Carrie Childs, University of Derby**
- **Dr Magnus Hamann, Loughborough University**
- **Dr Laura Jenkins, Loughborough University**
- **Dr Emma Richardson, Loughborough University**

Conference Notes

We have a rich and varied line up of contribution types for Voices of Justice.

- Oral Presentations – 20-minute talk followed by 10 minutes for questions
- 3 x Lightning Round Sessions – Each session contains 5-minute talks from 4 contributors followed by 10 mins for questions
- Panel Discussion – Whose Voices of Justice? Key contributors explore this challenging question.
- Keynote Speaker – Prof Liz Stokoe

Contributions to the conference are organised into six themed sessions spanning policing and criminal justice contexts:

Conference Themes

□ 'Initial Contact' focuses on the earliest communicative encounters between members of the public and the police, particularly through emergency and non-emergency telephone services and digitally mediated points of access. These first moments of contact are often brief yet emotionally charged, taking place in contexts of uncertainty, urgency, distress, or vulnerability. They play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of legitimacy, responsiveness, and care, and frequently set the trajectory for any subsequent police or criminal justice involvement. This theme examines the interactional practices through which needs are identified, risk is assessed, decisions are justified, and trust is negotiated at the point of first contact. Alexandra Kent is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

◇ ‘Everyday Policing’ focuses on face-to-face interactions between frontline police officers and members of the public outside of formal criminal investigations and prosecutions. These routine yet high-stakes encounters, such as patrols, stop and search, neighbourhood engagement, welfare checks, and first response to incidents, form the everyday fabric of policing and are central to how authority, trust, and cooperation are experienced and understood within communities. This theme explores the communicative and relational practices through which police officers exercise discretion, manage conflict, provide reassurance, and negotiate their role as representatives of the state. Magnus Hamann is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

◦ ‘Evidence Gathering’ Effective communication during evidence gathering is crucial for the integrity of the criminal justice process. Indicative topics include examining techniques for interviewing victims, witnesses, or suspects, communicating during forensic evidence collection and examination, and supporting vulnerable and marginalised individuals and those who interview them to communicate effectively during police investigations. Carrie Childs is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

* ‘Online Policing’ The continuing growth of online offences, especially on the dark web and in areas such as fraud and child sexual exploitation and abuse, necessitates effective digital communication strategies that are both responsive to demand and proactive in preventing harm. Indicative topics for this theme include communication considerations around contemporary online formats for contacting the police, understanding how offenders interact online, and how this linguistic knowledge can be applied in the training of online undercover police operatives. Sarah Atkins is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

^ ‘Courts and Judgements’ Communication in court settings is vital for fair and transparent legal proceedings. Here we will explore how effective communication can enhance the administration of justice, build public trust in the legal system, and ensure that marginalised voices are represented and heard. Indicative topics include how consent and coercion are managed in court interactions, the role of technology such as video links constrain or enable interactions in courtroom proceedings, and interactions during mock trial jury deliberations. Emma Richardson is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

+ ‘Post-conviction’ Communication with offenders following conviction is essential for rehabilitation and reintegration. This theme examines how communication practices can support governance in correctional institutions and community supervision, build trust in the rehabilitation process, and amplify the voices of offenders in their journey towards reintegration. Indicative topics include best practice for communication in parole hearings and probation meetings, communication strategies to support children’s participation in youth justice schemes, interactions with prisoners in custody or on licence, and communication relating to discharge, exoneration, or decisions not to prosecute. Exploring how we talk about when criminal justice proceedings end is vital for understanding how individuals move on from their engagement with the police and criminal justice system and the understandings and perceptions of fairness, democracy and trust that they carry with them moving forwards. Laura Jenkins is the dedicated convenor overseeing the contributions to this theme.

Conference Programme

Wednesday 16th September

Registration opens: 09:15

Time	Room 1 – SHAPE Room	Room 2 – Lecture Room
0945	Welcome	
1000	◊ Geoff Raymond , University of California Santa Barbara (with Kevin Whitehead, University of California Santa Barbara and Albert Meehan, Oakland University) - Some Systematic Sources of Trouble in Police Encounters: The Case of 'Good Citizen Tests'	◦ Dave Walsh , De Montfort University – The Mendez Principles: An international response to the call for action.
	◊ Andre Buscariolli , State University of Campinas – How Police Officers Account for the Use of Force in Internal Affairs Interviews.	◦ Ray Bull , Leicester University – The interviewing of vulnerable suspects.
	◊ Elliott M. Hoey , Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (with Uwe-Alexander Küttner, Institute for the German Language, Mannheim) – Transformative compliance.	◦ Martijn van Beek , Netherlands Police Academy – Interviewing Suspects Strategically: Factors to Consider when Gathering and Disclosing Information in Interviews with Suspects.
1135	Comfort Break	
1145	Lightning round	
1215	Lunch	
1315	◊ Robin James Smith , Cardiff University and The University of the Witwatersrand (with Terry Au Yeung, Leiden University) – Visions of Policing: Tracing Trajectories and Tellings of Video	◦ Charles Antaki , Loughborough University – Probing inconsistency and accountability when interviewing persons with intellectual disabilities.
	◊ Ruwan Uduwerage-Perera , De Montfort University (with John Coxhead, Loughborough University) – title tbc	◦ Lorenza Mondada , University of Basel (with Fernanda Cruz, Federal University of São Paulo, and David Monteiro, University of Basel) – Voices from the archives: researching disappeared activists in ante-mortem forensic investigations.
	+ Laura Jenkins , Loughborough University – Offence-focused hypothetical questions and prosocial identity construction in youth justice practice in England	^ Fabio Ferraz de Almeida , University of Lincoln (with Sigurd D'hondt, University of Jyväskylä) – Negotiating trial procedure at the International Criminal Court.
1450	Break	
1520	+ Anna Sowerbutts , UCL; Homerton Healthcare – “What does obey mean?”: language disorder and communication in the youth justice system.	^ Susan Ehrlich , York University, Toronto, Canada – Intertextuality and Racialized Inequalities in Trial Discourse: A Case Study.
	+ Ann Merrit Rikke Nielsen , University of Copenhagen (with Mie Femø Nielsen, University of Copenhagen, and Sabine Ellung Jørgensen, University of Copenhagen) – Trust and Social Justice in Action: Trust-building in the context of hopelessness, victimhood and powerlessness.	^ Chris Heffer , Cardiff University – No Sure Thing: Why Use of 'Sure' to Convey the Criminal Standard of Proof to Juries Might be a Travesty of Justice.
	+ David Peplow , Sheffield Hallam University (with Jake Phillips, University of Cambridge) – Questions, Answers, and Decisions: The Discourse of Parole Hearings.	^ Selena Mariano , University of Perugia – Secondary Victimisation in Courtrooms: Rape Myths and Gendered Stereotypes at Trial.
1700	Finish	

Thursday 17th September

Registration opens: 08:45

Time	Room 1 – SHAPE Room	Room 2 – Lecture Room
0915	Welcome	
0930	□ Emma Tennent , Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington (with Ann Weatherall, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington and Flinders University) – Using conversation analysis to shape communication training for police call-takers.	^ Xiaodan He , Wuhan University of Technology – Strategic Same-turn Self-repair in Chinese Criminal Courtroom Defense.
1000	□ Jessica W. Gillooly , Suffolk University – Beyond the Clerical Role: A New Vision for Emergency Call-Takers	* Sofia Navarro Beck , Aarhus University – Toward Safer Digital Interactions: Developing Red Flags to Spot Online Grooming
1030	Break	
1100	□ Joanne Traynor , Anglia Ruskin University – Before the Blue Lights: Communication, Risk and Everyday Policing in Control Rooms.	* Nuria Lorenzo-Dus , Swansea University (UK) and Universidad Politécnica de Valencia (Spain) – From Messages to Action: Using Offender Communication to Strengthen Online Policing Practice.
1130	□ Kate Steel , University of the West of England – Communication at the scene: from research findings to recommendations for domestic abuse first response policing.	* Emily Chiang , Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics – Linguistic approaches to understanding deviant online communities and supporting online undercover police practice.
1205	Lightning Round	
1240	Lunch	
1340	Lightning Round	
1415	Keynote Speaker: Professor Elizabeth Stokoe , The London School of Economics and Political Science – Whose Voice, Whose Talk, for What Kinds of Justice?	
1515	Break	
1545	Panel Discussion – Whose voices of Justice?	
1645	Closing comments	
1700	Finish	

Panel Discussion

Confirmed Contributors:

- Joanne Traynor, Senior Lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, following a career in Police Command and Control
- Laura Jenkins, Senior Vice Chancellor Independent Research Fellow, School of Social Sciences and Humanities at Loughborough University
- Nicola Vejelis, Advanced Forensic Practitioner (sexual offence medicine) and Doctoral Researcher at Loughborough University
- Nick Jeffreys, Head of Youth Justice at the Youth Endowment Fund

How can communication research navigate the competing priorities of practitioners, victims and those accused or convicted of crime? Bringing together diverse professionals, this panel explores where these perspectives intersect, where tensions arise, and what communication research can contribute to policy and practice while remaining attentive to the tensions, trade-offs and competing priorities inherent in criminal justice practice.

Keynote Abstract

Whose Voice, Whose Talk, for What Kinds of Justice?

Elizabeth Stokoe

Justice is built from talk. Yet there is a persistent gap between how people imagine talk works and how it actually works turn by turn, in real time. We treat "ums" and "uhs" as mistakes rather than the utterly commonplace features they are; we credit "body language" with meanings that evidence does not support; we assume our intuitions about conversation are reliable when they rarely are. This same gap runs through legal and criminal justice settings: between the law as written and how it sounds when spoken; between interview guidance and what interviewers actually do; between how police and courts transcribe a recording and what conversation analysts find in it; between role-play and the real thing; and between how an emergency call for help actually unfolds and what AI hears. These gaps matter, since when confident but mistaken assumptions about talk hold sway, it is victims', witnesses', and suspects' voices that get discounted. This is, in part, an injustice of another kind: epistemic. By attending to actual recorded voices rather than imagined, scripted, or simulated ones, conversation analysis keeps the empirical reality of talk in view and provides an evidence base for training that works. Taking seriously what people do with words is one way of giving them voice in the most literal sense - which is, I argue, what justice should do.

Abstracts for Talks

Negotiating trial procedure at the International Criminal Court

Fabio Ferraz de Almeida

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is still a relatively new international court, and many of its legal rules and procedures are still developing. In this presentation, we examine how judges and lawyers deal with these uncertainties in practice. First, we look at how the ICC combines features of both civil law and common law systems, and how judges manage their dual role of overseeing proceedings while also seeking the truth when questioning witnesses. We then examine the unclear rules around victim participation in trials, focusing on the ICC judges' decision that victims can express their "views and concerns" only by giving testimony. Together, these examples show how conversation analysis (CA) can help us understand how people at the ICC manage uncertainty while shaping a new international legal system. Although CA is often used to study established institutions, our analysis demonstrates that it is also useful for examining institutional change as it happens.

Probing inconsistency and accountability when interviewing persons with intellectual disabilities

Charles Antaki

I'll be talking about what happens when a police officer interviews someone with an intellectual disability who's alleging that they've been sexually assaulted. The interviews follow the guidelines set out in the policy document "Achieving Best Evidence", which require officers to ask questions to probe the robustness of the complainant's account. Some of these questions can be taken to imply doubts about the truth of what they have said, or the reasonableness of their conduct. I'll give examples of that kind of question, and explain why they might be useful to the authorities in deciding whether to pursue the case.

Toward Safer Digital Interactions: Developing Red Flags to Spot Online Grooming Dynamics

Sofia Navarro Beck

In this talk, I will present the main contribution of the first study of my PhD. For the thesis, I conducted a case study of a Danish online grooming conversation between an adult man and a female child, acquired from the Danish police. Using a digital conversation analysis approach, the study describes the array of social actions used by the participants in an online grooming interaction. By focusing on the power imbalances between groomer and child, the study shows that the groomer is more intense and superficial in his displays of affection towards the child, whereas the child seems to be more emotionally invested in the relationship. The sexual interactions between the participants are characterized by the groomer instructing the child using sexually explicit language, compliments, endearment terms, and loving emojis, whereas the child mostly engages at the level of following instructions and seeking positive assessments from the groomer. The study concretizes the specific social actions that, in combination, make up the manipulative aspect of grooming. By virtue of digital conversation analysis, the study effectively documents not only which social actions constitute this online grooming process, but also when these actions occur. The study results in the presentation of six red flags, or warning signs, for identifying online grooming dynamics. The talk will revolve around the red flags and present excerpts from the conversation to exemplify the dynamics.

Interviewing Suspects Strategically: Factors to Consider when Gathering and Disclosing Information in Interviews with Suspects

Martijn van Beek

Disclosing police information to suspects is a key factor in receiving relevant information in return during investigative interviews. However, such disclosure must be done with skill: innocent suspects may be overwhelmed and may confess falsely, while guilty suspects may manoeuvre around the evidence. To (a) minimise such risks, (b) support police interviewers, and (c) amplify potential differences between guilty and innocent suspects, several models of 'strategic interviewing' have been developed. This presentation discusses the findings and implications of four studies that explored several factors that must be considered when interviewing suspects in such manner.

In the first study, 53 police interviewers conducted 100 mock interviews. They made use of three different strategic interviewing models. The design contained several naturalistic elements. For example, the interviews took place in formal interview rooms in police stations. Furthermore, the interviewees were students in safety and security who had applied to become a police officer. Were the accusation true, this would have had implications for their ambition to become one. This set-up ensured they could easily imagine something serious was at stake for them while being interviewed.

The second study made use of the same design. Now half of the interviews started with an invitation to the interviewee to provide a free account, the other half started 'strategically' right away. The third and fourth studies focused on interviewers' and senior investigative officers' awareness that the police may unwittingly disclose incorrect information; and on their adaptiveness to handle such a situation when being faced with it.

How Police Officers Account for the Use of Force in Internal Affairs Interviews.

Andre Buscariolli

Complaints about excessive use of force occupy a special status within police departments. Even when citizens do not file complaints, use-of-force review boards evaluate incidents to determine whether officers' use of coercive force conforms to official policies and, if not, initiate an internal investigation. This presentation examines how police officers account for the use of force, drawing on data from organizational records and 62 interviews conducted as part of internal accountability processes. The findings suggest that officers establish the proportionality of their actions by maximizing, on the one hand, the severity of the situations in which force was used and the malicious intentions attributed to the subjects against whom force was directed and, on the other hand, the limited tactical options available in response to an incipient attack by a hostile subject. Importantly, both officers under investigation and those conducting the investigations share implicit expectations regarding the interactional work necessary to justify the use of force, at times coordinating their actions to produce a collaborative account. In this respect, representatives of the local police labor union (called guild representatives), who participate in these accountability interviews to advocate for officers' interests, rely on their status as higher-ranking members (typically sergeants and lieutenants) to guide officers more actively in constructing accounts of the use of force.

Linguistic approaches to understanding deviant online communities and supporting online undercover police practice.

Emily Chiang

Dark-web discussion forums facilitate criminal activity and community-building amongst anonymous individuals with illicit and unlawful interests. Online undercover investigations play a key role in disrupting these groups by identifying harmful practices and particularly dangerous or prolific offenders. Such investigations require undercover officers (UCOs) to engage in various forms of online identity assumption, like assuming the role of a 'typical' member of a child abuse forum. Linguistic research shows that this cognitively demanding and high-stakes task requires a sound understanding of the target community's rules, behavioural norms, and linguistic practices (Grant & MacLeod, 2020).

In this talk, I offer a 'linguistic tour' of dark-web communities in the criminal domains of child sexual abuse and fraud. I demonstrate the use of discourse analytic approaches including move analysis (Swales, 1990) and corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker, 2006) as tools for identifying the linguistic activities and social identities that characterise these groups. I draw together these findings to consider more broadly how online communities function to further the goals of community members, and what linguistic insights can offer to undercover police practice.

References

Baker, P. (2006). 2006. Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis. London: Continuum.

Grant, T. and MacLeod, N. (2020) Language and Online Identities: The Undercover Policing of Internet Sexual Crime. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Swales, J. (1990). Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Intertextuality and Racialized Inequalities in Trial Discourse: A Case Study

Susan Ehrlich

Intertextual practices have been the focus of much work within the language and law literature given that lawyers often rely on intertextuality to establish the credibility (or lack thereof) of witness testimony. Within trials, for example, verbal statements and audio or video recordings from previous settings are quoted, indirectly reported, reframed or summarized by lawyers, often in strategic ways. The data for this paper come from a USA rape trial, a trial in which both the accused and the complainant were African American. One of the prosecuting lawyers in the trial spent a considerable amount of the cross-examination of the accused engaged in an intertextual exercise—he drew extensively from a written transcript of the accused's police interrogation, putting the accused's utterances from the interrogation on display and making prominent certain aspects of these utterances, most notably, the accused's use of features of African American English (AAE). I adopt an approach to linguistic varieties that investigates the process by which 'figures of personhood' (Agha 2005: 39) come to be associated with them. That is, I suggest that the prosecutor's foregrounding of the accused's use of AAE made recognizable a racialized persona-type: a racist stereotype of African American masculinity as street-smart, hypersexual and physically violent that would be particularly prejudicial to an accused in the context of a rape trial. In this way, the paper demonstrates, following Bauman and Briggs (1990: 76), how decontextualization and recontextualization processes can be implicated in larger patterns of social inequalities.

Beyond the Clerical Role: A New Vision for Emergency Call-Takers

Jessica W. Gillooly

Emergency call-takers sit at the heart of public safety systems, serving as the critical communication link between the public and first responders. Yet, for decades they have been burdened by a historical legacy that portrayed them as neutral conduits of information: members of the public request help, dispatchers relay information, and police respond. That framing still shapes how many researchers and practitioners understand the dispatch role, as clerical and largely reducible to the application of departmental rules. When emergency response is characterized in these ways, police encounters can needlessly escalate and efforts to shrink the footprint of policing falter. To make progress the field needs to recognize several crucial but often unrecognized call-taker functions, including risk appraisal, incident framing, resource matching, and expectation setting. By closely describing their varied functions, this presentation puts forth a clearer vision of their role in the criminal justice system. It provides actionable insights to fill the gaps between existing rules, protocols, and the realities of their work. A more nuanced, realistic understanding of the profession is critical to transform communication in emergency call centers and pave the way for better governance of the field.

Strategic Same-turn Self-repair in Chinese Criminal Courtroom Defense

Xiaodan He

This study investigates how same-turn self-repair is sequentially organized and interactionally motivated in Chinese criminal courtroom defense by using the methods of Conversation Analysis. While self-repair in institutional interaction has traditionally been treated as a mechanism for resolving problems of speaking, hearing, or understanding, this study demonstrates that repair practices in courtroom interaction may also function strategically to highlight favorable implications. Drawing on audio recordings of criminal cases, this study shows that although self-repair is relatively infrequent in courtroom interaction due to institutional constraints on turn-taking and precision requirements, when it occurs it frequently functions as a strategic interactional resource through which defendants/witnesses and defense lawyers suspend projected turn completion to manage accountability, construct credibility, mitigate potentially damaging implications, and foreground favorable interpretations of evidence. Such strategic self-repair commonly occurs in response to accusatory questions, challenges, or potentially incriminating formulations. The findings further show that strategic same-turn self-repair is closely tied to the asymmetrical nature of courtroom interaction, where speakers must negotiate restricted turn space and institutional authority while maintaining defensively advantageous positions.

No Sure Thing: Why Use of 'Sure' to Convey the Criminal Standard of Proof to Juries Might be a Travesty of Justice

Chris Heffer

Few matters are more fundamental to criminal justice than whether jurors understand the standard they must apply before convicting. In England and Wales, juries are no longer routinely directed that the prosecution must prove guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt'. Instead, judges commonly tell them that they may convict only if they are 'sure' of guilt. The move to 'sure' was intended as a plain English solution to a long-recognised problem: that 'beyond reasonable doubt' is familiar but poorly understood. Yet this talk argues that the solution may have created a new and serious problem.

The central difficulty is that 'sure' is treated by the courts as an ordinary word requiring no explanation, even though it now performs a highly technical legal function. Through repeated use in jury directions, appellate decisions, and judicial guidance, 'sure' has effectively become a legal term of art: it is expected to convey a very high threshold for conviction, not everyday confidence, belief, or certainty. But jurors are not told this. When they ask what 'sure' means, judges are strongly discouraged from offering anything beyond repetition or minimal clarification.

Drawing on linguistic analysis, legal materials, and examples of jury uncertainty, I argue that the current direction risks placing an undeclared legal meaning inside an apparently ordinary word. That matters because if jurors understand 'sure' too weakly, the risk is wrongful conviction; if they understand it too strongly, the risk is wrongful acquittal. The talk asks whether continued reliance on 'sure' is not merely a drafting problem, but a threat to the safety of verdicts.

Transformative compliance

Elliott M. Hoey

Not doing as one is told by putative authority figures can be a source of conflict. Such disobedience often takes subtler forms than outright refusal, however. Directive-recipients can also respond with various forms of less-than-full compliance. Drawing on analyses of 'transformative answers' to questions, this study examines such forms of response in encounters between the police and citizen videographers, and introduces the notion of 'transformative compliance'—ways of complying that retroactively operate on some aspect of the directive. To illuminate the concept, the analysis focuses on police officers' spatial directives and videographers' responses to them. Two main transformation types are distinguished: accountability transformations, where the directive-recipient operates on the auspices of their compliance, and acceptability transformations, through which the directive-recipient attempts to redefine what constitutes acceptable compliance. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of these practices for the sequential management of nascent disalignment and conflict. Data are in English.

Offence-focused hypothetical questions and prosocial identity construction in youth justice practice in England

Laura Jenkins

In England and Wales, the dominant 'Child First' approach to youth justice deliberately shifts from risk- and offence-focused approaches towards practices that emphasise children's strengths, participation, and prosocial identity. However, little is known about the reality of how youth justice is delivered in practice. My study of genuine recorded practitioner-child interactions reveals that practitioners do, in fact, introduce discussions about offending by asking about offence-focused hypothetical scenarios. Hypothetical questions have been studied in clinical and therapeutic settings where they facilitate extended discussion of highly delicate matters, but the use of hypothetical scenarios in youth justice settings remains thus far unexamined.

Using conversation analysis, I identified 34 instances of offence-focused hypothetical scenarios, captured within 10 video-recorded appointments between children and practitioners across three Youth Justice Services in England. The scenarios included revisiting the original offence and considering future re-offending. Practitioners introduced hypothetical scenarios to adeptly facilitate extended discussions around offending, leading to collaborative construction of the child's prosocial identity, for example, explaining why they wouldn't re-offend. However, prosocial outcomes were not guaranteed; complexities resulting from children pursuing pro-criminal narratives had to be carefully handled by practitioners.

The findings identify an interactional tension at the heart of 'Child First' youth justice practice. Although contemporary youth justice policy seeks to de-centre offending as the primary focus of intervention, practitioners nevertheless make offending relevant within encounters with children. Hypothetical scenarios emerge as a key interactional resource through which offending can be explored while preserving children's opportunities to present themselves as more than their offences.

From Messages to Action: Using Offender Communication to Strengthen Online Policing Practice

Nuria Lorenzo-Dus

Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Material (CSEAM) is fundamentally communicative. Behind every image or video sits a sequence of interactions through which offenders sustain abuse. Contemporary policing has made significant advances in detecting and removing harmful visual content at scale; however, much of the linguistic dimension of these offences remains comparatively underexploited.

This talk reframes CSEAM as an interactional phenomenon. Drawing on anonymised digital datasets provided by UK and Spanish law enforcement—specifically (1) adult-child interactions and (2) communication within clear-web offender communities—the analysis focuses on how offenders negotiate the production and transmission of CSEAM.

The findings highlight the adaptive nature of offender communication. Cross-jurisdictional comparison between the UK and Spain points to both shared communicative practices and context-specific patterns shaped by platform use and investigative environments.

Positioned firmly within the Online Policing theme, this session demonstrates how fine-grained linguistic insights can be translated into operational value: enhancing detection beyond surface-level cues and informing the training of operatives, ultimately supporting more context-sensitive safeguarding interventions. Drawing on applied work within established applied research programmes in the UK and Spain, the talk outlines how research on offender communication is being embedded into tools and training pipelines for law enforcement.

Secondary Victimisation in Courtrooms: Rape Myths and Gendered Stereotypes at Trial

Selena Mariano

Secondary victimisation, where victims of crime are further traumatised by the legal process, is a frequent phenomenon in criminal trials involving gender-based violence (Condry, in Shoham et al., 2010). Specifically, both defence lawyers and judges find themselves using rape myths (Bohner et al., 1998) and gendered stereotypes (Smith, 2018) during cross-examinations and rulings, respectively, to assess the veracity of the victims' testimonies.

Employing ethnomethodological approaches (Garfinkel, 1967), such as conversation analysis (CA; Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974) and membership categorisation analysis (MCA; Sacks, 1972), this study analyses courtroom transcripts and judgements to observe how these strategies unfold in practice. The findings reveal how the use of specific interactional tools and categories can create a hostile environment for victims, leveraging moral judgments and prejudicial assumptions rather than a legal evaluation of the facts.

Voices from the archives: researching disappeared activists in ante-mortem forensic investigations

Lorenza Mondada

This talk focuses on the archival practices of forensic experts engaged in the search of disappeared people and in the possible re-identification of human remains. Archival searches are a constitutive moment in the ante-mortem investigations, which are an important procedure within the forensic anthropology inquiry. This talk explores these searches, within a more general objective, aiming at a praxeological approach of the archive. Archives in the forensic investigations dealing with mass crimes and state violence are often constituted by diverse and fragmented sources—from cemetery books to publicly accessible data banks, from private archives to past posts in local medias, etc. The ways forensic experts navigate in these archives, selectively reading them, and interpreting them, constitute the basis for our study of archival practices. In particular the talk will be interested in the search and selection of documents, and in their reading and commenting aloud, as well as their integration in a wider emerging network of fragments of information concerning missing persons. The way archives are voiced in the course of the investigation, and the way versions are considered as valuable or as dismissible or fake, is an important dimension of this interpretive work.

The talk is based on ongoing fieldwork in a forensic laboratory in Brazil, specialized in inquiries about human remains related to the former Brazilian dictatorship and in the search of activists disappeared by the army in that same period. Data are in Brazilian Portuguese and belong to a large corpus collected since 2022.

Trust and Social Justice in Action: Trust-building in the context of hopelessness, victimhood and powerlessness

Ann Merit Rikke Nielsen

Trust is widely recognised as central to rehabilitation and reintegration among current and former prisoners (Ugelvik, 2022). Yet little is known about how trust is practically accomplished in interactions between formerly incarcerated service users and professionals working in community-based support settings.

Drawing on ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EMCA), this paper examines interactions from a Danish non-governmental organisation supporting current and former prisoners, including parolees. The analysis focuses on a recurrent phenomenon: service users presenting themselves through narratives of hopelessness, victimhood, limited agency, and constrained life trajectories.

Through micro-analysis of naturally occurring interaction, we examine how participants jointly manage questions of responsibility, accountability, and agency. Service users describe themselves as trapped by circumstances, family histories, institutional barriers, or social conditions, while professionals face the interactional challenge of acknowledging these experiences without undermining the service users' capacity for action and change. The analysis explores how such accounts contribute to the in situ negotiation and co-construction of mutual trust (Jørgensen, 2017; M. F. Nielsen, Forth).

We show how trust is built through a delicate balancing of recognition and validation on the one hand, and accountability and future-oriented agency on the other. The analysis further explores how trust becomes a practical accomplishment embedded in participants' moment-by-moment interactional work.

The paper contributes to research on communication in criminal justice settings by demonstrating how trust-building practices support socially just forms of engagement with current and former prisoners (A. M. R. Nielsen et al., Accepted; M. F. Nielsen & Nielsen, 2023).

Questions, Answers, and Decisions: The Discourse of Parole Hearings

David Peplow

Each year in England and Wales, around 8,000 prisoners take part in oral parole hearings. In these hearings, prisoners and professionals answer questions from a panel to help decide whether the prisoner can be safely released. This talk explores how these hearings work, based on our past and ongoing research. We look closely at the role of communication: how questions are asked, how answers are given, and how this shapes decision-making. A key focus is the recent shift from in-person to remote (online) hearings. We consider how this change affects prisoners in particular, including how easy it is for them to explain themselves and be understood. Drawing on detailed analysis of real hearings, we examine how panel members sometimes rephrase or summarise what prisoners say through formulations. These moments can guide prisoners toward certain kinds of answers, or encourage them to reflect more deeply on their behaviour. We explore how this interaction works in practice, and whether it changes depending on whether the hearing is face-to-face or online. Finally, we highlight the gaps in knowledge that still exist around parole hearings and outline the next steps for research in this important but under-studied area.

Some Systematic Sources of Trouble in Police Encounters: The Case of ‘Good Citizen Tests’

Geoff Raymond, Kevin Whitehead and Albert Meehan

Police encounters with civilians are routinely complicated by mutual mistrust. The pervasive relevance and consequentiality of such mistrust can be most directly appreciated in the range of ‘tests’ that officers use to locate and, at times, challenge possible discrepancies regarding appearances in a setting. In this talk, we focus primarily on how police conduct what we call ‘good citizen tests.’ The model ‘good citizen’ is assumed in the training of police officers, shaping their expectations of how citizens ought to behave. Thus, when encountering residents, officers routinely formulate tests that rely on a conception of how a ‘good citizen’ would respond or act in the situation, as a basis for finding that the residents they observe or speak with have fallen short of this standard. In conducting ‘good citizen tests,’ officers produce actions that make relevant a choice between two alternative responses that the officer treats as indicative of whether the civilian is either a ‘good citizen’ or somehow implicated in a matter of suspicion or investigation. Since officers use these tests with persons they suspect are not ‘good citizens,’ and they tend to be used in neighborhoods where police suspect residents harbor anti-police sentiments, they are practices through which civilians subject to pervasive policing because of their racial, economic, or occupational status are disproportionately policed. In this respect, ‘good citizen tests’ are both solutions police use to manage mistrust and sources of mistrust and other trouble on the part of community members who are subject to them.

Visions of Policing: Tracing Trajectories and Tellings of Video

Robin James Smith and Terry Au Yeung

In the context of the proliferation of audio-visual recording technology and instantaneous sharing to globally distributed audiences and assembled moral communities, policing practice has gained a new visibility (Goldsmith, 2010, Schneider and Laming, 2026). Commensurately, in various contexts of the criminal justice system, videos take centre stage (Watson and Lynch, 2026). As seen in the cases of well-known incidents of misconduct and brutality – from the beating of Rodney King (Goodwin, 1994) to the killing of Reéne Good – in different settings, and in different ways, the same video ‘evidence’ can be made show ‘what happened’ in varying, contested, and contestable ways. No video speaks for itself.

Our interest here, inspired by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, is in the local emic methods through which the video is made to speak, for what, and for whom. Rather than focusing on institutional settings, however, we are in this paper primarily concerned with sense-making in the public domain and, specifically, how categorisation operates in producing what can be seen in the video. We also focalise common contextual practices that contest the video itself as ‘evidence’, such as questioning editing, trimming, and ‘what happened before’. Given the velocity of their viral circulation online, videos are seldom viewed in isolation but, rather, within and as an emergently assembled ‘collection’. As such, the emergent visibility is constantly (re-)curated and (re-)shown through audio, visual, and discursive methods to represent, reconstruct, and recontextualise ‘what actually happened’.

Through presenting findings from the Visions of Policing project, this presentation will examine specific cases of how police use of force and violence is accounted for, including the grounds for accusations of misconduct in the first instance which display moral reasoning (Au Yeung and Smith, In Press). We will also consider how such accusations are responded to, institutionally, and describe a central method of description through which the moral implicatures are removed from the scene (Smith, 2026). Such methods, we suggest, are central to the ways in which policing and law enforcement are produced and preserved as a protected domain of knowledge and experience, which in turn demonstrate how visibility does not equate to accountability.

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“What does obey mean?”; language disorder and communication in the youth justice system.
Anna Sowerbutts

Young people in the justice system disproportionately present with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD) and are likely to struggle with its myriad and complex communication demands. Professional guidance outlines strategies for facilitating successful communication, but observational studies of youth justice interactions to substantiate these recommendations are lacking. In this presentation, I outline the findings from two pieces of research:

- a) A scoping review of the literature regarding the communication requirements, barriers and recommendations for routine youth justice interactions. This found that recommendations were wide-ranging and broadly consistent, though very few had been evaluated for effectiveness. A relatively small number of papers considered the views of young people or analysed real youth justice interactions.
- b) A close examination of three routinely-occurring sessions between a young person with language disorder and his youth offending team worker, transcribed and analysed according to the conventions of Conversation Analysis. This found that the impact of the young person’s language difficulties was greatly mitigated by careful management of the interaction by both parties, creating an environment where repair could be initiated by either participant and the young person was able to contribute to the agenda and direction of the conversation.

Both pieces of research indicate that simply ‘tinkering’ with the language of the youth justice system to make it comprehensible is not always helpful or sufficient. Guidance for practitioners on effective communication with young people should therefore incorporate consideration of how to foster collaborative conversation, as a necessary precursor to resolving any communication challenges that arise.

Communication at the scene: from research findings to recommendations for domestic abuse first response policing

Kate Steel

This talk draws on my ongoing empirical study of police-victim communication at the scene of reported domestic abuse incidents. This research is based on body-worn video recordings of real call-out interactions within a case study UK police force area, focusing on the pivotal exchanges between officers and victims as they seek to establish an initial account of the incident. Through close analysis of these interactions, I identify the many communicative complexities which arise in this setting - including managing distress, eliciting victims' accounts and navigating questions around blame and accountability - and the strategies deployed by officers, with varying degrees of success.

The second part of the talk focuses on the translation of these research findings into usable, evidence-based recommendations for police leaders, first responders and educators. I will discuss what this applied work has involved, including the challenges of translating fine-grained linguistic analysis into practicable guidance. The talk is intended to be of relevance to both practitioners and researchers across domestic abuse policing and victim support, and will consider what linguistic research can offer for those working in this area.

Using conversation analysis to shape communication training for police call-takers

Emma Tennent and Ann Weatherall

In this presentation we will describe the creation of the first-ever corpus of call recordings to the New Zealand police for academic research and explain how we are progressing our work to enhance communication training for call-handlers. In 2020, 200 call recordings made to the police's emergency and non-emergency helpline, in and out of COVID-19 lockdowns were released to us. Producing detailed transcripts has been a time-consuming process. However, the resultant corpus is proving a rich resource for original studies of the fundamental communicative mechanisms driving interactions in calls to the police. Examples include explaining how the selection of person reference forms is a resource for constructing social distance between relevant parties in the incident (Tennent & Weatherall, 2024) and showing that being identified as the person who called the police can be a caller's focal concern in cases of family harm (Tennent & Weatherall, 2025). A next challenge is the effective use of the corpus and our evolving knowledge to shape communication skills training for call-handlers. Following a participatory approach, we are connecting with trainers to understand how teaching resources informed by our research programme can be developed to support them and the professional development of call-takers.

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Before the Blue Lights: Communication, Risk and Everyday Policing in Control Rooms

Dr Joanne Traynor

Contact with the police often begins with a call to a police control room. These interactions are key moments when callers' accounts are interpreted and translated into police action, shaping how events are understood, how vulnerability is identified, and how risk is responded to. Drawing on an ethnographic study that combines analysis of 316,262 incident logs with 48 hours of situated think-aloud interviews, this paper examines how communications officers construct meaning from callers' accounts and initiate responses, positioning the control room as a site of discretionary decision-making in which organisational priorities and risk frameworks are applied in real time.

Officers use the THRIVE model (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, and Engagement) to guide their risk assessments, yet risk work is far from mechanical. Decision making relies on professional judgement, tacit knowledge and the pressures of fast-paced operational environments. Call handlers condense and reinterpret narratives, manage uncertainty and make judgements that shape incident grading and escalation.

The paper explores the emergence of the Summary–Assessment–Response (SAR) model as an evolution of THRIVE that better reflects operational communication. SAR structures risk around a concise incident summary and rationale for response. Early evidence suggests it reduces duplication, clarifies call handlers' reasoning for dispatchers, and improves efficiency. By foregrounding the interpretive and relational labour of communications officers, the paper reconceptualises the control room as a critical site where meaning, risk and organisational priorities are actively shaped long before officers arrive on scene.

The Mendez Principles: An international response to the call for action

Dave Walsh

In 2021, after a three-year period of consultation and analysis, a UN endorsed document was published that became to be known as 'The Mendez Principles'. While not a code of operational practice, it nevertheless sets out what are the expectations of practitioners when undertaking interviews with victims, witnesses and suspects (a practice that is not only one most commonly undertaken during criminal investigations, but also one that is often cited as most critical). The six Principles are based on law, ethics and science and has paved the way for a global response of a project called ImpleMéndez, that has - as its main goal - that of helping implement the Mendez Principles, and in so doing safeguarding human rights. The four-year project is funded by the European Co-operation in Science and Technology (or COST) that began in October 2023 with 88 members from 32 countries and now ImpleMéndez (as of May 2026) has nearing 450 members from 60 countries. It has led to a number of sub-projects that has examined themes such as the interviewing of children in line with the Principles who are suspects of crime, as well national undertakings in several countries that has seen to varying levels initiatives emerge that are the prelude to change in that country towards practice and policies that are in alignment with the Mendez Principles. Sustainability of the project has been a key feature and in that regard further developments have been made that will be discussed during the presentation.

Lightning Round Abstracts

TACT (Talk to ACTION): Understanding and improving police communication from 999 call to Command & Control log

Sarah Atkins, Alexandra Kent and Nicki Furlong
Aston University, Keele University and Staffordshire Police

Police 999 call-handlers perform a complex communicative task: they manage high-stakes interactions with callers in real time while simultaneously producing Command & Control (C&C) incident logs that constitute the first point of data-recording in the policing chain. These logs shape incident categorisation, resource allocation and frontline response, yet the process by which spoken caller accounts are transformed into written operational records remains largely unexamined. Research in Conversation Analysis has produced important findings on sequential organisation, caller requests and call-handlers' initial questions in emergency calls, and studies of workplace interaction more broadly have identified significant tensions between communication and concurrent documentation. However, police call-handling has not benefited from analysis of this early and consequential stage of log creation, in which talk becomes text. TACT addresses this gap through a collaboration between Staffordshire Police, Keele University and Aston University. Firstly, we employ Conversation Analysis to produce parallel-track transcripts aligning 999 call recordings with time-stamped C&C log entries, enabling fine-grained examination of how call-handlers manage spoken interaction and record production simultaneously. Secondly we use ethnographic methods (observation, interviews and video-reflexive ethnography in the Force Control Room) to document call-handler practices, institutional pressures and professional reasoning. Thirdly, we develop a coding scheme informed by the CA findings to quantify patterns of omission, addition and reformulation across the dataset. Together, these provide triangulated insight into the talk-to-text process. Findings will directly inform evidence-based training using the Conversation Analytic Role-play Method (CARM), alongside recommendations for C&C system design, contributing to improved data recording and frontline response.

“The good old days of policing?”: Reflections on the narratives of police encounters in the Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development.

Henriette Bergstrøm (Presenting), Miguel Basto-Pereira, and Darrick Jolliffe.
University of Derby, Instituto Universitário and University College London

The Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development (CSDD) is a prospective longitudinal study that has followed 411 South London males (Generation 2, “G2”) from childhood to old age. The CSDD is one of the most well-known and influential studies within criminology. This is due to its methodological rigour and the vast number of influential publications the study has generated. However, almost all of these publications have been based on quantitative interpretations of the CSDD interview schedules, but these interviews also included open-ended interview questions. This paper is a novel exploration of how the G2 males described their experience of police contacts between the ages 15 to 18. The narratives included descriptions of physical violence and verbal abuse by the police as well as being exposed to physical violence against others perpetrated by the police. The recorded experiences are framed within the police zeitgeist of 1960s and 1970s Britain and includes commentary on topics such as ‘skinhead’ culture, interviewing and stop and search practices pre-PACE 1984, and crowd control at football matches pre-Hillsborough. Reflections on key changes to British policing over the past 50 years will be discussed.

Marginalised Voices at the Bar

Natalie Braber, Jane Ching and Jane Jarman
Nottingham Trent University

Accent is not explicitly protected under the Equality Act 2010. As such, there are frequently no steps taken to prevent discrimination on this basis and accent prejudice continues to be an issue which reduces social mobility. Our project was interested in approaches to help understand more about implicit accent bias affecting barristers. Barristers are considered to be professionals with a high social status whose work involves persuasive speaking. The study consisted of different methods of data collection, including an online study to examine how the public judge barristers based upon their accent. The second stage consisted of semi-structured interviews with students intending to join the Bar and early-career barristers, investigating their experiences with accent bias and how it has been addressed during their training. Finally, semi-structured interviews were carried out with senior barristers, investigating how attitudes have changed over time, their experiences with those they have trained, and the function of accent in recruitment for training and positions at the Bar. By investigating and removing barriers in accessing one of the legal professions, we can improve its representativeness and ensure confidence in it. Some initial results suggest that particular accents are more highly respected than others, although suggestions have been made that this has been changing over more recent years.

A taxonomy of influence: Developing a pragmatic framework for the analysis of computer-mediated encouraged suicide

Lily Calloway
Aston University - Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics

This research seeks to address the ambiguity of encouraged suicide (ES) legislation in the UK and offer a means of identifying whether an offence has taken place. First, clearer definitions for the acts relevant to ES as a communications offence (assistance, coercion, encouragement, persuasion and promotion) are proposed using insights from linguistics, psychology and philosophy. Second, I design and reliability test a novel framework incorporating these pragmatic definitions of the ES criteria, which considers them illocutionary acts through the lens of speech act theory. The findings of this research suggest distinctions and degrees of severity between the ES speech acts in relation to culpability and harm. Further, the framework returns satisfactory inter-rater reliability scores for identifying the ES speech acts in two genres of ES data.

Negotiating Blame: Psychiatric Fictions and the Language of Diminished Responsibility

Felicity Deamer and Sam Wilkinson

Aston University and Exeter University

The partial defence of diminished responsibility is grounded in psychiatric evidence demonstrating that an abnormality of mental functioning substantially impaired a defendant's capacity for rational judgment, understanding, or self-control. However, little research has examined how this relationship between psychiatric expertise and legal responsibility is linguistically constructed within judicial discourse. We analyse sentencing remarks from murder cases involving diminished responsibility using discourse analysis, Bell's Audience Design framework, and insights from Sam Wilkinson's (2022) concept of psychiatric fictionalism. The analysis identifies systematic differences in lexical choice, evaluative stance, agency, and narrative framing across cases in which diminished responsibility is rejected, reluctantly accepted, endorsed, or actively advocated by the sentencing judge. It further demonstrates that judges' style-shift between multiple audiences, including defendants, victims' families, legal professionals, appellate courts, and the wider public to reconcile the apparent tension between the seriousness of the offence and a legally mitigated outcome. We identify variation in the judicial presentation of psychiatric evidence itself, suggesting that psychiatric discourse functions as an unstable genre, alternating between logico-scientific, narrative-contextual, compassionate, and forensic-persuasive registers depending on the moral and legal demands of the case. Drawing on Wilkinson's (2022) psychiatric fictionalism, we argue that psychiatric expertise functions less as an independent causal determinant of diminished responsibility than as a legitimating discourse through which pre-existing judicial intuitions about blameworthiness, tragedy, and culpability are translated into legally authoritative reasoning. The findings contribute to forensic linguistics, philosophy of psychiatry, and criminal law by illuminating the co-construction of diminished responsibility through psychiatric and judicial discourse.

What does fear sound like? Perceptions of voice and the "ideal" victim

Matthew Hunt

University of Southampton

When risk assessing victims of domestic abuse, police officers frequently report taking a victim's level of fear into account (Robinson et al, 2016). Evaluations of a victim's fear can even become evidentially consequential in instances of evidence-led (or "victimless") prosecution, with officers' descriptions of victims often used by the CPS when deciding on possible charges. Increased voice pitch is commonly interpreted as an indicator of fear, but in a recent experimental study (Hunt, 2025) I showed that this relationship can be complicated by extra-linguistic factors. In my study – which used a trained voice actor and digital manipulation of voice pitch – while a victim with a male abuser was indeed perceived as more scared when her pitch was raised, a victim with a female abuser received no such boost. Instead, the victim with a female abuser was viewed as irrational, regardless of changes to the victim's voice. Findings like this could have consequences for how non-heteronormative victims of domestic abuse are risk-assessed, and how their cases are pursued. I will be heavily expanding this project starting in July 2026 using an ESRC New Investigator Grant. The new project will incorporate a range of classed and racialised voices into the experimental design. It will also involve comparing results using general population listeners against those from trained domestic abuse support workers. There is also future scope to run these experiments with frontline police officers, and any other relevant public service with which victims come into contact in their journeys.

Unheard at First Contact: D/deaf Victims of Domestic Abuse and Police Communication

Sukhpreet Kaur, Karlie Stonard and Eleanor Martin
University of Wolverhampton

This paper presents emerging findings from the Smart Safe Signing project on police communication with D/deaf victims of domestic abuse. Drawing on conversations with police, Police Link Officers for Deaf people, domestic abuse leads and criminal justice practitioners across England, it focuses on first contact: reporting, emergency response and initial risk assessment. Practitioners described an “emergency gap” where officers may arrive quickly but be unable to communicate safely because interpreters must be pre-booked, systems are unclear, or available tools are not used confidently. This can delay disclosure, risk assessment and evidence gathering, leaving victims at prolonged risk and waiting longer to give their account. Barriers are compounded by limited professional understanding, low victim confidence, close-knit community dynamics, and a lack of accessible BSL information about services such as BSL 999 and video relay routes. The paper argues that communication is central to safeguarding, trust and justice.

Hearing fragmented selves in police evidence gathering: communicative sensitivity in working with trauma and dissociation

Agnieszka Lyons
Queen Mary University of London

This talk proposes a novel approach to engaging with narratives produced by those with experience of trauma and dissociation in police evidence gathering. This approach ensures more accurate evidence and lowers the risk of retraumatisation. Certain aspects of narratives constructed by trauma-impacted individuals are held in these individuals’ separate fragments and some memories are either unavailable or impossible to express in traditional evidence gathering contexts. I argue that trauma-informed sensitivity to communication across various media in evidence gathering offers unique access to the parts of life narratives of such individuals which would have remained silenced when approached from existing angles. This talk argues for a key role of adopting an agile approach to hearing and responding to narratives of trauma, which considers a range of semiotic resources in building a nuanced understanding of narrative enactment conveyed through an individual’s fragmented parts within this context. Insights offered bear direct consequences for improving policing and support services for individuals with lived experience of trauma and structural dissociation and will further inform the practical application of trauma-informed police practice, in particular within the Safer Streets Mission context.

AI, Law Enforcement, and Community Perspectives: Using Storytelling as an effective methodology

Michael Maher

University of Northampton

The growing use of AI in law enforcement, and across society more broadly, is reshaping the world around us. Often presented as a tool for enhancing efficiency and improving decision-making, AI is influencing social relationships, institutional practices, and systems of governance (Callari and Puppione, 2025). As these technologies become embedded in everyday life, they also reshape the narratives through which people make sense of the world. These narratives influence identity formation, how individuals position themselves within society, and importantly, how they understand their relationship with public institutions (Sagar, 2025). Storytelling is a qualitative research method that emphasises relational, creative, and participatory engagement with complex topics (Thompson et al., 2025). By centring personal narratives, lived experience, and reciprocal dialogue it generates rich, contextualised insights into how people interpret their experiences (Pierpaolo et al., 2021). This approach is particularly valuable for exploring complex social experiences, and identity formation (Lutgendorf et al., 2026). PROBaBLE Futures is a research project investigating the adoption of AI within law enforcement. The research explores the use of storytelling to explore the experiences of groups who are often disproportionately affected by policing practice and technological change. Through narrative reflection participants explored their self-positioning and evolving relationship with law enforcement. By sharing and reflecting collaboratively, participants questioned underlying assumptions, have conversations about trust, bias, and identity, highlighting the social and emotional implications of AI adoption that may be overlooked by more conventional research approaches.

Examining cross-examination with autistic adults

Katie Maras

University of Bath

Cross-examination is a key component of court proceedings but is widely recognised as challenging, particularly for vulnerable court users. In contrast to ‘Traditional’ cross-examination, the ‘Best Evidence’ approach emphasises clear, concise, non-leading questions. This study examined how questioning style (Traditional vs Best Evidence) impacts autistic mock-witness testimony and mock-juror perceptions. In Study 1, autistic adults (n = 56) completed a mock-crime paradigm and underwent cross-examination; testimony quality, perceived question difficulty, and anxiety were assessed. In Study 2, lay-jurors (n = 860) viewed recorded cross-examinations and rated witness coherence, credibility, and question clarity. Questioning style did not affect overall levels of live difficulty or anxiety. However, higher anxiety predicted greater difficulty under Traditional, but not Best Evidence, questioning. When directly compared, Best Evidence questions were rated as easier to answer. Importantly, Best Evidence questioning did not negatively impact juror perceptions. Findings highlight the importance of individualised questioning approaches in cross-examination for autistic witnesses.

Youth justice communication: A case for forensic linguistics

Ralph Morton

Aston University

Since its inception, forensic linguistics has focused on the communication issues that vulnerable participants face when interacting with the justice system. Communication in high pressured institutional settings can be difficult even for expert speakers with a good working knowledge of the rules governing the interaction. For speakers defined as vulnerable these challenges can be aggravated significantly. Under UK law age is considered a source of vulnerability. Perhaps due to the practical and ethical difficulties in securing access to data, linguistic analysis of child interaction with the justice system remains relatively rare. This brief talk details a semi-recent exception in the area of youth justice assessment. When a young person gets into legal trouble, the first significant contact they have with the justice system is an assessment interview with a Youth Offending Team (YOT). There are a number of challenges inherent to these interactions, from the power imbalance between speakers, to the difficulty of the subject matter, to the limited time available which impacts both relationship building and the ability to properly complete the assessment. From 2017-2019 the 'YOT Talk' project set out to examine the communication challenges faced by young people and practitioners in this context through the linguistic analysis of transcribed interactions and thematic analysis of questionnaire/focus group data. Nearly ten years on from the original research, this short presentation summarises some of the key findings from the study, highlighting the insights that linguistic analysis was able to provide, and makes a case for further research in the area.

Exploring linguistic behaviours as a basis for linking users across online spaces

Ralph Morton

Aston University

The last two decades have seen the development of increasingly powerful authorship analysis tools (e.g. Nini, 2024), with some progress even having been made addressing internet-level author search questions (Kredens et al 2019). Much of the current linguistic research in this area uses statistical measures that were adopted from behavioural psychology to test the similarity of texts at the word/n-gram level (Grant, 2010, 2013; Nini, 2018, Grieve et al 2019). In 2024, Woodhams and Grant demonstrated that these measures can also be used to link online users, both linguistically and behaviourally, at the feature level. The combination of linguistic and behavioural factors proved particularly powerful as authors were shown to be consistent in different ways and to different extents. This talk briefly reports on the first year and a half of the 'User Consistency in Online Spaces' project (UCOS) which builds on previous work combining linguistic authorship analysis and behavioural crime linkage to examine questions of authorial consistency in online spaces. Using data sampled from a small group of users across three distinct subreddits, a range of linguistic behaviours were coded, and their use compared across and within user and across and within space to analyse how similar user behaviour is within and across spaces. These results will be reported along with some reflections on our attempts to translate typically psychological approaches to analysis of online behaviour into something more linguistic.