

A tale of two transcripts: interpreted police interviews as evidence

Dr Krzysztof Kredens
Centre for Forensic Linguistics
Aston University

Recent related studies

- ▶ Heydon (2004) 'The Language of Police Interviewing'
- ▶ Komter (2006) found that what the record of a police interview is not just a reflection of the interaction but also a result of the interrogator's solutions to problems of coordinating the talk and the typing.
- ▶ Haworth (2009) was interested in the evidential role of police-suspect interviews.

Recent related studies

- ▶ Van Naerssen (2009) looked at leading questions in an interpreted police interview and concluded that the defendant may have been unable to participate in the legal proceedings in order to effectively present their stories?
- ▶ Nakane (2007) looked into problems in communicating the suspect's rights in interpreted police interviews.

Related studies

- ▶ Komter (2002) found that suspects' statements are in fact the police officers' written *versions* of what was said in the interrogating room.
- ▶ Rock (2001) looks in detail at a statement-taking session and the resulting statement and the changes introduced.

Original spoken
interaction

Audio tape

Official police
transcript

Reading aloud
of transcript

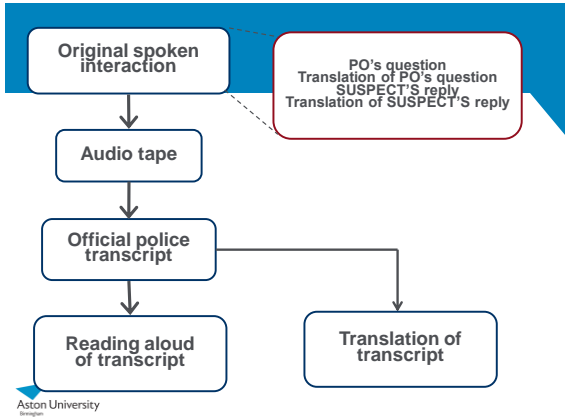
Original spoken
interaction

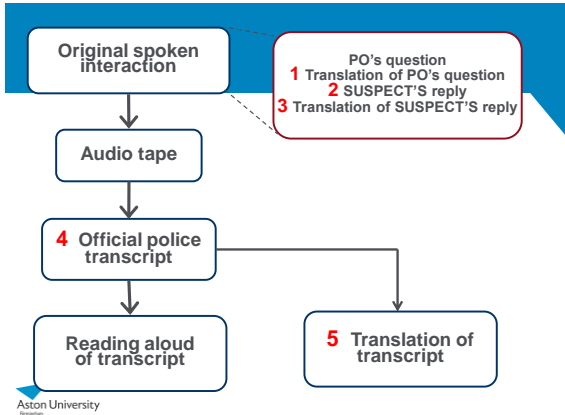
Audio tape

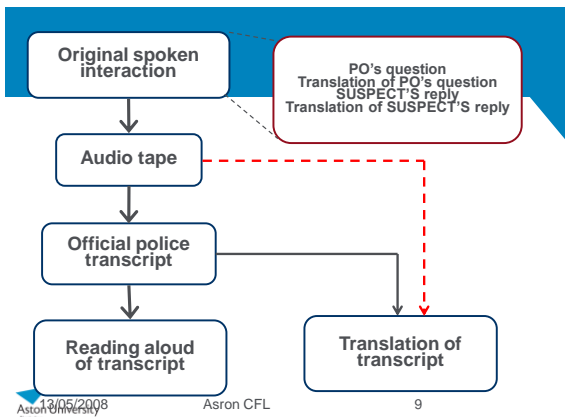
Official police
transcript

Reading aloud
of transcript

PO's question
Translation of PO's question
SUSPECT'S reply
Translation of SUSPECT'S reply







Types of problems

- ▶ Interpreted-induced.
- ▶ Resulting from transcription process.
- ▶ Resulting from (back-) translation process.



Data

Case files (ca. 2000 pages) including transcription and translation documents.
Case heard in Birmingham Crown court in January 2009.
Four defendants found guilty of manslaughter and sentenced to 7 years in prison each.



Conclusion

- ▶ Suspect's original version and transcript unlikely to be equivalent semantically
- ▶ Transcript and translation can be reasonably equivalent, BUT
- ▶ Suspect's original version and translation unlikely to be equivalent, ALTHOUGH
- ▶ Translator can in fact correct mistakes in transcript to a certain extent, WHICH IN TURN MEANS THAT
- ▶ Transcript and transcription will not in fact be equivalent...



? Solutions

- ▶ Translator works directly from tapes
- ▶ Translator works from transcript but has access to tapes
- ▶ Translator and interpreter are the same person
- ▶ Transcript sight-translated and confirmed by suspect as accurate
