

Abstract

Examination in court is a specific type of verbal activity, in which the interlocutors cooperatively HAVE to establish a correct version of a story. However, by definition, the cooperative aspect is only partially supported by the power structures in a trial. Starting with the description of the activity, the analysis aims to uncover the dynamic relationship between institution and practice, between legal structure and human interaction. By focusing on inherently dialogical features such as repetitions and reformulations and their relation to various other interactive features, e.g. feedback, communicative acts, modality, sentence type, overlap, and pauses, this thesis aims to demonstrate the mechanisms behind the realization of verbal defense strategies, the expression and projection of doubt, etc. and to formulate ideas and methods concerning the development of integrated qualitative and quantitative discourse analysis.

The perspective is cross-cultural, finding similarities and differences in the realization of functions and structures. The data consist of audio-recorded trials in Sweden and video-recorded trials in Bulgaria; the legal systems in both cultures are officially considered inquisitorial and based on Roman law.

Four major conclusions are:

1. The activity factor and the associated pre-defined purposes and roles influence the use of repeat sequences and the interaction more profoundly than the language factor.
2. Bulgarian court examinations exhibit greater power distance between the participants than do the Swedish examinations, although in both cultures the examinees behave defensively, independently of the combativeness of the examiners.
3. Integration between qualitative and quantitative analysis is productive and complementary.
4. The main purpose of a court examination is to find the truth but the actual practice of the courts in both Sweden and Bulgaria is to demonstrate and reach recordable consensus on the preferred interpretations of the truth.

Key words: Language and Law, Forensic linguistics, Credibility, Doubt, Discourse analysis, Conversation analysis, Activity analysis, Bulgarian, Swedish, Spoken language interaction, Typology, Style analysis, Repetition, Reformulation, Communicative act.

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