# Language & Communication for Police Interviewers: Training, Evaluation & Development

Project funded by the BAAL Applying Linguistics Fund
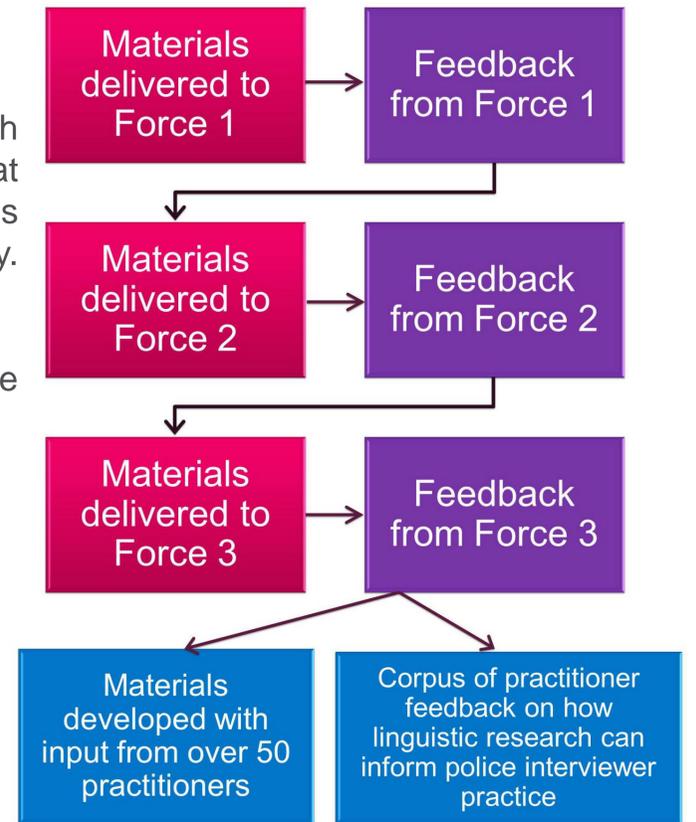
## The activity

We were awarded BAAL funding to develop training for police interviewers which applies linguistic research to professional practice. A key aspect was to ensure that our training materials were developed in collaboration with practitioners, as opposed to attempting to impose academic 'solutions' on their day-to-day reality. Format of activities:

- One-day training sessions delivered to 3 English police forces.
- Participants completed questionnaires and took part in a focus group to provide feedback.
- Materials revised in response to feedback before delivery to next force.
- Total 52 participants; all experienced interviewers of various levels up to Force Interview Advisors.

Materials delivered to Force 1 → Feedback from Force 1

Materials delivered to Force 2 → Feedback from Force 2

Materials delivered to Force 3 → Feedback from Force 3

Materials developed with input from over 50 practitioners

Corpus of practitioner feedback on how linguistic research can inform police interviewer practice

## Training content

Topics included turn-taking, pragmatics, formulations, participation frameworks, language and identity, and audience design, all illustrated with data from real interviews. The emphasis was on providing participants with practical tools and skills to apply in their day-to-day work, and a deeper understanding of the discursive roles of interviewer and interviewee. Example slides:

### Inferential frameworks

```
IE:   I was (.) hanging around for a bit?  (.) wh- I might've
      been looking for Nicky I might've been (.) •h I don't
      know what I was doing but I was- I know I was (.)
      hanging around for a bit (.2) •h when I f- (.3) clicked
      on about the taxi firm round the corner?

IR:   mmm=

IE:   =and then (.) that's when I went round that corner.

IR:   right.

IE:   (.7) °yeah°

IR:   (.6) so:(.4) possibly CCTV would show you maybe moving
      around quite a lot.

IE:   yea:h °possibly° yeah.
```

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### 'we' vs. 'you'

```
IR:   the officer's received injuries that amount to,
      what we call ABH and that's bruising, which we
      accept could have happened during the struggle,
      but they still happened during the struggle with
      yourself, and, okay! the injuries w- you might
      not regard as serious, in terms of the fact that
      it's gonnu put him in extreme pain. but they still
      amount to an ABH
                                        (IV 5-11-2_1 :343-351)
```

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### 'Police-speak'

IR1: how much had you had to drink, including yesterday evening up until this morning- how much had you had to drink before this incident took place.

IR1: okay. she then said that you became aggressive, started moaning about a Christmas present, and then left the premises. is that right?

IR1: okay. she then said that after being pushed away from committing or tryna carry out the oral sex on her that you moved your hips up to her face, and asked for her to com- to err, to commit oral sex on you.

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### Formulation

```
IR:   and then what happened?
      (.)
IE:   they said "ah s- can we come back to your
      house" (.) and I said "ok fine it's not
      very often I    get company"(.)didn't have
      a problem with it
      (5)
IR:   so how had you felt about the night so far
      with=
IE:   =okay (.) no problems at all
      (3)
IR:   and you'd said yes because you were w- w-
      enjoying the c[ompany]
IE:   [yeah][I felt safe]
                                        ('Angela')
```

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## Example feedback:

It has provided a different perspective, provided new concepts, and an improved understanding …It was also an excellent mix of academic and practitioner based knowledge and experience.

As a practitioner it is always good for me to listen to Academics. Definitely had 'real life' value. Thanks

It was interesting to have it pointed out the sort of "Police" language we use without considering whether the interviewee actually understands it; I always try to use language they would understand, but realise now that sometimes I don't.

More than anything, it is nice to know what a linguist makes of it, rather than training written by police officers.

## Outcomes

The response from practitioners was overwhelmingly positive. In response to the question 'What parts of today's training will be most useful for your own interviewing practice?', every linguistic feature was mentioned by at least 2 participants. 25/52 participants indicated, or directly stated, that they could identify nothing that was 'least useful'. The aspect with the most positive feedback was pragmatics, specifically the gap between locutionary force and illocutionary act. This project will now form the basis of a bid for larger-scale Knowledge Transfer funding to incorporate linguistics directly into police interviewer training programmes in future.

Aston University Birmingham

Dr Kate Haworth
k.j.haworth@aston.ac.uk

Dr Nicci MacLeod
n.macleod1@aston.ac.uk

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