The Suspect’s Statement

What suspects tell the police may become a crucial piece of evidence when the case comes to court. But what happens to ‘the suspect’s statement’ when it is written down by the police? Based on a unique set of data from over fifteen years’ research, Martha Komter examines the trajectory of the suspect’s statement from the police interrogation through to the trial. She shows how the suspect’s statement is elicited and written down in the police report, how this police report both represents and differs from the original talk in the interrogation, and how it is quoted and referred to in court. The analyses cover interactions in multiple settings, with documents that link one interaction to the next, providing insights into the interactional and documentary foundations of the criminal process and, more generally, into the construction, character and uses of documents in institutional settings.

Martha Komter is research fellow at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement (NSCR), Amsterdam. Her research interests include interaction in institutional settings, such as job interviews, courtroom interaction and police interrogations. She has published widely on these themes, and is author of Conflict and Cooperation in Job Interviews: A Study of Talk, Tasks, and Ideas (1991) and Dilemmas in the Courtroom: A Study of Trials of Violent Crime in the Netherlands (1998).
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The Suspect’s Statement

*Talk and Text in the Criminal Process*

Martha Komter

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Paul Drew, Susan Ehrlich, Henk Elffers, Heimrich Kanis, Tom Koole, Marijke Malsch, Harrie Mazeland, Hedwig te Molder, Peter van der Laan, Annerie Smolders, Wilbert Spoooren and Marigo Teeuwen, for their insightful comments on earlier versions of the chapters in this book; and to the anonymous suspects, police interrogators, defence lawyers, prosecutors and judges who gave permission for their talk to be recorded and their texts to be studied. And, finally, I am grateful to the NSCR for offering me this stimulating work environment.

This study has been supported by NWO, the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (project 360-70-240).
Transcription Conventions

The transcription conventions depart from the standard Jeffersonian transcript notation for reasons of readability, and because the fragments are translated from Dutch (translation by the author). Those features of the standard transcript notation have been preserved that are compatible with the translation. For the original Dutch text, see Appendix B, which can be found online at www.cambridge.org

P police interrogator/public prosecutor
P¹ interrogating police officer
P² reporting police officer
S suspect
J judge
D defence lawyer

full stop.
comma,
question mark?

underlining

brackets

(3)
dash-

. . . a few words
omitted

= latched utterances

▲ gaze direction moving upward
▼ gaze direction moving down

::: colons

“yes” prolongation of prior sound

spoken in a soft voice

() unclear utterance

((double brackets)) transcriber's note

shading typing simultaneous to the talk

¦dotted line editing simultaneous to the talk

x
Transcription Conventions

**bold**

(13, N)  text of the police report

interrogation or trial number 13, of the ‘new’ (O = old) materials

**Disclaimer**

The names of the participants featuring in the excerpts (police officers, judges, prosecutors, defence lawyers, suspects, witnesses, etc.) and other identifying features (times, dates, places, etc.) have been changed.