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.

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The Suspect’s Statement

*Talk and Text in the Criminal Process*

Martha Komter

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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
P¹
P²
S
J
D

full stop.
comma,
question mark?
underlining

brackets
\brackets

(3)
dash-
. . . a few words
omitted
=

▲
▼

::: colons

"yes"

((double brackets))

shading
dotted line

= police interrogator/public prosecutor
interrogating police officer
reporting police officer
suspect
judge
defence lawyer
falling intonation
slightly rising intonation
rising intonation
emphasis
overlap
pause of three seconds etc.
sudden cut-off

latched utterances
gaze direction moving upward
gaze direction moving down
prolongation of prior sound
spoken in a soft voice
unclear utterance
transcriber’s note
typing simultaneous to the talk
editing simultaneous to the talk
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.