The value of linguistics in assessing potential threats in an airport setting

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25.1 Introduction

This chapter exemplifies linguistic research which engages directly with a context where conflict is a palpable possibility: the airport. Airport contexts came to be recognised as sites for potential terrorist and other mal-intentioned activities following an increase in airliner hijacking in the 1960s (Ravich, 2007). Various security measures have been implemented in response, including the introduction of Air Marshals (AMs) from the 1960s onwards and Behavioural Detection Officers (BDOs) following 9/11. The primary role of an AM is to prevent an aircraft from becoming a weapon of destruction (Karber, 2002). Depending on the airport, some AMs are also tasked with airport surveillance. This means adopting a role similar to that of a plain-clothed BDO: namely, reporting instances of suspicious behaviour upwards to airport security personnel (Price and Forrest, 2012, p.160). As part of the decision-making process, uniformed security personnel, screeners, etc., can then make use of chat-downs. Chat-downs are a verbal equivalent of the pat-down (Swaine, 2011), and are akin to a (semi-)formal interview, where passengers are asked to supply details respecting their destination, purpose for flying, duration of trip, etc. AMs and plain-clothed BDOs do not have this kind of overt authority when determining whether to refer upwards, of course. Instead, they have to rely upon more subtle (usually, undercover) means of extracting information from a particular Person of Interest (POI).

This chapter will spell out why it is as important to have linguistic as well as behavioural insights in this field of work, especially given undercover officers’ reliance on clandestine elicitation techniques. A reliance on such techniques is inevitable, of course, if undercover officers are to retrieve the information they need while camouflaging their objective within an interpersonal veil (so as not to “tip off” the target). It raises a number of ethical issues, nonetheless. These include whether it is ever justifiable to train others to use lies or deception to gain information from X (Wilson, 2002, p.8) and counter positions arguing that such deception can be appropriate “when […] motivated by a genuine desire to keep others safe” (Wilson, 2002, p.8). This chapter does not aim to present a theoretical thesis on the ethical costs and benefits of such work. Suffice it to say, our role as trainer-researchers is not to train anyone in the art of deception. Rather, we train them to first notice (clusters of) indicators,
which may be indicative of others’ deceptive behaviour, and where possible (in)validate them as a means of determining when to flag POIs upwards (see Sections 25.3–25.3.2). A related ethical issue worth highlighting – as worthy of greater debate beyond what is possible here – is that such detection is preventative in nature. Simply put, the aim is to identify people as POIs pre-event: cf. those who are known to have committed a criminal act post-event (Zanotti, 2012, p.103). As Zanotti (2012, p.104) notes, the need for such preventative measures – and the ethical issues that arise in consequence – are best considered against the growing (seemingly global) need to stay vigilant for any behaviour that marks an individual out for “further surveillance” and/or questioning (see Section 25.4).

For reasons stipulated by the relevant security and airport agencies we work with, this chapter cannot provide a detailed account of the techniques used by AMs or BDOs in a particular airport. Rather, our focus is on the (more general) benefits to be gained by focusing on the linguistics of interaction in such settings, especially when those linguistic techniques are being used to engage in seemingly mutually co-operative interactions with strangers (albeit for transactional ends). As a means of demonstrating the level of interactional skills that airport personnel need if they are to extract useful information successfully and subtly, we begin the chapter with an analysis of the conflict caused by a botched interaction between undercover officers and a legitimate passenger (see Section 25.2). This section draws in particular upon the concepts of:

- **face** – as a dynamically-negotiated image of self that, because it is shaped by interlocutors, can be withdrawn as readily as it is given (Goffman, 1967, pp.5–14), and thus damaged as well as enhanced
- **facework** – as the “actions taken by a person to make what [s/]he is doing consistent with face” (Goffman, 1967, p.5), be it to achieve face enhancement, face threat or both

Most readers will be aware of the lay notion of “losing face”, akin to X sustaining reputational damage (that is, a diminished self-image), as well as related concepts such as “saving face” and “honouring” face, akin to X seeking to restore, maintain or enhance one’s own or another’s image/reputation. Early linguistic notions of face(work) and politeness share some similarities with such lay interpretations. For example, Brown and Levinson (1987, p.61) explained that:

> since people can be expected to defend their face if threatened, and in defending their own to threaten others’ faces, it is in general in every participant’s best interest to maintain each other’s face.

They suggest, further, that participants may choose to include linguistic devices that explicitly signal their attendance to others’ positive and/or negative face. Positive face, here, relates to a person’s “want” or desire to be valued/liked/appreciated, etc., and negative face relates to a person’s “want” or desire for autonomy (i.e. being free from imposition). Positive politeness linguistic devices thus include “noticing H[earers]; exaggerating approval of/interest in [them]; seeking agreement; avoiding disagreement; presupposing/asserting common ground; joking, etc”. (Archer et al., 2012, p.86). Negative politeness linguistic devices, in contrast, might include mitigating requests “with apologies for interfering or transgressing, with linguistic and non-linguistic deference, with hedges on the illocutionary force of the act” and/or “other softening mechanisms that give H a face-saving line of escape” and/or sense that his/her “response is not coerced” (Archer et al., 2012, p.70).
As Archer et al. (2012, p.86) go on to note, “how much […] mitigation” interlocutors actually engage in will depend on a number of factors, including “the social, familial, and/or power relationship between them”. However, in some cases, like the botched interaction we discuss in Section 25.2, interlocutors appear to engage in facework that is decidedly more face-threatening than it is face-saving (or face-enhancing). Researchers have developed linguistic impoliteness models to account for this. They include Culpeper’s (1996) anatomy of impoliteness, which effectively flips the Brown and Levinson model to capture, for example, positive and negative impoliteness. Positive impoliteness devices include “ignoring the other; being disinterested, unconcerned, unsympathetic; not using identity markers (e.g. address forms) where they are expected (or using inappropriate identity markers for the context); using obscure or secretive language; seeking disagreement; using taboo words; and calling the other names” (Archer et al., 2012, p.91). Negative impoliteness devices include “frightening, condescending, scorning or ridiculing, being contemptuous, not treating the other seriously, belittling the other, invading the other’s space and putting the other’s indebtedness on record” (Archer et al., 2012, p.91).

These early models of linguistic (im)politeness have been criticised and revised over the years: in part so as to be able to better consider (i) the hearer’s uptake of the speaker’s intent, (ii) the situational context, and (iii) how (im)politeness can be constructed and countered over stretches of dialogue (hence the need to look beyond single utterances only). Some of these revisions have made greater use of Goffman’s (1967, p.14) distinction between “intentional”, “incidental” and “accidental” face threat. Intentional face threats equate to those acts that have been undertaken “maliciously and spitefully”, with the aim of causing face damage (Goffman, 1967, p.14). Incidental face threats equate to face damage that, although unplanned on the speaker’s part, was nonetheless undertaken in the knowledge that it might have (potentially) offensive consequences. Accidental face threats equate to face damage that the speaker was responsible for: however, they were unintended and, moreover, would have been avoided had the speaker foreseen their potential for offense. We make use of all of the aforementioned approaches when analysing the botched interaction between two undercover officers and the passenger they apprehended (see Section 25.2). We then move on to outline a training programme for AMs (and other airport personnel) devised by the EIA Group.1 This programme adopts a two-tier approach, in that personnel are initially trained to identify POIs, and then scan an individual’s audio and visual communication channels during a casual or formal engagement as a means of identifying inconsistencies in their behaviour that first led to them being identified as a POI (see Section 25.3.1). Of particular importance for this paper is that they are trained in how to use elicitation techniques: to give them the communicative resources to check whether any noted inconsistencies can be accounted for, thanks to the newly elicited information, or whether they remain inconsistencies requiring further investigation by others (see Section 25.3.2). We will show that, when used well, such elicitation allows for the subtle extraction of information during what, from the perspective of an AM’s (or BDO’s) fellow passengers, equates to “an apparently normal and innocent conversation” (Department of Defence, 2014), given the context. Indeed, Section 25.3.3 outlines an airport-based study we conducted within a European international airport (that cannot be identified explicitly), which exhibited a high correlation between the quality of “low risk” but “often very hard to detect” elicitation techniques (Hadnagy, 2011, p.56, Watson et al., 2014) used by AMs, and the quantity and quality of data gathered by them during their brief engagements with passengers (Lansley et al., 2016). We will also explain the consequences of these elicitation techniques from a face(work) perspective (see especially Sections 25.3.2 and 25.3.4).
25.2 When – and why – botched conversations lead to conflict

The interaction drawn upon in this section took place at Los Angeles LAX Airport. It was filmed by a passenger (P), using his mobile phone, and uploaded to YouTube on 9 July 2013. The clip captures an altercation between three males: two undercover officers (O1 and O2) and a passenger (JL). JL had been detained by O1 and O2 as he was about to leave the airport. This physical act impacted upon his want to act without imposition (see Brown and Levinson’s [1987] notion of negative face and Culpeper’s [1996] example of negative impoliteness relating to invading the other’s space, as outlined in Section 25.1). JL subsequently responded negatively to the undercover officers’ methods, even after being informed by O1 and O2 that they were plain-clothed officers. By so doing, he impacted upon what Brown and Levinson (1987) have labelled “positive face”, i.e. their want that they and/or their actions be approved of (see also Section 25.1, above).

The Appendix provides a transcription of the part of the interaction where JL attempts to ignore O1 and O2 as well as his frustration with them when this proved impossible. JL repeatedly made one appeal throughout this part of their exchange: that a uniformed LAPD officer come to the airport (U1, U7, U12, U16, U22, U28, U30). He also pre-modified his reference to police officers using “real” on two occasions:

- at the beginning, when making clear his “need” for an actual police officer (U1)
- towards the end, as part of a simile addressed to the gathered crowd, where he alleged O1 and O2 “flashed their badges at [him] like they were real police officers” (U32)

JL’s assumption that O1 and O2 did not possess the same authority to ask him questions as uniformed LAPD officers was subsequently confirmed explicitly in U22, when he directed them to “give [him] a uniformed officer and [he would provide them with] all the information [they] want”. Although demonstrating a conditional willingness to co-operate, the implication nonetheless impacted once again upon the undercover officers’ positive face. JL was aggrieved, in addition, that O1 had physically “grabbed” him (U27), as well as confused as to why they were “touching” (U1) and “putting [their] hands on” him, as signalled by his repetition of the why-interrogative in U3, for example.

JL’s additional why-interrogatives are also significant when it comes to explaining the conflict between them (as well as the level of negative face threat experienced by JL). They called into question the undercover officers’ right to:

a. request his date of birth (U18)

b. ask how much money he was carrying at this time (U29)

c. focus upon him specifically (U33)

A fifth significant feature, in facework terms, is JL electing to directly address P, and hence the camera, more than he directly addressed O1 and O2 (eight utterances as opposed to five and five respectively), with the result that he mostly referred to them in the third person. He also ignored O1’s requests for his date of birth (U4, U6), preferring instead to reiterate – to camera – his need for an LAPD officer. In fact, it was not until U11 that JL even acknowledged one of the undercover officers’ utterances when on camera. The snubbing of O1 and O2 as interlocutors in such ways means that JL was repeatedly engaging in positive impoliteness (see Section 25.1, above). Evidence that the undercover officers found the snubbing behaviour face-damaging include O1 deliberately moving into JL’s personal/intimate space.
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(Hall, 1966) so that he was optimally visible, prior to making a statement that, at that point, was overtly self-evident: “I’m here Jason” (see U2). This invasion of JL’s space effectively meant that O1 was responding to JL’s positive impoliteness with negative impoliteness of his own. This undoubtedly served to increase (rather than diminish) the tension between them.

O2’s direction to JL to “come outside […] and talk” (U10) and to come with him so that, together, they might “find” a uniformed officer (U13) are indicative of a desire to converse with JL away from the growing crowd (whilst acceding to JL’s wishes for a uniformed officer). O1’s rhetorical question to JL some 13 turns later was far less considerate: “are you happy with your audience?” (U26). The latter term, in particular, suggests that O1 may have been interpreting JL’s behaviour as a performance of (rather than genuine) exasperation. Such questions will have had implications for JL’s negative face (his want that his actions be unimpeded). His subsequent refusals, in turn, impacted upon the officers’ negative and positive face wants: by undermining their power to impose their will on JL, and thus their seeming ability to do their role well. The refusals were made more emphatic, moreover, by being repeated (“I’m not going anywhere”, U11) and via the inclusion of religious references (“as God is my witness”, U14, U17).

JL’s unequivocal refusals were ignored by O2. Instead, he reiterated O1’s earlier request for JL’s date of birth (U18). When JL queried “why [he] should tell” him this information, O2 then used what, in context, was bound to prove provocative: “so I can run you” (U19), meaning check whether JL was known by the authorities for any reason. JL’s echoic reaction in U20 – “so you can run me” – alludes to his level of incredulity. In response, O2 asked JL a deliberately face-damaging, alternative question, in order to provide JL with a choice between two equally damming options that assumed he had previously engaged in criminal activity: “probation” or “parole” (U22). JL did not pick up on the question at that time, but he was careful to point out repeatedly, in a later utterance to O1 (U30), that he had “never” “not been in trouble a day in [his] life” (x3).

As the YouTube clip reveals, this altercation was eventually resolved. Indeed, JL later reported to P that “they were doing their job”, but that “it just felt strange” and he “just kinda got nervous”. “Doing their job” is an interesting post-evaluation, in facework terms, as it suggests that JL now understood the undercover officers to have been engaging in incidental facework (Goffman, 1967). As we noted in Section 25.1, this means that the face damage he experienced was unplanned, but was still undertaken (by O1 and O2) in the knowledge that it might have (potentially) offensive consequences for JL. That it shook him up is evident from JL’s explanations of feeling “strange” and getting “nervous”, even at this point. There is evidence to suggest, moreover, that the altercation between them had become somewhat more personal than we would usually expect from incidental facework (cf. Goffman, 1967). By way of illustration, “so I can run you” (U20) and its follow-up question – “are you on probation or parole?” (U22) – seem to have been purposefully chosen by O1 to imply JL was the type to engage in criminality. We think it facile to point out that there are more effective ways for such officers to do their job. Instead, we focus (below) on how a European training programme for AMs and other airport personnel is providing them with interaction-based training as well as behaviour detection training, thereby enabling them to avoid such conflict when possible and, when it becomes unavoidable, to better manage that conflict.

25.3 Behavioural detection in airport settings

The use of behavioural detection in airport settings has proven to be somewhat controversial in recent years, not least because of fears that BDOs, in particular, were undertaking a form
Value of linguistics in assessing threats of ethnic and racial profiling (Bangert, 2003, Hawk, 2003). This should not be taken to mean that there are no behavioural indicators, which can be helpful in such settings. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that individuals with mal-intent (e.g. suicide bombers or those engaged in hostile surveillance towards a future attack) will generally feel high levels of stress and thus show visible signs of anxiety (Silke, 2010) and related self-regulatory behaviour (Lawson et al., 2013, Maccario, 2013). As Section 25.2 reveals, airport personnel must nonetheless avoid simplistic hypotheses such as someone with mal-intent looking a certain way, or conversely, signs of stress, nervousness or anxiety automatically equating to mal-intent on the part of an individual. The latter myth is particular dangerous, in an airport setting, given that:

Major airports are stressful environments at the best of times. Missed connections, flight delays and cancellations, missing luggage, tiredness, sleep deprivation, crowded environments, long queues and so on all have impacts. Indeed, for many (if not most) being stressed and anxious is an entirely routine experience at a busy airport.

(Silke, 2010, p.9)

Based on Section 25.2, the behaviour that undercover officers can trigger, because of the way in which they have approached a particular passenger, can also be added to this list.

The EIA Group have recently participated in the development of a programme for Behaviour Detection with senior operational staff from an international airport and related intelligence/security agencies (Lansley et al., 2017). The programme initially trained AMs to better identify and investigate inconsistencies in a POI’s behaviour, before being expanded to include additional airport and security agency personnel. The programme adopted a two-step process. Participants first learned how to identify a POI from a distance based on a cluster of behaviours using their Observe, Target, Engage, Respond (OTER) system (Lansley et al., 2017). This leads to them being able to scan a POI’s facial, gestural and body movements and/or their voice and verbal content, using the Six Channel Analysis in Real-time (SCANR) method. They were then shown how to use elicitation techniques to (in)validate hypotheses respecting why that individual may be exhibiting particular behaviour(s) (cf. Silke, 2010, p.9): for example, “funnel sequences”, which start with free-narrative before moving into more specific verification probes (Hargie, 2011, p.127, Kahn and Cannell, 1957, Miles, 2013). Sections 3.1 and 3.2 provide an outline of both aspects of the EIA training programme.

25.3.1 SCANR

The OTER system includes 49 criteria and a cluster algorithm, though these are classified for security purposes. The SCANR method is not sensitive so can be shared and discussed. It prioritises 27 research-corroborated criteria relating to six channels of communication (see Table 25.1).³

The FACE channel criteria are focused on inconsistencies or anomalies in a POI’s facial expressions. They draw, in particular, upon differences that have been noted with respect to the facial muscles involved plus the duration, symmetry, synchrony and profile of performed versus felt emotions (Ekman and Frank, 1993). For instance, surprise may be performed rather than genuinely felt when an individual raises their brows and keeps them raised for some time, as felt surprise is a momentary emotion that typically lasts for a second or two only (Ekman and Friesen, 1975). The BODY channel prioritises features that have been “shown to be of value in emotion” as well as “veracity judgments” (Vrij et al., 1996). As Table 25.1 highlights, they include “micro-gestures or gestural slips indicative of
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Table 25.1 The 27 SCAnR criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FACE</td>
<td>Facial Action Coding Scheme (FACS) anomaly; Duration; Symmetry;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronisation; Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BODY</td>
<td>Gestural slip; Illustrators; Manipulators; Tension; Eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANS</td>
<td>Heart rate; Galvonomic; Temperature; Blood pressure; Breathing; Digestion;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENT</td>
<td>Tense; Distancing; (adapted) Criteria Based Content Analysis (CBCA) criteria;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Verbal slip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOICE</td>
<td>Pitch; Volume; Tone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERACTIONAL STYLE</td>
<td>Flow; Evasiveness/ambiguity; Impression management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“leakage”; evidence of change(s) in illustrator behaviour and/or manipulators; evidence of (muscle) tension in the body; and changes in eye behaviour (blinks, eye gaze/movement/closure, etc.)” (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.237). In this training context, psychophysiological criteria relate to those aspects of a POI’s autonomic nervous system (ANS) that are observable in real-time, without using technological aids. This might be changes in skin colour (see the galvonomic criteria in Table 25.1, above), breathing rate, pupil dilation, etc.

Criteria prioritised within the linguistic CONTENT channel include changes in tense or inappropriate tense usage – as when someone uses the past tense in respect to a missing loved one in a public appeal. By way of illustration, when US citizen Susan Smith made a public appeal for help in finding her four children in 1994 after they were apparently kidnapped, she stated “My children wanted me. They needed me. And now I can’t help them”. As Newman (2013, p.201) notes, “The fact that Smith used the past tense in this context suggested to trained FBI agents that she already viewed them as dead”. It later transpired that she had, in fact, drowned them in a lake, and fabricated the kidnapping story in a bid to cover her actions. The SCAnR system also takes note of potential distancing language, as indicated by pronoun usage (such as fewer or more of the self-references “I”, “me” and “my”, depending on context), qualifiers, minimisers and other epistemic modality markers (Bond and Lee, 2005, Newman et al., 2003, ten Brinke and Porter, 2012). The third CONTENT criterion draws upon (while reversing) specific criteria drawn from the CBCA system (see Archer and Lansley, 2015). CBCA criteria are used, currently, to assess the veracity of statements in criminal courts in several countries, based on the notion that truth-tellers providing accounts of self-experienced events tend to achieve higher CBCA scores than liars (Amado et al., 2015). SCAnR users, however, are trained to notice only those indicators that suggest that an individual’s self-experienced account:

(i) lacks coherence, (ii) lacks unstructured, spontaneous reproduction, (iii) includes inappropriate detail, especially relative to the core of the story and what we know about memory […] (iv) exhibits contextual vagueness (as opposed to being characterised by contextual embedding), (v) is devoid of descriptions of interactions (including [recorded] verbatim conversations), (vi) is devoid of admissions of poor memory recall/spontaneous correction of memory errors (without prompting) and/or self-deprecation, and (vii) is devoid of accounts of mental states (self and other).

(Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.238)
Criteria within the VOICE channel are focused on detecting changes in respect to the intensity (i.e. volume level), pitch (range) and tonal quality of the voice. We might note, for example, how a voice trails off in ways that suggest a lack of commitment on the speaker’s part. Alternatively, a voice may increase in general pitch level and/or be affected by some evident vocal tension that may be a result of felt emotion (e.g. fear or anger). The channel relating to INTERACTIONAL STYLE shares some overlap with the VOICE criteria in that it is designed to capture “changes to the rhythm (or ‘flow’) of the interaction because of features such as (filled) pauses, stutters, disfluencies, response latency, and so on” (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.238). Trainees are also advised to note any evidence of evasiveness, ambiguity or equivocation (Wright Whelan et al., 2013) as well as other forms of impression management. Evasion, ambiguity, etc., are deemed to be relevant for several reasons. An individual can pretend to provide a co-operative answer that is nonetheless deceptive, as it equates to inducing the hearer/audience to believe/accept something that is false. They can also attempt to control the flow of information by: answering a question that is different to the one asked, answering the question but in such a way that they do not fully commit (epistemically) to the answer, challenging the questioner’s right to ask the question or refusing to answer at all (Galazinski, 2000, p.70). Impression management tactics are deemed to be relevant, in particular, given the (widely cited) hypothesis that liars will tend to “put more effort into making a convincing impression than truth tellers” (Vrij, 2008, p.194). Such tactics might include using “religious belief/values/character references, credibility labels […] proof/evidence frame[s] (Houston et al., 2012), representational frames relating to the Other, inappropriate politeness, repetition, etc”. (Archer and Lansley, 2015, pp.237–8).

Following a period of foundation training and directed reading on the OTER process, trainees then engage in an intensive SCANR course made up of pre-tests, theory, role-play, fieldwork and post-tests. Trainees are first drilled on how to recognise the 27 criteria. They learn “from the outset that they are not to assume these (or other behaviours) map incorrovertibly to deception” (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.232). In order to dissuade trainees from jumping to conclusions based on inadequate data – a single criterion like (a decline in) self-references, for example – the SCANR method schools trainees to maximize their observational capabilities by:

1. ignoring any behaviours that seem consistent with ABC, that is, the Account being given by an individual, that individual’s apparent/emerging Baseline and/or the macro or micro Context
2. paying attention, instead, to Points of Interest (PIns), which represent an inconsistency in respect to ABC
3. responding only to clusters of three PIins across two or more of the six communication channels

Point 1 is in line with the belief that, generally speaking, people are better at detecting truths than they are lies: see, for example, Vrij’s (2008) assessment that 67 percent of people can correctly evaluate truths (while only 44 percent can correctly evaluate lies). Point 2 is an attempt to “free up” trainees’ time, as well as mental faculties so that they can “prioritise those occasions when an individual demonstrates inconsistencies across [the] communication channels” (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.236). A focus upon multiple cues in point 3, from words, body, face, etc., in combination with the baseline method (see point 1), is believed in turn to boost a trainee’s confidence respecting the PIins identified (cf. Porter and ten Brinke, 2010). Points 1 to 3 are based, further, on the belief that “when people lie – they
leak the truth” (Lansley, 2017, p.30): that is to say, they experience and thus potentially leak more indicators of cognitive load and/or emotions (fear, duping delight, guilt) when lying than they do when telling the truth (Ekman, 2004).

As PIns based upon behavioural observation are only points of interest at this stage, trainees are advised of the need to engage in further probing, when possible, using elicitation techniques (see Section 25.3.2). It can often be advantageous for AMs and plain-clothed BDOs to undertake this probing themselves – albeit under the veil of small talk – given that, to most passengers, they will appear to be engaging in “simple, light, airy conversation” (Hadnagy, 2011, p.58). In such cases, trainees are “advised to pay especially close attention to a person’s cross-channel behavior” for up to seven seconds following one of their elicitation prompts (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.232), in line with the belief that this behaviour is likely to be “directly associated with the stimulus” (Houston et al., 2012, p.30). What would still need to be ascertained is why the prompt is triggering that behaviour in that individual (hence the need for specific elicitation training).

25.3.2 Elicitation training

The elicitation approach within SCAnR has similarities to and drew from Controlled Cognitive Engagement (CCE): an approach developed for uniformed staff working within airport contexts (Ormerod and Dando, 2014). As CCE is usually undertaken by authorised screening agents, it is akin to a semi-formal interview, albeit one that involves “a short phase of rapport-building followed by cycles of information-gathering and veracity-testing” (Ormerod and Dando, 2014, p.78) using non-scripted/unanticipated questions (Vrij et al., 2009). According to the CCE creators, the use of unanticipated questions helps “to raise the cognitive load faced by deceptive passengers” (Ormerod and Dando, 2014, p.78), while the rapport aspect helps to keep legitimate passengers’ cognitive load to a minimum. Based on our analysis in Section 25.2, we contend that when a level of rapport is missing and/or when unanticipated questions are designed to be too provocative, as in the case of O2’s “are you on probation or on parole?” (see U22), the consequences will be face-damaging for even the most genuine of passengers. The undercover status of plain-clothed BDOs and AMs tends to mean, in addition, that they do not have the necessary visible authority required for (and thus are best to avoid) overt security screening (i.e. chat-down protocols). What they need, instead, are more subtle means of being able to extract information from POIs. If they do engage passengers in a casual conversation, then their engagement with them is best kept short – a few minutes in duration, in the main – so as to avoid triggering suspicion in their interlocutor (cf. Section 25.2; see also Section 25.4). The EIA Group thus train AMs (and other airport and security personnel working in high stakes environments) to use a combination of methods by which to initiate and develop an engagement. Trainees learn how to make use of “ice breaker” topics, according to various time periods: specifically, the distant-to-immediate past, present and imminent-to-longer-term future. This flexible time component was factored, randomly, into the EIA approach as accounts derived from remembering/recalling a genuinely-lived experience can differ significantly in content and quality from fabricated or fictitious accounts (Undeutsch, 1967). The topics – Family/friends, Occupation/skills, Recreation, Current events, Education/qualifications, Dreams/plans (the FORCED mnemonic) – are designed to be easy to engage with as part of small talk. Indeed, most are in line with the types of conversation that non-native speakers of a language learn when familiarising themselves with ways of interacting in an airport setting (see Archer et al., forthcoming). They provide an effective means for AMs to establish a POI’s baseline behaviour nonetheless (see Section 25.3.3).
While there are some similarities with the CCE devised by Ormerod and Dando (2014, p.79), there are also important differences. The use of scientifically validated, multi-channel cues does not feature in CCE; instead, interviewers are looking more generally at behavioural change that may result from cognitive load. Trainees are also encouraged to make use of the full range of elicitations, from hints through to commands (see Figure 25.1).

EIA’s “PERFECT” mnemonic alerts AMs (BDOs, and other airport personnel) to particular disclosing and developing techniques: making Provocative statements, Encouraging complaining, using Repetition, engaging in Flattery, using Erroneous statements/naiveté, Criticising and Testing perceived/reported reality (including by feigning disbelief). Elicitation types – like engaging in flattery, encouraging complaining, feigning naiveté, expressing sympathy and signalling a mutual interest – all make use of positive face (Brown and Levinson, 1987): they are designed to appeal – albeit in different ways – to the potential POIs want to be approved of, to be liked, to be deemed useful. Hadnagy (2011, p.67) suggests that “subtle flattery can coax a person into a conversation that might not have taken place”, for example. As it is potentially more difficult to use flattery when meeting strangers for the first time, naiveté can be an especially good opener in an airport context. An AM might implicitly signal their need (or even explicitly ask) for help from the potential POI, for example (see Sections 25.3.3 and 25.3.4).

Elicitation techniques such as using provocative or even purposefully erroneous statements, feigning disbelief and criticism each have the potential to threaten (instead of appealing to) an individual’s positive face or to threaten the AM’s own face: but deliberately so, so as to bring about a response from him or her. This is in line with the belief that most people seem to want “to prove they are correct”, when challenged and/or feel compelled to “correct wrong statements when they hear them” (Hadhagy, 2011, p.69). Using false statements can be especially useful in some contexts, as they provide users with a way of testing how knowledgeable X is (respecting Y). In an airport context, this may relate to particular places they claim to have visited previously. Provocative statements, in contrast, can serve to identify a common other, which the AM can share with the POI (see, for example, I don’t like the way they make you queue for ages to get through security here).

The above techniques also subsume others, such as appealing to X’s ego, expressing mutual interest, volunteering information and assuming knowledge. By way of illustration, volunteering information relies on the Principle of Reciprocity (Cialdini, 1993) i.e. the idea that people feel beholden to repay another’s (especially positive) actions towards them in some way. Assuming knowledge can include quoting reported facts (as if they are already in the public domain, and thus “known”) and making oblique references in order to provoke a more specific response from the POI. The latter is based on the belief that people will tend to transition from the more general to the more specific when conversing. In line with this, Meloy and Mohandie (2013, p.392) suggest that elicitation strategies can be especially effective when used in ways that “move from the least anxious and threatening content to the most”, via open-ended questions, followed by closed questions that require specific, verifiable answers. We pick up on some of the trainees’ own elicitation techniques when initiating conversations with passengers in Sections 25.3.3 and 25.3.4.

Figure 25.1 Elicitation scale
25.3.3 A case study demonstrating the effectiveness of AM training

In 2016, we undertook an airport-based study with the support of a European intelligence agency and an international airport, as part of an AM training programme (Lansley et al., 2016). The aspect of the study we report on here was designed to test the interactional proficiency of those professionals receiving AM training. Their levels of English varied from conversational to fluent. Prior to the study, the AMs received 36 hours of training spread over four days. On the fifth day, they were taken to a European international airport, so that they might apply their training in context. They were directed to operate undercover as passengers, travelling in pairs, and to remain in role throughout. Working in pairs ensured that one AM could adopt an active role, while the other observed. The role of the latter was to note (covertly) how many and which types of elicitation probes were used during their partner’s interaction with a passenger (or passengers) – with examples, where possible – so that they could record them post-engagement. Covert devices were also used to capture the conversations, thereby enabling us to (in)validate the AMs’ written observations. The pairs were instructed to engage passengers nominated by the research team, and were given a maximum of 25 minutes to obtain as much of the following from them as possible:

- name
- nationality
- origin and destination
- verified information connected to two of the FORCED topics, one covering the past and one covering the future
- mobile phone number
- PIN for phone
- prohibited items they had carried through airports in the past
- prohibited items they were carrying now

The above carried points, weighted to the degree of difficulty that we expected. As well as engaging with real passengers, secret service security personnel (unknown to the AMs) were used as (what is referred to in security contexts as) a “red team” or “penetration team”. The red team, in this case, was instructed to gather intelligence information relating to the landside Departures areas, and to get unauthorised objects through security (the overall aim of such activities is to improve the effectiveness of the airport’s surveillance and security measures). The AMs knew only that POIs were possibly operating, together or individually, in the airport. AMs who believed they had found members of the red team were thus instructed to refer those individuals to the research team.

Because of the (i) sensitive nature of the data gleaned and (ii) stipulated need to ensure the anonymity of both AMs and red team members, we cannot analyse any specific interactions in detail in this section. We can report that 19 records of engagements were returned and scored and that the average elicitation score was 26.4 out of 50 (see also Lansley et al., 2016). Some information could be derived covertly: several AMs managed to elicit the PIN for a mobile device when the passengers unlocked them to look for things, for example. Most of the information had to be extracted subtly, however, during what, from the perspective of fellow passengers, was an apparently normal and innocent conversation, given the context (Department of Defence, 2014). We found that, while AMs drew on closed questions and open questions most frequently (38 percent and 29 percent of the time respectively), the majority of these occurred once an initial engagement was underway (cf. Section 25.3.2). This was also true of complex or leading questions, which accounted for a mere 5 percent of the total elicitations used. In contrast, declarative-based elicitations and
requests each accounted for 14 percent of the total elicitations used and tended to occur most frequently at the beginning of the interactions.

Elicitation approaches were a key part of the interactions, which lasted between four minutes to 25 minutes (giving an average of nine minutes, 43 seconds per interaction). When these engagements were rank-ordered using Spearman’s (1904) Coefficient of Rank Order Correlation – that is, on the scores achieved for (the quantity and quality of) the data elicited compared with the types of elicitations used – we noted a high correlation of 0.89 between eliciting targeted information successfully and using the less oppressive elicitation types which were weighted positively in the scoring algorithm (Lansley et al., 2017). Other markers of successful engagement were the identification and referral of the four red team members, and the identification and referral of a fifth person (this time via us to the security staff on duty), who was found to be a foreign agent working undercover and thus lying about his identify, job role and travel plans.

25.3.4 The importance of linguistic insights when assessing elicitation probes

We have found linguistic insights to be useful both when training AMs (BDOs and other airport personnel) in the various elicitation techniques and also as a means of demonstrating some of the implications of the choices they made when interacting with passengers. By way of illustration, from a purely interactional perspective, greetings like “Hi, I am” [first name] are useful initiating moves, as a greeting normally prompts a greeting in return (in most cultures). Providing one’s name is also a useful way of getting an addressee to share their name (or, at least, a name) in return. There are issues to consider with such openings, however – not least cultural variation. Some would interpret first name usage as a positive signal of informality and/or communicative ease among strangers. However, other cultural groups might find using first names overly familiar and even impolite (Bargiela et al., 2002). The giving of a greeting and a name also fail to provide an immediate reason, on the AM’s part, for engaging in interaction with the addressee and would thus need to be followed up with a second initiating move. Most AMs used self-disclosures as a follow up to their exchanges of greetings and first names, for example. The revealing/sharing of personal information about oneself is known to be effective in eliciting emotional support in particular, especially where some indication of the need for such support is made explicit (Jourard, 1959), as in the example “I am very nervous”. This assumes that the speaker exhibits behavioural signs matching the self-disclosure, of course. Self-disclosure can also promote liking and positive affect (Collins and Miller, 1994, Strong and Aron, 2006) as well as mutually progressive and reciprocal self-disclosure (Aaron et al., 1997). Some of the second moves used by AMs indicated uncertainty on their part i.e. were instances of naiveté. These types of disclosure can work well when people meet for the first time, assuming they are positively – rather than negatively – framed (see McKay et al., 2009). Statements such as “I hope that I am OK with a 1 litre bottle of whiskey at security”, in contrast, have the potential to unsettle recipients, especially in an airport context. These riskier strategies are best seen, then, as engagement moves to be undertaken only when a certain level of rapport has been achieved.

One AM used a phrase along the lines of “You look like you know what you are doing here” as their initiating move. This enhanced their addressee’s image in at least two respects: as having useful knowledge to impart, and as being a well-travelled individual. It thus constitutes the type of “subtle flattery” which Hadnagy (2011 p.67) contends “can coax a person” into “freely” conversing with another – for a short period of time at least. Questions, in contrast, tend to create negative face implications for addressees by impeding on their ability to act freely (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This explains why AMs were careful to frame some
of their interrogatives so that they functioned as requests. Once answered affirmatively, requests such as “If you’re not using that plug socket, am I ok to recharge my phone?” gave the AMs a right to be in close proximity with the passenger (cf. Hall, 1966, and Section 25.2 of this chapter). Another popular approach was to request an item that belonged to the addressee, but to make the size of the imposition small: for instance, the addressee’s lighter or matches, for a few seconds. When this probe was used within a designated smoking area, it often prompted further interaction between the AM and passenger. Requests that demanded more from their addressees included specifically seeking the addressee’s help or advice, creating time implications for their targets. The AMs were thus careful to ensure that their requesting structures provided the addressees with a high level of optionality (Leech, 1983), thereby rendering the obligation to comply a weak one (“You don’t happen to A”; “Would you be willing to B”). One AM did not seek a passenger’s help or advice but, rather, demonstrated interest in the addressee, thereby enhancing their positive face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). There were time implications for the addressee nonetheless. A useful technique, in such circumstances, is to establish artificial time constraints, such as only having X minutes to engage in a discussion because of having to Y, thereby ensuring that the passenger understands there is an end in sight (cf. Dreeke, 2011).

Some of the AM’s examples made use of criticism, as a means of “encouraging complaining” (cf. Section 25.3.2). The aim here was to get the passenger to discuss the Wi-Fi or “overbearing” security systems, for example, as a prelude to the AM engaging them in a longer conversation that provided him with relevant information (such as their name, nationality, origin and destination, mobile phone number, etc.). In fact, all examples were merely preludes to a more targeted conversation, albeit one that, from the perspective of the passengers, equated to small-talk. Those conversations progressed by picking up on topics that are also highlighted regularly within online lessons designed to help non-native speakers of a language talk to a co-passenger (see Section 25.3.2, and also Archer et al., forthcoming). As such, they should not stand out as being markedly different from “ordinary” airport chat for most passengers.

25.4 Conclusion

The objective of this chapter was to demonstrate that it is important that AMs, BDOs and other airport personnel have access to linguistic insights as well as behavioural insights in their field of work. We have done so by exploring a conflictive exchange in the LAX Airport (Section 25.2) and describing a training scheme where linguistic insights relating to elicitation probes are given equal treatment alongside behavioural detection insights associated with identifying potential mal-intent (Sections 25.3.1 and 25.3.2). We have also highlighted the ongoing debate in respect to the use of behavioural detection in airport settings (Section 25.3) as a means of arguing that the efficient use of elicitation techniques is a must if behavioural observations are to be probed and (in)validated effectively in real-time without triggering resistance or, equally importantly, being unduly intrusive (especially when follow-up engagements appear to be unnecessary). These latter points are important, given that AMs and plain-clothed BDOs do not have the visible authority to carry out semi-formal interviews with passengers (cf. Section 25.2). There are advantages to be gained, therefore, by training them to use the veil of small talk to (in)validate behavioural observations: among them, the fact that, to most passengers, they will appear to be engaging in simple, light, airy conversation. As noted in Section 25.1, we are aware that this type of training raises important ethical issues, albeit set against a backdrop of needing to keep airports safe (and aeroplanes secure). These issues are of paramount importance to those responsible for
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(international) national security, especially in the face of a growing terrorist threat; hence reports such as that produced by Reding et al. (2014) for RAND Europe, which seeks to not only provide an account of, but also a practical response to, some of the ethical issues faced by national security personnel in Europe. An important factor highlighted by this report, in particular, is the need to have robust “Methods of reviewing decision making” in place, which are nonetheless alert to “the time-sensitive nature of some counterterrorism situations” (Reding et al., 2014, p.46). We believe our training adds to the robustness of such decision-making, by providing a six-channel-analysis system through which to evidence points of interest that can be (in)validated via interactions akin to small talk. As our airport-based study demonstrates, it is possible to use low risk but often very hard to detect elicitation techniques to gather specific information during what amount to very brief engagements with passengers (cf. Section 25.3.3). From the perspective of the unknowing, innocent passenger, these brief engagements should appear to be no more than friendly chat. Although we have been unable to share actual interactions with readers (for reasons explained), we hope to have demonstrated, in addition, that such engagements within an airport setting can actually be dual-purposed: designed to show interest in another – thereby enhancing their positive face – whilst simultaneously playing a small, but very significant, part in keeping airports safe. In line with the edited collection, this (linguistic) research, therefore, engages directly with situations that have the potential to lead to conflict (Section 25.2) with the aim of mitigating that conflict. Indeed, the genuine passenger should not know they have engaged with an undercover officer. As Section 25.3.4 reveals, linguistic insights can also be drawn upon effectively by us and other trainers when helping AMs, BDOs and other airport personnel reflect on the success (or not) – as well as any possible (un)intended consequences – of the elicitation probes they use when interacting with others, thereby helping them to interact more successfully the next time they might engage passengers in an airport context.

Appendix – Altercation at LAX Airport

U1 JL (to camera): I need a real police officer right here, right now. these two guys are saying they’re police officer[s] and they’re touching me. he’s putting his hands on
U2 O1: [we’re getting one I’m here Jason
U3 JL (to camera): me. why’s he putting his hands on me. why’s he putting his hands on me. I have not done anything and he’s putting his hands on me. that doesn’t make any sense. that doesn’t make any sense. these two guys are putting their hands on me [and I have not done anything
U4 O1: [Jason Jason what’s your date of birth?
U5 JL (to camera): and their putting their hands on m[e so all I need
U6 O1: [what’s your date of birth?
U7 JL (to camera): is a police officer. can someone please call 911[1] can someone please call
U8 O1: [laughs] I got it. I got this
[UO1 leaves]
U9 JL (to camera): 911 because these two guys right here
U10 O2: [come on out then come outside come outside and talk
U11 J (to O2): I’m not going anywhere dude. I’m not going anywhere.
U12 JL (to camera): can someone please call 911. I need an actual er a a dressed officer someone with a I need a uniform—I need a uniformed officer I need a uniformed officer
U13 O2: come on we’ll go find him
U14 JL (to O2): no I’m not moving.
U16 O2: I’m not moving anywhere. they can come and meet me right here
U17 JL (to officer): as God is my witness my name is Jason Lowder my name is Jason Lowder and as God is my witness I’m not going anywhere until I see a uniformed officer come and meet me right here
U18 O2: Jason, what’s your date of birth?
U19 JL (to O2): Why would I tell you might date of birth?
U20 O2: so I can run you
U21 JL (to O2): so you can run me? Man [xx] show me a–
U22 O2: yeah– are you on probation or on parole?
U23 JL (to O2): give me a uniformed officer and I will give you all the information that you want. all the information you want

[O1 returns]

U24 O1: got a uniform for you come here
U25 JL (to O1): they’re going to have to come right here man I’m not going anywhere
U26 O1: are you happy with your audience?
U27 JL (to O1): My cousin works for the TSA man my cousin works for TSA. that’s not a uniform I need a Los Angelos Police– LAPD give me LAPD and I will answer your questions .. Dude this is– man this is too strange right here that’s all

[J’s speech, (28-3x), overlaps with O1’s speech, which is not picked up by the camera phone]

U28 JL (to O1): I’m telling you I’m telling you right now that this is too strange. you guys come to me and then you grab me like that that .. no you grabbed me early you grabbed my arm. you said Jason come here you grabbed my arm no dude like you don’t know me you don’t know man you don’t know me you don’t know me you don’t know me you don’t know me

U29 JL (to camera): I need a uniformed officer I need a uniformed officer to come and escort me out out of the [xxxx] I need an escort out of the [xxxx] I’m a law abiding citizen [xxxx]

U30 JL (to O1): I don’t– I know I’m not in trouble I’ve never been in trouble a day in my life dude I’ve never been in trouble a day in my life that’s why I’m so [xxx] this seems a bit weird this seems weird man. I’ve not been in any trouble a day a day of my life not a day. why am I going to tell you how much money I’m travelling with are you serious

U31 JL (to camera): I need a uniformed police officer I need a uniformed police officer right now I need a I need a uniformed officer to come and escort me out out of the [xxxx] I need an escort out of the [xxxx] I’m a law abiding citizen [xxxx]

U32 JL (to crowd): They flashed their badges at me like they were real police officers. they flashed their badges at me. is that supposed to make me say “oh ok”

U33 JL (to O1): I’m going to tell you how much money I have. get out of here man

[O1 and O2 leave]

U34 JL (to crowd): [pause] why didn’t he ask anybody else. why did he stick to me.

[….] [sits down on luggage]
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U35 JL (to crowd): this is a great introduction to Los Angeles folks. this is my first time in LA. what a way to be introduced to Los Angeles. this is perfect. this is beautiful man. beautiful. this is all good right here all good

(YouTube, 2013)

Notes
1. See eiagroup.com/about/. (Accessed 1 May 2017)
2. See youtube.com/watch?v=6L1G4n4w1gs. (Accessed 1 May 2017)
3. See Lansley (2017) for a detailed account of each of the twenty-seven criteria.
4. In fact, trainees are “made aware that the veracity of” some of the features captured within the 27 SCANR criteria continue to be “hotly debated” (Archer and Lansley, 2015, p.232) within the deception detection literature. A lack of, or decline in, self-references has been suggested as a possible indicator of psychological distancing by some, and, by extension, then linked to deception (see DePaulo et al., 2003). But Vrij (2008) cautions that the relationship to deception may be weak.
5. PIns remain points of interest to be referred upwards (for further consideration/investigation by others) in situations where AMs or BDOs are unable to engage in small talk.
6. For an example, see youtube.com/watch?v=RjRjjwVF9RA&list=PL93kmSfkzzvk-8CbNlp87moi-0OmX13u7l. (Accessed 1 May 2017)
7. This aspect of the training draws upon the Defense Department’s (2014) ‘Elicitation – Would you recognise it?’ publication, as well as the work of Nolan (1999), Dreeke (2011) and others.
8. The exercise was approved by all relevant agencies.
9. The trainees were male graduates aged between 24 and 46 years old who served (in Romania, Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Slovenia and Poland) as police/security officers or as existing AMs at the time of the study.
10. Transcriptions of these conversations cannot be included here for security reasons.
11. Red team members did not pass through security on the day of the exercise, even though they were equipped with travel documents (including Boarding Cards).
12. Relevant agencies were aware of the exercise. A code word was also established for members of the red team, in case any were engaged by agencies outside of the airport-based exercise.
13. No AM was overtly rejected by a passenger. To the best of our knowledge, the passengers we targeted did not suspect them of being security staff either.

References


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