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A sequential examination of offenders’ verbal strategies during stranger rapes: the influence of location

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This paper examines the verbal strategies used by offenders during rape, examining the sequential, temporal and interactional aspects of sexual assaults. Forty-five statements taken from victims of rape were analysed in order to examine the interactive impact of the verbal strategies of offenders. There were three main aims: (i) to illustrate the impact these strategies have on victims’ behaviours during assaults; (ii) to discuss how these verbal strategies vary across assaults; and (iii) to examine the precursors of and impact of victim resistance during the offence. Further, following recent examinations of the influence of location on the nature of rape and sexual assaults, assaults were compared between three locations: the victim’s bedroom, elsewhere in the victim’s home, and outside the victim’s home. In each location, both compound (elaborate and repeated assaults) and direct assaults were examined. Findings across these styles and locations are discussed in order to understand the nature and use of offenders’ verbal strategies during rape across locations, and the role of these utterances within offender–victim interactions.

Keywords: rape; sexual assault; verbal strategies; sequence analysis; interaction

Introduction

The number of rapes of females has risen steadily in England and Wales over the last 20 years (Kelly, Lovett, & Regan, 2005). Indeed, the number of sexual offences recorded by the police in England and Wales between March 2005 and March 2006 reached 62,081. Of these, 22% were classified under section 19 (parts a, and b) of the British Home Office guidelines, i.e. termed ‘rape of a female’ (Walker, Kershaw, & Nicholas, 2006), representing a 3% rise from the previous year. Rape and sexual assault can have devastating effects on victims, with psychological as well as physical trauma being common (Koss, Figueredo, & Prince, 2002). While it is acknowledged that rape between males exists, and that the majority of victims know their attacker (Myhill & Allen, 2002), this paper only examines statements from females who have been raped by a stranger where a conviction has been secured.
Offenders’ verbal strategies

The current paper investigates the statements of victims of rape in order to examine the role of offenders’ verbal strategies to control and manipulate the victim during stranger rapes. To date, relatively little work has been conducted examining the role of offenders’ verbal strategies and utterances during sexual assault and rape (but see Davies, 1992; Dale, Davies, & Wei, 1997; Holmstrom & Burgess, 1979; Woodhams & Grant, 2006 for exceptions). However, offenders display a range of patterns of behaviours and verbal strategies during rape and sexual assaults (Holmstrom & Burgess, 1979; Woodhams & Grant, 2006). Indeed, Grubin, Kelly, and Brunsdon (2001) have gone so far as to identify the analysis of offender speech as a potentially important method to uncover patterns in serial offences in order to link cases to a single individual. Crucially, however, Grubin et al. (2001) calls for the interactive nature of verbal exchanges during the sexual assault to be better understood. It is this interactive element that informs the current study.

Second, while excellent work has been conducted developing a categorization of offenders’ verbal strategies, this approach does not allow an examination of the impact these strategies have on victims’ behaviour. For example, some verbal strategies may be associated with increased levels of victim compliance or resistance. In turn, variation in victim behaviours may disrupt patterns of offenders’ behaviours (Davies, 1992). Therefore, the current study examines the effect of offenders’ verbal strategies on victims over the course of the assault by identifying the temporal patterns of verbal behaviours during sexual assaults using sequential analysis. Understanding these sequences of offenders’ verbal strategies with offender and victim behaviours will allow more detailed and in-depth interpretations of the interpersonal dynamics between offender and victim.

Existing approaches: offender typologies

Research examining what occurs during sexual assault typically has concentrated on two main approaches. Firstly, research has focused on generating offender typologies based on examinations of offender behaviours as deduced from the crime scene and victim statements (Barker, 1989; Canter & Heritage, 1989; Canter & Kirby, 1995). Two major taxonomies have developed: the Massachusetts Treatment Centre taxonomy (MTC:R3) (Knight, 1999); and the investigative approach classifying offenders depending upon the behaviours engaged in within the assault itself (Canter, 1995; Canter & Heritage, 1989). However, because sexual assaults involve interaction between victim and offender, considering it as a unified crime is problematic (Woodhams & Grant, 2006). It is imperative, therefore, that analysis of what takes place during the offence incorporates the behaviour of both individuals involved (Fossi, Clarke, & Lawrence, 2005). Therefore, the sequential nature of these interactions will be considered to be fundamental in this paper. Accordingly, the present study analyses the statements of victims of rape in order to examine the dynamic nature of sexual offences following the sequential methodology employed by Fossi et al. (2005).
Location of assault

Offender typology research rests on an underlying assumption that offenders are relatively stable in their modus operandi. However, there is evidence suggesting that rapists may be more influenced by the context of the assault than is typically assumed by more standard rapist typologies. For example, Beauregard and Leclerc (2007) showed that rapists display rationality in adjusting their behaviour to suit the location of the offence. Similarly, in their linguistic examination of the language used by offenders across a large corpus of offences, Dale et al. (1997) demonstrated that individual offenders’ language differed across offences as a function of the type of victim, with the same offender using different forms of verbal utterances to older women or women of higher occupational status. Again, this suggests that rapists may be more fluid in their strategies depending on the variables in their environment. As a result, as well as the interactive nature of verbal utterances examined in the current paper, we will also examine the organization of verbal utterances across the different locations of the assault.

Victim-behaviour approaches

A third strand of research investigating sexual assault concentrates on victim behaviour. In particular, there is debate over what a person should do when confronted by an assailant. Some research suggests that in general victims who use active strategies to resist their attacker (physical strategies, shouting for help) are less likely to be hurt or experience a completed sexual assault (Levine-MacCombie & Koss, 1986; Ullman & Knight, 1993). However, later studies (e.g. Carter, Prentky, & Burgess, 1995) found that dominant, aggressive rapists reported that they became more sexually aroused and violent following victim resistance, while almost an equal number of men reported that forceful refusal by the victims would have been influential in stopping their assault (Giacinti & Tjaden, 1973).

According to a recent review of empirical studies examining the impact of victim resistance on offender behaviour (Ullman, 2007), three studies have analysed the temporal sequence of offender attack, victim resistance and assault outcomes in incidents of rape (Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman & Knight, 1992, Ullman, 1998). These studies demonstrated that the level of offender violence determines victims’ physical resistance (Ullman & Knight, 1992) and highlighted the need for more studies incorporating the sequence of events to obtain accurate information about the effects of resistance strategies on attack outcomes (Ullman, 1997). Ullman (1997, 1998) has indicated that when offenders threaten victims, then strong verbal responses from the victim have been associated with avoiding rape. However, the influence of a wider range of offenders’ verbal strategies (e.g. reassurance, verbal demands, description of plans for assault) on victims’ resistance strategies has not been examined during occasions where rapes are completed. In addition, Turchik, Probst, Chau, Nigoff, and Gidycz (2007) demonstrated that the use of non-assertive strategies to negotiate with, or dissuade their attacker is often unsuccessful in avoiding assault. However, it is not clear at what point this strategy is employed, and whether this is as a result of an offenders’ particular verbal strategy. As a result, there is a need to examine offenders’ speech within a sequential, temporal framework to
gain a closer and more accurate examination of the impact of verbal strategies on victims’ resistance behaviours, and thus fill a gap in the literature.

**Sequence analysis**

A crucial stage in the understanding of rape is to document in detail what actually occurs during an offence. In the current paper, we are dealing with one particular aspect of this – namely what happens according to victims in their statements to the police following rape by a stranger, where a conviction has been secured. One way to analyse such material, would be to develop a description of offences by simply identifying the kinds of events and behaviours that were reported, and the relative frequency of each kind. Indeed, this is a typical approach in the social and behavioural sciences. But our claim is that this approach would not capture the important aspects of the offence unless the sequence of events were captured too, just as sentence without its syntax becomes a meaningless string of words – see Fossi et al. (2005), and Warner (1992).

Accordingly, this paper examines the role of offenders’ verbal strategies in a series of rapes, as each offence develops, using lag sequential analysis (Faraone & Dorfman, 1987). This kind of analysis has been used successfully in previous research to examine the phases and patterns of behaviour in a range of situations – particularly those characterized by conflict, including marital conflict (Gottman, 1979); traffic violations (Clarke, Forsyth, & Wright, 1998, 1999); and violent episodes between individuals (Beale, Cox, Clarke, Lawrence, & Leather, 1998). Importantly, it has also been used to examine the patterns of behaviour during sexual assault (Fossi et al., 2005). Thus, this paper offers a novel methodological approach to the examination of witness statements – particularly those involving interaction between offender and victim.

**Method**

**Data**

A corpus of statements taken from female victims of sexual assault was provided by police forces in the North of England over the course of a single calendar year. The material consisted of anonymized written statements taken from victims and collected using police interviewing protocols. Statements were taken from a corpus of approximately 200 statements. Statements were included for analysis using the following criteria. First, the victim did not know the offender. Second, there was a single victim and a single assailant. Third, the offender was later convicted for the assault. Lastly, victim and offender speech and actions were reported from the point where the victim first noticed the presence of the offender through to a completed rape in order to ensure that a full description of the incident was obtained. This yielded a dataset of 45 statements suitable for detailed analysis.

All transcripts were in a narrative form, with any police questioning being omitted from the statement. In the transcripts, a brief description of the location of the individual involved was provided followed by an in-depth description of the sequences of events leading up to and including the offence. The victims’ description of events ranged from 1118 words to 2700 words.
Coding scheme

The first stage of analysis was to ‘unitize’ or ‘parse’ the statements into discrete units, each describing one action or utterance. Next, each of these units was assigned to a single category, using two separate coding schemes distinguishing the actions and verbal utterances of the victim and offender. These had been formulated from the original statements using content analysis (Weber, 1990). For verbal utterances, the coding scheme was not aiming to use or develop a linguistic coding scheme like that of Dale et al. (1997). Rather the aim was to capture offenders’ and victims’ behaviours and verbal utterances in a sequence of codes in which predictable pairs could be identified. This was to help us understand the predictors and impacts of offenders’ speech, and the precursors and effects of victim resistance.

Victims’ behaviours typically involved: (i) behaviours occurring before, (ii) during and (iii) following the assault, as well as (iv) introspective declarations and (v) verbal utterances. In total, 123 separate victim behaviours were drawn out of the statements. Offenders’ behaviours typically involved: (i) victim approach, (ii) moving, (iii) controlling and (iv) preparing the victim, (v) sexual acts, (vi) post-event behaviours and (vii) verbal utterances. In sum, 135 separate offender behaviours were identified.

In order to examine the ability of these codes to capture the nature and content of the original statements, two ‘back translation’ reliability studies were conducted. Here, two independent coders were given the coded versions of 11 statements. From these coded statements, the first coder was asked to write a full statement based on the coded version, adhering strictly only to what was presented in coded form. The second coder was asked to do the same as the first coder, but was permitted to embellish events to improve the clarity or fluidity of the statement. These coder-generated statements were then compared directly with the original statements and deviations were identified. Out of 829 codes across the 11 statements, the first coder deviated in only 60 codes and the second coder deviated in 63 codes ($k = 0.93$; $k = 0.92$ respectively, after correcting for chance). This coding scheme therefore showed that the codes captured the essence of the statements without loss of important detail (Fossi et al., 2005).

Statistical analysis

The data were analysed with lag sequential analysis (LSA) using the statistical package MacShapa (Sanderson et al., 1994). This is a common technique in some branches of social and behavioural science, which has been described in detail elsewhere (e.g. Faraone & Dorfman, 1987; Gottman & Roy, 1990). Each unit of speech or behaviour though the course of the statement was assigned to one of the coding categories. In its simplest form, LSA identifies the contingency of each event upon the one preceding it, to see if pairs of successive events are more (or less) common than they would be if they occurred in succession by chance alone. For instance, Figure 1 shows a link between the event-type ‘Victim screams’, and the event type ‘Offender replies aggressively’. If a single event was selected at random from this dataset, there is a chance it would be an instance of the type ‘Victim screams’. There is also a (different) probability it would be ‘Offender replies aggressively’. Those two probabilities multiplied together tell us the probability that a pair of events selected at random would by chance alone, be ‘Victim screams’...
immediately followed by ‘Offender replies aggressively’. This is the expected frequency with which the pair of events would occur, under the null hypothesis that they are independent of each other, and the first is neither triggering nor inhibiting the second. Of interest in this analysis are cases where the null hypothesis fails, and the pair of events occur together more frequently than chance alone would
predict, suggesting that the first event is triggering the second (or at any rate, making it relatively more likely than it would otherwise be).

In principle, such reasoning can also show that a pair of events is too rare for chance alone, suggesting that the first event delays or inhibits the second. However, in practice inhibitory pairs are less often explored, (i) because facilitatory links between events are typically more theoretically or practically interesting than inhibitory links, and (ii) because the low base rates involved mean that some event pairs could not be significantly less common than expected, even if they never occurred at all.

Z-scores were then used to identify the event pairs that occurred significantly more often than their expected frequencies ($p < 0.05$), and the resulting linkages between events were represented in a series of flow charts or ‘state transition diagrams’. Such diagrams can be constructed to show the strength of association between individual event-types. In this way, the interplay of victim and offender behaviours is highlighted.

**Phase identification**

One feature of this kind of analysis is that it only deals with very localized (short-range) behaviour patterns. Consequently, if a certain category of event, such as ‘Victim feels fear’ recurs at various points during the offence, it seems as though the chain of events is repeatedly re-visiting the same state, with the same implications each time for what could happen next. In order to limit this problem, each rape statement was divided into seven phases, and the sequence analysis carried out within each phase separately. The phases were logically necessary stages which any completed rape must pass through: (i) victim alerted to offender, (ii) offender approach, (iii) maintenance I – first contact to first penetration, (iv) maintenance II – first to last penetration, (v) closure, (vi) victim’s last sighting of offender, and (vii) concluding statement remarks. Phases (i), (vi) and (vii) only involved the actions, thoughts and speech of the victim. Because the majority of the verbal interaction took place during maintenance phases of the assault (specifically events between first physical contact and penetration occurring), this paper will concentrate on that phase. This is also where the actions of the victim and the offender are most interdependent.

**Categories of sexual assault**

Assaults occurred in one of three places: (i) in the victim’s bedroom, (ii) elsewhere in the victim’s home or (iii) outside. Assaults in the victims home were categorized into bedroom and non-bedroom assaults owing to the different nature of (a) the offender approach strategy and (b) the development of the assault. Bedroom assaults all involved the offender breaking into the victim’s property and starting the assault while the victim was asleep. As a result, the bedroom rapes were all ‘surprise attacks’ (Warren et al., 1999). Assaults taking place elsewhere in the victim’s home all involved confidence trickery, for example a request to use the telephone, a bogus sales approach, etc. Finally, assaults taking place outside typically involved two main types of approach akin to ‘con’ approaches and blitz attacks.

In addition, an initial examination of the statements in each of these three locations showed there were two broad types of offence. In the first, the victim was
subjected to numerous sexual assaults drawn out over time. These were termed compound assaults. In the second, the victim was typically subjected to one main incident of rape over a relatively shorter time period. These assaults were termed direct assaults. Table 1 shows the number of assaults in each of the resulting six categories of rape. While the absolute number of assaults in each category is relatively small, it should be remembered that from a statistical point of view, the units of analysis are not the assaults, but rather the pairs of successive behaviours making up each coded statement. Secondly, it could be argued that the small number of assaults per category threatens generalizability. However, the data used in this study comprises part of a relatively smaller number of offences: stranger rapes. The British Crime Survey (Myhill & Allen, 2002) demonstrated that only 8% of rapes across England and Wales are carried out by an offender not known to the victim.

The study was carried out on a legacy dataset, and there was no opportunity for extension. Collapsing or combining the categories of offence would have compromised the validity of the study, as sequence analysis has to be performed on homogeneous (similarly structured) sets of sequences.

Results
The six categories of assault are examined in turn below. For each assault type, the data are presented as a ‘state transition diagram’ showing the linkage between behaviours during the assault. The main focus across each assault type will be the speech acts of the offender, including what precipitated the speech types and the impact of his speech acts on the victim. In each diagram, oval shapes represent victims’ behaviours and rectangles represent offenders’ behaviours. Thicker borders represent offenders’ and victims’ verbal utterances. Arrows represent the transitional probabilities between different types of events: the thicker the arrow, the more probable the linkage. For each assault category, three aspects will be examined: (i) offender verbal strategies, (ii) the interaction between offender verbal strategy and victim behaviour; and (iii) information relating victim resistance to verbal and physical strategies. Examples of offenders’ and victims’ speech and the corresponding codes are shown in Table 2 and Table 3 respectively. For brevity, only examples of codes that were prominently involved in sequences of speech or behaviour are shown.

Direct assaults in victim’s bedroom
Figure 1 shows the state transition diagram for direct assaults occurring in the victims’ own bedroom. Three main points are noticeable about this offence type. First, there is a paucity of offenders’ speech. When it does occur, offenders’ speech is not a reaction to victims’ speech or behaviour. Rather, offenders’ verbal utterances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Bedroom</th>
<th>Elsewhere in victim’s home</th>
<th>Outside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compound</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are self-motivated and speech is used alongside other, more physically controlling actions. Only when victims scream, do offenders react verbally in response. In these cases, offenders respond in a verbally aggressive manner (where offenders threaten victims or tell them to ‘shut up’), rather than any kind of negotiation or reassurance. Unusually, given the controlling theme of this assault category, there is evidence of offender-motivated reassurance to victims (e.g. ‘don’t worry’). Second, levels of verbal aggression are relatively high implying that there is no attempt at building any intimacy or pseudo-relationship script for these offenders. The primary use of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offenders’ speech code</th>
<th>Examples from victims’ statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Offender asks victim for object</td>
<td>‘Get me some cash’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender demands victim put object somewhere</td>
<td>‘Put the money on the table’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender uses verbal aggression to gain control</td>
<td>‘Shut up or I’ll hit you again’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender replies aggressively</td>
<td>‘Shut up’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender reassures victim</td>
<td>‘It’s OK I won’t hurt you’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender demands victim moves herself</td>
<td>‘Keep your legs down’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender asks personal question about victim</td>
<td>‘What’s your name?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender asks victim about the current situation they are in</td>
<td>‘Is anybody else in the house?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim how he is feeling</td>
<td>‘I’m tired’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim what he is about to do</td>
<td>‘I was only going to rob you, but I might as well rape you’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim to move</td>
<td>‘Get down there’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender replies to a victim’s question about what’s happening</td>
<td>‘I’m going to rape you now’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender demands the victim remove her clothing</td>
<td>‘Take your tights off’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim he has a weapon</td>
<td>‘I’ve got a knife’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim to go somewhere</td>
<td>‘Get into the room, there’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells victim where to sit or lie</td>
<td>‘Get onto the couch’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender verbally establishes his control</td>
<td>‘If you move I’ll f***ing kill you’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender tells the victim to kiss him</td>
<td>‘Kiss me’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offender comments about the victim</td>
<td>‘You like that’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples from victims’ statements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I’ve got tights on’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I haven’t got any money’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘What are you doing?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim says her name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘No, there’s no-one else here’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I don’t know’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Please, stop’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Examples of verbal codes: offenders’ speech.

Table 3. Examples of verbal codes: victims’ speech.
offenders’ speech is to support the physical and sexual control over victims. Third, contrary to the findings of Turchik et al. (2007), active resistance on behalf of the victim results in physical and verbal dominance and control from the offender. Although all the cases in this data set come from completed incidents of rape, it is clear that in this category of assault, victim active resistance does not result in reduced aggression on behalf of the offender. Typically offenders’ verbal utterances are demands and aggressive language, similar to the ‘Do As I Say’ (DAIS) type of pattern of rapists’ utterances identified by Dale et al. (1997).

**Compound assaults in victim’s bedroom**

Figure 2 shows the state transition diagram for compound assaults occurring in the victims’ own bedroom. Here, offenders are more involved in a verbal interaction with their victims. The role of offenders’ speech is less controlling than in direct bedroom assaults. Offenders respond to the victims’ questions and exchange information about the situation they are in. Indeed offenders are shown to tell victims how they

![Diagram](image-url)
are feeling in response to the victims’ questioning, for example ‘I’m tired’ or ‘I don’t know why I can’t do it’. The high degree of verbal exchanges between offenders and victims differentiate this category of assault markedly from the direct assault described above and a movement towards interaction and intimacy with personal as well as situational questions.

It is not possible to see from these data what the impact of victims’ resistance behaviours would be on offenders’ subsequent actions, as no consistent sequence following victim resistance was evident within this category.

**Direct assaults elsewhere in victim’s home**

Figure 3 shows the state transition diagram for direct rapes occurring elsewhere in the victim’s home. Offenders’ speech acts are characterized by two types of utterances. Firstly, as in direct assaults in the victims’ bedroom, offenders’ speech, is primarily used to control victims, e.g. ‘if you move I will f***ing kill you’. There is little predictable speech or behaviour from victims as a result of offenders’ behaviours or speech. This may be because the most predictable utterances from offenders come about after gagging or blindfolding the victim.

![State transition diagram](image)

**Figure 3.** State transition diagram to show sequences of behaviour and speech during direct assaults elsewhere in victim’s home.
Similarly, as in direct assaults in the victims’ bedroom, offenders’ utterances are typically not responses to victims’ speech or behaviour, but are self-motivated and used alongside other, more physically controlling actions.

However, unlike direct bedroom assaults, in this category of assault, offenders also tell the victim what they are about to do alongside controlling behaviours, e.g. ‘I was only going to rob you but I might as well rape you’. The commentary may be due, in part, to the higher incidence of victims being blindfolded and therefore not being able to see what is happening. However, it is important to note that in this category, the offenders clearly want their victims to know what they are doing.

**Compound assaults elsewhere in victim’s home**

Figure 4 shows the state transition diagram for compound assaults occurring elsewhere in the victim’s home. While compound assaults taking place in victims’ bedrooms were characterized by offenders verbally interacting with victims, compound assaults taking place elsewhere in the victims’ house are very different in nature. Here the offenders’ verbal utterances are used to orchestrate the assaults rather than interact with victims. Offenders tell victims where to sit or lie, what clothing to remove, where to go and what objects to retrieve for financial gain or to be used within the assault. They also tell victims to kiss them and make victims aware that they have a weapon. When offenders engage in verbal interaction with victims, it is only to ask a question about the situation they are in – specifically whether they will be disturbed by anyone.

Victims tend to resist both as a result of, and prior to, an act of physical violence by offenders, which can be seen to lead to a reiterative cycle of resistance and violence. Ultimately offenders’ resulting physical violence towards the victims leads to victim compliance. Again, there is no evidence that active victim resistance results in reduced intensity of assault, or prevents the assault altogether, as was suggested by Turchik et al. (2007). In addition, previous literature has argued that the relative lack of information regarding the temporal sequencing of existing behaviours on the part of victims means that it is difficult to know whether victims are typically injured before or after they resist an attack (Tark & Kleck, 2004). The limited number of studies examining the temporal sequence of victim resistance and injury (e.g. Bachman, Saltzman, Thompson, & Carmody, 2002) suggest that most injuries occur prior to resistance, and that victim resistance rarely results in further injury (Tark & Kleck, 2004). However, victims experiencing multiple assaults within their home (excluding bedroom assaults) see their resistance met with increasing violence and control showing that, in this category at least, resistance is more likely to result in injury or threat of injury (see Figure 4).

Whilst there is some evidence associated with pseudo-intimacy motivations in this category of assault (e.g. the offender demanding that the victim kisses him), the speech of the offender is generally functional to the assault itself-geared towards positioning the victim for the assault.

**Direct assaults taking place outside the victim’s home**

Figure 5 shows the state transition diagram for direct assaults occurring outside the victims’ homes. Offenders use verbal control strategies extensively here. Two main
Figure 4. State transition diagram to show sequences of behaviour and speech during compound assaults elsewhere in the victim’s home.
categories of strategy are used. Firstly, offenders verbally control victims – telling them where to sit/lie, to remove their clothing and establishing the offenders’ control. Secondly, offenders attempt to talk to victims in such a way as to construct a version of what is happening and communicating this to the victim. For example, offenders tell the victim what is about to happen (‘I’m going to rape you’) and by telling the victim what the offender believes she is thinking or feeling (e.g. ‘you’re lying’, ‘you like that’). The victim speaks very little to the offender, and the offender does not engage the victim in conversation.

Victims in this category of assault do, however, tell offenders to stop – a self-protecting behaviour (Tark & Kleck, 2004). When this occurs, offenders typically respond in a verbally aggressive manner to the victim (e.g. ‘shut up’), comment on her mental state and tell her what is about to happen. Victims do resist during this category of attacks, however, it is not possible to see from these data what the impact of victims’ resistance behaviours are on offenders’ subsequent actions, as no consistent sequence following (or prior to) victim resistance emerged within this category.

**Compound assaults taking place outside the victim’s home**

Figure 6 shows the state transition diagram for compound assaults occurring outside the victim’s home. Offenders’ speech and behaviours in this category are characterized
by ‘managing’ the protracted assault, given the relatively open, and therefore, detectable environment. The proportion of offender speech acts is relatively small, compared to direct assaults taking place outside. Offenders’ speech is concerned with directing and positioning the victims – victims are told where to go, sit, lie, etc. This mirrors the offenders’ behaviours – which are predominantly occupied with locating a place to commence the attack. Interestingly, offenders are seen to reassure victims

Figure 6. State transition diagram to show sequences of behaviour and speech during compound assaults outside victim’s home.
following three main events: (i) the offender being verbally aggressive, (ii) the offender telling the victim where to go, and (iii) the offender attempting physical intimacy.

In this category of assault, victims’ self-protective behaviours are reliably associated with subsequent offender behaviour. Firstly, when victims tell offenders to stop, in these cases, offenders assert their intentions, and to position themselves ready for sex or sexual assault. When victims actively resist, this is met with the offender establishing control both physically and verbally. Again, active or assertive resistance does not reduce the intensity of the assault.

Discussion

This study examined the nature and impact of offenders’ speech during sexual assaults. The findings emphasized the importance of the location in which the assault occurs (following Fossi et al., 2005; Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007), and the impact of offenders’ speech on victims’ behaviour across the different types of assault. By taking into account the intrinsically interpersonal nature of this type of offence, this paper analysed the behaviours, and more specifically, the speech of both victim and offenders.

Differences in verbal strategies within locations: compound vs direct assaults

Interestingly, while most assaults involved verbal utterances as a means to control victims, offenders’ speech differed both by location, but also the degree to which the assaults were direct or compound. For example, both compound and direct assaults taking place within victims’ bedrooms involved a degree of surprise attack – as assaults began while the victim was in bed asleep. Indeed, the offenders have entered the victims’ homes without their awareness, making a previous conviction for burglary more likely (Davies, Wittebrood, & Jackson, 1998; Fossi et al., 2005). However, offenders engaging in compound assaults clearly wish to engage in more conversation and verbal intimacy with their victims. These assaults are characterized by the pretence of a relationship, with the offender asking the victim questions about herself, and telling the victim how he is feeling. This type of assault comprises what Canter and Heritage (1990) term Involvement behaviours, where desire for intimate and personal contact is the primary motivation for rape. Here, it could be argued that there are parallels with victim as person motivations (Canter, 1994), where the offender is seen to engage the victim in conversation and attempts a pseudo-relationship with her. However, during direct bedroom rapes, offenders used speech much more to control and gain power over victims, with a series of verbal demands, orders and verbal aggression. In these direct assaults, there was no evidence for the pseudo-intimacy or involvement behaviours seen in compound bedroom assaults.

Compound and direct rapes taking place elsewhere in the victim’s home were more similar in tone, in that both were characterized by control and verbal aggression. However, in compound assaults taking place elsewhere in victims’ homes, offenders’ verbal utterances were consistently associated with victims being controlled and positioned, using verbal aggression, orders, demands, and threats. Conversely, the use of binding and blindfolds during direct assaults in this location may mean that the extensive use of controlling verbal strategies seen by offenders in compound assaults was not necessary. The distinguishing feature of the verbal strategies of offenders in
direct assaults elsewhere in victims’ homes was the use of offender commentary. Here, after blindfolding, binding or gagging, the offender tells the victim what he is about to do. It is not clear why such verbal strategies would serve to simply control the victim, as she is already bound and gagged. If the motivation for this assault was solely control-orientated, such commentaries would not be necessary. It may be that there may be a sexual motivation where the offenders in this category are sexually aroused by spelling out the sexual and violent acts they are about to inflict on the victims and by making victims aware of this, thereby increasing victims’ fear above and beyond that which would be required to control victims’ behaviour. This may correspond to the sadistic sexual type of rape (Knight, 1999). Conversely, it could be argued that the offender is communicating to the victim that he is not going to kill her (e.g. I am only going to rape you). However, the way in which the codes are generated within this study would have meant that this type of utterance would have been coded as reassurance. Clearly, future research is required into the use of such commentaries in a wider range of sexual assaults in order to tease apart the motivational basis of this speech and to determine the impact this has on victims.

Again, there are similarities between compound and direct assaults outside the victim’s home. Both assaults involve the offender using verbal strategies to position the victim. She is told where to walk, sit and lie in order to aid the offender in his assault. When the victim asks the offender to stop, this results in the offender telling the victim what he is about to do to her, replying aggressively and positioning himself for the assault. The main difference between the two types of assault is the extent to which the offenders’ verbal strategies are involved in predictable interactions with the victims. In compound assaults, there is extensive evidence of the offender telling the victim where to go and what to do, and the addition of threat and victim reassurance. It is possible that this is due to the offender having to ‘manage’ a protracted assault in a relatively ‘open’ environment where the risk of detection is higher. As a result, the victim needs to be controlled at each stage of the assaults, and therefore there are a greater variety of verbal strategies used: e.g. threat, verbal control and reassurances.

Beauregard and Leclerc (2007) suggested that location of assault may, in part, determine the way an offender commits a rape or sexual assault. There is some evidence for this within the current data. However, it should be noted that there are differences in offenders’ verbal strategies within location depending upon whether the offender carries out a direct or compound assault. For example, offenders’ use of verbal strategies during direct assaults is relatively homogeneous across locations. Offenders’ speech is direct, aggressive and controlling in order to gain immediate victim compliance. One exception is the direct assaults elsewhere in the victim’s home. Here the use of commentary alongside gags, binding and blindfolding indicates some additional motivations on behalf of the offender beyond simply gaining control. Conversely, offenders use more varied verbal strategies in compound assaults across locations. This is particularly seen in bedroom assaults, where offenders use speech in order to develop a conversation with victims; asking for and sharing personal information, and responding to the victim’s questions. Compound assaults taking place outside involve a wider variety of strategies, including demands, threats and reassurances, in order to manage the more protracted assault, which may indicate some support for a rational choice approach to offenders’ behaviours during rape and sexual assaults (Beauregard & Leclerc, 2007).
**Offender behaviour and victim resistance**

While some sequential research provides evidence to suggest that victims should use physical and verbal active resistance to avoid serious injury and reduce the severity of sexual assaults (Ullman, 1997, 1998), other studies have demonstrated that victim resistance typically results from an increased level of offender violence (Quinsey & Upfold, 1985; Ullman & Knight, 1992). The current study uses an analysis of the sequences of behaviours and speech between offender and victim in cases of completed stranger rapes and finds that for this sample, victims’ resistance typically originate as a result of an intensification of either offenders’ sexual (e.g. positioning himself for sex) or aggressive (e.g. lashing out physically) behaviour. Only in outside direct assaults, is victim resistance not predictably generated by offender behaviour.

Where victim resistance is evident, within this dataset the typical outcome of their behaviour is increased offender control, aggression or sexual behaviour. For example, in direct bedroom assaults, compound assaults elsewhere in the victim’s home, and compound assaults outside victim resistance results in increased physical control, while in direct assaults outside, resistance leads to more aggressive verbal replies. It must be noted that all the statements examined here comprise accounts of completed rapes. Therefore it is not possible to investigate whether victim resistance would have been successful. However, it is clear from this corpus of data, that victim resistance does not always lead to reduced intensity of assault.

**Limitations and future work**

The current data were obtained from victim’s statements taken by police officers. As such, verbatim accounts of offenders’ speech cannot be assumed. However, according to Reyna and Brainerd (1995) and Dale et al. (1997), individuals typically remember the gist and meaning of what was said and for the purposes of this study, exact words said are less important than the nature of the verbal utterances.

The use of legacy data, has limited the size of the sample, but the procedures used, and the criterion of \( p < 0.05 \) for accepting any event pair as significant, should ensure the internal reliability of the study. Its external validity – representativeness, or generalizability – may be debated, but the analysis presented here represents an important approach to the temporally embedded aspects of interactive offences such as rape and sexual assault, which larger datasets could also make use of. In addition, all the cases included in this study involved completed rape and a convicted stranger as the assailant. As a result, these incidents are not representative of rapes per se. Indeed the findings may not replicate to examples of acquaintance or partner rape or assaults that do not result in a completed rape or sexual assault. However, they do demonstrate the links between offender verbal strategies and victim behaviours in stranger assaults, which are often highlighted as being particularly prone to violent escalation (Ullman, 1998).

The inclusion of offence location in differentiating offence styles has also opened up some key questions for further work of the kind suggested by Beauregard and Leclerc (2007): Do offenders choose the location of their crime as to fit their offence motivation, or does the location afford certain offence behaviours? It is therefore important to examine the stability of verbal utterances by offenders across offences in order to identify if a stable verbal strategy ‘style’ is adopted, and, if so, under what
circumstances it is adapted. Further work examining verbal strategies during assaults, together with offenders’ own perspectives on their motivations, could also potentially also help to link offenders’ verbal strategies (such as commentaries during assault) to their motives. This might be used in case linkage, following the addition of interviews with offenders.

The current study has shown that by using LSA, it is possible to gain a sense of the impact of offenders’ verbal strategies in interactions with victims as they unfold over time. The role of location on the nature of these assaults has been demonstrated and the paper as a whole presents a novel means of examining statements from victims of rape which could potentially be broadened to offer a method of examining other offences involving interactive sequences. Further, while the assaults examined in the current study focused entirely on rapes where the victim did not know her attacker, male on female assaults, and those where a conviction was secured, the extent to which the findings generalize to other types of assault is not known, which can be followed up in future work.

References


