The Criminal Justice Discourse Community.

By Lindsay Martin

Defining Discourse Communities.

Ann M. Johns defines discourse communities as containing the following:

- a broadly agreed set of common goals
- mechanisms of intercommunication among its members
  - ie. newsletters, journals
- utilize and possess one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims.
- use participatory mechanisms to provide information and feedback
- acquire a specific lexis, in addition to genres
- level of members with a suitable degree of relevant content and experience (Johns 500).

Johns uses Swales defining characteristics to describe her view of discourse communities; however, she also brings in the term "communities of practice". She states that the difference between the two is their main focus. Discourse communities focus on the text, language, and genres of the group while communities of practice focus on the values and practices; the culture; of the group (Johns 500).

I define a discourse community as a group of people, sharing common interests and practices as well as common language, texts, and genres. However, I feel that the most important characteristics in any discourse community are the sharing of common values and goals.

Common Texts.

There are many texts that exist in the criminal justice field. I will present three of them: police reports, court cases, academic journals (case studies).

Police Reports.

Police reports are legal documents containing specific information regarding a crime. They are sometimes referred to as incident reports as well. Police reports are in a fill in the blank format. They also contain discourse specific terms, such as zones and premise types specific to every city. The usual tone of police reports is strictly professional, factual, and unbiased as information presented in the form may be used in a criminal or civil court of law. An image of an actual police report appears below.
**Criminal Justice Discourse Community**

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**INCIDENT/INVESTIGATION REPORT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case#</th>
<th>02-09-003351</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date/Time Reported</td>
<td>02/18/2009 13:29 Wed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Known Scene</td>
<td>02/18/2009 13:00 Wed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### INCIDENT DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Crime Incident(s)</th>
<th>Weapon/Tools</th>
<th>Zone/Trust</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Voyeurism (Com.)</td>
<td>NONE</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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### VICTIM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victim Business Name (Last, First, Middle)</th>
<th>Victim of Crime #</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Relationship To Offender</th>
<th>Resident Status</th>
<th>Military Branch/Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L.</td>
<td>06/01/1987</td>
<td>W</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>Resident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### OTHERS INVOLVED

### PROPERTY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item #</th>
<th>Status/Freeze</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>QTY</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Make/Model</th>
<th>Serial Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>335Y</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>SURVEILLANCE VIDEO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**VICTIM**

- Home Address
- Employer Name/Address
- Business Phone
- Mobile Phone

**OTHERS INVOLVED**

- Home Address
- Employer Name/Address
- Business Phone
- Mobile Phone

**PROPERTY**

- Officer ID: WHITE, R. P. (0797)
- Invest ID: MCCOLLUM, J. N. (0596)
- Supervisor: SATCHER, L. S. (0170)

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**Page 1**
Court Cases.

Another widely encountered text in the criminal justice discourse community is the standard court or legal case. Court cases present all aspects of a legal case. They start by presenting the background information of the people involved such as the victims and, most often, the offender. Then, the facts of the case are presented in a chronological, or time orderly, fashion. Specific details included are the date and exact or approximate time of the events and the actions of the defendant and/or victim. I have brought in an example of the Miranda v. Arizona from 1966 which can be seen below. In the example presented, you can see how these cases are presented in a highly organized fashion. Every new paragraph has a corresponding letter or number to the proceeding information. The cases are presented in such an organized manner as to make referencing back to specific paragraphs, and possibly references from other court cases, as painless as possible. At the top of the case, the docket number, case name and other information is presented, also in an orderly manner. The language used in court cases requires a background in law terminology to fully understand. It also cites other court cases and specific legal documents throughout. Court cases are presented very professionally in tone in order to show the authority of the justices.

MIRANDA v. ARIZONA, 384 U.S. 436 (1966)

384 U.S. 436

MIRANDA v. ARIZONA.
CERTIORARI TO THE SUPREME COURT OF ARIZONA.

No. 759.
Argued February 28 - March 1, 1966.
Decided June 13, 1966. *

[ Footnote * ] Together with No. 760, Vignera v. New York, on certiorari to the Court of Appeals of New York and No. 761, Westover v. United States, on certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, both argued February 28 - March 1, 1966; and No. 584, California v. Stewart, on certiorari to the Supreme Court of California, argued February 28 - March 2, 1966.

In each of these cases the defendant while in police custody was questioned by police officers, detectives, or a prosecuting attorney in a room in which he was cut off from the outside world. None of the defendants was given a full and effective warning of his rights at the outset of the interrogation process. In all four cases the questioning elicited oral admissions, and in three of them signed statements as well, which were admitted at their trials. All defendants were convicted and all convictions, except in No. 584, were affirmed on appeal. Held:

1. The prosecution may not use statements, whether exculpatory or inculpatory, stemming from questioning initiated by law enforcement officers after a person has been taken into custody or otherwise deprived of his freedom of action in any significant way, unless it demonstrates the use of procedural safeguards effective to secure the Fifth Amendment’s privilege against self-incrimination. Pp. 444-491.

(a) The atmosphere and environment of incommunicado interrogation as it exists today is inherently intimidating and works to undermine the privilege against self-incrimination. Unless adequate preventive
measures are taken to dispel the compulsion inherent in custodial surroundings, no statement obtained from the defendant can truly be the product of his free choice. Pp. 445-458.

Academic Journals.

My third and final example of a text commonly used in the criminal justice field is the academic journal. Academic journals are commonly presented in a magazine type fashion with page numbers and multiple articles ranging from any multitude of topics. They are commonly organized by article titles or content. One of the major parts of an academic journal is the presentation of cases in a manner called a case study. Case studies are an important part of the field and often relate back to ethics and values of the discourse community. Case studies are often presented similarly to a court case, but in a more casual manner. They also look more in depth at the facts surrounding the actions of all parties involved, including members of the legal system. Academic journals also present new information related to the field and often encourage the analysis of new values and ideas by each individual member.

Conclusion.

The criminal justice discourse is a community that focuses on the ethics and theories of what causes crime and how to improve society. Discourse communities are a collection of people that share the same values, language, and common experiences. The criminal justice community uses court cases, police reports, and academic journals to record and share information. Because of its legal importance, the majority of language in the field is purely fact based and presented in a very professional, concise manner. Academic journals also present information to its audiences that may be entirely new ideas in the field, or even possibly actual cases. They are presented in a more casual fashion and often request opinions of other members of the field. Examining other court cases is vital to developing new values in the community. Membership in the criminal justice discourse requires basic knowledge and experience in the field. With knowledge and experience, membership in this discourse can be acquired and a successful career is sure to follow.

Works Cited


