



## Using the model statement to elicit information and cues to deceit in interpreter-based interviews<sup>☆</sup>



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### ABSTRACT

We examined how the presence of an interpreter during an interview affects eliciting information and cues to deceit, while using a method that encourages interviewees to provide more detail (model statement, MS). A total of 199 Hispanic, Korean and Russian participants were interviewed either in their own native language without an interpreter, or through an interpreter. Interviewees either lied or told the truth about a trip they made during the last twelve months. Half of the participants listened to a MS at the beginning of the interview. The dependent variables were 'detail', 'complications', 'common knowledge details', 'self-handicapping strategies' and 'ratio of complications'. In the MS-absent condition, the interviews resulted in less detail when an interpreter was present than when an interpreter was absent. In the MS-present condition, the interviews resulted in a similar amount of detail in the interpreter present and absent conditions. Truthful statements included more complications and fewer common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies than deceptive statements, and the ratio of complications was higher for truth tellers than liars. The MS strengthened these results, whereas an interpreter had no effect on these results.

As a result of globalisation investigators and interviewees often do not share the same native language (Mulayim, Lai, & Norma, 2014), which can hinder the effectiveness of an investigative interview (Gibbons, 2001). In such circumstances an interpreter could become a vital part of the investigation. Deception researchers have started to carry out experimental research examining the effect of the presence of an interpreter on eliciting information and cues to deceit (Ewens, Vrij, Mann & Leal, 2016; Ewens, Vrij, Leal, et al., 2016a, b, c). This article builds upon this work, particularly on Ewens, Vrij, Leal, et al. (2016c), in the following manner: (i) We used a different control group (non-native English speakers speaking in their own languages) than Ewens et al. (2016, a, b, c) who used English speakers speaking in English; (ii) unlike Ewens et al. (2016c), we introduced a control condition to experimentally examine the effect of a model statement on eliciting information; and (iii) in addition to 'total detail' (the only verbal cue examined in Ewens et al., 2016, a, b, c) we examined three additional verbal cues: complications, common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies.

### 1.1. Total detail

A consistent finding in the work of Ewens and colleagues is that in interviews where interviewees speak in their own language through an interpreter fewer details are provided than when interviewees speak in their own language without an interpreter. There are two possible explanations for this. First, perhaps interpreters do not translate every detail the interviewee gives and information thus gets lost in translation. Second, perhaps interviewees say less with an interpreter present, because interruptions disrupt the interviewee's train of thought and makes memory retrieval more difficult (Vrij, Hope, & Fisher, 2014; Nelson & Goodmon, 2003) or because an interviewee may decide to be concise when an interpreter is present given the extra time it takes to communicate through an interpreter (similar to that people are more concise when talking to a hard hearing person, Ewens et al., 2016a). Ewens et al. (2016b) found evidence for both. In that study the interpreter implemented a long consecutive style of interpretation in which the interpreter translates segments of talk. This style is frequently

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used in real life (Viezzi, 2012), including in intelligence interviews (Department of the Army, 2006). Remembering all the details an interviewee conveys is difficult in such a situation and the interpreters did not translate about 10% of the details given by the interviewees. However, when the interviewees' text was analysed, it still was the case that they provided less detail than interviewees who spoke in their native language without an interpreter.

In Ewens et al. (2016a, b, c) the participants who spoke in their native language through an interpreter came from different countries (Republic of Korea, Russia and US) than the participants who spoke in their native language without an interpreter (UK). It therefore cannot be ruled out that the effect was (in part) caused because of a cultural difference. In the present experiment we avoided this possible confound: Participants who spoke through an interpreter or spoke without an interpreter came from the same countries and spoke in the same languages. Specifically, unlike the previous Ewens et al. studies, half of the participants were interviewed by fellow native speakers of that language.

In ordinary conversations, people never say initially all they know but typically provide a summary of their activities, highlighting some core issues ('I did some shopping in the morning, and had a BBQ in the evening') (Fisher, 2010; Vrij, Hope, & Fisher, 2014). This is, in part, the result of conversation rules (Fisher, 2010, Fisher, Milne, & Bull, 2011). Through life experience, people learn how much detail is anticipated in conversations. Truth tellers realise that in interview settings they have to provide much more information than in ordinary conversations but they still do not provide all the information they know (Fisher, 2010; Vrij, Hope, & Fisher, 2014). One effective way to change truth tellers' expectations about how much information to provide in an interview is to expose them to a detailed model statement (MS), which is an example of a detailed account/story unrelated to the topic of the interview (Leal, Vrij, Warmelink, Vernham, & Fisher, 2015). A MS changes truth tellers' expectations about how much detail is required. As a result, truth tellers exposed to a MS provide more detail than truth tellers who have not been exposed to a MS (Bogaard, Meijer, & Vrij, 2014; Leal, Vrij, Warmelink, Vernham, & Fisher, 2015).

Since interviewees are particularly reluctant to provide all the information they know when interviewed through an interpreter, it could be predicted that a MS is an effective method in an interpreter interview to get interviewees to say more because there is much room for improvement in providing details in such an interview setting. This is indeed what Ewens et al. (2016c) found: a MS resulted in additional details provided by interviewees in interpreter-present interviews. However, in Ewens et al., the MS was used as a within-subjects method (all interviewees provided an initial recall, then listened to a MS, and then were invited to report again what they had experienced). Since a control group, in which interviewees were asked to report their experiences twice without listening to a MS, was missing it cannot be ruled out that the additional detail was caused by a factor other than the MS. Perhaps mere asking the same question twice leads to more detail. In the present experiment MS was introduced as a between-subjects factor (participants were or were not exposed to a MS).

A consistent finding in deception research is that truth tellers typically provide more detail than liars (Amado, Arce, & Fariña, 2015; DePaulo et al., 2003; Masip, Sporer, Garrido, & Herrero, 2005; Oberlader, Naefgen, Koppehele-Gossel, Quinten, Banse, & Schmidt, 2016; Vrij, 2008). Reasons for this are that liars lack the imagination and skills to convey the amount of detail that truth tellers convey (Vrij, 2008), or are reluctant to provide detail out of fear that such details may provide leads for investigators to check (Nahari, Vrij, & Fisher, 2014). A MS not only makes truth tellers aware how detailed they are supposed to be, it also makes liars aware of this. The result is that both liars and truth tellers become more detailed after being exposed to a MS (Bogaard, Meijer, & Vrij, 2014; Ewens et al., 2016c; Leal et al., 2015).

Based on these considerations we predicted the following regarding providing detail: Interviewees will provide fewer details through an

interpreter than without an interpreter, particularly when no MS is presented (interpreter  $\times$  model statement interaction, Hypothesis 1a); a MS will increase the total amount of detail provided by truth tellers and liars (model statement main effect, Hypothesis 1b); and truth tellers will provide more details than liars (veracity main effect, Hypothesis 1c).

## 1.2. Type of detail: complications, common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies

Ewens et al. (2016a, b, c) examined 'total detail'. Although this has been shown to be a diagnostic cue to deceit (Amado, Arce, and Fariña [2015] found an effect size of  $d = 0.55$  in their meta-analysis), it also has shortcomings. First, it is a general cue. This makes it a vague cue and all kinds of specific details that reveal deceit are overlooked when examining 'total detail'. Second, there are large individual differences in people's speech (Nahari, 2017; Nahari & Pazuelo, 2015; Nahari & Vrij, 2014), therefore cut-off scores - 'If a person provides more than an X number of details s/he is likely to be telling the truth, but when the person provides less than this number of details s/he is likely to be lying' - will not work. Not being able to come up with cut off scores is a known problem in verbal lie detection (Nahari & Vrij, 2015; Vrij, 2016). A possible solution is to design 'within-subjects tools', that is, being able to make a decision about the veracity status of an interviewee by comparing different responses made by the same interviewee during a single interview. The development of a verbal within-subjects lie detection tool would benefit investigators and they often stress the importance of such tools in conversations with academics.

In the present experiment we attempted to design a within-subjects tool by distinguishing between three types of detail: complications, common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies. Complications have been examined before (in a verbal veracity assessment tool called Criteria-Based Content Analysis, criterion 7, Amado et al., 2015; Vrij, 2008), but common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies are to our knowledge new in deception research. We will argue that complications are more likely to occur in truthful statements and that common knowledge details and self-handicapping strategies are more likely to occur in deceptive statements. The within-subjects element is that someone can examine the ratio of complications (complications / (complications + common knowledge details + self-handicapping strategies) which should be higher for truth tellers than for liars.

### 1.2.1. Complications

'Complications' is anything a person says that complicates the statement. For example, if someone says that while driving to his holiday destination he made a brief visit to a city that he always wanted to visit, he describes a complicated travel itinerary (it is more straightforward to drive directly to the holiday destination). If the person then adds that he had a flat tire en route and, that he got lost, and that there was heavy traffic due to a road accident he adds three more complications. Complications do not just occur when people travel, they occur all the time: 'The sailing race was cancelled, there was not enough wind', 'When we arrived at the museum it was closed', 'Initially we did not see our friend, it appeared that he was waiting at a different entrance'. Complications are more likely to occur in truthful statements than in deceptive statements, as a meta-analysis of CBCA research revealed (Amado et al., 2015). Making up complications requires creative thinking and not everyone possesses this skill. In addition, research has shown that liars prefer to 'keep their stories simple' (Hartwig, Granhag, & Strömwall, 2007) and including many complications does not constitute a simple story.

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