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Keeping airports safe: the value of small talk

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Airport interaction, Air Marshalls (AMs), Behavioural Detection Officers (BDOs), covert surveillance and investigations, face(work), mutual face enhancement, phatic veil, security, small talk, transactional talk

1. Introduction

As Forest (2008:97) notes, “there have literally been thousands of attacks and plots against aviation targets worldwide” during the past 35 years - with “criminals, terrorists and, in some cases, [even] naval warships” targeting passenger airlines in particular. Forest (ibid:98) provides “at least three...rationales...for” the specific “targeting” of “commercial aviation” in this way: the certainty of both “media coverage” and “economic impact” if an attack succeeds, in combination with “the vulnerable nature of aviation targets” worldwide. The aviation industry’s recognition that “airplanes (as well as airports) are inherently soft targets” (ibid:102) means that they are constantly looking for new ways to help them keep airplanes and airports as secure as possible. By way of illustration, as well as enhancing established screening

procedures (such as border controls) in airports across the world, they have also introduced additional “security layers” on flights, which include “reinforced cockpit doors, armed pilots, [and] more air marshals” (ibid:117). The primary role of an Air Marshal (AM), for instance, is to protect the cockpit and prevent an aircraft from becoming a weapon of destruction (Karber 2002) affecting not only the passengers and crew on board but - perhaps more importantly - a densely populated land target: as in the case of the Twin Towers in the 9/11 incident. Like Behavioural Detection Officers (BDOs) operating in the airport itself, AMs are also frequently tasked with airport-based surveillance. This might involve reporting instances of suspicious behaviour, which cannot be accounted for by a person’s emerging baseline behaviour and/or the context (Lansley et al. 2016), upwards to the relevant security personnel (Price and Forrest 2012:160).

AMs and BDOs have various methods available to them, when deciding whether to take immediate action or report someone/a group upwards, including engaging the individual(s) in interaction (as a checking move). Because of their undercover status, their interaction with such individuals cannot be an official *chat-down* (Price and Forrest 2012:248) akin to a verbal pat-down. Instead, AMs and BDOs must rely on more subtle ways of extracting information, akin to *small talk*. As this chapter will reveal (see especially Section 4), chat-downs tend to be transactional in the main: that is to say, officials at border controls ask questions designed to establish a person’s (true) identity, nationality, travel history, travel plans, etc., as a means of establishing the validity of their travel documents. Such protocols may begin, nonetheless, with a greeting that, for most, is akin to small talk. An article on chat-downs in the online program, NPR, mentions “Hi, how are you?” as a typical (American) greeting for a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officer, for example (Smith 2011). The main contention of this chapter is that the type of small talk that AMs and BDOs engage in as part of their interactions with a person of interest (henceforth POI), within aviation contexts, is (by necessity) much

more covert than such chat-downs allow. Yet, it still enables them to do key work for their organization as a means of helping to keep airports (as well as airplanes) safe.

It should be noted that small talk is widely acknowledged to be “a commonly used and highly effective intelligence-gathering technique” in military and security circles, because of allowing for the extraction of “targeted information from a person in a manner that does not disclose the true intent of the conversation” (NCIS 2013). The idea that small talk can be transactionally as well as interpersonally (or relationally) motivated has been largely ignored within linguistics, however: the collection of papers in Coupland ([2000] 2014) probably come closest to adopting such a view. This is in spite of facework-related studies, which have focused upon how small talk can be used by intimates, work colleagues and strangers alike (Laver 1975; Brown and Levinson 1987; Tracy 1990; Scollon and Scollon 1994:135; Holmes 1998, 2000; Tzanne 2000:193); albeit to engage in rapport building/management, overcome miscommunication, etc. This paper will address this gap by focusing on the types of facework AMs and BDOs might engage in when using small talk to lubricate their interactions with strangers in the airport. For safety, security and data protection reasons, the examples of *relational-as-transactional talk* (cf. McCarthy 2014) discussed in the chapter are taken from publically available (YouTube) sources. They include five fictionalised interactions that represent the kinds of small talk non-native speakers of English are encouraged to engage in when in an aviation setting. As will become clear, although such interactions do not have any explicit link(s) to aviation security, they provide insights into the types of topic - as well as the combination of methods - an AM or BDO might draw on to initiate and develop an engagement with another or others subtly (in place of a more overt and authoritative chat-down).

We identify the types of topics drawn upon in the five fictionalised (English-language-learning) interactions in Section 3, after outlining some of the most pertinent characteristics of small talk in Section 2. In Section 4, we go on to explore, first, (transcripts of mediated) real-life

interactions, in English, involving border control personnel and passengers, taken from the UK television series *UK Border Force*. The first series aired in 2008, and the second, in 2009, and followed officers at three sites: London Heathrow Airport, Dover and Calais. We then compare excerpts from the official interviews with the fictionalised interactions (discussed in Section 3), as a means of highlighting the most pertinent differences between passengers involved in official interviews and chat-downs (cf. Price and Forrest 2012:248) and passengers engaged in small talk with strangers. This is followed by a discussion of the behavioural detection programme that has been developed to train (European) AMs and BDOs (see Section 5), as well as some of the elicitation techniques used by them, and their seeming similarities with (as well as differences from) social engineering practices (see Section 6). The latter, for example, equate to surreptitiously manipulating people “into giving out information, or performing an action” (Mann 2012:11), but in such a way that they believe they have been involved in an “apparently normal and innocent conversation” (Hadnagy 2010:56). Undercover AMs and BDOs interact with passengers in a similar way. Their aim, however, is to extract information via which to in/validate them as a POI worthy of further investigation (as opposed to gleaning information from passengers that might benefit the AM/BDO personally/financially, etc.). One argument for using a more covert approach (like this) in airport settings is that genuine passengers will not experience the stress levels associated with the formal interviewing process (unless the AM/BDO signals the need for others to formally interview them). This view is supported by research contending that unsuspecting people can be motivated to voluntarily communicate information via a variety of elicitation techniques (see, e.g., Duncan 2008). We will go on to show that several of these elicitation techniques have obvious connections with the extant facework research, due to advocating the use of criticism, feigned disbelief, flattery, naiveté and sympathy. By *facework*, we mean the (communicative) actions interlocutors engage in to make what they are doing consistent with *face* (Goffman 1967:5). *Face*, here,

includes the attributes they want others to acknowledge about them, associate with them and/or ascribe to them, as well as those they do not (because of being too affectively sensitive, for example), following Spencer-Oatey (2007:644). Although facework can be undertaken un-/semi-consciously by interlocutors, it can also be tactical in certain circumstances and, hence, akin to *impression management*: namely, X managing their behaviour in order to influence the perceptions of another (Goffman 1959:17, 22). An interlocutor might combine an apology to a stranger with excuse-making, evaluations, disclaimers, justifications or the like (Tedeschi and Melburg 1984). Alternatively, they might engage a stranger via ingratiation: drawing upon, for example, compliments. It is because people are not equally adept at engaging in small talk with strangers that Sections 6 and 7, especially, highlight how linguistic training in engagement – including training in the use of different elicitation techniques – has been helping (European) BDOs and AMs garner useful information from passengers.

2. The (linguistic) characteristics of *small talk*

Within the extant linguistic literature, small talk is nearly always distinguished from talk that is deemed to be “transactional”, “instrumental”, “goal oriented” or “means-end rational” (Maynard and Hudak 2008:662). Indeed, Holmes (2000:37-43) has gone as far as to situate these types of talk at the opposite end to small talk on a communicative continuum. This does not mean that small talk cannot occur in, for example, a work-related discourse. On the contrary, it is often deemed to *oil* “the social wheels” of such discourse (Holmes 2000:57). This is in line with Malinowski’s (1923:312) argument that the object of such talk is *phatic*: namely, an exchange of words, which is “almost...an end in itself”. It is almost - but not quite - an end

in itself, given its potential function in helping interlocutors to begin interacting, thereby defusing potential hostilities caused by uncomfortable silences, and/or helping them to reach a consensus of some sort.¹ According to Holmes (2000:48), such functions equate to “doing collegiality” and “paying attention to...face needs” (especially in English-speaking contexts). Maynard and Hudak (2008:663) concur, adding that, although small talk is “not necessary to the instrumental task itself”, participants will nonetheless recognise it as achieving “prosocial” actions for them and others. By way of illustration, Maynard and Hudak (2008:661) show how small talk often provides patients and doctors with an opportunity to (albeit temporarily) “ignore, mask, or efface” the more taxing transactional aspects of some exchanges. A number of researchers have gone on to explore the use of small talk within a variety of other work-related settings too. Collectively, they argue that small talk serves several important purposes, including supporting and promoting instrumental goals (see, e.g., Ragan 2000), developing - and maintaining - sociable relationships (see, e.g., McCarthy 2000; McKenzie 2010) and (re-)inforcing particular organisational cultures (Mirivel and Tracy 2005). Whilst such work concedes that small talk is therefore “far from pointless” (McCarthy 2000:97), it seems to be recognised, nonetheless, as a site in which the context for enabling “the social practices of informing” is enacted and then negotiated (McKenzie 2010:18). Much of this work also focuses on small talk involving familiars, with the result that small talk with strangers is still relatively under-researched. This may be because early work in this regard assumed that strangers were expected (and, hence, assumed) to refrain from speaking to each other (Saville-Troike 1985): in part, for fear of rejection. Yet, recent experimental psychological studies have highlighted contrary evidence to this. Epley and Schroeder (2014) found that interactions with strangers can bring unanticipated benefits, including positive boosts in mood and feelings of belonging. They thus argue that being overly anxious about conversing with strangers is misplaced and

¹ Laver (1975) describes these as *initiatory*, *propitiatory* and *exploratory* functions respectively.

that, on the contrary, people (including those in commuting situations) are more than willing to talk, to the point of being flattered to receive attention from others (see also Sandstrom and Dunn 2014).

3. Engaging with others in airport settings: some fictional illustrations

As noted in the Introduction, this section provides an overview of the types of topic that feature as part of small talk in a predominantly English-speaking aviation setting (based upon the advice given to non-native English speakers online) and, thus, that can be aped by AMs and BDOs when seeking to covertly glean information from POIs (see Section 5). For example, there are numerous videos aimed at non-native English speakers available on YouTube. Although the bulk of these concentrate upon the more formal types of interaction they might encounter at the check-in, going through customs, etc., a small number - like (1) to (5), below - also focus on small talk between strangers. In (1), Jessica and Matt begin to converse following an announcement that their flight has been delayed (note that the animation depicts Matt as being quite a bit younger than Jessica):

(1) Small talk at the airport

Jessica: Are you kidding me! Urrgghh! I can't believe I'm on another delayed flight. This is the second time this week!

Matt: Yeah, that's a pain. Sorry about that.

Jessica: Well, it's not your fault of course, but thanks. Anyway, my name's Jessica. What's yours?

Matt: I'm Matt. Good to meet you. Where are you headed?

Jessica: Well, I'm actually on a business trip. Of course, you know I'm heading to Sydney, but then after that I'm going to Brisbane.

Matt: Brisbane? Nice! It's a great town. I went to school there.

Jessica: Really? You went to school there? Wow! What did you study?

Matt: Well, I was a double major in computer science and linguistics.

Jessica: Computer science and linguistics, oh my gosh! You must be a total Brainiac! Do you have any idea what you might want to do?

Matt: Yes, I want to make computers speak like humans.

Jessica: Oh I see, so do you mean things like automatic teller machines that talk to people when they're doing basic transactions, and stuff like that?

Matt: Yeah. That's part of it. But also for people who are disabled and can't speak.

Jessica: Outstanding! I think it's amazing what technology can do for people who are disabled, or got into an accident, or something like this. That's great! Well, it looks like our flight is ready to go.

Matt: Yes, I see. Well, it has been good talking with you. Have a safe trip.

Jessica: Thank you. Yes, you too. Bye!

Although the interaction is obviously fictitious, it nonetheless introduces how interlocutors might exchange names with one another as an early initiating move. This is true to life in at least two ways. First, that a greeting will normally prompt a greeting in return in most cultures. Second, that greeting-greeting exchanges involving (first) names are generally understood to be “a positive signal of informality” that can put strangers at their “communicative ease” (Archer et al. 2019:465). It is worth noting, however, that some cultural groups may find first names overly familiar and even impolite (Bargiela et al. 2002) – especially if they speak a language where, for example, a T/V distinction is important. As such, first names will probably prove to be the most effective when used in culturally appropriate ways.

The sharing of first names is not the only (or even the first) initiating move in evidence here, of course. Indeed, this particular extract demonstrates how complaints, as well as enquiries in respect to destination, can be used as initiating moves. Although complaints are recognised to be inherently face threatening by Brown and Levinson (1987), Jessica’s grumbling seems to trigger the opposite for her and Matt: namely, mutual face-enhancement work. Notice, for example, that Matt is not the intended target of the complaint (Dersley and Wooton 2000). Rather, the complaint is a means by which Jessica can openly acknowledge her hitherto privately experienced personal trouble (Drew and Holt 1988:399) with an understanding other - given Matt is on the same flight - thereby inviting a (reciprocal) response from him. In that response, Matt acknowledges and then apologises for Jessica’s plight, following which Jessica makes clear what they both know: the blame actually lies elsewhere. Having established a shared mutual reality, they then go on to briefly discuss Matt’s career plans, allowing Jessica to signal - via further face enhancement - how impressed she is by Matt’s academic history and choice of career. See, for example, her use of the adjectives, “outstanding”, “amazing” and “great”, and her description of Matt as “a total Brainiac”.

(2) and (3), below, also make use of self-disclosure as a follow up to the exchanging of first names. In the case of (2), Mark and Sam talk about their destination, after learning that they are on the same flight (note that both actors are close in age, on this occasion). In the case of (3), Paula engages Angie in small talk when she notices the book she is reading “looks interesting”. In both instances, there is evidence (once again) of mutual face enhancement. For example, Sam is able to show off his knowledge of Las Vegas at the same time as expressing approval of Mark’s choice of hotel in (2), and attends, thereby, to both his own and Mark’s positive face “wants” (to be deemed useful and be approved of respectively):

(2) Talking to a co-passenger

Mark: Hey! I’m Mark. Are you on Continental 21?

Sam: Yup! Going to Las Vegas. I’m Sam by the way.

Mark: First time going there?

Sam: Nah! My uncle lives there. So I fly there quite often. Anything you want to know about Vegas?

Mark: Well...this is my first time. I don’t really know much about the place.

Sam: Oh, don’t worry. You’re going to love it. No matter what your preferences are, Vegas has something for you.

Mark: That’s good to hear! I’m staying at the Bellagio. Any good places around that area?

Sam: Are you kidding me! It’s a hub of entertainment. It’s surrounded by luxurious hotels, huge casinos, delicious food and just about everything else you need.

Mark: Oh! Then I guess I made the right choice.

Sam: Sure did!

(Twominute English, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjRjjwVF9RA>.

Published 8/08/2013. Accessed 19/02/2018).

In (3), Paula's attention to Angie's negative and positive face "wants" (Brown and Levinson 1987) is evident from the outset.

(3) Which book are you reading?

Paula: Excuse me. I'm sorry I just couldn't help noticing that the book you're reading is really colourful. It looks interesting. I'm Paula by the way.

Angie: Hi Paula. I'm Angie. Well, it's a book for children. Do you like reading children's stories?

Paula: I think I read this one as a kid. It has stories of Brer Rabbit, doesn't it?

Angie: Yes, it does. It's by Enid Blyton.

Paula: Oh, I love Enid Blyton! I've been reading her stories since I was five.

Angie: Me too. Where are you flying to?

Paula: Quincy, California. What about you?

Angie: My goodness! I'm going there too!

(Twominute English, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjRjjwVF9RA>.

Published 8/08/2013. Accessed 19/02/2018).

The politeness marker, “excuse me”, and, apology for interrupting Angie (“I’m sorry”) attend to Angie’s “want” to act freely (without interruption), for example, whilst her interest in Angie’s reading material draws upon the positive politeness feature of complimenting: hence adjectives such as “colourful” and “interesting”. Paula then goes on to provide her first name, and it prompts Angie, in return, to provide a greeting followed by first name and further information about the reading material, as well as to ask a question of Paula that is designed to show reciprocal interest in her (thus attending to Paula’s positive face “wants”). As they continue their interaction, each learns that they share not only an interest in Enid Blyton – who they display mutual approval of - but a final destination (Quincy).

Like (1), extracts (2) and (3) are true to life in ways that would benefit AMs and BDOs (seeking to glean information, covertly, from POIs). For example, the revealing or sharing of personal information about oneself, in such ways, is believed to promote liking and positive affect (Collins and Miller 1994; Strong and Aron 2006). It can thus lead to mutually progressive and reciprocal self-disclosure (Aaron et al. 1997). Self-disclosure is believed, in turn, to be an effective strategy for eliciting emotional support, especially when the need for such support is made explicit in some way (Jourard 1959). Consider (4), involving two passengers. As the plane they are on nears the end of its journey, the male passenger notices that the female next to him “look[s] terrified”. He goes on to signal concern for her, explicitly, by asking if “Everything [is] “alright”. When she self-discloses her fear “of planes”, he comes up with a way to distract her (but with her agreement, thus revealing his sensitivity to her negative as well as positive face “wants”):

(4) Checking all's ok

Male: Hey, you look terrified. Everything alright?

Female: I'm just afraid of planes. Besides that, everything is fine.

Male: Oh! Take a deep breath. Let's talk and you can take your mind off the plane.

Female: Well, I guess I can try that.

Male: So this is my first time in Las Vegas. I'm staying at the Bellagio. How do I get there?

Female: Well you need to take a cab. Just get off on terminal 3 and you will find a lot of them in that area.

Male: Ok. No other options?

Female: You could rent a car. Some rental companies have their stands around the airport. It might be cheaper.

Male: Great. I'll do that I guess. By the way, we're already on the ground. I guess it did work out.

Female: Seriously? Thanks.

(Twominute English, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjRjjwVF9RA>.

Published 8/08/2013. Accessed 19/02/2018).

Notice how the diversionary tactic enables the male passenger to glean information from the female regarding the best form of transport to get to his hotel – something she could only know if she had been to the airport previously. (4) thus provides a useful example of how small talk can be used to check (albeit surreptitiously) the accuracy of someone's alleged knowledge.

(5), below, presents a contrasting scenario, as a means of also showing how strangers are often prepared to help others who display their lack of experience when it comes to X or lack of knowledge about X. In this case, the male passenger engages with the female passenger at the airport when he notices that she seems confused:

(5) First time at the airport

Male: Hey! Are you alright? You look confused.

Female: I've never been at an airport in my life. So I don't really know where to go first.

Male: Well, for starters, where are you going?

Female: I'm going to Las Vegas, on Continental Flight 21.

Male: Ok, let me see. First you need to check in at your airline's counter.

Female: Yeah, I already did that. I got my boarding pass and checked my luggage.

Male: Well then you need to go through the security check.

Female: Alright. Anything after that?

Male: Nothing much. Just go to your gate and wait for the boarding call.

Female: Oh! That was easy. Thanks a lot [laughs].

(Twominute English, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjRjjwVF9RA>).

Published 8/08/2013. Accessed 19/02/2018).

Naiveté – i.e., suspending one’s ego in order to give an impression of lacking experience of/knowledge about X (Nolan 1999) – is believed to be a very effective elicitation strategy when the participants involved are meeting for the first time, and the meeting is positively - rather than negatively - framed (McKay et al. 2009), as here. Things we might note about the facework in this case include it being limited to showing concern and providing help (on the part of the male) and thanking (on the part of the female). Of all the extracts, (5) is thus the most transactional, with only one example of a positively oriented face-enhancing evaluation (“That was easy”). As Section 4 will confirm, however, (5) is still less officious than interactions that involve border security personnel.

4. The different types of “small talk” in airport settings

As the Knowledge and Information Management Unit made clear in their response to a 2015 request for information falling within the (2000) Freedom of Information Act, officials at border controls can ask “questions...that allow them to establish the authenticity” and hence validity of a person’s “travel documents”.² As noted in the Introduction, this includes asking questions via which to establish that person’s true identity, nationality, travel history, work, etc. As (6) reveals, such chat-downs tend to be transactional, discursively speaking. This particular official was careful, nonetheless, to put the passenger at his ease, by engaging in a level of rapport work (even though intelligence suggested he may have applied for two passports using the same information, but different identities – one UK based, the other Jamaican).

² https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/252614/response/621493/attach/3/33431%20Richardson.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1

(6) You've had a long journey

Official: yes sir [passenger comes forward] hello sir how are you today

Passenger: good

Official: where do you live in the UK sir?

Passenger: in Bristol

Official: ok sir I just need to have a quick look at your passport ok

Passenger: ok (.) I've been going through it for the past three days

Official: oh have you oh ok won't take a minute

Passenger: no problem

Official: alright

Passenger: that's the same I went through in Miami

Official: oh did you oh dear it's not your lucky travel then is it

[...] you've been there on holiday

Passenger: was in Trinidad first [Barbados (.)

Official: [Trinidad first and then Barbados

you've had a long journey then haven't you

[...] did you have a nice time [laughs]

Passenger: [xxxx]

Official: so what I'd ask you to do please just for a moment can you just

take a seat down there for me please and we'll be back with

you as soon as possible alright

(UK Border Force (S01E04), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx8GNMIgjjE>.

Published 18/01/2012. Accessed 03/08/2018).

The official inquired as to the passenger's health/wellbeing, for example, thereby engaging in positive politeness: that is, she paid attention to his "want" or desire to be valued (Brown and Levinson 1987). She also sympathized with him on two occasions. First, when the passenger self-disclosed he had "been going through" such checks for "the past three days" and she responded "oh have you", before stating she would attend to this as quickly as possible, thereby engaging in negative politeness work, with the aim of signalling her awareness of his "want" or desire for autonomy (Brown and Levinson 1987). Second, when she commented that it was not his "lucky travel" day. Interspersed throughout, however, were questions designed to ascertain where the passenger lived in the UK and his reason for travelling (i.e., characteristics of a chat-down). The passenger was then (politely) asked to take a seat, by the official, thus impacting on his negative face (i.e., his desire to be unimpeded in his actions).

In order to appreciate the differences between diverse types of small talk (and chat-downs), let's compare the features outlined **above with those outlined** in Section 3. Notice, for example, that there appeared to be a greater emphasis upon the participants discovering extraneous information about each other in extracts (1) through (5) for no other reason than having a genuine (albeit passing) interest in the other. They exchanged greetings, shared names with the other, mutually self-disclosed additional personal information to the other – and sometimes used that information to establish a shared (but temporary) mutual reality between them. (6) does not display this sense of small talk as "an end in itself" (cf. Malinowski 1923:312). There was no name sharing by either of them, for instance, and the passenger, only, was expected to share (or, more appropriately, confirm) their current place of residence. We might thus understand this type of rapport work as a communicative veneer serving two interrelated purposes: (i) masking the more taxing transactional aspects of what is nonetheless an official exchange (as it unfolded), and (ii) an attempt to defuse the potential for hostility (Maynard and

Hudak 2008:661). Notice that, although the official paid “attention to” the passenger’s “face needs” (Holmes 2000:48) via small talk, in (6), the passenger did not reciprocate by inquiring as to the official’s health/wellbeing. Indeed, we arguably see evidence of resistance from him, even at this early stage. His answers tended to be short, for example, and when he initiated a topic himself, using self-disclosure, it functioned as a kind of indirect criticism of being (continually) held up by such processes. This criticism was different to the complaint noted in (1), as the official was arguably the intended target of a level of face aggravation rather than face enhancement in this case. The official offered no apology for the passenger’s plight, however (as Matt had done with respect to Jessica).

Other airport settings where small talk features - albeit at the start - are investigative interviews undertaken by security personnel (and sometimes, the police). One purpose of the (albeit limited) small talk, in such cases, is (to attempt) to establish the interviewee’s baseline: that is, their “natural, truthful, behaviour at the beginning of [the] interview” (Inbau et al. 2013:140, cited in Ewens et al. 2014:245) as much as is possible, given the time limitations, context, etc. This is based on the (research-validated) belief that people who are exposed to truthful baseline behaviour, when they first meet a stranger, are better at discriminating truths from lies (see, e.g., O’Sullivan et al. 1988). There is a need for caution here, of course. It would be problematic to mislabel first behaviours as honest when they are deceptive, for example, as this could lead to errors when assessing subsequent behaviours. This is especially the case if the baseline detection method is used unthinkingly to determine any/all change(s) in behaviour from an interviewee’s baseline as set via the small talk exchange(s) just prior to or at the beginning of the interview proper. A related caveat we might note is that rapport work involving the same person can exhibit differences, whether someone has something to hide or not (see Ewens et al. 2014). An apparent behavioural change might be to do with the interviewee having assessed the “appropriate” level of formality (Vrij 2008) differently to the interviewer, for example.

Alternatively, an interviewee might be more nervous at the outset than the interviewer had anticipated - or might change their behaviour, later, (whether or not they are being deceptive) when they find themselves:

- Accused of wrongdoing (rather than being left unchallenged) (Vrij 2006).
- Asked about a topic they find embarrassing rather than neutral, or find engaging and thus care about (Kleinke 1986; Davis & Hadiks 1995; Matarazzo et al. 1970).
- Questioned by a different interviewer (Vrij and Winkel 1991).

The passenger in (6), for example, went on to have his luggage checked by a second official, a custom's officer, in his and the initial border control official's presence. Whilst the search was taking place, the passenger exhibited a greater level of anxiety, including fidgeting and turning away from his luggage. When the custom's officer found that he had more alcohol than the allowance allows, the following interaction ensued:

(7) Over the allowance

2nd Official: you are one litre over your allowance but because you've been
delayed here as a gesture of good will I'm gonna let you take it

Passenger: thank you

2nd Official: my pleasure sir (.) alright

Passenger: what next

1st official: ok you'll follow me back upstairs sir

(UK Border Force (S01E04), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx8GNMIgjjE>).

Published 18/01/2012. Accessed 03/08/2018).

The second official's "gesture of good will", relating to keeping the prohibited litre of alcohol, equates to remedial facework on his part. The face-enhancing gesture was verbally acknowledged by the passenger through the speech act of thanking. However, the passenger's body language prior to asking "what next", his voice quality when asking the question, and the gesture accompanying it, alluded to his annoyance/anxiety at being further delayed. This particular case is interesting as the passenger was later body searched and then x-rayed, and found to be concealing 96 packages of cocaine (in his intestines). As this was not known, at this time, however, the officers needed to keep in mind that innocent as well as "guilty...people are likely to exhibit different behaviours during" (Ewens et al. 2014:245) what, in essence, are distinct activity types (Levinson 1992). In addition, major airports tend to be,

[...] 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 2010:9).

As we have argued in previous work, it is for such reasons AMs, BDOs and other airport personnel must "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" (Archer et al. 2019:459). We argue, in addition, that they themselves can trigger nervous behaviours (as well as resistance rather than cooperation), due to "the way in which they have approached a particular passenger" (ibid.). We have therefore 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 and is outlined, briefly, in Section 5 below.

5. EIA Behavioural Detection Programme

The EIA behavioural detection programme for AMs and BDOs adopts a two-step process. First, participants learn how to identify a POI both (i) from a distance, using a cluster of behaviours outlined in our Observe, Target, Engage, Respond (OTER) system, and (ii) as they move closer to them, using our Six Channel Analysis in Real-time (SCAnR) system. This involves noting relevant facial, gestural and body movements and (if close enough) voice and verbal content. By way of illustration, SCAnR familiarises trainees with the features captured under 27 research-corroborated criteria (Archer and Lansley 2015). Depending on the POI, clusters of such features might include “inconsistencies or anomalies in” respect to “facial expressions” (Archer et al. 2019:459). They might be held too long and/or not match the spoken message, for instance. A POI might also display an increased use “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” (ibid:460). Their voice might also trail off, “in ways that suggest a lack of commitment on” their part (ibid:460). There might be evidence, in addition, “of (muscle) tension in the [POI's] body” and/or “changes in [their] skin colour”, “breathing rate”, etc. (ibid:460). None of these features would be a “point of interest” (henceforth PIn) for the AM or BDO in isolation. Indeed, trainees of the SCAnR system are advised to respond “only to clusters of three PIns” involving

at least two communication channels; and only when such behavioural clusters cannot be accounted for by (i.e., discounted because of) “the *Account* being given by an individual, that individual’s apparent/emerging *Baseline* and/or the...*Context*” (ibid:461).

As noted in Archer et al. (ibid:462), “PIs based upon behavioural observation” remain “*points of interest*” only unless they can be validated (by some sort of additional investigation). The second step of the training process is thus focussed on coaching trainees in the use of (covert) elicitation techniques, via which to in/validate their hypotheses respecting an individual’s behaviour(s). It is worth noting that our approach to elicitation in airport settings differs in several ways from another well-known system developed (by Ormerod and Dando 2014) for uniformed staff: the Controlled Cognitive Engagement (CCE) system. The use of empirically validated, multi-channel cues does not feature in CCE, for example; instead, interviewers are trained to focus upon any behavioural change resulting from cognitive load. CCE is usually undertaken by authorised airport personnel moreover, and is thus 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” using non-scripted/unanticipated questions (ibid:78).³ Because of their undercover status, plain-clothed BDOs and AMs do not have the necessary visible authority required for - and thus are best avoiding – such overt chat-down protocols. It is also advisable to keep any engagements to a minimum – for example, a few minutes in duration – in order to prevent such POIs from becoming (overly) suspicious (see Section 7). We therefore train them (and other airport and security personnel working in high-stake environments) to use a combination of methods by which to initiate and develop an engagement subtly. Our system makes use of “ice breaker” topics, for example, but according to various time periods: the distant-to-immediate past, present and imminent-to-longer-term

³ According to the CCE creators, the use of unanticipated questions helps “to raise the cognitive load faced by deceptive passengers” (ibid: 78), whilst the rapport aspect helps to keep legitimate passengers’ cognitive load to a minimum.

future. This flexible time component was factored into our 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 - **F**amily/friends, **O**ccupation/skills, **R**ecreation, **C**urrent events, **E**ducation/qualifications, **D**reams/plans (known by the mnemonic, FORCED) - are designed to be easy to engage with, as part of small talk. They are thus in line with the types of conversation evidenced in the YouTube examples relating to non-native speakers of a language in aviation settings (hence our discussion of them in Section 3). They are in line, too, with the types of interaction native (English) speakers are likely to engage in, according to the different self-help books we have consulted. By way of illustration, Lerner et al. (2002) quote different people's ways of engaging in small talk with strangers in the airport in their *Vault Guide to Schmoozing*. Typical examples reported, by them, include "talk[ing] about the flight" they are "waiting for", asking "where they're going" and noticing, so as to be able to "make some comment" on, what they are reading (ibid:135-6).

When used well, FORCED "ice breaker" topics can help AMs and BDOs (i) initiate a level of rapport (cf. Section 3), (ii) begin assessing (so as to establish) a POI's baseline behaviour (cf. above), and also (iii) glean useful information covertly (cf. Sections 3 and 7). Participants, within our system, are encouraged, further, to make use of the full range of elicitations, from hints through to commands (rather than relying primarily on unanticipated questions, as with CCE). We have thus identified mnemonics such as "PERFECT" for them, to alert them to/remind them of specific elicitation techniques: namely, making *Provocative statements*, *Encouraging complaining*, using *Repetition*, engaging in *Flattery*, using *Erroneous statements/naiveté*, *Criticizing* and *Testing perceived/reported reality* (including by feigning

disbelief).⁴ In Section 6, following, we compare some of these techniques with the techniques used by social engineers.

6. Comparing social engineering techniques with alternative covert elicitation techniques based on small talk

We are including a (brief) section on social engineering techniques, in this chapter, as a social engineer shares something in common with undercover AMs and BDOS. Simply put, each uses elicitation techniques that encourage their targets to volunteer information to them or to perform an action on their behalf without them having to disclose their ultimate motivation for wanting that information/action. In the case of a social engineer, *however*, this is to enable him or her to (surreptitiously) manipulate people for their own gain. As Mann (2012:13) notes, human vulnerabilities “are not as easy to secure as a web server” or other IT systems, and thus tend to be the biggest vulnerability for most organisations. Consider (8), taken from a YouTube clip demonstrating some “simple social engineering” techniques (as part of a DEFCON Hacker Convention).

(8) Playing the “damsel in distress”

<baby crying in background, and throughout>

“mom”: hi I’m actually- I’m so sorry can you hear me ok I- my baby
I’m sorry <laughs> my <laughs> er my husband’s like we're

⁴ This aspect of the training draws upon the Defence Department’s (2014) “Elicitation – Would you recognise it?” publication, as well as the work of Nolan (1999), Dreck (2011), and others.

about to apply for a loan and we just had a baby and he's like *get this done by today* so I'm so sorry I can't er erm call you back <laughs> I'm trying to log into our account for user's information and I can't remember what email address we used to log on to the account and the baby's crying and can (h.) can you help me [..]

“mom”: awesome

“mom”: if I needed to add our older daughter on our account so she could call in and make changes how would I need to go about doing that [..]

“mom”: you would have to send me a secure pin through a text message [..]

“mom”: yeah well the thing is that I don't think I'll be able to receive a text message if I'm on the phone [..]

“mom”: oh I'm not on there either [..]

“mom”: so I thought when we got married he added me to the account [..]

“mom”: 5127 [..]

“mom”: wait I'm sorry so there's no password on my account right now can I set that up [..]

“mom”: thank you so much for your help today

“mom”: I'll get her fed after this <laughs> all right thank you

(This is how hackers hack you using simple social engineering.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lc7scxvKQOo>.

As the professional hacker (Jessica Clark) explains to her interviewer at the beginning of the clip, this social engineering attack is an example of vishing: using the phone to extract information or data points that can be used in a later attack. The eleven turns (above) capture Jessica's side of an interaction with her interviewer's mobile phone provider. Jessica adopts the role of a harassed "mom" and wife of the interviewer. To add to her credibility, she uses the interviewer's actual mobile number (so that it appears as if she is calling from his mobile) and plays an audio of a crying baby for the duration of the call. Notice that she is very apologetic with respect to the crying baby initially, but also mixes her apologies with laughter – especially at the point she requests help from the agent. This is in line with Franzini's (2012:16, 17) suggestion that humour can be helpful "in many everyday settings, including settings that can be delicate or sensitive in some way", as when "requesting help from a stranger" (cf. [Section 3](#)). Notice, in addition, that the laughter, apologies and request for help coincide with verbal evidence of anxiety – including false starts, "so" emphasis prior to *sorry*, and an audible sigh - all of which are designed to feign embarrassment, exasperation and/or exhaustion on Jessica's part. Intermingled in this exchange are key "self-disclosures", which (as previously noted) can be an especially effective strategy for eliciting emotional support when the need for such support is made explicit in some way (Jourard 1959). Jessica emphasises that she cannot remember what email address was used to log onto the account, cannot call back (but without explaining why) and does not think she will be able to receive a text message. The latter two serve to add to the urgency of the agent acting now, as does Jessica's hint that her husband is somewhat demanding, using reported speech in combination with a different voice quality: "and he's like *get this done by today*". It is enough to win the agent's sympathy. S/he not only provides Jessica with the requested email information, but also

allows her to change the pin and password for the account (thereby blocking the interviewer from using it).

Although the above is designed to demonstrate how easy it can be to glean information from others surreptitiously, this exchange is **both** more overtly transactional and emotionally manipulative than the exchanges AMs and BDOs will tend to have with passengers. Indeed, the aim is that AMs and BDOs will extract information with which to in/validate passengers as a POI but in such a way that genuine passengers, in particular, believe they have been involved in nothing more than an “apparently normal and innocent conversation” (Hadnagy 2010:56) **akin to small talk**. As highlighted in the Introduction, one argument for using a covert approach such as this is that genuine passengers will not experience the stress levels associated with the formal interviewing process (unless the AM/BDO signals the need for others to formally interview them). As Duncan (2008) and others have noted, unsuspecting people can be motivated to *voluntarily* communicate information via a variety of elicitation techniques. Some of these techniques, moreover, have obvious connections with extant facework and impression management research, due to advocating the use of criticism, feigned disbelief, flattery, naiveté and sympathy. By way of illustration, elicitation types – such as engaging in flattery, encouraging complaining, feigning naiveté, expressing sympathy and signalling a mutual interest - all make use of positive face (Brown and Levinson 1987). That is to say, they are designed to appeal (albeit in different ways) to the potential POI’s want to be approved of, to be liked and/or to be deemed useful. Hadnagy (2010:67) suggests that “subtle flattery can coax a person into a conversation that might not have taken place” otherwise, for example. Extract (3), when Paula signals her interest in Angie’s reading material, provides the closest example to this. For each learns they share both their love of Enid Blyton and a final destination. As not everyone is adept at using (or receiving) flattery, when meeting strangers for the first time, naiveté can be an especially good opener in an airport context. In this case, an AM or BDO has

the option of implicitly signalling a need of some sort of (or may even ask explicitly for) help from the potential POI. Extract (5) provides one such example in that the female passenger admits, first, to having “never been at an airport” and then to not “really know[ing] where to go first”. This prompts the male passenger to help the female passenger, by explaining the process (i.e., check in, security check, gate). (1) provides us with examples of the two remaining elicitation types to make use of positive face: encouraging complaining and expressing sympathy. As previously noted, encouraging complaining in order to establish a shared mutual reality can lead to mutual face-maintenance and/or face enhancement: as it does in the case of Jessica and Matt, both of whom shared the experience of having their flight delayed. Matt’s expression of sympathy – in the form of an apology – seemed to be important, in turn, in prompting the longer exchange between them, as it gave Jessica the opportunity to clarify it was not his fault, and then to exchange names with Matt, before asking him about his career plans.

Elicitation techniques such as using provocative or even purposefully erroneous statements, feigning disbelief and engaging in criticism each have the potential to threaten (instead of appealing to) an individual’s positive face or to threaten the AM’s or BDO’s own face: but deliberately so, so as to bring about a response from that individual. 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” (Hadjnagy 2011:69). 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. Consider, once again, the (fictional) interaction between Jessica and Matt in (1). Rather than asking about his studies, an AM or BDO, in this case, might test Matt’s knowledge of Brisbane by stating false things about the town (cf. also (5) and especially (6)). Provocative statements, in contrast, can serve to identify a common

other, which the AM or BDO can share with the POI. This is evident, *once again*, in (1). Indeed, it was Jessica's complaint over the second delay in a week that prompted her and Matt to develop (an albeit temporary) shared mutual reality. The above techniques also subsume others, such as appealing to X's ego, expressing mutual interest, volunteering information, and assuming knowledge: *some of which also feature in Section 3. We might note, for example, that* volunteering information relies on the Principle of Reciprocity (Cialdini 1993). That is, the idea that people feel beholden to repay another's (especially positive) actions towards them in some way. *Whilst* there are numerous examples of information being volunteered and self-disclosures being reciprocated in the (fictionalised) interactions between strangers, *the second* official's attempt at developing reciprocity was not as effective (*see (7)*). His "gesture" of overlooking the passenger's excess of alcohol (by one litre), given he had experienced delays, was met by a "thank you" only. When the second official responded to the thanks with "my pleasure sir", *moreover*, the passenger seemed more interested in determining "what next" than acknowledging the second official's ongoing positive facework. These short responses probably allude to his anger/anxiety at being (repeatedly) held up: anxiety as well as anger as he was concealing cocaine (which had not been discovered at this point).

7. Small talk as a phatic veil for transactional work: some closing observations

In Archer et al. (2019:466), we demonstrated how "AMs, BDOs and other airport personnel" benefit from having "access to linguistic insights as well as behavioural insights in their field of work". We focussed, in particular, on how they can use different elicitation techniques to probe (as a means of in/validating) behavioural observations and linguistic clues in real time – whilst avoiding any semblance of "being unduly intrusive (especially when follow-up engagements appear to be unnecessary)" (ibid:466-467). The latter is important, of course, as

plain-clothed AMs and BDOs do not have the visible authority to carry out semi-formal interviews with passengers. Archer et al. (2019) also demonstrate the (facework) consequences for both undercover officers and those they opt to interact with when things do not go as planned. This chapter has extended this line of work further, by exploring the benefits that small talk affords undercover officers in airport contexts: in essence, providing them with a “veil” under which to in/validate behavioural observations, such that “to most passengers, they...appear to be engaging in simple, light, airy conversation” only (ibid.:467). The main contention of this chapter - that small talk provides AMs and BDOs with an opportunity to glean useful information from POIs but in such a way that genuine passengers feel they are engaging in no more than pleasantries and/or mutually-agreed helping behaviours (as outlined in Section 6) – has theoretical implications for our understanding of small talk, in turn. Simply put, we have sought to explain that, contra Malinowski (1923), McKenzie (2010) and others (see Section 2), small talk can serve a specific instrumental (or transactional) function in its own right: especially in contexts where that function is camouflaged within its stereotypically phatic veil. We have also discussed some of the benefits for genuine passengers, when small talk is used in this way by undercover AMs and BDOs. When small talk appears to be undertaken - as it is in (1)-(5) - for no other reason than having a genuine (albeit passing) interest in the other, for example, the passengers’ stress levels are likely to be lower (unless the AM/BDO signals the need for others to formally interview them). When the small talk appears to be “an end in itself” only (cf. Malinowski 1923:312), genuine passengers also display more reciprocation and less resistance. These latter observations are based on Sections 3-5, where we outline so that we might contrast extracts (1)-(5) with (6). That is, the passenger only sharing their current place of residence in the latter, but without name sharing, compared with (1)-(5), where greetings are exchanged, names are shared and mutually self-disclosed additional personal information is volunteered, as well as being used, on occasion, to establish shared

(temporary) mutual realities. The observations have also been validated by an airport-based study we conducted in a European international airport that confirmed 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 (Lansley et al. 2016). Participants involved in this particular study received 36 hours of training in behavioural detection and elicitation spread over four days, before being expected to operate undercover as a passenger (with a partner). Although their levels of English varied from conversational to fluent, each pair had to engage passengers nominated by the research team, for no more than 25 minutes, in order to obtain information such as: the passengers' names, nationalities, destinations, mobile phone numbers and PIN, whether they had carried prohibited items through airports in the past and/or were carrying them now. They were also asked to make use of FORCED topics, one covering the past, and one the future. As explained in Section 5, these topics are designed to be easy to engage with, as part of small talk, as well as being typical for aviation contexts (this, in turn, explains the overlap with the type of advice given to (non-)native (English) speakers who are seeking to improve their interactions in such settings, for which see Section 3). Each required piece of information carried points, weighted to the degree of difficulty expected in obtaining them.

Nineteen records of engagements were returned and scored. Cumulatively, the participants achieved an average elicitation score of 26.4 out of 50 during these engagements. They were also found to have elicited most or all of the information they were required to, from those they interacted with, within an interaction window of between 4 and 25 minutes (giving an average of 9 minutes, 43 seconds per interaction). Importantly, their successfulness in achieving (what the team regarded to be) quality information correlated at a high level (0.89^5) with the types of

⁵ Using Spearman's Coefficient of Rank Order Correlation.

elicitation probe used.⁶ Some of the information the participants derived was obtained 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 was extracted subtly, however, during what appeared to be normal “small talk” for such contexts (Department of Defence 2014). No participant was overtly rejected by a passenger, for example, or suspected of being security staff (as far as we could tell). Participants were informed at the beginning of the exercise that red-team members may also be engaging in covert activities designed to test the effectiveness of airport surveillance,⁷ and that they should therefore refer any individuals they suspected of being red-team members to the research team.⁸ By the end of the exercise, they had successfully identified/referred four red-team members as well as a fifth person, who was later found to be a foreign agent working undercover and thus lying about his identity, job role and travel plans (by the security staff on duty).

We are aware that this type of training raises a number of important ethical issues, some of which are discussed in detail in a report produced by Reding et al. (2014) for RAND Europe (and thus will not be repeated here). Suffice it to say, airports have been aware of a growing terrorist threat since the 1960s (Ravich 2007). Indeed, AMs and BDOs were introduced (from the 1960s onwards and following 9/11 respectively) in response to such threats (see also Section 1). The RAND report is amongst several to highlight “the time-sensitive nature of some counterterrorism situations”, and thus the importance of having robust “[me]thods of reviewing

⁶ The participants drew on closed questions and open questions most frequently (38% and 29% of the time respectively), the majority of these occurring once an initial engagement was under way. This was also true of complex or leading questions, which accounted for a mere 5% of the total elicitations used. In contrast, declarative-based elicitations and requests each accounted for 14% of the total elicitations used, and tended to occur most frequently at the beginning of the interactions.

⁷ The red-team members, in this case, were secret service security personnel. They were instructed to gather intelligence information relating to the landside Departures areas, and to get unauthorized objects through security (but did not pass through security on the day of the exercise, even though they were equipped with travel documents, including Boarding Cards).

⁸ 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.

decision making” that allow all security personnel to act effectively and efficiently (Reding et al. *ibid*:46). We believe our training adds to the robustness of such decision-making, by providing systems via which AMs and BDOs can, first, evidence points of interest that have been empirically grounded by previous deception detection studies and, then, in/validate them using interactions akin to small talk (before reporting POIs upwards, where/when necessary). We have been unable to share actual interactions involving the participants in our 2016 study. However, when participants interacted with passengers with nothing to hide, those interactions were akin to the kind of (friendly) chat passengers regularly engage in in airport contexts (*cf.* Sections 3 and 6). These instances of small talk thus had the added benefit of providing a positive (face-enhancing) experience for the passengers involved. The participants, in turn, learned techniques that they can use in their roles as AMs and BDOs, in order to help their industry keep airports safe.

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