

# Move-Structure Analysis of Police Written Witness Statements in Ghana: An Account of a Context-Defining Police Discourse

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## Abstract

The police written witness statement is a major evidentiary document that has a direct bearing on the prosecution and adjudication of criminal cases. The present study examines the rhetorical structure of police written witness statements in Ghana as a genre by adopting Bhatia's genre model to examine 120 statements on alleged criminal cases that were sampled from the Wenchi Division of the Bono Regional Police Command in Ghana. The findings suggest that the police written witness statement is typically characterized by five moves (*Disclaiming, Identifying the Witness, Stating Witness's Involvement with the Case, Reporting the Facts, and Indicating Discharge of Legal Responsibility*) that bear facts necessary in the prosecution of crime in Ghana's criminal justice system. The choice of lexicogrammatical features varied depending on the function of each move. The study concludes that the witness statements possess peculiar functional features that meet the legal demands of Ghana's judicial expectations and police discourse.

## Keywords

genre, police discourse, technical communication, rhetorical structure

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## Introduction

The police written witness statement is a major evidentiary document that assists the police in carrying out their core duty of investigating and prosecuting suspected crimes (Milne et al., 2022). The witness statement is one of the formal texts of police procedure of investigations besides the police report, court or forensic written request, phone dialogue transcription, and investigation final report (Ribeiro, 2010). It is a testimony given by a person or witness to the police on a suspected criminal event. In the criminal justice system, it could be subsequently relied on as evidence in court, based on which the state prosecutors (i.e., the police or attorneys) argue their case against the accused during trial proceedings. Ultimately, it could serve as a basis for winning or losing the criminal case against the accused (Komter, 2006).

The success of the witness statement as an evidentiary material, to a great extent, is dependent on its composition and the use of language. Saletović and Kišiček (2012), for example, assert that the use of conversational and administrative language features including long, complex, multiclausal sentences and frequent use of coordinating and subordinating conjunctions have significant impact on the effectiveness of witness statements and that linguistic patterns often impact statement veracity. Hence, the witness statement is not just a verbatim record of the original utterances of the witness during the statement-taking session but a carefully couched statement that details events in a manner that meets the legal expectations of the genre (Canning, 2018; Jarmołowska, 2010). In recording witness testimony, the police attempt to ideally produce an account that is “consistent and relevant for legal purposes, as they select certain pieces of information and integrate them into a coherent story, with enhanced chronology” (Jönsson & Linell, 1991, p. 96). However, the literature suggests police recording and writing of witness statements may be fraught with several inaccuracies and omissions (Johannsen et al., 2021; Milne et al., 2022; Walsh et al., 2023). Gregory et al. (2011) note that police officers omit details that they (the police) regard as trivial in their writing of witness statements. Such omissions make the witness statements less complete and harm the investigation or trial process. Johannsen et al. (2021), in their study of mock witness statements in Germany, report that as high as about 60% of the original utterances of witnesses may be lost in the writing of the statements, leading to misinformation.

Especially, in instances where the written statements are translated from one language to the other, Griffiths et al. (2011) and Jarmołowska (2010) note the occurrence of several inaccuracies that may be associated with the communication process or the translation of the original statements of witnesses from the original language. Mistranslation of witness statements may lead to

distortion of facts and blurring of acts or actions in the reported speech of the witnesses that may eventually injure the judgment of the court (Lee, 2017). Eventually, the witness statement may misrepresent some facts or actors in the statements.

Nevertheless, the police endeavor to select or represent what they deem essential to cases to present in witness statements (Seawright, 2012). This selection process rests on the police's consideration of what is important to the judicial process and to a large extent, the required structure of the witness statement. It is this need by the police to select relevant information from witnesses' testimonies that may lead to the manipulation and coconstruction of the witness statements to achieve certain preconceived goals including eliciting confessions from suspects and presenting a winnable case or argument (Sagana et al., 2017). This manipulation and coconstruction of the statement eventually affect investigations and the prosecution of cases in the form of positively providing consistency in the narrative of the criminal incident, and negatively impeding accurate crime reconstruction and eventual interpretation of evidence (Komter, 2002; Rock, 2001; Sagana et al., 2017).

It is thought that written statements that give particular attention to essential details and structure can mitigate against some of the aforementioned challenges (Mattison & Cooper, 2021). Henry et al. (2020) suggest that composing an account of witness's testimonies that meets the communicative purpose of the genre is necessary for the narrative coherence of essential details relevant to the judicial process. Indeed, the ability to compose a fit-for-purpose written witness statement is an indispensable workplace skill for the police. Studies by Alhuqbani (2014), Byrman (2014), Kekana (2015), Seawright (2012), Schönteich (1999), and H. Yu and Monas (2020) assert that the communicative competence needed to compose written statements may be a challenge to some police officers globally. These challenges manifest as inefficiency in basic writing skills across the various levels of linguistic competence: words, sentences, punctuation, paragraphs, tenses, and reporting skills, among others. For instance, Byrman (2014) reported that some police officers in Sweden misuse both quotation marks and slashes, which present vague and unclear impressions and interpretations of statements. According to H. Yu and Monas (2020) and Schönteich (1999), the lack of basic writing skills by some police officers despite the high stakes attached to such competence is a threat to the prosecution of cases and could serve as the basis for which prosecutors nullify statements taken by the police.

The importance of rhetorical structuring of witness statements has been neglected, a gap that genre analysis might address. For instance, available literature suggests that genre analyses on police written discourse have

focused on the police report but not the police written witness statement (see Četković, 2017; Ribeiro, 2010). Studies that have paid attention to written witness statements have not considered it as a genre but rather as linguistic features that focus on the validity of the evidence presented in the statements, such as verb tense and evidentiary perceptive verbs like *see* and *hear* (see Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Picornell, 2013a, 2013b). Hence, the present study seeks to bridge the identified gap by examining the move structure of the police written witness statement in Ghana from the English for Specific Purpose (ESP) genre tradition, as a genre exemplifying a professional and legal discourse. This agenda is also motivated by the call for deliberate specification of the functional structure of written witness statements (Mattison & Cooper, 2021). Moreover, the researchers believe that establishing the structural patterns of the genre emphasizes the linguistic competence that can help improve the writing of witness statements. Further, studies by Hope et al. (2021) and Anakwah et al. (2020) have pointed out that there are cross-cultural differences in the features of police discourses across different contexts. Anakwah et al. (2020), for instance, identified that individualistic societies like European societies and collectivistic societies like sub-Saharan African societies (including Ghana) show variations in the quantity and the quality of witness reports. This observation makes it imperative to study the genre of police written witness statements as an account of what pertains in a sub-Saharan society like Ghana to draw attention to the statements' peculiar functional features like rhetorical structuring and particular vocabulary items. The study, therefore, specifies the functional move structures of police written witness statements used in Ghana and also probes some lexicogrammatical resources that characterize the witness statements.

## The Composition of Police Witness Statement

As argued by Mattison and Cooper (2021), the presentation of the witness statement ought to be logical and chronological to aid coherency for the end users of the statements, particularly the tribunal tasked with decision-making in the judicial process. The broader consensus from several of the studies, which were mainly based on the validity of statements, suggests that effective witness testimony can be partitioned into three broad parts: prologue, criminal incident, and epilogue (Adams & Jarvis, 2006; Johnson et al., 1988; Picornell, 2013a). Johnson et al. (1988) note that these three parts correspond to *preceding events*, *target event*, and *events following the target event* in the testimonies, and witnesses often recall events by these frames.

The Prologue often presents information on the actions of the victims before their encounter with events that characterize the Criminal Incident; thus, the Prologue foreshadows the Criminal Incident (Rabon, 1996). As the orientation to the main incident, the Prologue is not expected to be lengthy. Indeed, statements with longer prologues (i.e., opening section) than the criminal incident may be indicative of deception (Adams & Jarvis, 2006; Rudacille, 1994). The second broad segment, the Criminal Incident, relays information on the actual crime event by describing the suspect's purported criminal actions. The Criminal Incident is usually the dominant part of the narrative of the testimony. Ribeiro (2010) renamed this segment *narrating/reporting the facts*. The facts regarding what occurred during the crime event.

Van Charldorp (2014) noted that in police witness or statement-taking situations, when witnesses are allowed to narrate their stories/incidents freely, the narrative usually consists of an orientation, complicating action, evaluation, and resolution. However, the written narrative under the supervision of police officers often possesses only orientation, complicating action, and resolution (van Charldorp, 2014, p. 22). This reduction in the structure of the Criminal Incident segment occurs because of police supervision and guided elicitation, and co-construction of the statements that draws on the specific details of interest to the prosecution of cases. The final part of the police witness statement, the Epilogue, reports actions sequent to the Criminal Incident (Adams & Jarvis, 2006; Johnson et al., 1988). This part is often not lengthy as witnesses are often more interested in the Criminal Incident and are quick to end after their narration.

In relation to the study of lexicogrammatical features of witness statements, particular interests has been placed on tenses, sentences, and style, among others. Regarding tenses, there is much consensus among scholars (Byrman & Byrman, 2018; Okawara, 2012) that the past tense is significantly the preferred verb form in recording the narratives of witnesses. Reporting or narrating the suspected incident using only the present tense renders statements illogical since the actions or events represent completed actions in the past and therefore ought to be relayed in the past tense (Byrman & Byrman, 2018; Picornell, 2013b). However, Jarmołowska (2010) argues that the use of the past tense in witness statements is not universal to the text. The use of the past and present tense is tied to the function of each section of the statement. In effect, both communicative purpose and institutional conventions play critical roles in the choice of one tense type over the other. As for sentence types, the witness statements are likely to be characterized by long sentence structures (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Komter, 2003; Ndatyapo, 2022;

Saletović & Kišiček, 2012; Shuy, 1998). In Saletovic and Kisicek's (2012) study, for example, each witness statement contained at least two long, complex sentences. Indeed, long and complex sentences have been considered as unmarked features of legal genres and are employed because of the stylistic convenience they provide in making the communication easier, clearer, and appealing (Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Tiersma, 2006). Additionally, the inclination toward the use of complex sentences is motivated by the need to represent evidence as explicitly as possible to avoid ambiguities (Ćetković, 2017). However, contrary to the position about long, complex sentences in witness statements, Jarmołowska (2010) has observed that simple sentences may sometimes dominate translated witness statements for brevity and accuracy that translators strive to achieve in the reports that ought to be translated.

## The Institutional Context

The study focuses on the witness statements written and used by the Ghana Police Service (GPS). The Ghana Police Service, established under Ghana's Police Service Act 1970 (Act 350), aims at protecting life and property, investigating suspected crimes, apprehending and prosecuting crimes, deepening the governance culture of the service, promoting accountability in the service, and building the human resource capacity of the service (Ministry of Interior, 2023). In the justice delivery system in Ghana, GPS collaborates with other institutions like the Judicial Service, Ghana Bar Association, the Office of the Attorney General and the Ministry of Justice, and the Ghana Prisons Service.

In Ghana's criminal justice system where an accused person is considered innocent until proven guilty (Article 19(2) of Ghana's 1992 Constitution), the commission of crimes may be followed by an arrest by the police that may or may not be instigated by a complaint, or by summons from the court. More frequently, the police serve as the first point of call and are tasked with the duties of crime investigation, which include taking witness statements from eyewitnesses. The police receive complaints, interview parties and witnesses to crimes, record statements, and issue extracts of the occurrence of crime on request to complainants, witnesses, or victims (Adu-Gyamfi, 2014). As a country that practices common law, the police may further prosecute crimes on behalf of the Attorney General, who is vested with the legal authority to do so (Article 88 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana) (Republic of Ghana, 1992).

In the discharge of its duties of investigation and prosecution, the GPS engages several forms of documentation like the complainant statement (used

to refer to the statements produced by victims/complainants), the witness statement, the investigation cautioned statement (a term used in the context to refer to statements produced by the suspect, and sometimes known as the suspect statement), and charge cautioned statement (a term used to refer to statements that indicate the charges given to the accused when the case is transferred to the court). These statements are produced, usually, through the guidance or assistance of the police. The witness statement serves as evidence for prosecutors, and the witnesses become the prosecution witness in the court proceedings. The accused may produce witnesses who may also write witness statements to defend their case at the court.

The researchers limit the study to the witness statements taken at the police station. As indicated, these witness statements taken at the police stations serve as an important channel of communication or correspondence between the Police Service and the courts, with the communicative purpose of detailing crimes and events surrounding crimes to allow for an informed adjudication of cases. In Ghana's judicial system, it is part of the essential documents filed at least 2 clear days before the Case Management Conference (CMC) in the court proceedings and may be presented as "the evidence in-chief" of witness if agreed by both parties, the accused and the prosecution (Kuwornu, 2018).

Because of its legal stakes, much attention is paid to its writing to make it fit for purpose. The police often assist the witnesses by writing the statements while the witnesses dictate in Ghanaian local languages such as Twi, Ga, Frafra, and Dagbani, among others. The police officers, who have fluency and usually native competence in the particular local language, interview the witness and directly translate and record the witness's testimony or response in the local language into English. This particularly happens when the witnesses cannot write in English or choose not to do the writing themselves although they can write in English. However, the practice of police writing the statements of the witnesses is most common for two reasons: that the witnesses often dictate their statements in local languages, and that the police are more familiar with the writing conventions of the statements. Where necessary, interpreters are contracted to assist with the translation of the witness's information into English while the police write the statements.

## **Method**

The research adopts the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach to genre analysis of the texts. According to this tradition, communicative events influenced by communicative purposes define a genre and instigate the patterns of structure, style, content, and intended audience of the genre (Swales,

1990, p. 58). The pursuit of ESP genre studies, therefore, lies in the quest to analyze the formal language features in its context to unravel the language resources that define the genre as appropriate professional writing to a discourse community (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990; D. Yu & Bondi, 2019). Informed by these assumptions, the study sought to provide a linguistic description of police written witness statements, to “unpack the meanings” (Leaway, 2017, p. 34) members of the Ghana Police Service as a discourse community attach to various aspects of the police written witness statement as a professional and legal genre in the Ghanaian context.

This study uses a mixed methods approach that incorporates qualitative and quantitative methods in the data analysis, as has been for several genre studies of this kind (Malmir et al., 2019; Mintah, 2024; D. Yu & Bondi, 2019). Linguistic features of the moves and steps, and some lexicogrammatical features, are counted and compared, while an in-depth and interpretive understanding of the moves, steps and linguistic features observed in the data are qualitatively derived in relation to the communicative purpose and context of the discourse community.

The data for the study was obtained from the Wenchi Division of the Bono Regional Police Command, Ghana. In the architecture of GPS, the Wenchi Division, headquartered in the Wenchi district, is one of the four divisions of the Bono Regional Command. The police divisional command represents a high rank in the police administrative system, and it can be argued to have officers with expertise in the discharge of police duties as compared to other lower levels on the command chain. It is, therefore, appropriate to assume that the police written statements that were obtained from the Wenchi Divisional Police Command would provide exemplary and authentic insights into the rhetorical practices of members of the police profession in Ghana as far as the composition of the written witness statement is concerned.

The data comprised 120 police written witness statements on alleged criminal incidents. A purposive sampling technique was employed to collect samples of the witness statements contained in the station diaries between the months of January and October, 2023. As a criterion-based procedure that considers common features of sample units that enable exploration of central themes (Ritchie et al., 2003), the researchers established three criteria in the selection of the samples: the statements must be police written statements from witnesses, must be on suspected criminal incidents, and must be eyewitness's statements. Using the hat-and-draw method (a sampling method where items are randomly selected from a population, with each having an equal chance of being selected), 12 samples were randomly selected from each of the 10 months of the year; thus, the witness statements for each of the 10 months were serially numbered, ballot of serially numbered papers that bore

corresponding numbers to those on the witness statements for each month was made, 12 ballots were randomly handpicked for each month, and the witness statements that bore the same numbers as those on the ballot papers qualified as the sample for the study.

The data analysis was carried out using Bhatia's (1993) genre analysis procedure. To examine the structure of police written witness statements in Ghana, the researchers first identified the moves and steps (i.e., a section of text that performs a communicative intent) that existed in the witness statements by segmenting and coding the texts into meaningful units using cognitive-semantic discourse markers to establish the move-structure frames. According to Afful and Gyasi (2020) and Mintah (2024), cognitive-semantic move identification involves identifying the communicative purposes of the move or step, and marking how the main communicative purpose is realized by rhetorical sections in the text by discourse markers. The move discourse markers include linguistic units or forms like phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs and punctuation marks, among other features that are used to indicate the move's or step's communicative intention in stretches of structures. A change in communicative goal by a stretch of words, phrases, or clauses, sometimes signaled by the presence of a punctuation mark or other discourse markers, calls for the identification of a new move or step. Consider this example: *Witness stated in Twi language and the same recorded in English as follows: I am a trader residing at K A. . .* Although this is a single sentence, it communicates two different ideas: the disclaimer of the writer to attribute the content of the statement to a witness, and the identification of the witness. These two are separated graphologically and discourse-wise from each other with the use of the colon after the word *follows*. The pronoun *I* used after the colon represents a shift in voice. Thus, the colon signals a change in thought and the communicative purposes of the stretches of words before and after the colon.

The next stage involved establishing the status of each move and step, that is, whether the move/step is an obligatory element or not. The moves and steps percentages were checked against Huttner's (2010) method of move-status determination. According to Huttner (2010), moves that record a frequency of occurrence between 90% and 100% are obligatory; 50% and 89%, core moves; 30% and 49%, ambiguous moves; and 1% and 29%, optional moves. The next step involved establishing the moves sequence. The occurrence of the moves and steps sequences in each witness statement was outlined, and the most frequent pattern was taken as the established move pattern in the data set. At the lexicogrammatical level, an examination of the linguistic realization of each of the rhetorical moves vis-à-vis lexicogrammatical resources including structural types of sentences, voice types,

evidentiality perceptive verbs, and verb tenses was conducted to account for their (linguistic realization) communicative purposes. Finally, in line with Bhatia's (1993) ESP tradition, the linguistic features observed were valued against the communicative purposes of the discourse community's context-specific demands as a professional genre.

In regard issues of ethical concern, this study acknowledges that witness statements are the products of human subjects and could include very sensitive information that could threaten the "face" of the human subjects concerned. Consequently, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Ghana and the Ghana Police Service, Bono Regional Division, prior to undertaking this project. To protect identities, the researchers used pseudonyms for all persons and place names.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Rhetorical Moves and Steps*

This section reports the frequency of moves that were observed in the data. Determining the obligatory and optional moves of texts is necessary in the account of the rhetorical structures of genres. Using Huttner's (2010) method of move-status determination, the researchers examined the frequency of the occurrence of the moves in the data to identify the obligatory, core, and optional moves and steps. The result is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1 shows that witness statements written by the police are characterized by three obligatory moves, two core moves, and one optional move. It can be asserted that the *Disclaiming (Move 1)*, *Identifying the witness (Move 2)*, and *Reporting the facts (Move 4)* as well as the core moves including *Stating witness's involvement with the case (Move 3)*, and *Indicating discharge of legal responsibility (Move 6)* define police written witness statements in Ghana and appear to be requisite moves with much significance to the professional genre. On the other hand, the inclusion of the only optional move, *Indicating closure (Move 5)*, seems to be a rare practice as it had the least frequency of occurrence. *Reporting the facts (Move 4)* was the only move that had steps (*orienting the audience [Step 4.1]*, *recounting previous events [Step 4.2]*, *recounting the reportable event [Step 4.3]*, and *resolution [Step 4.4]*) and these were either core or obligatory. Thus, it can be concluded that based on the frequencies observed in the data, it is established practice among police officers to include such information as captured in the obligatory and core moves, including all four steps within Move 4 in recording witnesses' statements.

The core and obligatory moves seem necessary to the professional genre as they respond to several expectations of Ghana's Evidence Act 1975

**Table 1.** Moves and Steps in the Witness Statements.

Move	Step	Frequency (f)	Percentage (p)	Status
Move 1: Disclaiming		120	100	Obligatory
Move 2: Identifying the witness		111	92.5	Obligatory
Move 3: Stating witness's involvement with the case		88	73.3	Core
Move 4: Reporting the facts		120	100	Obligatory
	Step 4.1: Orienting the audience	120	100	Obligatory
	Step 4.2: Recounting previous events	102	85	Core
	Step 4.3: Recounting the reportable event	120	100	Obligatory
	Step 4.4: Resolution	77	64.2	Core
Move 5: Indicating closure		7	5.8	Optional
Move 6: Indicating discharge of legal responsibility		93	77.5	Core

Note:  $p = f/120 \times 100$ , where 120 = total number of witness statements in the corpus.

(NRCD 323) (Republic of Ghana, 1975). *Moves 1, 2, and 3* correspond to the requirements of Sections 116, 117, and 119 of the Act that define what a statement should be and the inadmissibility of hearsay statements. The Act considers oral statements transcribed as competent enough to be admitted as statements (Section 116) and asserts that statements generated from hearsay are not admissible (Section 117). It seems necessary, therefore, that the police-written witness statements disclaim ownership of the statements in *Move 1* and establish the witness's identity and the witness's firsthand involvement in the case in *Moves 2 and 3* to grant credibility to the statement as not hearsays. Again, Section 11(2) of the Act indicates that in criminal actions, the evidence including statements of facts in statements which may be the evidence in chief must be detailed and sufficient enough to be considered proof "beyond a reasonable doubt" for the adjudication of cases in a "court of competent jurisdiction" (a court clothed with judicial authority to try cases as specified in the Courts Acts 1993, Act 449). Indeed, Section 3(3) indicates that the quality and details of the facts are necessary for the admissibility or inadmissibility of the evidence. This motivates the extensive structuring of *Move 4* with various steps to meet the evidential requirements of statements. The core *Move 5* echoes the legally binding responsibilities of the police in Ghana to assist witnesses in the investigation of criminal cases.

### *Presentation of Moves and Steps*

*Move 1: Disclaiming.* The act of disclaiming is a very crucial part of this genre because a written witness statement must reflect the exact words of the witness's oral testimony, and this has direct links with the admissibility or otherwise of the evidence adduced in the statement by the court (Walsh et al., 2023). Hence, it seemed important that the statements started with the police disclaiming that the statement was authored by the police since it is a special requirement of the law of evidence and criminal procedure in Ghana's legal system. In Ghanaian police written witness statements, this move manifests by the declaration that the police only assisted the witness by writing the statement and the statement was delivered by the witness in a specific local language. Examples:

1. *Witness states in the Twi language and the same recorded down in English language as follows.*
2. *Witness states in Akan language and same recorded down in English language as follows.*

This declaration should not be read as just establishing that the narrative was authored by the witness but also as shedding the future judicial challenges

that may arise from the statements by the disclaimer. D. Yu and Bondi (2019) suggest that the presence of legal disclaimers in statements not only allows denial of responsibility for the consequence of the statements made but also promotes a positive image of professionalism that appears to be important to the Ghana Police Service and necessary for future engagements with stakeholders.

*Move 2: Identifying the witness.* This move provides information about the person giving the report. This is necessary for establishing the person's identity; hence, it aids the police and the court in determining who exactly is making the claims. Examples:

3. *I am a student at X Junior High School and residing with my grandmother, one Y at H.*
4. *I am a butcher as well as a cattle owner residing in T with my family.*

Walsh et al. (2023) suggest that the identification of the witness is a part of the prior requirements in the collection of witness statements. It was, therefore, expected that this essential information would be found in the text to allow the witnesses to take legal responsibility for the facts recorded by the police. As observed in the above examples, the move consisted of witnesses providing the background identification information (name, occupation, and place of abode, among others).

*Move 3: Stating Witness's Involvement with the Case.* A witness's involvement with the case refers to circumstances that allow for the witness to encounter the facts of the matter (Mattison & Cooper, 2021). It informs the police and the court of the basis on which the witness became familiar with the facts of the case. Usually, it involves information about the witness's relationship with either the complainant or the suspect; hence, placing the witness in a position that appears to establish their "capacity" and credibility as witness. Examples:

5. *Complainants H and F are my neighbors at X. . .*
6. *I live in the same house with the complainant. . .*

*Move 4: Reporting the facts.* Ribeiro (2010) observes that reporting the facts details the history of the case. It carries the main communicative purpose of the witness statement that involves informing the police about a suspected crime and describing the alleged criminal conduct of participants to enable

prosecution or to persuade the courts that a suspect is guilty. The findings of the study indicate that it is an obligatory move. In composing the move, the data inform that the Ghana Police Service adopts four steps: *orienting the audience* (Step 4.1), *recounting previous events* (Step 4.2), *recounting the reportable event* (Step 4.3), and *resolution* (Step 4.4).

**Step 4.1: Orienting the audience.** The move details the definitive temporal setting in terms of the exact day and time that the “criminal” event occurred. In addition, its purpose is to set the tone at the very outset of the witness’s narrative for the chronological unfolding of events and to further emphasize that the events that the witness purports to have experienced or witnessed, did occur in real-time. The date, time, and setting an event occurs are equally important facts that establish whether the testimony can be regarded as credible or not. Example:

7. *On the 20th day of September 2021 at around 7.45 am I was in the house when the elder brother of the deceased, one Mr X called me on phone and informed me that the deceased came to K to visit his friend and this morning they saw him dead.*

**Step 4.2: Recounting previous events.** This move refers to all events that occurred before the first purported criminal conduct of the suspect that the witness purports to have experienced or encountered. For narratives about a particular incident to be considered credible, it is essential that previous events that have a bearing on the main incident are recounted, as they provide context for the reportable event (Labov, 1972). In the present study, the reportable event, the alleged criminal conduct of the suspect, is captured in the *recounting the reportable event step* (Step 3). Hence, the *recounting of the previous events’* function, therefore, is to expose the audience to the status quo prior to the witness’s encounter with the facts of the matter at hand, by providing brief background information that will make the testimony logical, more credible and chronologically appealing. Example:

8. *We were in the church premises when the complainant and the deceased came that they were coming to spend some time with us and go back and during their visit sometimes they travel and come back.*

**Step 4.3: Recounting the reportable event.** Labov (1972) contends that in narrative discourse generally, the reportable event is the “most salient” aspect of the narrator’s story (p. 39). The reportable event in the witness statement

is characterized by a set of actions and inactions of participants, which are either in sync or at variance with the dictates of the laws of the state. In effect, such conducts of the participants, which are allegedly criminal (acts that embody *actus reus* and *mens rea*—the two requisite elements of a crime which mean criminal act and criminal intent [Haworth, 2020], respectively) usually get their expression in this step. Examples:

9. *On reaching a section of the road, four young boys who were armed with cutlasses and knife suddenly attacked and ordered us to stop and bring out our belongings. At that time, none of them was wearing a mask so I was able to identify suspect Y and Z. One of them raised up his cutlass and threatened to butcher me. Suspect Y who was armed with a kitchen knife put the knife on my wife's neck and suspect Z took my wife's bag containing her mobile phone and other items away.*

The alleged criminal behavior described in example 9 will form the core part of the police's investigation. The conduct of the suspects captured in the witness's narrative in the example above is likely to constitute criminal acts. During criminal trials, when the burden of proof rests with the police or state prosecutors, it is these facts that ought to be proved "beyond a reasonable doubt" as provided in Section 11(2) of the Evidence Act 1975 (NRCD 323) before the judge or jury, to persuade the judge or jury to deliver justice in favor of the state.

**Step 4.4: Resolution.** The Resolution marks the aftermath of the alleged criminal actions or events that transpired. It has the communicative purpose of drawing the audience's attention to the consequential outcome sequent to all the happenings that characterized the suspect's actions. Examples:

10. *We, however, decided to have him arrested to the police station.*
11. *Thereafter, they assisted the complainant and sent suspect to the police station.*

**Move 5: Indicating closure.** This optional move realizes the function of signaling the expert addressee that the witnesses have said everything they want to say. It also brings the mind of the expert addressee out of the realm of the narrative situation of the witness's testimony to the present "here and now." Examples:

12. *Hence, my statement.*
13. *This is all what I want to say.*

The move, however, appears insignificant to the overarching purpose of the witness statement. This lack of significance can be argued as the reason for Closure being an optional move, with very few instances of its occurrence in narratives, since narrators may choose to end their testimonies without overtly stating so.

*Move 6: Indicating discharge of legal responsibility.* This move is an affirmation made by the police to the effect that they have discharged the duty of care owed to the witness: assisting the witness to have their testimony recorded down, ensuring the witness understands the content of the testimony by explaining in the local language the translated version to the witnesses' comprehension, and checking that the witness assents to the evidence that will represent the witness legally. It is when the witness has well understood every bit of the transformed version that makes the witness capable of speaking to the issues captured. This, in effect, gives the assurance that the written version represents facts or evidence known to and given by the witness, and further provides a guarantee that the content of the resultant version matches what the witness intended (Milne & Shaw, 1999; Jarmolowska, 2010). Examples:

14. *I hereby certify that I have read and explained the content of the document to the person whose name is appended and such a person understood and approved of same.*
15. *I hereby certify that I have read and explained the content of this statement to the person whose name is annexed and that he has understood and approved of it.*

*Move sequencing.* Mintah (2024) suggests that how moves are typically patterned is consequential to the communication of a goal-directed purpose of a text and affects its comprehension and function. Therefore, exploring the moves and steps sequencing in the witness statements not only assists in establishing the distinct ways of structuring information in the statements (Seawright, 2012) but also unveils the proper patterning of the moves for effective communication. The research examined the sequencing of the moves in the data, and Table 2 below provides the different patterning of moves adopted in the composition of the police written witness statements.

The results in Table 2 above depict that, generally, the most preferred move sequence is  $M1^{\wedge}M2^{\wedge}M3^{\wedge}M4^{\wedge}M6$ , which recorded 46.7% of the data, followed by  $M1^{\wedge}M2^{\wedge}M4^{\wedge}M6$ , which occupies 15.8% of the data. The preferred move arrangement is functional in achieving a sequential and logical progression of issues. A look at the progression from M1 to M2 to M3, that

**Table 2.** Move Patterns in the Witness Statements.

Move sequence	Frequency (f)	Percentage (p)
M1^M2^M3^M4^M6	56	46.7
M1^M2^M4^M6	19	15.8
M1^M4^M2^M3^M4	11	9.2
M1^M4	9	7.5
M1^M2^M3^M4	7	5.8
M1^M2^M3^M4^M5^M6	5	4.2
M1^M2^M4	4	3.3
M1^M3^M2^M4^M6	4	3.3
M1^M3^M2^M4	3	2.5
M1^M2^M3^M4^M5	2	1.7
Total (t)	120	100

Note.  $p = f/t \times 100$ , where  $t$  = total number of witness statements in the corpus.

is, from *disclaiming* (M1) to *identifying the witness* (M2) and finally *stating witness's involvement with the case* (M3), suggests that these three (3) moves are considered the preliminary or introductory sections. Together, their arrangement serves as lead-ins that provide brief background information to the expert addressee on what to expect in the main section of the witness statement. *Reporting the facts* (M4) comes next as the main section and presents the relevant information. The final move, *indicating discharge of legal responsibility* (M6), then signals that all has been satisfied as far as the production of the statement is concerned, thereby functioning like the concluding section of an essay.

#### Lexicogrammatical resources

*Structural sentence types in the moves.* As each move achieves a different rhetorical function from the other, it is argued here that the moves' ability to perform such distinctive roles will be influenced by the use of particular sentence types that will meet the communicative needs of the users of the police written witness statement genre. It becomes necessary, therefore, to ascertain how variations in communicative purposes of each move manifest in the choice of sentence type as language users make grammatical choices based on their situational and contextual needs. Table 3 below shows the distribution of the different structural types of sentences in the moves

The results as captured in Table 3 demonstrate that all the structural types are important to the discourse of the police written statements (Simple sentence, 14.7%; Compound sentence, 13.2%; Complex sentence, 47.8%; and

**Table 3.** Sentence Structures According to Moves.

Moves/ Sentence type	Simple	Compound	Complex	Compound- Complex	Total
M1	–	120	–	–	120 (6.9)
M2	102	13	25	5	145 (8.4)
M3	42	13	8	5	68 (3.9)
M4	105	83	703	411	1302 (75.0)
M5	6	–	1	–	7 (0.4)
M6	–	–	93	–	93 (5.4)
<i>n</i> (%)	255 (14.7)	229 (13.2)	830 (47.8)	421 (24.3)	1735

Compound-Complex, 24.3%); however, the Complex sentence is the most salient to the genre. The least employed structure is the Compound sentence while the Compound-Complex sentence and the Simple sentence follow consecutively. Notably, all the instances of the *disclaiming* (Move 1) were written with the Compound sentence, and the *disclaiming move* (Move 2), the *stating witness’s involvement with the case move* (Move 3), and the *indicating closure move* (Move 5) showed a preference for the Simple sentence. The *Indicating discharge of legal responsibility* (M6) is solely composed of Complex sentences. The preference for Complex sentences in the data confirms earlier scholarly positions on the relevance of the Complex sentence as a marked features of legal genres, especially witness statements (Četković, 2017; Coulthard & Johnson, 2007; Komter, 2003; Saletovic & Kisicek, 2012). Wiredu (2012) and Frimpong (2017) argue that Complex sentences are the most useful in argumentative texts as they help in information-packing and the inclusion of more information or more ideas within a stretch of a sentence. Hence, the police may have preferred the frequent use of the Complex sentences to capture persuasive details and to make the statements more elaborative. Evidential details are presented as explicitly as possible to avoid ambiguities in the Complex sentences (Četković, 2017).

**Tenses.** The major tense forms used in the data were simple and continuous present tenses, and the simple past tense. The use of either present or past tense depended on the move as each move could be characterized by either of the two tenses or both. For example, the present tense greatly characterized *disclaiming move* (Move 1), *identifying the witness move* (Move 2), *closure move* (Move 5), and *indicating discharge of legal responsibility move* (Move 6), while the past tense characterized *reporting the facts move* (Move 4). In realizing the *disclaiming move* (Move 1), the Ghana police consistently used

the present tense to establish their habit of disclaiming the content and also to afford the information a sense of contemporary relevance to the expert addressee. Malmir et al. (2019) note that this convinces the reader or the audience that the information is still true and relevant irrespective of the time that the information was relayed. Example:

16. *Witness **states** in the Twi Language and same **(is)** recorded in English as follows.*

In the *identifying the witness move (Move 2)*, relying on the present tense allows the police to establish an identity of the witness that exists beyond the day of the statement-taking. This strategy seems useful in assigning legal responsibility to such an identity because it will not prove legally feasible or effective to attribute a report to an identity that is nonexistent or no longer holds true, as the case may be, if the past tense were used. Example:

17. *I am a student at Y Junior High School and residing with my grandmother; one at H.*

Adopting the past tense in the *reporting the facts move (Move 4)* is influenced by the fact that the move inherently recounts actions of persons including the suspect and other participants that are claimed to have occurred sometime in the past. According to Byrman and Byrman (2018), it is more logical and credible when the facts are narrated from the past tense. Example:

18. *I **was** in the W Market with my mother XX. At about 1500 hours, I **was** asked by mother to go to the house and prepare food. I **got** home and **detected** that a thief or thieves **caused** damage to one of the outside windows, **entered** into the room and **made** away with our 32 inches Nasco flat screen television. I **called** my mother on phone and **reported** the incident to her. She **came** home and **detected** the missing items.*

The *closure move (Move 5)* is composed entirely of present tense verbs. Carranza (2003) notes that changes in tenses usually bring about a close to an episode in a story. It is observed that the *reporting the facts (Move 4)* which usually precedes the *closure move (Move 5)* in sequencing was mainly composed in the past tense. A switch from the past tense in this preceding move to the present tense in the *closure move (Move 5)* serves to bring the entire narrative episode to its logical conclusion and also to bring the witness's narrative back to the "here and now" as a mark of the end of the witness's testimony. Example:

19. *This is all I want to say.*

In the *indicating discharge of legal responsibility move (Move 6)*, the performative verb “certify,” which construes an affirmation of having performed the roles expressed in the other clauses in the move, affords the entire sentence a present time orientation although the activity of certifying occurred in the past. The present tense verb “certify,” thus, presents the past action as a routine standard procedure, where after the police have assisted the witness by recording their testimony, the police go ahead to read the contents of same to the witness to ensure that the witness comprehends the contents of the written statement before finally assenting to it as a legal document by either thumb printing or signing. Example:

20. *I hereby **certify** that I have read and explained the content of the document to the person whose name is appended and such a person understood and approved of same.*

*Voice in the statements.* The choice of either the passive or active voice in any speech situation is conditioned by discursual exigencies. Porter (2005) suggests the type of voice impacts the evidentiality of the witness statement, either positively or negatively; hence the study assessed the patterns of the voice realized in the data. The study found that the Active voice was realized in 91% of the data while the Passive voice constituted 9%. The passive form of the verbs was looked at from two lenses: the Agentless Passive (Example: *After unlocking the mobile phone, I was called by the X police that the mobile phone in question was stolen*) and the Agentive Passive (Example: *I also give all my daily sales to the suspect before it is being handed over to the manageress by suspect X*). The special preference for the active voice by the police especially in Move 4, is perhaps not haphazard. The dependence on the active voice forms arises from the fact that the actions of individuals need to be explicitly attributed to the perpetrator. Explicitly connecting an action to the perpetrator requires the unveiling of the identity of the person, and this is achieved through the use of the active voice, which emphasizes who did what to whom rather than what was done to whom.

Using the passive voice, particularly the agentless passive, conceals the identities of individual participants to a great extent and that makes it equally more difficult to assign legal responsibilities to participants for actions taken by them (Tiersma, 1999). Moreover, since the information given needs to be specific enough to identify culprits and leave no room for speculation, over-dependence on the passive especially the agentless passive could lead to vagueness and anonymity about the identities of individuals including the

suspect or accused. Such vagueness is inimical to establishing the necessary evidence for the case. The agented passives observed in the data make known explicitly the agent of the action. This leaves no room for speculation as to who did what. Example:

21. *I got home and realized that the accused caused damage to one of the outside windows, entered into the room and made away with our 32 Nasco television.*

## Conclusion

The study responds to the call for deliberate specification of the functional structure of witness statements (Mattison & Cooper, 2021) by specifying the move-step structure of police written witness statements used in Ghana and probing the lexicogrammatical resources that characterize the statements. The study found that the texts exhibited a highly conventional structure with five moves that established the police written witness statement, and the move sequence allows the presentation of the witness's testimony in a manner that creates a chronologically organized narrative about the sequence of events. The lexicogrammatical features showed distinct realizations that are relevant to the functions of the witness statements in Ghana.

These findings hold useful implications for professional police discourse, especially in relation to the writing of witness statements. First, knowing and utilizing the knowledge of the functional structures of police written witness statements can be essential in the training of the police. The failure of police officers to deal with expectations associated with the writing of police texts can make them feel insecure and incapable of discharging their duties (Seawright, 2015). The familiarity of the structure of witness statements, therefore, may prove useful for police officers who often assist witnesses generate witness statements if adopted in the writing of their statements. This is necessary for officers to write clearly not only to avoid confusion but also to demonstrate critical skills that assert their authority in writing (Seawright, 2015, p. 66).

Contextually, the study notes that the police written witness statement in Ghana is complex with several rhetorical moves and lexicogrammatical features that make the text functional to the country's judicial process and police discourse. The witness statements are patterned systematically with much complexity that aligns with the legal expectations of admissible evidence in Ghana's judicial system. As demonstrated earlier, much of its rhetorical features respond to Ghana's Evidence Act (Republic of Ghana, 1975). For

instance, the mindful details captured in the narration of the *recounting the reportable event* move seem to be inspired by the country's requirement of the burden of proof where the police prosecutors ought to prove "beyond a reasonable doubt" as provided in Section 11(2) of the Evidence Act 1975 (NRCD 323) before the judge or jury. The study finds that the moves pattern M1^M2^M3^M4^M6 is the preferred move sequence that conventionally responds to the dictates of the Evidence Act. Thus, the acts of indicating the authorship of the statements while the police disclaim the authorship, identifying the witnesses' involvement with the case, narrating the criminal incidents by reporting the facts, and indicating the discharge of legal responsibilities by the police are consequential to the judicial expectations about police written witness statements in Ghana. It is important that members of the discourse community are educated on the need to sequence these in the functional order to avert future challenges of statements in the prosecution of cases. A deliberate observation and sequencing of these functional structures in the statements not only underscores the writing competence and judicial responsibility of the reporting police officers but also has a direct bearing on the prosecution and eventual adjudication of cases as a badly written witness statement can give room to the acquittal of persons who actually commit an offense.

Further, the study indicates that the narrative structure of written witness statements is more complex than the simplified three units of the prologue, criminal incident, and epilogue as suggested by scholars (Adams & Jarvis, 2006; Picornell, 2013a). Like previous studies (Ribeiro, 2010), the study asserts that the *reporting the facts move (Move 4)* is the major part of the narration but shows variation from other narrative genres identified by earlier scholars (Al-Ali, 2003; Khan et al., 2021; Labov, 2010) and other written statements of police discourse (van Charldorp, 2014).

The research was limited to police written witness statements. It will be interesting for future research if the rhetorical structures and lexicogrammatical features identified in this study as characteristic of this kind of statement are compared to those of other types of police statements including investigation cautioned statements, and charge cautioned statements, among others. Finally, this research limits itself to the case of Ghanaian police written witness statements. It will be important to the literature if police written witness statements of other jurisdictions, especially Anglophone judicial jurisdictions that practice similar judicial systems, are researched to demonstrate how generalizable or distinct these identified rhetorical structures are as Hope et al. (2021) and Anakwah et al. (2020) suggest that cross-cultural differences may exist in the features of police discourses across different contexts.

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