

Narrative Study on Witnesses' Involvement in Their Statements

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ABSTRACT

The present study, based on Labov's narrative theory, focuses on how witnesses' involvement affects their narrative reconstruction of criminal cases. Witnesses' involvement is first separated into two categories according to the circumstances of the case, one being single suspect crime and the other multi-suspects crime. The present study takes four witness statements from a single suspected malicious injury case as sample to further analyze the effects exerted by different witness involvements on witness statements and their corresponding representations. Results of the analysis indicate that how witnesses are involved in the criminal event have different effects on witness statements in three aspects: narrative structure, participant distribution, and language strategies. The results of this study further reveal that the more legal responsibility a witness is likely to take for the criminal event, the more transformations he would make in his narrative reconstruction of the crime.

KEYWORDS

witnesses' involvement, witness statements, narrative, participant distribution, language strategy

1. Introduction

Witnesses' involvement refers to witnesses' roles in a case. Here the definition of witness is a broad one, which "includes eyewitnesses, parties and expert witnesses" (Wang 2002: 1). How witnesses are involved in alleged criminal cases determines what stance they take in reconstructing the criminal events in their statements, because how the witnesses are related to the crime affects their legal responsibility in the alleged crime. Every word in the witness statement represents complicated relations and legal obligation of the persons involved in that "language expressions concerning legal activities contain social relations related to the law" (Du 2004: 54).

Witnesses are normally given freedom to tell their own story about the criminal event which constitutes the body of witness statements. Their stories are usually put forward in a narrative way. How much the witnesses are involved in the criminal event is likely to influence their narrative reconstruction of the criminal event. It is reasonable to assume that witnesses "transform reality by techniques more subtle and effective than lying" (Labov 2001: 14) when telling the truth brings disadvantages to themselves.

The first of Labov's narrative study (1972: 363) lays out a six-part structure model "Abstract, Orientation, Complication action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda". In his following studies, Labov (1997) puts more emphasis on temporal organization in complication action and evaluation of narrative and regards them as the two backbones of narrative in fulfilling the referential and evaluative functions respectively. He proposes that a narrative can be viewed as a theory of the causes of the most reportable event, and the chain of causal events selected in the narrative is intimately linked with the assignment of praise and blame for the actions reported. From Labov's view of narrative structure, it can be concluded that narrative organization, that is, the temporal organization and evaluation (which is also labeled as an ideological framework by Labov), may be determined by the chain of causal relations and the assignment of praise and blame.

Labov (2001) later discovered the event structure of narrative by analyzing a witness statement of a criminal case. The crime used in that study is an intentional homicide case co-committed by two suspects, and the witness statement chosen as sample for the analysis is produced by one of the suspects. Labov used the method of participant analysis, semantic analysis of crucial verbs, and analysis of deleted events to reconstruct the underlying structure of the crime.

2. Classification of Witnesses' Involvement

The witnesses involved in a criminal case usually include three parties: the suspect of the crime, the victim, and the people who witnessed the crime. However, a distinction can be drawn between single suspect crimes, and multi-suspect crimes. The distinction is made by the number of suspect instead of victim mainly because the multi-suspects crimes always involve the conflict of interest between the suspects themselves.

In a crime where there are more than one suspects, usually one suspect would try to avoid his connection with the crime as much as possible by blaming the crime on the other suspect or suspects, whereas this kind of behavior is not replicated if there are more than one victims because the victims in a criminal case are affected by the same criminal action and have the same aim of seeking justice from the suspect or suspects. Therefore the analysis of witnesses' involvement in criminal cases would be done within the categories of the single-suspect crimes and multi-suspect crimes respectively. This paper only examines the first circumstance by taking witness statements from a single-suspect crime as the study data.

3. Effects of Different Involvements on Narrative Structure

The effects of different involvements in a criminal case can be first and foremost reflected on the narrative structure of witness statements. As mentioned above, witnesses are allowed the most freedom in their narrative reconstruction of the criminal event. As such, witnesses are unrestricted to express their own view towards the criminal event and subtly turn their account of the criminal event to a favorable direction.

As Labov (1997) described, temporal organization and evaluation of narrative are the sequential and ideological frameworks of narrative. The sequence of the specific actions in one criminal event also reflects the causal relation of the actions. The part of

evaluation assigns the narrator's praise or blame for the actions reported in the narrative. Therefore different involvements in a criminal event can have different impacts on the perspectives of temporal sequence and evaluation of the witness' narrative.

3.1. Effects of Different Involvements on Temporal Organization

Sequence of actions can greatly affect the causal relation in a criminal event. When a witness describes how a criminal event occurred in his statement, which action happened first and which happened next plays a crucial role, for example, a criminal action that occurred first could place the person performing the action at a disadvantage in that he should take more or sole responsibility for the criminal event.

This paper takes four witness statements from a Chinese Malicious Injury case as sample for analysis. This criminal event is recounted by four witnesses in quite different ways. *Great discrepancies appear on the temporal organization of the criminal actions among the witness statements.* The sequential statements about how the main criminal actions developed are set out in Appendix 1. The statements are excerpts from the components of complicating action and evaluation in the narrative part of the four witness statements. All the clauses are presented exactly according to the sequential order in which they appeared in the witnesses' narratives. All the given names of the witnesses that appear in the study are replaced by asterisks; most of the names of the witnesses consist of three Chinese characters, with the second and third being the given name, and the first being the family name.

The general circumstance of the malicious injury case can be gathered from the comparison of the four narratives in Appendix 1. The crime started from a quarrel between the suspect (Liu **) and the female victim's grandfather (Old Wang) at the gate of the female victim's house. The cause of the quarrel was that the suspect has been annoying and unreasonable to Old Wang. The female victim (Wang **) came out to help her grandfather and shouted abuse at the suspect (Liu **). The suspect was irritated and ran back home to take a knife and then injured the female victim's head. The male victim (Li **), the female victim's husband, then took a shovel to fight with the suspect and both of them were injured in this fight. Finally the eyewitness and other neighbors helped to stop the fight. A comparison between the statement of the male victim and that of the suspect may leave us puzzled because they both describe the same event, yet in their narratives the same action happens in different temporal sequence.

In this study, the actions are picked out sequentially from the eyewitness' statements and marked by numbers according to the sequence they are presented. And the sequence of actions in the other witnesses' statements will be compared with that in the eyewitness' statement.

The actions picked out sequentially from the eyewitness' statement are (1) "quarrel" — (2) "the suspect's taking a knife to cut the female victim" — (3) "male victim's taking a shovel to fight with the suspect" — (4) "the suspect's cutting the male victim with the knife" — (5) "the suspect and the male victim's fight for the knife". The comparison of the sequences of the actions from the four witnesses' statements is presented in Table 1.

Inconsistencies in temporal sequence of criminal actions are evident in the statements of the suspect and the male victim. In the suspect's account, time juncture at which the male victim took out the shovel to fight with him is brought forward. In the suspect's

statement, when he took the knife from his house, the male victim had already held a shovel in his hands in [8] (see Appendix 1), he then chopped at the female victim's head with the knife, see [9]. There exists a question at this point: if one victim held a shovel in his hand and another victim did not have any weapon in her hands, why would the suspect choose the unarmed female victim and leave himself in a much more vulnerable position threatened by another male victim holding a weapon?

Table 1: Comparison of Sequences of Actions

| Witness | Sequence of actions |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| eyewitness | (1)-(2)-(3)-(4)-(5) |
| Suspect | (1)-(3)-(2)-(4) |
| female victim | (1)-(2) |
| male victim | (1)-(2)-(4)-(5)-(3) |

Here, a distortion of sequential order by the suspect can be found based on the statements of the other three witnesses in Appendix 1. Clauses [3] and [4] in the female victim's statement, clause [2] in the male victim's statement and clauses [4] and [5] in the eyewitness' statement are all consistent in indicating that the male victim only took a shovel after the suspect had injured the female victim with a knife.

On the other hand, the male victim delayed the event where he took out the shovel to fight with the suspect. The male victim insisted that he took a shovel for defense after the suspect had injured him in his face with a knife: see [9] and [10]. However, according to the eyewitness, the male victim took a shovel to fight with the suspect when he saw his wife (the female victim) was injured by the suspect in [5], and the eyewitness and other neighbors held him back and took his shovel away in [6]. Then the suspect got the opportunity to stab the male victim with the knife in [7]. This temporal sequence of the fight is also corroborated by other eyewitnesses, which indicates that the male victim intentionally delayed the time of taking the shovel to fight in his narrative.

By delaying the occurrence of this event in his statement, the male victim can avoid taking responsibility for intentional injury to the suspect with the shovel and he later regarded the suspect's injury as an inadvertent wound caused by his struggle for the knife with the suspect. The distortion of temporal sequence in the male victim's narrative could be caused by his fear of taking possible legal responsibility for the injury that he brought to the suspect.

It seems that both the female victim and the eyewitness did not change the temporal order of the events in their narratives. Their narratives about the criminal event are consistent with each other. The actions from [1] to [4] in the eyewitness' statement describe how the quarrel between the suspect and female victim began and how the suspect injured her with a knife. These actions totally coincide with the ones in the female victim's statement. After the criminal action the suspect performed to the female victim, there is no mention of her in this eyewitness' narrative, thus it is reasonable to assume that the female victim has been seriously injured and lost the ability to help her husband (the male victim) to fight with the suspect. This also confirms the self-description of unconsciousness after she got injured in [5] and [6] in the female victim's statement. So far the eyewitness and female victim's statements have corresponded faithfully to the temporal sequence of the criminal actions later found to be true by the law enforcement officers.

From the above comparison and analysis of the statements by four witnesses of different involvements, we can see that in this case, both the suspect and the male victim transformed their narrative of the criminal events by changing the temporal sequence of the specific criminal actions in their narratives. They intentionally made these alterations in order to minimize their own guilt and responsibility for the actions they performed in the crime in that the underlying causal relation changes along with the temporal sequence of specific criminal actions most of the time.

The suspect's transformation through distorting temporal sequence is not due to natural memory loss or any other objective influences; it is affected by the mental state of the witness who is involved in the case as a suspect. That is, the transformation of temporal sequence is a result of active decision making when he is treated as a suspect and interrogated by the police officers.

On the other hand, the male victim was reluctant to make a totally faithful reconstruction of the criminal event in that he also injured the suspect in this fight, and it is hard to say whether he did it intentionally or inadvertently. Thus he was afraid he might have to take partial responsibility for the crime, which is determined by his special involvement in this case and is reflected in his complicated mental state in his recollection of the events.

Therefore it is clear that different involvements in the criminal case can change the temporal sequence in witnesses' narratives. The more responsibility the witness may take for the crime, the more distortions he might make in the temporal sequence in his narrative. The female victim and the eyewitness who are not likely to take any responsibility for the crime did not change the temporal organization in their narratives, which also indicates that witnesses who are free of responsibility for the crime can be quite faithful in reconstructing the criminal event in their statements.

3.2. Effects of Different Involvements on Witnesses' Evaluation

Evaluation represents ideological framework in the narrative. By evaluating, the narrator asserts his praise and blame in his narrative. In their narrative, witnesses are allowed to freely give their recollection of the events of the crime which provides them with the opportunity to give their personal evaluation about the criminal event. Witnesses are very conscious of evaluation in the narratives they make in police interviews in that the evaluative part can show their own judgment on the assignment of responsibility for the criminal event. Thus the component of evaluation in narrative can also be regarded as a strategy used by witnesses to express their personal opinion on the crime.

The suspect gives his evaluation in [6] in Appendix 1 that he was not strong enough to fight with the three members of the victim's side (female victim, male victim and one eyewitness Old Wang). The suspect used the evaluation to justify that he had to take the knife to fight with the victims in [7]. But this evaluation is proven false by statements of the victims and eyewitness who all stated that the fight did not begin until the suspect started it by injuring the female victim's head with a knife. Thus the suspect had made up evaluation of the criminal situation to protect his own interest.

The female victim made her comment on the suspect by the evaluation in her statement. She said that the suspect had been unreasonable at that time in [2] and so she had to quarrel with him which directly led to the suspect's criminal action towards her in

[4]. The suspect's unreasonableness can also be inferred from other witnesses' statements. Thus the female victim assigned the blame on the suspect for provoking the quarrel and fight. In addition, she also made a self-comment in [7] and [8] that she was totally telling the truth and she would not say things that she did not experience, which is an attempt to enhance the reliability of her statement.

Neither the male victim nor the eyewitness used evaluation to express their personal attitudes or opinions on the criminal event in their narratives. The male victim was drawn to the crime by the suspect's criminal action towards the female victim. He would not have known what actually caused the fight. Thus his narrative mainly focused on the fighting part. The eyewitness is supposed to be the impartial person in reporting what happened in the crime. Therefore he rarely gave any personal attitudes or judgment on the criminal actions.

Different involvements in a crime may bring different effects on witnesses' evaluation in their narratives. The suspect made an evaluation in order to justify his action of taking a knife as a weapon in the fight. But this evaluation cannot stand detailed comparison with other witnesses' statements. Eyewitnesses are normally conscious of their impartial position in a case and thus seldom give evaluation in their narratives. The victims do not give evaluation or only express objective evaluation to assign the blame on the specific criminal actions.

4. Effects of Different Involvements on Participant Distribution

Participant analysis is introduced in Labov's narrative study (2001) to understand how the responsibility of each action is distributed to each participant involved in a narrative story. For each activity the active causal agent "y", patient "z" and other participants "x" are marked accordingly. Through the examination of different actors of each activity, we can get a general picture of the distribution of responsibility for the activities in the narrative.

In the analysis of the participation, the responsibility of every action is distributed to each participant in the criminal case. And how each witness distributes the responsibility for the crime in his narrative would be quite clear through participant analysis. The participant distributions in the four witnesses' statements are presented in Table 2 for a better comparison. The detailed participant analysis of each witness statement is recorded in Appendices 2, 3, 4, and 5.

The participant distribution in the suspect's narrative is quite different from those in the other witnesses'. When the female victim, male victim and eyewitness were reporting the criminal event in their narratives with themselves as involved members, they themselves appeared more often as active causal agent than anyone else in that they had to relate one action to another in order to form a coherent story. The suspect's participant distribution forms a sharp contrast with the other three witnesses'; he described himself as active causal agent fewer times and as patient to criminal actions more times. That is, in the suspect's account, the person accused of committing the crime conducted fewer criminal actions than one of the victims ($8 < 9$), at the same time, he plays the part of direct patient of criminal actions much more frequently than the victims do ($7 > 2$).

Although the two victims appeared more often as active agents than any other participants in their narratives, it is noticeable that they also appeared more frequently as

patients to criminal actions in their own narratives. This kind of participant distribution accords more faithfully with the “our understanding of causal relationships in the real world” (Labov 2001: 7), in which suspects should participate as active causal agents more times and victims as patients to criminal actions more times. The participant distribution in the suspect’s narrative totally violates this pattern.

Table 2: Participant Distribution in Witness Statements in the Malicious Injury Case

| witness | participant | suspect | female victim | male victim | eyewitnes s | Old Wang |
|---------------|-------------|---------|---------------|-------------|----------------|----------|
| | label | | | | | |
| suspect | y | 8 | 3 | 9 | 1 | 5 |
| | z | 7 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| | x | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| female victim | y | 4 | 5 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| | z | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| male victim | y | 3 | 0 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| | z | 1 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| | x | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| eyewitness | y | 4 | 2 | 3 | 7 | 0 |
| | z | 2 | 1 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | x | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Notes: “y” represents the active causal agent of an action; “z” represents the patient of an action and “x” other participant in an action. Old Wang is also a by-stander who is the female victim’s grandfather.

From the eyewitness’ perspective, the participant distribution presents us a more comprehensive view: the suspect performed 4 actions, while the female victim performed 2 actions and male victim did 3 actions; the suspect is described as patient to 2 criminal actions, while the female victim 1 criminal action and male victim 4 criminal actions. Generally speaking, in this narrative, the suspect carried out more criminal actions and the victims underwent more criminal actions. This kind of agent-patient distribution accords more with the common ideology about crime in which suspects perform criminal actions and victims get injured. This kind of agent-patient distribution in the eyewitness’ statement is totally different from that in the suspect’s statement.

From the above analysis and comparison, it is clear that the suspect has taken the opportunity of free narrative to try to evade his responsibility for the crime and emphasis on the injuries he suffered by rearranging the participant distribution in his narrative. While the rest of the witnesses who should not worry about taking responsibility for the crime or taking much responsibility for the crime presented a more reasonable participant distribution in their narratives. Thus the more legal responsibility the witness is involved with, the more likely he would deliberately rearrange the participant distribution in his narrative.

5. Effects of Different Involvements on Language Strategies

The subjective evaluation and biased arrangement of participant distribution in the suspect’s narrative suggests that the suspect may have made other intentional transformations in his reconstruction of the criminal event in addition to his distortion of temporal sequence of the narrative. These intentional transformations can appear on

different levels; Labov, in his narrative study (2001), discovered that a suspect employed the techniques of deletion of events and exploitation of ambiguous constructions in order to minimize his responsibility for the crime. That is, apart from distorting temporal sequence of the narrative and using evaluation, witnesses can also employ other strategies to transform their narrative reconstruction of the criminal event in order to avoid responsibility for the crime as much as possible.

The evaluation in [6] in the suspect's narrative has been proven to be false information by other witnesses' statements, so has the action in [5] that alleges that the three members of the victim side began to attack him before he ran to take a knife to protect himself. The other witnesses' accounts are that the fight did not begin until the suspect started it by injuring the female victim with a knife.

Also both narratives of the female victim and other eyewitnesses can prove the actions mentioned from [15] to [22] (see Appendix 6) in the suspect's narrative are totally fabricated. These fabricated actions are used to accuse the male victim of hitting him with a knife and to shift the blame on the female victim for hitting him with a brick. The suspect even made up a story that his wife got hurt in protecting him from getting injured by the male victim. It is obvious that the suspect has fabricated a series of criminal actions and inserted them in his narrative to form a self-serving story so that he would not have to take full responsibility for what happened in the series of events.

The inconsistency of the actions in [6] and [7] in the eyewitness' statement is worth mentioning. If the action in [6] really occurred, that is, the eyewitness and others stopped the male victim and the suspect, action in [7] would not have happened in which the suspect hit the male victim in the head with his knife. It is reasonable to assume that the eyewitness stopped the male victim and took away his shovel, which accidentally gave the suspect a chance to hurt the male victim with his knife. This absence of the description of the detailed action implies that the eyewitness, while trying to give an unbiased statement, still holds back some facts that might jeopardize his reliability or bring himself trouble in this criminal case.

The male victim, though did injure the suspect in the process, never mentioned this specific action in his narrative. The two key clauses [6] and [10] in which this action might have happened did not reveal any information concerning this action. He held it until the police asked him the question "Did you get to injure the suspect in this fight?" in the question-answer part after his narrative reconstruction, to which he answered "Yes, I felt the knife hit him while we were struggling for it". Here the male victim, being afraid that he might have to take responsibility for the injury he caused to the suspect, neglected this information in his narrative clause sequence and gave an ambiguous expression concerning this information when he had to answer the specific question raised by the police later.

The suspect, the male victim and the eyewitness all employed certain language techniques when they describe the specific criminal actions in their narratives. The suspect added a series of fabricated criminal actions that never occurred in order to lessen his responsibility for the crime and enlarge the injuries he suffered. The male victim and eyewitness neglected information concerning certain criminal action which might bring them trouble in the case. The female victim is the only one who has not intentionally transformed her narrative and she is also the only one who does not have to worry about taking any legal responsibility for the crime. Therefore the more legal responsibility the

witness is likely to take in a crime, the more language techniques he might adopt to transform his narrative to a direction of advantage.

6. Conclusion

Through the detailed comparison and analysis of the statements of the four witnesses in the malicious injury case, the general pattern can be observed: the more responsibility the witness may have to shoulder in a crime, the more transformations he might make in his statement. These transformations are exactly the effects exerted by witnesses' involvement on their statements. These effects manifest themselves on three levels in witness statements: the narrative structure, the participant distribution and the language strategies employed by the witnesses. The effects on narrative structure can be further explored on the temporal sequence and evaluation part of the narrative. The relationship between the involvement and their effects on witness statement in this criminal case can be summed up in the following table:

Table 3 Effects of Different Involvements on Witness Statements

| Witness | Narrative | | Participant distribution | Language strategy | |
|----------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------------------|-------------------|----------|
| | Temporal sequence | Evaluation | | Fabrication | Deletion |
| Suspect | + | + | + | + | - |
| Female victim | - | - | - | - | - |
| Male victim | + | - | + | - | + |
| Eyewitness | - | - | - | - | + |

Notes: "+" refers to the existence of effects of a specific involvement; "-" refers to nonexistence of effects. Though there is evaluation part in female victim's narrative, she did not use it to transform the actual fact.

The suspect, being the one who is exposed to the most responsibility for the crime, made a lot of transformations in his narrative reconstruction of the criminal event on every level mentioned above. The male victim distorted the temporal sequence and deleted one specific action in his narrative, being afraid that he might also have to take partial responsibility for the crime. The eyewitness neglected one specific action the existence of which might undermine his credibility and bring him trouble. The female victim is not involved in any legal responsibility in the crime and did not make any transformation at all.

This paper focuses on how the different involvements of witnesses affect their narrative reconstruction of the criminal event. Through detailed analysis, we can see that the effects exerted by different involvements can be manifested on three levels. And the more legal responsibility the witness is involved in, the more transformations he would make in his statement. This indicates that witnesses' involvement plays a significant role in their own narrative stories about the criminal event, and therefore determines the accuracy and reliability of witness statements.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

| No. | Suspect Liu ** | female victim Wang ** | male victim Li ** | eyewitness |
|-----|--|--|--|--|
| [1] | So Old Wang began to curse me | When my grandpa and Liu ** were quarrelling outside, I went out | When I got home after I sprayed pesticide in my field and went back home, my wife Wang ** was quarrelling with Liu ** at the aisle, I just entered the room to wash my face. | Li **'s wife Wang ** went out from Old Wang's house, and cursed that her grandpa was so old and how Liu ** could tease him |
| [2] | Old Wang and Wang ** (his granddaughter) began to curse with me at the aisle | He cursed at random after he got drunk, and he wasn't reasonable | When I was washing my face, I heard a cry outside from Wang **, so I came out to the yard to see what happened, Wang ** was leaning on the tricycle. | I then dragged Wang ** into Old Wang's house, I talked with Li ** and Old Wang in Old Wang's kitchen, I said, "Old uncle, he was cursing you on the street, but I did not curse you. |
| [3] | Wang **'s husband Li ** heard the curse and went over to curse | So I cursed with him, and was dragged home by Liu Ke * and other persons | So I went up to fight with Liu **, I don't know when I got injured in my face. | Wang ** was nagging in the yard, lots of people were watching |

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|
| | with me too | | | |
| [4] | Then Li**, Wang ** and Old Wang – three of them cursed with me at Old Wang’s house yard. | When I was talking with other persons, Liu ** took a kitchen knife from his home and chopped at my head with it. | I found Liu ** had a kitchen knife in his hand, so I began to snatch away the knife from his hands. | I heard people yelling outside, “Xiao Hong has been chopped down”, I saw Wang ** lying down on the ground |
| [5] | Later we three began the fight at Old Wang’s house yard | I immediately fell unconscious | He was holding the handle of the kitchen knife. | Li ** went out from the kitchen, and took a shovel at the kitchen door. |
| [6] | I wasn’t strong enough to fight with the three of them | I had no idea who dragged me into the room | I grasped his wrist with one hand, and grasped the back of the knife blade with another hand. At that time I was lying on the ground as I did that. | Other neighbors and I stopped Li ** and Liu ** |
| [7] | so I ran back to my house to take a knife | I was not clear what happened finally, and I heard the rest of it from other persons. | Finally Bad egg (Liu Bin *) pulled me away. | Liu ** chopped at Li **’s face with the knife |
| [8] | When I took a knife from my house, Li ** already held a shovel in his hands. | But I would not tell the things that I do not know, what I have said is truth. | What happened after he pulled you away? | Liu ** and Li ** fell down on the ground, those two fought with each other on the ground for a while |
| [9] | I chopped at Wang **’s head with the knife | | I went into the room to look into the mirror after I was dragged away, I was hurt on my face, and blood was running down | The neighbor Shao ** and others and I drew them apart, and seized the knife away |
| [10] | And Li ** struck my head with the shovel | | so I came out with a shovel to hit Liu ** | The neighbor Xiao Feng took the knife away |
| [11] | and struck my eyes with the shovel | | Liu ** held my waist with his hands and would not let go | I held Li ** up to stop their fight |
| [12] | I chopped at Li **’s face with the knife | | I don’t know who took the shovel away | Liu ** sat on the ground, then they did not fight any more |
| [13] | My knife was seized by the neighbors trying to stop the fight there | | | |
| [14] | I don’t know who did it. | | | |
| Notes: The Arabic numerals in square brackets represent the sequential clause in the narratives of the four witness statements. | | | | |

APPENDIX 2: Participant Distribution Analysis of the Suspect's Statement

| | I | Bad Egg | Old Wang | Li * | Wang ** |
|---|---|---------|----------|------|---------|
| passed by, asked Li * to return his money | | | y | z | |
| said he had no money | | | | y | |
| cursed Li * | | | y | z | |
| making jokes while walking | y | | z | | |
| followed us | | y | | | |
| told me to get off his tricycle | x | | y | | |
| would not get off the tricycle | y | | | | |
| cursed me | z | | y | | |
| cursed with | y | | z | | z |

| | I | Old Wang | Wang** | Li** | Knife | Shovel |
|--|---|----------|--------|------|-------|--------|
| curse with me too | z | | | y | | |
| cursed with me | z | y | y | y | | |
| began the fight | y | | y | y | | |
| ran back to my house to take a knife | y | | | | z | |
| held a shovel | | | | y | | z |
| chopped at Wang **'s head | y | | z | | x | |
| struck my head with the shovel | z | | | y | | x |
| struck my eyes with the shovel | z | | | y | | x |
| chopped at Li **'s face with the knife | y | | | z | x | |

| | I | Wang** | Li ** | Neighbors | Guan ** | Knife | Brick |
|--|---|--------|-------|-----------|---------|-------|-------|
| seized by the neighbors trying to stop the fight there | | | | y | | z | |
| took out a knife | | | y | | | z | |
| chopped at my forehead with the knife | z | | y | | | x | |
| fainted | y | | | | | | |
| held a brick, hit my head | z | y | | | | | x |
| hold Li ** | | | z | | y | | |
| chopped at Guan **'s arm with the knife | | | y | | z | x | |

APPENDIX 3: Participant Distribution Analysis of the Female Victim's Statement

| | I | Old Wang | Liu ** | Bad Egg | Knife | Tricycle |
|---|---|----------|--------|---------|-------|----------|
| asked my grandpa | y | z | | | | |
| determined to sit in my tricycle, made it, teasing, pulled down | | z | (y) | (y) | | z |
| went out | y | | | | | |
| cursed randomly, and is unreasonable | | | y | | | |
| cursed with him | y | | y | | | |
| chopped at my head with the knife | z | | y | | x | |
| got unconscious | y | | | | | |
| had no idea | y | | | | | |

APPENDIX 4: Participant Distribution Analysis of the Male Victim's Statement

| | I | Liu** | Knife |
|---|---|-------|-------|
| heard, came out to the yard to see | y | | |
| fight with Liu **, don't know | y | y | |
| found Liu ** had a kitchen knife in his hand, snatch away the knife | y | (y) | z |
| (holding the handle of the kitchen knife) | | y | |
| grasped his wrist, grasped the back of the knife blade | y | x | z |

| | I | Bad Egg | Liu** | Shovel |
|---|---|---------|-------|--------|
| pulled me away | z | y | | |
| look into the mirror, was hurt in my face | y | | | |
| with a shovel to hit Liu ** | y | | z | x |
| held my waist and would not let go | z | y | | |
| took the shovel away | | | | z |

APPENDIX 5: Participant Distribution Analysis of Eyewitness' Statement

| | I | Liu** | Old Wang | Wang** | Li** | Tricycle |
|---|---|-------|----------|--------|------|----------|
| sit on Old Wang's tricycle | | y | x | | | z |
| followed, came to the house gate | y | | | | | |
| asked Liu ** to step down, wanted to push the tricycle into the yard) | y | | | | | |
| heard Liu ** cursed Old Wang, Li ** went into the house | | | | | y | |
| came out of Old Wang's house, cursed at the gate | | | | y | | |
| dragged Wang ** into Old Wang's house, talked with | y | | | z | | |

| | I | Liu** | Wang** | Li** | Shovel | Knife |
|--|---|-------|--------|------|--------|-------|
| nagging | | | y | | | |
| heard, saw Wang ** lying on the ground | y | | | | | |
| came out from the kitchen, took a shovel | | | | y | z | |
| stopped Li ** and Liu ** | y | z | | z | | |
| chopped at Li **'s face with the knife | | y | | z | | x |
| fell down on the ground, fought a while | | y | | y | | |

| | I | Liu** | Li** | Neighbors | Xiao Feng | Knife |
|---|---|-------|------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| drew them apart, seized that knife away | y | z | z | y | | z |
| took away the knife | | | | | y | z |
| held up Li ** to stop their fight | y | | z | | | |
| sat on the ground, did not fight any more | | y | | | | |

APPENDIX 6: Fabricated actions in the suspect's narrative

- [15] Li ** said something, then he ran into his house and took out a knife
- [16] and chopped at my forehead with the knife
- [17] I got faint immediately.
- [18] When I was faint and lying down on the ground, Wang ** held a brick with her hands and hit my head.
- [19] When I went out from my house with the knife, my wife Guan ** followed me out
- [20] When Li ** was going to chop me once again after he had chopped at my forehead, Guan ** went up to hold Li ** and would not let him do that
- [21] Then Li ** chopped at Guan's arm with the knife
- [22] After I got faint, I had no idea how that fight ended