Investigating Gaps in Police Narratives

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

Report writing is a major form of communication in the law enforcement; hence, professional writing skills are mandatory among the police. Though empirical studies suggest that police officers are confronted with inadequate report writing skills, little is known about how the report writing difficulties of the police manifest in their written narratives. Hence, using qualitative inquiry, this study analyzed, described, and interpreted the gaps or errors in written police narratives. One hundred twenty (120) police blotter narratives written by police investigators in three municipal police stations were analyzed to look into errors in grammar, mechanics, and lexis. Findings revealed that grammatical gaps are composed of errors on sentence construction, verb usage, connective, pronoun, plural noun, and preposition; mechanical gaps include errors on punctuation, capitalization, and spelling; and lexical gaps are inappropriate word choice and improper word form. These findings offer manifold academic and professional intervention ideas that would help address the report writing issues among the police.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Police officers, the prime movers of the criminal justice system, are tasked to maintain peace and order, protect life and property, and reinforce the law. One of the most fundamental functions of police officers, often unnoticed by the general public, is reporting and documentation [1] [2] [3] Police officers are tasked to record information for every call to which they respond, making report writing a large percentage of police works [2]. Since the police are often the first points of contact in a criminal situation, it is imperative that they can write reports effectively [4]. Having professional writing skills among them is essential to creating thorough, well-written police reports.

Police reports are accounts of multiple crucial functions. They play a critical role as investigative aids or as pieces of evidence in legal proceedings [5] [2]. Since police reports are often the first and the most significant documented account of a possible crime (California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training [6], prosecutors rely on them for judicial decision making [1] [3] Police reports also provide data that help shape hiring decisions, budget proposals, and policy changes, extending its impact to other agencies and organizations [3] Moreover, since well-written reports help create a reputation of professionalism, accuracy, and fairness, they are used as a basis for rank advancement among police officers [7]. They also serve as a tool to protect officers from civil liability, public ridicule, unjustified discipline, and termination [7] [3]. Even researchers and media personnel utilize police reports as a reliable source of information [8].

Since police reports are of absolute importance, they have to be written in accordance with the standards of professional and technical writing. The police should find balance between the content and the manner in which content is presented [2]. Wallace and Robertson [4] posited that content must conform to the principles of accuracy, completeness, and impartiality. Just as important as content are grammar, mechanics, word choice, and organization, as the manner in which facts are presented could significantly impact the report [9]. Well-written police reports are clear, concise, and well-organized – strictly conforming to the conventions of technical writing

[10] [6] [9]. This implies that police reports should maintain language precision and officers need to have adequate language proficiency [11] [12] [13].

Mastery of the technicalities of report writing empowers police officers to produce quality reports. However, several foreign studies [14] [15] [12] K-Romya, 2006; [16] [17] show that police officers have inadequate report writing skills. One of the writing problems faced by law enforcers is poor sentence construction [12]. Police reports often include lengthy and complex sentences [18], which are, in some cases, "not only grammatically incorrect but also hard to follow" [15]. Other common issues that plague most problematic police reports are grounded in grammar and diction [9] [3]. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) needs analyses revealed that Jordanian tourist police [14] and Turkish public order police officers [17] both dealt with insufficient grammar knowledge and inadequate vocabulary. Prosecuting attorneys in Indiana, USA supported this claim and considered grammatical errors and misspellings as common problems in arrest reports [16]. Moreover, Tourist police in Thailand encountered problems with vocabulary, particularly with the legal terminologies (K-Romya, 2006), while police officers in South Africa struggled with vocabulary and spelling [12], resulting in a poor quality of statements from witnesses [19].

Local police officers, who consider English a second language, are also confronted with writing problems. The memorandum issued by The Acting Chief of Directorial Staff (TACDS) of Philippine National Police (PNP) dated April 1, 2014, with the subject: *Reiteration on the Guidelines for the Standard Preparation of Communication*, states that the common defects of communications prepared by the different PNP offices/units are faulty format and incorrect entries, typographical and grammatical errors, and the like.

These problems in the written works of police officers receive considerable attention, because they may damage not only the credibility of the police but also the precision of investigation and prosecution [16] [9] [3]. If any specific information is found to be inaccurate, the reliability and credibility of the report and the officer may be jeopardized [6]. In the same manner, a poorly-written report raises questions about a police officer's work. If a police report is full of misspelled words and typographical errors, the

officer would appear careless, and questions may be raised about the level of care taken in conducting the investigation [20]. Erroneous police reports can also be confusing and may cause misconceptions [3]. They may fail to properly communicate important facts about a particular case, or critical details may be lost in confusion. Issues on spelling, punctuation, word choice, and grammar may distract readers and may change the meaning of a sentence [21] [9]. Ultimately, faulty police reports may damage investigation, defile legal proceedings, and cause public misconceptions.

To avoid these dire consequences of having poorly written police reports, the writing skills of the police have to be strengthened. The first important step in developing the writing ability of the police is to investigate their specific writing needs and difficulties in the workplace. The *gap* between their actual and intended written performance has to be explored to establish a strong basis for intervention. Training opportunities would address the increasingly complex and diverse writing tasks of the law enforcers [22].

Though there are already studies on the writing difficulties among police officers, little is known about the gaps in the written police narratives in the local context. The memorandum issued by the PNP-TACDS [8] is one of the few reports that revealed the common defects in the written communications of police officers in the local context. The memorandum broadly covers written communications of the PNP and does not present the details of the writing defects nor the factors that generate them.

Moreover, foreign studies [14] [12] K-Romya, 2006; [16] [17] investigated the writing needs and problems of police officers using survey questionnaires and interviews and paid little attention to the written works of the officers. In some cases, what the officers perceive as difficulty may not exactly reflect as problems on their written works or vice versa. Studies (Cetkovic, 2017; [18] that analyzed written police reports, on the other hand, focused on the linguistic features of the reports and not on the writing gaps. Furthermore, the bulk of studies on writing gaps or difficulties [23] [24] [25] [26] [27] [28]. largely focused on the academic essays of ESL students. Little attention has been given to the writing gaps of professionals, specifically police officers.

This research scenario prompted the researcher to investigate the gaps in the narratives written by police officers. These gaps would shed light on the writing difficulties, needs, or problems of police officers in writing reports. This study aimed to generate a deeper understanding of the writing difficulties of the police to provide a basis for intervention.

The findings of this study would shed light on the difficulties of police officers in writing narratives. The study would help specify the problems on grammar, mechanics, and lexis, which would provide ESP teachers and curriculum makers a deeper understanding of the difficulties that officers commonly encounter when writing police narratives. Cognizance of the writing problems in the workplace provides teachers and curriculum makers an input for instructional modification or a basis in designing writing courses for aspiring police.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study views writing through the lens of the Cognitive Writing Theory by Flower and Hayes [29] who hypothesize that the act of writing involves three major elements, namely, the task environment, the writer's long-term memory, and the writing processes. Police report writing, just like all forms of writing, is a cognitive undertaking. It involves processes that police officers go through to realize the primary goal of report writing – to present a comprehensive, complete, and accurate account of an incident. Police report writing involves the elements of composing as described by Flower and Hayes [29]. Task environment with the rhetorical problem is present in police report writing. The rhetorical problem is to record facts chronologically. The long-term memory, which refers to the stored knowledge of the officers, is also used to solve the rhetorical problem. Lastly, the police report writing process, which includes preparing, drafting, and revising [3], coincides with the writing process of Cognitive Writing Theory which involves planning, translating, and reviewing (Flower & Hayes, 1981)[29]. Gaps in any of these elements and processes may lead to report writing problems among officers.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

This study looked into the difficulties of police officers in writing narrative reports. Specifically, it aimed to identify, describe, and interpret the gaps in the written narratives of police officers in

terms of (a) grammar, (b) mechanics, and (c) lexis.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

A qualitative research approach was used to investigate the gaps in police narratives. Qualitative research, which is exploratory in nature, is commonly used to discover new ideas and to present an up-close and in-depth picture of a phenomenon [30]. The approach includes detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of information and focuses on understanding the particular and the distinctive in a phenomenon. A qualitative study does not seek or claim to generalize findings to other contexts [30]. This study specifically aimed to analyze, describe, and interpret the gaps in written police narratives.

2.2 Corpus of the Study

Written police narratives, the corpora of the study, were used to look into the writing gaps of the police. The narratives were taken from the police blotter entries written by police officers and investigators in three selected municipal police stations. The municipal police stations were selected based on crime volume, that is, the three stations with the highest record of crime volume were chosen as the source of corpora. It was based on the assumption that stations with higher crime volume have enough narratives needed for this study.

2.3 Data Collection

The researcher started the collection of corpus by identifying the police stations from which the reports would be taken. The crime statistics of the municipalities was requested from the Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management, Police Regional Office VIII to determine the three municipal police stations from which the narratives would be taken. The crime volume of a police jurisdiction served as the only criterion in selecting the three police stations. It was based on the assumption that the number of written narratives in police jurisdictions with higher crime volume would satisfy the number of corpora needed in this study.

Then, the researcher sought the permission of the Director of Provincial Police Office and of the police chief of the selected police stations in the province prior to conducting the study. Then, the researcher asked for a copy of forty (40) police blotter entries recorded in 2019 from each station. The researcher specifically requested for lengthy blotter reports, regardless of incident, to ensure rich data for analysis. Since a blotter book is difficult to be machine-copied due to its size (larger than the ordinary document), the police stations provided the researcher a copy of Incident Report Form (IRF), which contains the same narrative that appears in the blotter book. Upon receipt of the IRF, the researcher immediately concealed names, dates, addresses, and other sensitive facts in the report using a black marker in the presence of a police officer to guarantee that confidential facts would not be jeopardized in the study.

The reports were grouped according to police officers who made the reports. Each group of reports was labeled using codes that represent the station and the officer. The same procedure was used in collecting corpus from other stations.

2.4 Data Analysis

The written police narratives were analyzed by the researcher to investigate writing gaps in terms of grammar, mechanics, and lexis. Content, as an aspect of written police reports, was not looked into due to the complexity of verifying its accuracy and objectivity.

Grammar refers to correct, conventional usage of language, which requires the narrative to conform to the conventions governing sentence construction, agreement, tense, number, article, pronouns, prepositions, and the like (Jacobs, 1995). *Mechanics* refers to the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviation. *Lexis* deals with effective word choice and appropriate register. It also covers some specific principles of formality, conciseness, and objectivity as described by experts [6] [9] [3] [4]. Deviation from the descriptors of each category was the primary basis of the researcher in identifying writing gaps or difficulties.

The researcher thoroughly and critically read each narrative to spot writing gaps. He read each narrative several times while marking the errors on the corpus. This procedure continued until all narratives were analyzed and errors were marked.

Then, the researcher exhaustively worked on each police narrative by filling out the *Writing Gap Analysis Matrix* based on the faulty structures marked in the reading phase. The matrix was adapted from studies [31] [32] that analyzed errors in students' written works. Changes in the terms used were made to tailor the matrix to the scope of the study. The matrix is divided into four columns. The first column was filled out with gap code (e.g. [PS1-PO1-S1-001], which involves the code that represents the station from which the narrative was taken [PS1]; the officer who wrote the narrative [PO1]; the blotter report sample [S1]; and the identification number of the specific faulty structure [001]). Codes are reflected in the presentation of findings. The second column was filled out with an exemplar that illustrates the gap. The third column was filled out with the classification to which the gap belongs. The gap can be categorized as an error in grammar, mechanics, or lexis. The last column was filled out with the specific description of the gap. The matrix was used to analyze writing gaps or errors in the corpora.

After analyzing the entire corpora using the matrix, the researcher looked into consistent and recurring errors on grammar, mechanics, and lexis in the narratives. The researcher made a list of consistent writing gaps per station. Using the list, the researcher looked into similar writing gaps shared by the three selected stations. The shared errors among the three police stations were considered the gaps in police narratives.

The results of the analysis were submitted to two experts, who are ESL teachers and who are master's degree holders, for validation. They were oriented on how the gaps were analyzed using the Matrix. The researcher and the two experts discussed tricky structures before labeling them as gaps.

3. RESULTS

The gaps in written police narratives based on the analysis of the corpora are presented in this section. One hundred twenty (120) police blotter narratives from three municipal police stations were analyzed to look into the gaps in the corpora. These gaps are broadly grouped into three categories, namely, grammatical, mechanical, and lexical gaps. Other gaps that do not belong to any of the three categories are also identified and presented as another category. Each category is discussed in this section and is illustrated using extracts or samples from the corpora.

3.1 Grammatical Gaps

Grammatical gaps refer to faulty usage of language and deviation from the conventions governing sentence construction, agreement, tense, number, articles, prepositions, pronouns, connectives, etc. Analysis of the corpora revealed that the common grammatical gaps in the police narratives fall under the following categories – sentence construction, verb usage, connective, pronoun, plural noun, and preposition.

Sentence sprawl as illustrated in Extract 1 is a lengthy sentence that expands through a series of relative clauses. With excessive embedding, the word group becomes run-on blocks of phrases and clauses without any breaks. In the corpora, sprawling normally happens when a narrative starts to deal with the details of the incident, particularly, the results of the initial investigation. For vehicular incidents, for instance, the particulars of the route and movement of the vehicles involved are narrated using one lengthy complex sentence. The same writing style is used in other incidents where the details of a crime are embroidered in an overly-long complex sentence. This sentence structure may undermine clarity that is mandatory in police report writing. Extract 2 illustrates a run-on sentence in the corpora. The word group has two distinct main clauses; however, the first main clause (the underlined word group) does not end with a terminal punctuation mark. The two main clauses could have been written as two separate sentences or as a compound sentence. Absence of punctuation conceals the relationship between two independent clauses resulting in an incoherent flow of facts. Moreover, the absence of appropriate punctuation in written communication obscures where ideas end and begin. The underlined word group in Extract 3 illustrates a sentence fragment, which is composed of the subordinating conjunction *while* and the main clause *suspect immediately fled right after the incident*. In this extract, it is apparent that the sentence fragment is a subordinating clause of the preceding sentence only that a period is prematurely inserted before the subordinating clause. In Extract 4, the participial phrase *armed with the bladed weapon* is misplaced beside the noun *complainant* since the phrase modifies the word *suspect*. Though it is possible that the complainant was the one

armed during the incident, the context of the narrative suggests that the suspect was the one armed and not the complainant. This can be a critical gap since the issue as to who was armed in the incident is a critical detail in investigation. In Extract 5, the introductory phrase *upon arrival* is incorrectly placed before the noun *victim* as if it was the victim who arrived. The phrase must have modified the responding police team, which is not mentioned in the sentence. The introductory phrase is a dangling modifier since it does not refer to any of the nouns in the sentence. A sentence with dangling modifier can also be a source of confusion that may damage the clarity of a police narrative.

In Extract 6, the verb phrase *are traversing* in the present progressive aspect is incorrectly used to describe a past incident. To correct this gap, the auxiliary verb are may be changed to *were* or the verb phrase *are traversing* may be replaced with the verb *traversed* in the simple past form. In Extract 7, the plural subject *victims* does not agree with the singular auxiliary verb *was* in the verb phrases *was both killed* and *was brought*. In Extract 8, the verb *mauled* has the unnecessary auxiliary verb *was* that makes it appear that the suspect was the one mauled in the incident and not the complainant. In this case, the helping verb must have been omitted to make the main verb in active voice charging the suspect as the doer of the mauling. Since auxiliary verbs are used to convey the voice of a main verb, their presence and absence can be dangerous and can cause major confusion.

Table 1. Sentence construction

Category	Description	Extract
a. Sentence Sprawl	Sentence sprawls are lengthy and complex sentences that contain multiple parenthetical phrases and excessive subordination and coordination [33].	Extract 1 …said accused conspiring and confederating each other to cause harm and injury to Kagawad [name], did then and there willfully, unlawfully, feloniously and, without any apparent reason nor provocation from the part of complainant, the said accused [name] delivered punch blow that hit the Nasal Bridge of the victim and one [name] from behind grappled the latter that cause defenseless of the complainant and attacked by series of punch blows that hits the victim's buttocks and other parts of the body that caused complete Fracture on the Right Posterior rib that requires 8 weeks of medication based on the Medical Certificate of the said complainant, which resulted to incapacitate to work for the said period of time.
b. Run-on Sentence	A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are combined with no punctuation separating them.	Extract 2 Firefights lasted for about twenty (20) minutes enemy withdrawn to northwest direction utilizing the creek line.
c. Sentence Fragment	A sentence fragment is a group of words that is not grammatically a complete sentence but is punctuated like one.	Extract 3 The latter sustained several stab wounds on the right and left portion of his armpit. While suspect immediately fled right after the incident.
d. Misplaced Modifier	A misplaced modifier is a phrase or clause that is modifying the incorrect noun or pronoun in a sentence.	Extract 4 Investigation revealed that suspect forcibly entered the house of the complainant armed with the bladed weapon and confronted her husband and threatened to kill the same…
e. Dangling Modifier	A dangling modifier, on the other hand, does not logically describe any noun or pronoun in a sentence.	Extract 5 Upon arrival victim was already removed by his relatives from hanging and was brought to their house.

Table 2. Verb usage

	Category	Description	Extract
a.	Incorrect Verb Tense	This error happens when verb tense as time reference does not reflect the time the situation was in force.	Extract 6 Initial investigation conducted by this office disclosed that both vehicles are traversing the National Highway…
b.	Lack of Subject-Verb Agreement	The subjects and verbs do not agree in number.	Extract 7 Result of incident, victims was both killed in action and was brought to [hospital] for post mortem examination.
c.	Unnecessary Auxiliary Verb	The auxiliary verb or helping verb is unnecessary in the sentence.	Extract 8 Brgy. Captain [name] personally called to this office and reported that said suspect was allegedly mauled him…

Table 3. Connective

	Category	Description	Extract
a.	Improper Conjunction	Misuse of conjunction happens when a connective does not correctly convey how a linguistic unit relates to another unit	Extract 9 Her son [name] was found dead at the lake located at [barangay] this municipality, but the cadaver of her son was brought by alleged group of AFP personnel air lifted with a helicopter.
b.	Conjunction Abuse	Conjunction abuse occurs when the conjunction *and* is used to link each element in a series, instead of putting it before the final element	Extract 10 Afterwhich suspect turned and chased and attack victim, hitting the left armpit.
c.	Incorrect Transitional Device	The transitional device used to link two sentences and paragraphs is incorrect.	Extract 11 Initial investigation with the son of the victim who appeared at this office revealed that his parents has pending criminal case against their relatives Spouses [name] and [name] of same place. Accordingly case started on land dispute…

In Extract 9, the adversative coordinating conjunction *but* is used to connect two main clauses that do not share opposing or contradictory ideas. The first clause reveals that the son of the complainant was found dead, whereas the second clause states that the cadaver was brought by AFP personnel. The second clause is additional information of the first, making *but* an inappropriate connective in the sentence. In Extract 10, the conjunction *and* is placed between the verbs in a series. A comma must have been used between the first two verbs in place of the conjunction. In Extract 11, the transitional device *accordingly*, which is commonly used to introduce a consequence, is inappropriately used to introduce the cause (land dispute) of the criminal case mentioned in the preceding sentence.

In Extract 12, the masculine personal pronoun *his* in the phrase *his husband* is inappropriate since the referent of the pronoun, the complainant, is a woman, particularly, the wife of the victim. The feminine personal pronoun her must have been used in the sentence. In Extract 13, after stating the personal circumstance of the reporting person, the narrative shifts to first-person perspective evident in the pronouns *we* and *our* in the underlined subordinating clause making it appear that the officer writing the report was part of the incident. This error happens when a police officer writes from the perspective of the reporting person without directly quoting his/her statements. In Extract 14, the singular pronoun him does not agree with its plural antecedent suspects in number. Its plural counterpart them is the correct pronoun in the sentence.

Table 4. Pronoun

Category	Description	Extract
a. Improper Pronoun Gender	A common gap in the corpora is when pronouns do not agree with their antecedent in gender.	Extract 12 …(female) complainant came personally before this office to report and complained that on the above stated time and date of incident his husband/victim was stabbed to death by the above named suspect…
b. Unnecessary Shift in Perspective	While police reports in the Philippines are written in third person point of, some narratives in the corpora have unnecessary shift to first-person perspective.	Extract 13 [Name] and [name], both of legal age, married, members of [Philippine army] based at [barangay] [town and province], personally reported before this office and requested to put into police blotter book that on or about [time] in the afternoon, [date], while we were in our detachment rendering our official duty we were harassed, attacked and assaulted by a group of heavily armed [group]…
c. Lack of Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	Pronouns and their antecedents do not agree in number.	Extract 14 Suspects fled away to south west direction, bringing with him the weapons used.

Table 5. Plural noun

Category	Description	Extract
a. Singular Nouns with Plural Modifiers	Another grammatical issue in the corpora is when singular nouns or noun phrases are used after a modifier that must be followed by a plural noun or noun phrase.	Extract 15 …are monitored roaming in various part of [province] imposing permit to campaign and permit to win (PTC/PTW) to some politician.
b. Incorrectly Pluralized Nouns	Another common gap in number is when a plural noun or a noncount noun is incorrectly pluralized.	Extract 16 Upon received the information personnels of this office led by [name] immediately proceeded to the place of accident…

Table 6. Preposition

Category	Description	Extract
a. Improper Preposition	a common gap is when a preposition does not collocate with its preceding word.	Extract 17 With a blanket attached from the branch and tied to his neck thereafter he immediately informed his grandson to verify the identity of the hanging body…
b. Missing Preposition	In the corpora, some verbs and noun phrases are not joined by prepositions making the expressions awkward and illogical.	Extract 18 [Name], [age] years old, married, Filipino, member of [Philippine army] based at [barangay], [town and province], reported this office and requested to put into police blotter…

The noun phrases *various part* and *some politician* in Extract 15 are faulty since the modifiers, which require plural nouns or noun phrases, are followed by singular nouns. Other examples found in the corpora are *other motorist*, *both vehicle, and several fistic blow.* In Extract

16, the plural noun *personnels* is redundantly pluralized by adding the suffix -s at the end of the word.

The preposition *from* in Sample 95 does not collocate with the participle *attached*. The phrase

attached to must have been used in the sentence. In Extract 18, the missing preposition after the verb reported makes the sentence appear that this office (police station) was the one reported by the complainant. The preposition *to* must have been inserted before the noun phrase *this office*. This extract illustrate how a missing preposition makes a sentence awkward and illogical, which is a potential source of confusion in police narratives.

3.2 Mechanical Gaps

Mechanical gaps are a deviation from the rules of the written language, specifically on punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. They are errors in the technical aspects of writing.

In Extract 19, a comma that must have separated the introductory phrase from the main clause is missing. In this case, the lack of comma causes ambiguity since the introductory phrase could either be *according to her* or *according to her previous Project Manager*. The sentence is ambiguous because it could be the reporting person or her previous project manager who disclosed the information. The compound word *where about* in Extract 20 are incorrectly divided into two separate words, while the word *afterwhich* in Extract 21 is incorrectly written as a single word. The word *bycicle* in Extract 22 is one of the misspelt words in the corpora. The

common nouns *Hospital* and *Physician* in Extract 23 are unnecessarily capitalized. In the extracts, the word *hospital* is not used as a part of an official name of a hospital and the word *physician* is not used as a professional title; hence, there is no need to capitalize these words.

3.3 Lexical Gaps

Lexical gaps refer to problems in vocabulary and diction. The common lexical gaps identified in the corpora are improper word forms and inappropriate diction.

In Extract 24, the preposition *upon* is incorrectly followed by the verb *received* in the simple past or past participle form. Since prepositions are commonly followed by a noun or a noun phrase, the noun *receipt* must have been used in the sentence. In Extract 25, the verb *longing*, which has an emotional undertone, is used to describe the armed suspect involved in a hacking incident. Perhaps, the neutral verb phrase *looking for* is more appropriate in the context of the narrative.

3.4 Other Gaps

The corpora contain gaps that do not categorically belong to errors in grammar, mechanics, and lexis. These gaps include wordiness, redundancy, and use of contracted and clipped expressions.

Table 7. Punctuation, spelling, and Capitalization

Category		Description	Extract
1.	Punctuation		
a.	Missing Comma	A missing comma after an introductory element is a common mechanical error in police reports.	Extract 19 According to her previous Project Manager [name] received letter from [name] command by certain [name]…
2.	Spelling		
a.	Unnecessary Division and Compounding of Words	In the corpora, some words are improperly divided into separate words, while some expressions are incorrectly combined.	Extract 20 There after IOC proceeded to place of incident to conduct investigation. Extract 21 Afterwhich suspect turned and chased and attack victim, hitting the left armpit.
b.	Misspellings	Some words in the corpora are misspelled.	Extract 22 …she notice that the bycicle BMX dyno amounting to [amount] was lost inside her residence.
3.	Capitalization		
a.	Unnecessary Capitalization	A common mechanical gap in the corpora is when the initial letter of common nouns is capitalized.	Extract 23 [The victim] was immediately brought to the nearest Hospital and was declared dead on arrival of the attending Physician.

Table 8. Improper Word form and Inappropriate Diction

Category	Description	Extract
1. Improper Word Form	Word form errors in the corpora happen when a word with inappropriate syntactic category is used in a sentence.	Extract 24 Upon received of the said information personnel of this office led by [name] together with the investigator immediately proceeded to the place of incident.
2. Inappropriate Diction	Choice of word and style are inappropriate in report writing context.	Extract 25 Furthermore she averred, that prior the hacking incident, with ill motive, the suspect who is armed with long bolo entered the house of the complainant, longing the where about of her son…

Table 9. Wordiness, redundancy, and use of contracted and clipped expressions

Category	Description	Extract
1. Wordiness	Wordiness is the use of several words when a few can express the same idea more clearly and concisely.	Extract 26 At about [time] PM of same date Brgy. Kagawad and Tanod took effect the arrest of the said person and bring and put into their custody for safekeeping.
2. Redundancy	Redundancy is the use of more words than the necessary to express a thought, especially the use of two or more expressions that mean the same.	Extract 27 At around [time] more or less in the morning of [date], this office received a phone call from Brgy. Captain [name] that a shooting incident had just transpired…
3. Contraction of Words	Contracted expressions are a shortened form of one or two words. In contraction, an apostrophe takes the place of the missing letters or letter.	Extract 28 …victim was at the house of his son in-law together with his wife to visit same and his daughter [name] cause timely it's their barangay fiesta.
4. Clipping of Words	Clipped words are shortened words by common use; they are shortened form of a word, which makes them easier to spell and write.	Extract 29 Initial invest conducted by IOC revealed that at around [time] pm of [date], both vehicles was traversing south from the direction of [town and province]…

The expression t*ook effect the arrest of* in Extract 26 is wordy and can be expressed using the word *arrested*. Other wordy expressions in the corpora are *was placed under arrest* (was arrested), *was managed to be brought* (was brought), and *succumbed to death* (died). In Extract 27, the expressions *at around* and *more or less* are redundant since both indicate approximation of the stated time. In Extract 28, the contraction of the expression *cause*, ('because' with missing apostrophe) and *it's* (it is) is informal and considered inappropriate to police report writing. Aside from contractions, a few clipped expressions, like invest instead of investigation as illustrated in Extract 29. Clipped expressions, which are nonstandard, may generate different interpretations from the readers.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings on grammar errors in police narratives corroborate with the results of other studies and reports. The results agree with the claims of Jordanian Tourist Police [14] and Turkish Public Order Police [17] that they suffer from lack of grammar knowledge and inability to use grammar for writing. Such difficulties are also experienced by Arab Police trainees [34]. The

results also support the observation of prosecuting attorneys in Indiana, USA [16] and that of the Philippine National Police TACDS [8] that the most common issue of problematic reports is grounded in basic grammar. One of the grammatical gaps identified in police narratives is faulty sentence construction. This finding supports the claim of Kekana [12] that South African police officers write poorly-structured sentences. A sentence construction issue found in this study is overcrowding, which is evident in sentence sprawls and run-on sentences found in the corpora. Garner [35] explained that an overly-long sentence structure, which was also observed in the written reports of the British and Irish police (Cetkovic, 2019) and the local police [18], is a distinctive style in writing police reports largely influenced by the style of legal written discourse. In legal writing, sentences include a great deal of information, repetitiveness, long noun phrases with plenty of modifications, prepositional phrases, as well as coordinate and subordinate clauses resulting in embedding more extensive than what occurs in journalistic and scientific writing [35]. Tiersma [36] reasoned that this sentence structure adds formality to legal texts. Overcrowding a sentence, however, results in weak and loose sentences. This writing issue may undermine clarity, which is imperative in police report writing [21]. Wylie [37] and Rebello [38] both claimed that long sentences affect the readability of the text and decrease comprehension. Long drawn-out sentences in police reports can also be confusing and misleading [6]. Hence, the *Plain English Movement* disputes overly-long sentences in any form of professional writing [36]. Using complex and lengthy sentences, if not punctuated properly, also leads to other serious sentence construction problems. According to Afrin [39], non-English major undergraduate students in Bangladesh usually write sentence fragments when they want to write complex sentences. Because of faulty punctuation, a dependent clause or phrase is prematurely separated from its main clause. Overcrowding a sentence with phrases and clauses, if not arranged logically, may also lead to misplaced or dangling modifiers, which are considered serious errors in any written communication. In police report writing, in particular, sentence construction issues cause a narrative to deviate from the principle of clarity in police report writing [9]. Fragments or misplaced modifiers, for instance, may lead to confusion and miscommunication, which are a serious roadblock in a criminal investigation [6].

Problematic verb usage, such as faulty verb tense and lack of subject-verb agreement as identified in police narratives, is also one of the dominant issues in the written works of criminology students [40] teacher-education students [41], and entrepreneurship students [42]. Errors on verb tense and subject-verb agreement found in the corpora commonly occur when a sentence contains the verb *be*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman [43] explain that verb *be* is highly irregular that it has three distinct present-tense and two past-tense forms. Such multiplicity of forms confuses writers when using the verb *be* in their writing. Other grammatical gaps in the corpora are errors in connectives, pronouns, plural nouns, and prepositions. These gaps in the corpora were also found in the essays of students. However, unlike gaps in verb tense and subject-verb agreement, these gaps are less committed by students. Some of the grammatical errors of students in writing is on conjunction [41], personal pronoun [31] Heryanti, (2017), and preposition [39] [41] [44] Pluralization is also a writing problem among ESL learners [45] Heryanti, 2017).

Police narratives are also rich in mechanical gaps, namely, faulty punctuation, overcapitalization, and misspellings. The mechanical gaps identified in this study match the findings of other studies. Faulty use of punctuation, which is observed in police narratives, is also one of the mechanical issues in the written works of students [46] [42] Even proficient criminology students admitted that they suffer from difficulties in using punctuation [47]. Furthermore, the most frequently observed punctuation errors in college freshmen, similar to that of the police, are unnecessary and missing commas [32]. According to Lasaten [44], teachers claimed that students usually have confusion in using colon, semicolon, apostrophes, and commas when writing essays, while students admitted that their insufficient knowledge on the use of punctuation makes it difficult for them to use punctuation correctly and appropriately. Alfonso [41] explained that though punctuation errors abound, they are the easiest to correct compared to errors on verbs and prepositions. The issue on capitalization is another mechanical gap in the corpora. The findings confirm the observation of Wallace and Robertson [4] that there is a practice in most police reporting to overcapitalize. Most often, common nouns are unnecessarily capitalized in police narratives. Such faulty writing practice is also observed by foreign [48] Sawalmeh, 2013)

and local students [46] [32]. Alfaki [48] explained that students' problems in capitalization originate from their difficulty in classifying proper and common nouns. Moreover, misspellings are also observed in the corpora. This finding supports the observation of prosecuting attorneys that misspellings are a common problem in arrest reports written by police officers in Indiana, USA [16]. Written works of South African police [12] and the written communications prepared by PNP personnel [8] also contain misspellings and typographical errors. Misspellings are also observed in the written works of students in local [41] [40] [44] and foreign contexts [49] [48] [31] Heryanti, 2017). Afrin [39] explained students have a tendency to spell words according to their pronunciation. While police narratives contain errors on unnecessary division and compounding of words, students' written works have spelling errors, like letter omission, addition, transposition, and substitution.

The lexical gaps in police narratives include inappropriate diction and improper word form. Reynold [3] claims that most issues with police reports result from lexical inadequacy, which is commonly encountered by South African police [12], Jordanian tourist police [14], Turkish public order police [17], and Thai tourist police (K-Romya, 2006). Thai police officers, in particular, encounter problems with legal terminologies (K-Romya, 2006). Ndenze [19] reported that lack of vocabulary among South African Police results in poor quality of statements from witnesses. Lexical difficulties are also perceived to have damaged the quality of written works of criminology students (Payam, 2006), teacher education students [49], law students [50], and high school students [51] [52]. Choosing appropriate words, in particular, is a problem among students when writing [31]. In fact, some written works are totally obscure due to incorrect word usage [44]. Lexical gaps in the written works of students and professionals can be detrimental since errors in word choice could interfere with the meaning and could even make the writing incomprehensible (Ward-Cox, 2012).

Wordiness, redundancy, and use of contraction of expressions are the gaps identified in the corpora that do not belong to errors on grammar, mechanics, and lexis. These gaps deviate from the principles of conciseness and clarity in police report writing. Wordiness and redundancy in police reports are an influence of legal discourse. Cetkovic (2019) explained that police register is closely related to legal discourse in terms of its

"overly bureaucratic nature distinctive for a high level of formality, use of archaisms, and technical vocabulary." These features, however, make police reports tedious. Strunk and White [33] explain that writing needs to be concise, that is, there should be no unnecessary expressions in writing reports. Reynold [3] explains that wordiness and redundancy occur when officers attempt to make reports fancy. Contraction and clipping of words, which are considered informal, are also observed in police narratives. Though some contracted and clipped expressions are acceptable in other documents and make the writing brief, it is much discouraged in police report writing [9]. For instance, the clipped expressions *invest* for *investigation* and *res* for *resident*, as observed in police reports, may generate different interpretations and may cause confusion.

The recurrence of the identified gaps in police narratives may pose serious effects on individual officer or the entire police station. Flawed grammar distracts the reader and makes a report hard to read. Though other gaps are considered less serious and critical, they could still distract the readers from the content of the report [9]. Furthermore, grammar errors could change the facts of a report. Grammar and punctuation errors or gaps can affect both the clarity and accuracy of a police report. While others may undermine the impact of local errors, which do not affect meaning, the police must be cognizant of global errors, which could significantly interfere with the meaning of their written narratives. A change in meaning due to writing inaccuracies may cause serious miscommunication or confusion that could damage investigation and prosecution [16] [9] [3]. It could be a serious problem when an accused is wrongly convicted or acquitted due to miscommunication caused by critical gaps in police reports. Scaramella (2012) points out that "an omission of critical details cannot later be added to a report without doubting its veracity". It also raises questions about how many other errors they made [9]. Finally, a poorly written report can imply poor investigative skills [6]. If a police report is full of misspelled words and grammatical errors, the officer would appear careless, and questions would be raised about the level of care taken in conducting investigations [20]. Officers' credibility will suffer when they admit that they made mistakes in writing the report [4]. It is, therefore, imperative to address the gaps in police narratives to avoid their serious possible consequence.

5. CONCLUSION

The gaps identified in the corpora do not occur in isolation, and two or more gaps can be observed in a clause or sentence. In fact, the gaps in police narratives are highly interrelated. For instance, faulty punctuation, a mechanical gap, often affects sentence construction, a grammatical gap. Furthermore, there is regularity in the identified gaps across the corpora since police written discourse is a "highly conventionalized and institutionally-driven pattern of language use" (Cetkovic, 2019). Some gaps are present even in the formulaic expressions used in writing police reports. Moreover, some of these errors are considered critical gaps that may cause ambiguity and confusion, whereas other gaps do not interfere with the meaning of the narrative.

The findings of this study suggest that the writing instruction and curriculum of police aspirants do not adequately address the specific writing needs in the law enforcement. Moreover, the prevalence of gaps in basic writing technicalities is indicative of the insufficiency of learning assistance to students. Thus, the foundation of the police on the basics of technical report writing is not enough to enable them to assess and correct the gaps in their own reports.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that the police report writing instruction and training be contextualized. The police and the aspiring police officers have to be exposed to standard samples of blotter reports and course syllabus must be aligned with the needs, expectations, and standards in the workplace. Moreover, the police recruitment agency must introduce or strengthen technical report writing training to develop police report writing skills among police trainees who are composed of criminology and non-criminology graduates. Regular in-service training on technical report writing must be included as a part of the professional development plan/program to empower the police in assessing and correcting the gaps in their own reports. Report writing training must be contextualized, localized, and needs-based.

To further explore the report writing difficulties among the police, researchers are encouraged to quantify the qualitative findings of this study to determine the degree to which the gaps manifest and to expand corpora to other kinds of reports

prepared by the police, like progress report, spot report, investigative report, and the like.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study analyzed, described, and interpreted the gaps in written police narratives and explored the factors that contribute to these gaps. One hundred twenty (120) police blotter narratives written by police investigators in three municipal police stations were analyzed to look into errors on grammar, mechanics, and lexis. Findings revealed that Grammatical gaps in written police narratives include varied errors in sentence construction, verb usage, connective, pronoun, plural noun, and preposition. Police narratives are also rich in mechanical gaps, namely, faulty punctuation, overcapitalization, and misspellings. Inappropriate word choice and improper word form are the lexical gaps found in written police narratives. Other miscellaneous gaps identified in police narratives are wordiness, redundancy, and use of contracted and clipped expressions.

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

The researcher sought the permission of the Police Director of Provincial Police Station and the Police Chiefs of the selected police stations before conducting the study. They were informed about the purpose, nature, and data collection procedure of the study. They were also oriented on how the blotter reports would be handled to safeguard their confidentiality and to protect the identity of both the station and the police officers.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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