In 1978, a number of prostitutes were murdered in the South Florida area. The police interviewed Jerry Townsend, a mentally weak drifter, four times, during which he admitted to many of the crimes. The tape recording of these interviews reveals the most blatant case of police interrogation imaginable.

This book describes and illustrates eleven powerful conversational strategies used by undercover police officers and cooperating witnesses who secretly tape-record targets in criminal investigations. Twelve actual criminal case studies are used as examples. These strategies creating illusion of guilt include the apparently deliberate use of semantic ambiguity, blocking the targets’ words (by creating static on the tape, interrupting them, speaking on their behalf, and manipulating the off/on switch); rapidly changing the subject before targets can respond (the “hit and run” strategy); contaminating the tape with irrelevant information that can make targets appear to be guilty; camouflaging illegality by making actions appear to be legal; isolating targets from important information that they need in order to make informed choices; inaccurately restating things the target has said; withholding crucial information from targets; lying to targets about critical information; and
scripting targets in what to say on tape. These conversational strategies gain power from the fact that the targets do not know that they are being recorded, and often let things go right by them during the discourse. Nor do they know that the real audience of the conversations consists of later jury listeners, who do not know the full context of these conversations. Unlike everyday, unrecorded conversation, the most critical listening takes place at a future time and under very different circumstances. It is shown that undercover officers and their cooperating witnesses make use of essentially the same conversational strategies.

The manipulated bribery event of businessman Paul Manziel
Roger W. Shuy

in The Language of Bribery Cases

In this complex bribery case the police gave a local handyman unsupervised rein for ten days to tape record Bobby Joe Manziel agreeing to participate in a drug related crime. As an afterthought, the handyman devised a scheme to involve Bobby Joe’s brother Paul for bribing the supervisor of a local non-profit organization for whom Paul owed some community service hours stemming from his earlier drunken driving conviction. The ten days of random, poor quality undercover taping yielded disconnected conversations with unidentified speakers in unidentified places, none of which contained a bribery speech event or showed any schemas or agendas related to Paul’s alleged bribery. Of particular interest was the way the handyman strategically manipulated the tape off and on during conversations that appeared to show Manziel’s innocence.