The communicative event of the trial is a highly intertextual one: written documents and verbal statements from previous depositions, affidavits, and interviews are quoted, indirectly reported, reframed or summarized within trial contexts, often in strategic ways. Put somewhat differently, texts move across speech events in the legal system, creating trajectories (Blommaert 2005) that link text and talk in an ongoing meaning-making process. This paper draws upon audio-taped recordings from an American rape trial, Maouloud Baby vs. the State of Maryland, in order to examine some particular moments in a text’s trajectory, specifically, the recontextualization of a police interrogation within the cross-examination of an accused’s testimony. While the cross-examining lawyer seemingly engages in a neutral task-quoting and animating the accused’s utterances from the written record of the police interview, I argue that the social meanings indexed by this activity in fact undermine the credibility of the accused. Indeed, I demonstrate how this activity obscures not only the circumstances surrounding the police interview’s original production (i.e., that the accused’s utterances were co-constructed by the police and the accused), but also the ‘double voiced’ nature of the accused’s direct quotes as they are animated by the lawyer in the context of the trial. In other words, it is only by attending to the connections between these sequentially-related linguistic events that we see how meaning-making is achieved: as the accused’s ‘words’ move across time and space, the changing participation frameworks and power dynamics become crucial to the meanings ascribed to them. Moreover, such interpretations are naturalized by textualist ideologies that privilege propositional meanings over contextualized ones.

Keywords: legal discourse, text trajectories, reported speech.