

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Department of English

ENGE2540 Forensic Linguistics: Language as Evidence in Legal Processes

Course Outline

(tentative¹)

Course Lecturer: Prof. Carmen Lee (carmenlee@cuhk.edu.hk)

About the Course

This course introduces the role linguistics and linguists play in forensic science and legal investigations. Forensic linguists are like the Sherlock Holmes of language – they offer their expert opinions about linguistic evidence in the legal process. This course introduces some major topics in forensic linguistics, including authorship analysis, speaker identification, trial discourse, plagiarism and collusion, and linguistic evidence in cybercrime. High profile cases where forensic linguists have contributed to legal investigations will be discussed. Students will also be introduced the methods and tools commonly used in forensic linguistic analyses of spoken and written data. No prior knowledge of law is required.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- 1) understand the scope of forensic linguistics as a sub-branch of applied linguistics;
- 2) identify different types of linguistic data that can be used as forensic evidence;
- 3) construct a basic linguistic profile of a text;
- 4) discuss the role and responsibilities of forensic linguists in legal investigations;
- 5) critically assess the strengths and limits of linguistic evidence in the legal process.

Format of Class Meetings and Communication Media

Lectures	◆ 2 hrs/week
Tutorials	◆ 1 hr/ week
Communication	- Online discussion - Lectures - Tutorials

Assessment Scheme

	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Weighting</i>
1.	Online Discussion	20%
2.	Authorship Analysis	20%
3	Tutorial Presentation (based on reading)	20%
4.	Project Paper	40%

¹ Please note that this course outline only gives you a tentative overview of the course content. The assessment scheme, modes of class meetings, and course schedule may be subject to change upon University's teaching and learning arrangements in 2020-21.

Major topics of the course include:

- 1. What is Forensic Linguistics and the Role of the Forensic Linguist**
This lecture defines the scope and nature of forensic linguistics as a sub-branch of applied linguistics. It also introduces the responsibilities of a forensic linguist in legal proceedings.
- 2. Language of the Legal Process**
This lecture outlines the characteristics of legal discourse style and register, as well as the language of police interviewing and testimonies.
- 3. Discourse of the Courtroom**
This lecture discusses the trial as a complex genre, the power of language in the courtroom, and the role of the expert witness in the courtroom.
- 4. Types of Forensic Texts and Linguistic Evidence**
This lecture identifies the types of texts that can be used as forensic evidence, such as suicide notes, death threats, email and mobile texts.
- 5. Trademark Disputes**
This lecture introduces how linguistic analysis can be applied in trademark cases.
- 6. Authorship Attribution**
This lecture introduces the process in which linguists conduct stylistic analysis to identify the author(s) of disputed or questioned texts, as well as the consistency and distinctiveness of an author's linguistic style.
- 7. Plagiarism and Collusion**
This lecture deals with the concept of textual borrowing by looking into the issue of plagiarism in academic and legal contexts, as well as the problem of collusion in police statements.
- 8. Forensic Phonetics**
This lecture focuses on the use of spoken data as forensic evidence. It discusses the issues of transcribing and analyzing human voices, and how a speaker's social background may be derived on the basis of their voice.
- 9. Linguistic Evidence in Cybercrime**
This lecture discusses the growing trend of cybercrime and aggressive behaviour on the internet. Topics include email authorship, identity tracking, and hate speech.
- 10. Analyzing Linguistic Evidence**
Throughout the course, students will be introduced to the major tools and methods that can be used for analyzing linguistic evidence, such as transcription, stylistic analysis, discourse analysis, author profiling, etc.

Recommended readings

- Coulthard, M., Johnson, A., & Wright, D. (2017). *An introduction to forensic linguistics: Language in evidence*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.
- Gibbons, J. P. (2003). *Forensic linguistics: An introduction to language in the legal system*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Heydon, G. (2019). *Researching Forensic Linguistics: Approaches and Applications*. Routledge.
- Olsson, J. and Luchjenbroers, J. (2018). *Forensic linguistics*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Shuy, R. W. (1993). *Language crimes: The use and abuse of language evidence in the courtroom*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

- You must not at any time copy directly from sections of reference materials without acknowledging your source of materials.
- Please read carefully the information regarding academic honesty on the following website: <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty>
- Fill in the VeriGuide declaration form and attach it to your assignment.

Penalty for Late Submission of Assignments

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| ◆ A sub-grade will be deducted per late day . |
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