

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Department of English

ENGE2540 Forensic Linguistics: Language as Evidence in Legal Processes

Course Outline

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.	Participation	10%
1.	Online Discussion	10%
2.	Data Analysis Exercise	20%
3	Tutorial Presentation (based on reading)	20%
4.	Final Paper	40%

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.

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- CUHK's policy on use of artificial intelligence in coursework: https://www.aqs.cuhk.edu.hk/documents/A-guide-for-students_use-of-AI-tools.pdf

Late Submission of Assignments, Sick Leave, and Deadline Extensions

****Penalty for Late Submission of Assignments****

- ◆ 5% of assignment full mark will be deducted **per late day**.

See below for Department of English's policy on late submission, sick leave, and deadline extensions.

3.1 To ensure fairness, extensions will not be granted to individuals based on workload or extra-curricular activities, but special permission may be granted for students who are participating in events at an institutional or international level. Students are encouraged to communicate with their course instructor regarding any special circumstances and submit supporting documents whenever possible.

4. Consideration of Documents for Sick Leave or Deadline Extensions

4.1 Students should submit a document issued by a certified medical practitioner or by a university counsellor or other relevant bodies. Students are urged to consult with their course instructors as soon as possible if exceptional circumstances arise that impact their ability to attend class and/or submit assignments on time.

4.2 Relevant documentation should be issued as soon as possible but preferably within three days of the missed class or assignment deadline.

4.3 In the case of mental health issues, the document is considered valid for one semester or for the period specified by the medical practitioner or university counselor.

General Grade Descriptors and Assessment Criteria

This table serves as a general description of the grading criteria for evaluating your coursework. Additional criteria may be used where appropriate, depending on individual cases.

<p>A (Outstanding)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work is of exceptional quality in general; - Demonstrates significant originality while engaging previous academic studies; - Demonstrates high level of critical thinking skills, with insights beyond common knowledge; - Excellent command of academic English; - Demonstrates strong links between course content and own work; - Demonstrates strong connection between external resources and own work; - Work is well organized and is communicated effectively to the target audience; - Far exceeds basic understanding of course content; - Highly motivated and makes significant effort to participate in course activities. - A student receiving an A grade must complete all assessments.
<p>A- (Excellent)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work is of excellent quality in general; - Demonstrates considerable originality, with some insights beyond common knowledge; - Demonstrates good level of critical thinking skills; - Excellent command of academic English; - Demonstrates sufficient links between course content and own work; - Demonstrates sufficient connection between external resources and own work; - Work is well organized and is communicated to the target audience in appropriate style; - Beyond basic understanding of course content; - Makes significant effort to participate in course activities. - A student receiving an A- grade must complete all assessments.
<p>B+, B, B- (Good)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work is of good quality in general; - Demonstrates some degrees of originality; - Demonstrates some to little level of critical thinking skills; - Good command of academic English with occasional errors; - Demonstrates some links between course content and own work; - Demonstrates some connection between external resources and own work; - Work is basically easy to follow, with minor organizational and stylistic problems; - Demonstrates basic understanding of course content. - Shows some effort in participation. - A student receiving a B-range grade must complete all assessments.
<p>C+, C, C- (Fair)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work is of only acceptable quality in general; - Demonstrates little originality; - Demonstrates little sign of critical thinking; - Fair command of English, with errors that may impede understanding; - Demonstrates little to no links between course content and own work; - Demonstrates little to no connection between external resources and own work; - Major organizational and stylistic problems; - Limited understanding of course content; - Shows little effort in participation. - A student receiving a C-range grade must complete all assessments.
<p>D (Bare pass)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work is of insufficient quality in general; - Demonstrates little understanding of course content; - Shows almost no effort in participation. - Late submission of assignments without a valid reason. - You fail to complete some of the coursework assessments.
<p>F</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Your work does not meet basic standards;

(Fail)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fails to understand basic content;- Almost no effort in participation;- Late submission of assignments without a valid reason.- You fail to complete most of the coursework assessments.
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