

The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Department of English
ENGE2540 Forensic Linguistics: Language as Evidence in Legal Processes
Course Outline

Course teacher: 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.

COURSE COMPONENTS: TEACHING MODES AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

- On-site face-to-face lectures
- Interactive tutorials and in-class discussions
- Blackboard online discussion
- Occasional use of online resources for supplementary learning

ASSESSMENT SCHEME

	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Weighting</i>
1.	Assignment 1: Data Analysis	20%
2.	Assignment 2: Final Paper	40%
3.	Blackboard Discussion	10%
4.	Tutorial Presentation	20%
5.	Participation (attendance, contributing to class discussions, sharing relevant insights, and engaging with group activities, etc.)	10%

RECOMMENDED READING

- Coulthard, M., Johnson, A., & Wright, D. (2017). *An introduction to forensic linguistics: Language in evidence*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge. (E-book available via CUHK library)
- Coulthard, M., May, Alison and Sousa-Silva, R. (2020, 2nd ed.). *The Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics*. Routledge. (E-book available via CUHK library)
- Eades, D. (2010). *Sociolinguistics and the legal process*. Multilingual Matters. (E-book available via CUHK library)
- Heydon, G. (2019). *Researching Forensic Linguistics: Approaches and Applications*. Routledge. (E-book available via CUHK library)
- Olsson, J., & Luchjenbroers, J. (2014). *Forensic linguistics*. London: Bloomsbury. (E-book available via CUHK library)
- Shuy, R. W. (1993). *Language crimes: The use and abuse of language evidence in the courtroom*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.
- Tiersma, P. M., & Solan, L. (Eds.). (2012/2016). *The Oxford handbook of language and law*. Oxford University Press. (E-book available via CUHK library)

ONLINE RESOURCES

- en clair: <https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/enclair/> A podcast about “forensic linguistics, literary detection, language mysteries, and more”.
- Forensic Linguistic Data & Resources (by Tammy Gales and Dakota Wing): <https://forensiclinc.com/>
- Forensic Linguistic Resources (by Dakota Wing): <https://www.dakotawing.com/resources/forensic-linguistics-resources>
- Writing Wrongs <https://www.aston.ac.uk/research/forensic-linguistics/writing-wrongs> A podcast by Aston Institute for Forensic Linguistics
- YouTube Webinar: ‘Learn from a Forensic Linguist’ <https://youtu.be/J-6ERxoundE>

COURSE SCHEDULE/TOPICS

Topic
What is Forensic Linguistics and the Role of the Forensic Linguist Background reading: Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.1)
Language and the Legal Process Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 2, ch.4), Eades (2010, ch.1)
Courtroom discourse Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 5), Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.13)
Language as evidence 1: an introduction to forensic texts Background reading: Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.8)
Language as evidence 2: levels of linguistic analysis Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 6)
Trademark cases and linguistics Background reading: Butters, R. R. (2010). Trademark linguistics Trademarks: language that one owns. In <i>The Routledge handbook of forensic linguistics</i> (pp. 379-392). Routledge. Shuy, R. W. (2012/2016). Using linguistics in trademark cases. In <i>The Oxford Handbook of Language and Law</i> (ch.32).
Authorship attribution 1: Constructing the author Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 8), Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.2)
Authorship attribution 2: Analyzing linguistic variation and style markers Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 8), Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.10, 11)
Textual borrowing and detecting plagiarism Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 9), Woolls, D. (2012). Detecting plagiarism. In <i>The Oxford Handbook of Language and Law</i> (ch.37), Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.6)
Forensic phonetics Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 7)

Linguistic evidence in cybercrime (1): Types and Notable Cases Background reading: Olsson & Luchjenbroers (2014, ch.7)
Linguistic evidence in cybercrime (2): Challenges and Policies
Reflection: The linguist as expert witness and contributing to society Background reading: Coulthard et al. (2017, ch. 10, 11)

ACADEMIC HONESTY

- 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.

USE OF GENERATIVE AI

- This course adopts Approach 2 in CUHK's [Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools in Teaching, Learning and Assessments: A Guide for Students](#)
- Applied Linguistics requires your close reading skills, interpretive judgment, and theoretically-informed discussion in your own words.
- You may, however, use gen-AI tools for:
 - *personal learning* purposes, such as looking up basic definitions of key concepts, facts or historical events;
 - *proofreading* for grammar and spelling.

AI-generated content should *not* be used as part of your assessed work. Specifically, you should *NOT* use AI to:

- analyze or code your data;
- draft your assignments;
- generate reference lists;
- generate arguments or interpretations in assignments;
- rewrite your work;
- summarize academic sources instead of reading the original texts yourself.

Important:

- All AI use must be declared.
- Undisclosed or inappropriate use may affect your grade.
- You should consult Prof. Lee for any AI use beyond the above-listed purposes.
- If you're ever in doubt about what is or isn't appropriate, please **contact Prof. Lee** before using AI tools.

LATE SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS, SICK LEAVE, AND DEADLINE EXTENSIONS

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

One sub-grade (e.g. from A- to B+) will be deducted for **each 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.

[\[ACCESS FULL DOCUMENT\]](#)

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.

A (Outstanding)	- Your work is of exceptional quality in general; - Demonstrates significant originality while engaging in previous academic studies; - Demonstrates a 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 the 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.
A- (Excellent)	- Your work is of excellent quality in general; - Demonstrates considerable originality, with some insights beyond common knowledge; - Demonstrates a 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 an appropriate style; - Beyond the basic understanding of course content; - Makes significant effort to participate in course activities. - A student receiving an A- grade must complete all assessments.
B+, B, B- (Good)	- 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 a basic understanding of course content. - Shows some effort in participation. - A student receiving a B-range grade must complete all assessments.
C+, C, C- (Fair)	- 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.
D (Bare pass)	- 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.
F (Fail)	- Your work does not meet basic standards; - 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.