

Interdisciplinary Relations Between Police Science and Applied Linguistics – Forensic Linguistics

TOLNAINÉ KABÓK Zsuzsanna¹

There are interdisciplinary contacts between Law Enforcement and Applied Linguistics as well. Forensic linguistics as an independent discipline helps law enforcement activities. It is quite certain that the role of forensic linguistics in law enforcement will grow in Hungary, too, in the future. That is why it seems to be indispensable to introduce an innovative post-gradual training in forensic linguists. The most suitable institution for this purpose could be the National University of Public Service.

Keywords: *interdisciplinary relationships, reliability of forensic analysis, a main tasks of forensic linguistics, international organizations dealing with forensic linguistics*

I work for The National University of Public Service (Budapest, Hungary), in the Department of Foreign Languages at the Faculty of Law Enforcement. Besides general English, I teach my students the special language of Law Enforcement as an associate professor.

I obtained my PhD degree at the Doctoral School of Applied Linguistics at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Pécs in 2009. The title of my doctoral thesis was *A Corpus-based Analysis of the Hungarian and British Written Police Communication*.

While I was writing my dissertation, I was confronted with the fact that whoever wants to create something of scientific value on this subject, they have to look into several interdisciplinary disciplines, for example, sociolinguistics, statistics, stylistics, statistical linguistics, corpus linguistics, IT, police science, text linguistics, genre analysis, etc.

In the present, mainly descriptive study, I firstly focus on how two disciplines, Police Science and Applied Linguistics are connected and, secondly, how the interdisciplinary field of Forensic Linguistics is being developed abroad and in Hungary.

Discipline, interdisciplinary relationships

A discipline is the basic unit of any scientific cognitive activity. Police Science is part of the discipline of general scientific knowledge and activity, but it uses a diversified research framework.

1 TOLNAINÉ KABÓK Zsuzsanna, National University of Public Service, Faculty of Law Enforcement, Institute of Foreign and Special Languages, assistant professor (retired).
TOLNAINÉ KABÓK Zsuzsanna dr. egyetemi, docens, angol nyelvtanár, NKE Rendészettudományi Kar Idegennyelvi és Szaknyelvi Központ.
zsuzsatolnai@gmail.com

In the course of technological development, all disciplines, including Police Science use new methods and conceptual systems for their thematic scientific research. In doing so, the first step may be the creation of interdisciplinary relationships between the various disciplines.

At a next stage of the process one or another interdisciplinary area may be strengthened to the extent that it starts to develop independently and thus a new discipline is created.

I would like to interpret this process, the birth of a new branch of science. I intend to illustrate the process of formation and development of Forensic Linguistics, which is becoming a rapidly developing independent discipline.

Forensic linguistics as the main linguistic sub-discipline of police science

“Forensic Linguistics” was mentioned for the first time in the 1960s, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries. In 1968 Jan Sztavrik,² the Swedish linguist was the first to help the investigators use a suspect statement analysis with forensic linguistics methods.

Although initially the application of linguistic methods was not considered to have a probative force, now forensic linguists’ opinions are successfully used as official forensic evidence all over the world. Forensic linguists can help with the criminal investigation of linguistic evidence, author identification and the authenticity of documents, establishing the linguistic profiling of criminals, identifying farewell letters, e-mails, the stylistic analysis of mobile texts, the identification of plagiarism, solving trademark issues, the analysis of threatening voice messages, discourse analysis, etc.

A brief introduction to the field

Forensic linguistics is one of the rapidly developing branches of applied linguistics, which uses linguistic knowledge and the methods of applied linguistics in a forensic environment, during negotiations at legal proceedings. Forensic linguistics experts help to solve criminal cases. They are able to help to decide if the accused is guilty or innocent.

Forensic linguists assume that every native speaker has their own special and individual language version, called *idiolect*, which is very difficult to ‘disguise’. Idiolects can also help with identifying persons, no matter how they can distort their voice. Everybody has their typical vocabulary, frequent use of grammar and of certain grammatical forms and dialect. It is possible to identify persons by using a comparative analysis.

Forensic linguists work in three key application areas:

- interpretation of written legal texts,
- understanding language use in forensic and legal proceedings,
- linguistic analysis of the evidence.

² Jan SVARTIK: *The Evans Statements, a Case for Forensic Linguistics*, Göteborg, University of Göteborg, 1968, 46.

A forensic linguist is able to achieve that someone is acquitted after the linguistic analysis of the evidence. A forensic linguist can be asked to provide an expert's report in a wide variety of cases, including the abuse of the legal process, to identify the author of hate mails, correspondence relating to Internet child pornography, to analyse an arsonist's diary, cell phone texts and compare texts recorded during the interrogation of the suspect.

Forensic texts cover a wide range of legal language texts. Any written or oral statements of any legal or criminal nature can be examined (e.g. acts, wills, judgments and writs, interrogation reports, the judge's instructions, police witness statements). The most important written texts include the following:

Emergency call

It is never a calm, thoughtful phone call. It makes forensic linguistic analysis difficult that the signs of hesitation, incomplete or too short answers are typical both of those who are really in an emergency and those who just want to deceive the authorities.

Threatening letters, blackmail

In the case of threatening and blackmailing letters it can be extremely difficult for forensic linguists to perform a reliable and very quick analysis.

Letters of suicide

Experience has shown that a suicidal person never writes a letter longer than 300 words. Irrelevant information is never included. In almost all cases the letter is addressed to a specific person, describing the relationship between them. The writer of the letter wants that person to feel guilty and to make him or her suffer.

Death row statements

Death row statements are characterized by the fact that the author does not admit the crime. He or she asserts his or her innocence, mentions dishonourable witnesses, he or she blames the authorities for having sentenced him/her to death.

The language evidence may be an oral and a written one. In the first case we are speaking about a speaker, in the second case about a drafter.

The purpose of forensic analysis can be:

- speaker's profiling,
- draftsman's profiling,
- speaker's identification,
- draftsman's identification.

Forensic linguists' activities must not be narrowed down to only one of the methods used at the time of the crime investigation, as forensic experts can also provide protection to strengthen the evidence. In this case, after the analysis of the evidence, it may happen that the work of the investigation law enforcement agencies is questioned.

The forensic linguists' work is extremely important because in the investigative phase the law enforcement staff cannot determine if the perpetrator's or witness' testimony corresponds to the truth, or if the person recording their voice distorted it, in order to deceive the investigators. These doubts can be dispelled by the opinion of a forensic expert. As for the analysis of forensic linguists' reliability, it can be very different depending on the subject matter. Voice identification, provided it is performed by a qualified phonetician, can be very reliable, can have a probative value, but if we think about identifying the author, it is very hard to define the degree of reliability in short texts.

Forensic linguists have become "digital language investigators" as a result of the rapid development of electronic technology. There is a growing demand for the work of forensic linguistic experts. They are, in a growing number, able to solve crimes committed online, using forensic linguistic analysis.

The main tasks of forensic linguistics

This is a very complex, interdisciplinary field, related to a wide variety of applied linguistic tasks that contribute to the success of a criminal investigation.

Just a few examples:

- processing evidence,
- author identification,
- finding the authenticity of documents,
- identification of the linguistic profiling of offenders,
- stylistic analysis of farewell letters, e-mails,
- identification of the mobile-author texts,
- analysis of harassing letters,
- analysis of verbal and written blackmail messages,
- author identification of hate texts,
- evidence of plagiarism,
- voice identification of threatening messages,
- discourse analysis,
- investigation of language offenses,
- author identification of documents on counterfeiting,
- author identification of fraud matters,
- author identification of insurance documents,
- preparation of linguist special reports.

Of course, the list above may not be complete. It is certain that in the future this list will be expanded.

Language fingerprint analysis

Author identification is also called stylometry. In this case, a kind of “language fingerprint analysis” takes place. In the analysis of the crime, it is important to study the offender’s written or oral production. During the analysis we get relevant information about the age of the offender, his/her educational, religious or spiritual beliefs, geographical and socio-economic, cultural and ethnic background.

According to the concept of a linguistic fingerprint, each human being uses the language differently, and this difference includes a set of linguistic fingerprints with unique features. On the basis of a person’s linguistic fingerprint an individual’s daily written and verbal interactions, personality traits, situational variables and physiological markers (e.g. blood pressure) can be reconstructed.

Forensic transcription

An accurate, reliable text transcription is important to be used as evidence. If the transcription is wrong, the evidence will become unsuitable for use in forensic procedures. A number of problems can occur during a transcription process. A handwritten document may contain ambiguous words, a sort of handwriting can be illegible, or a document can be copied or old and damaged.

In the audio and video documents there may be repetitions of meaningless words, incoherent mumbling. The loud background (crying, laughter and other sound effects) can make the transcription process more difficult. These conditions will certainly negatively affect the reliability of the transcription. Most adult speech and writing also reflect linguistic peculiarities or a dialect.

The reliability of forensic analysis

The reliability of any kind of forensic linguistic analysis depends on many factors. It frequently happens that the documents for examination are too short. The modern methods of applied linguistics, modern phonetics technologies and a highly skilled forensic phonetic expert’s work nonetheless provide highly reliable evidence for forensic work. Worldwide, there is a tendency that the criminal laboratories are used everywhere either by the prosecution or the defence to facilitate their work.

The Interdisciplinary Fields of Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics is not homogeneous; it comprises a series of auxiliary sciences. For each analysis one must decide on the methodology of an area of applied linguistics that may be the most effective in a certain case. The most important sub-disciplines of forensic linguistics are the following.

Forensic Computer Corpus Linguistics

This area is one of the most rapidly developing fields of forensic linguistics, mostly used for comparison of the peculiarities of written or oral acts of communication. A summary definition can be read in Zsuzsa Tolnainé Kabók's doctoral thesis:³ "A corpus is an electronically stored, carefully selected, representative selection of linguistics elements made up in text files." The method of corpus analysis is often used for forensic linguistic analysis to get a more precise and reliable language evidence. Experts use statistical procedures (e.g. factor analysis) during the forensic statistical analysis.

Forensic Phonetics

In the modern world of technology, forensic linguists are able to produce analyses of increasing accuracy. Audio recordings made on the basis of forensic phonetic expert opinion are more and more effectively used in a wide variety of criminal matters. Most adults keep the local characteristics learned in a given geographic region as a child in their style of speech. Written communication contains fewer of these 'memories/imprints'. Identification can use these features very well. As for sound identification, there is a need for close cooperation between experts in several areas. When the offender is being identified, forensic dialectology also helps with the process of voice recognition and voice authentication.

Forensic Dialectology

Forensic dialectology plays a crucial role in voice recognition. It used to have a more dominant role because of the lower mobility of the population. People preserved several peculiarities in their original language, which were capable of identifying the author. Today there is an intensified unifying role of the television and the internet, a kind of standardized language was established in every country, so methods for reliability had to become more exact, therefore forensic dialectologists increasingly work together with forensic phonetic professionals.

Forensic phonologists have to identify or exclude the potential speakers. The acoustic-phonetic analysis is complicated by the fact that the speaker deliberately wants to arrange that his/her voice could not be recognized. The other problem is that the incriminating audio materials are often very short, and the recordings are made in noisy conditions. Sometimes the technique also works against the phonetic process, since the various techniques of recordings cut off some of the audio frequency range of speech.

In the case of a hostage-taking or a simple ransom negotiation it is necessary to provide a sound specialist, but a telephone conversation could also be significant as evidence in murder cases. The experts' aim is not only the exact profiling of the speaker but also his/her identification.

3 Tolnainé Kabók Zsuzsa: *A magyar és az angol rendőrségi szakterület trott kommunikációjának morfoszintaktikai, statisztikai és korpuszelemzéses vizsgálata*, PhD dissertation, Pécs, BTK, Alkalmazott Nyelvészeti Doktori Iskola. 2009, 71.

Forensic Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines the structure of written or spoken texts in order to identify the person on the basis of special structural issues used by him/her. Forensic discourse analysts work in close collaboration with experts of forensic stylistics. This work often takes a long time. The analysis itself, followed by creating a written opinion on the drafting and after its presentation in court can last for a few days, or even for several months, depending on the length of the text.

Forensic discourse analysts analyse discourse-related written documents, such as anonymous blackmailer letters, threatening letters, hate-letters, harassing letters, farewell letters, text messages and blog posts. The Internet makes the offenders' job easier because no graphology analysis can be done. However, a forensic text analysis can still be of assistance, because it can help to narrow the scope of the suspects. A comparative analysis can identify the author, when revealing the similarities in the parlance of the statement and of the analysed texts.

Forensic Stylistics

It can be used with high efficiency, together with the analysis of discourse to identify the author and to expose plagiarism cases.

Forensic Psycholinguistics

The importance of a forensic psycholinguistic research cannot be denied during assessing criminals' behaviour. Since the last third of the 20th century, we have been able to detect more and more close connections between the functions of language and a variety of character types and individual styles. A forensic psycholinguist helps to solve the tasks when the linguistic investigation should be extended to psychological areas. For example, without the precise clarification of the concept of impulsivity, anger, anxiety, mania, depression, paranoia, sadism and narcissism in many cases it would be impossible to obtain an explanation, or to predict a specific behaviour. This field has been increasingly important since the 1930s.

Forensic Sociolinguistics

The styles of spoken and written communication, the use of grammar, generation characteristics can be detected even if the offender wants to disguise themselves. Vocabulary, sentence complexity and sophisticated vocabulary are likely to indicate a higher level of education, a higher social status.

Forensic profiling

Criminal profiling is said to have more and more importance in the process of shortening a suspects' list. It is believed that the use of forensic psychological profiling in establishing the identity of the offender came from the FBI Behavioural Science Laboratory, where experts in psychology and criminology worked together. Yet, until recently, such profiling had not taken the linguistic clues into account sufficiently. Nowadays, however, forensic linguists are usually involved as well. Thereby the efficiency of the investigation is increasing.

International Organizations Dealing with Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics is an interesting and growing specialty. Several associations, institutes, forensic linguistic centres have been abolished worldwide. The most important ones are as follows:

1. The International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL)⁴

The discipline has an independent professional organization. They have their own IAFL periodical, the *International Journal of Speech*. They organize conferences every two years with the title *Language and the Law*.

2. FBI laboratory⁵

As one of the largest and most comprehensive forensic laboratories in the world, the FBI Laboratory provides forensic and technical services in all fields of inquiry, and also in the area of forensic linguistics, above all author identification.

3. Forensic Science Service⁶

The United Kingdom also operates a similar institution in the framework of the British Home Office.

4. Institute of Linguistic Evidence (ILE)⁷

The first and only non-profit scientific research organization devoted to developing and testing forensic linguistic methods, ILE conducts pioneering research and development for methods of handling language as evidence and provides validated, tested and proven methods for answering forensically significant questions. The scientific research institute is situated in Birmingham. It was created in 1998, with the aim of developing new, effective methods of forensic linguistic research, so that the opinion of a forensic expert would be more readily accepted in forensic procedures as having a probative value.

5. International Summer School in Forensic Linguistic Analysis

Prof. Malcolm Coulthard founded the International Summer School in Forensic Linguistic Analysis in 2000, which deals with topics such as the role, shape and evidential value of language in legal and forensic contexts. The Summer School

4 www.iafl.org (10.05.2016)

5 www.fbi.gov/hq/lab/labhome.htm (10.05.2016)

6 forensic.gov.uk/forensic_t/inside/about/index.htm (10.05.2016)

7 www.ile.org (10.05.2016)

addresses subjects within the broadly defined discipline of forensic linguistics, including the structure of legal language, forensic authorship attribution, copyright issues, plagiarism and its detection and forensic phonetics. The fifteenth edition was held from 31 August to 4 September 2015 at Aston University.

6. Cardiff University – Forensic Linguistics (MA)⁸

The degree programme has two main aims, one of which is to introduce students to linguistic aspects of the criminal justice system including those which centre on policing and the courtroom whilst also looking to the surrounding legal system, examining issues of justice, fairness and equality in law as they relate to language and communication. The second aim is to “explore the role of the linguist when interacting with legal and legislative systems by examining the actual or potential impact of linguistics (broadly defined) on criminal investigations and on legal activities and procedures.”

7. Centre for Forensic Linguistics at Aston University

The Centre for Forensic Linguistics at Aston University is the first of its kind in the world. Leading-edge research and investigative practice are combined with teaching and training in forensic linguistics. Research at the Centre involves all aspects of forensic linguistics from how the police and the courts can best work with interpreters to the development and refinement of methods for identifying the author of disputed forensic texts.

8. Forensic Linguistics Institute⁹

It was set up in 1995 by Prof. John Olsson. They can provide The Certificate in Forensic Linguistics, The Advanced Certificate in Forensic Linguistics and Diploma in Forensic Linguistics which corresponds to Level 6 in the UK National Qualifications Framework, which is the equivalent of an Honours Degree (BA or BSc).

The state of play in forensic linguistics in Hungary

It must be said that the importance of forensic linguistics in Hungary is not so significant as in Western countries or in the USA. However, already in 1980 Ferenc Nagy¹⁰ published his comprehensive work, titled *Kriminalisztikai szövegnyelvészet* (*Forensic corpus linguistics*). Also, several linguists and researchers were involved in forensic linguistics activities. After that time only studies were published in this area of science. However, the last few years have seen a new phase in forensic linguistic research.

8 <http://coursefinder.cardiff.ac.uk/postgraduate/course/detail/p117.html> (10.05.2016)

9 www.thetext.uk (10.05.2016)

10 NAGY Ferenc: *Kriminalisztikai szövegnyelvészet*, Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest, 1980.

There are only two registered forensic linguist experts in Hungary: Judit Szakácsné Farkas¹¹ and Jánosné Vágó.¹²

The E-Language Magazine¹³ launched in 2011 devoted their first issue to the field of forensic linguistics. In this issue we could read Sara Ránki's essay on the history of forensic linguistics,¹⁴ Eniko Henriett Hudecz's essay on linguistic profiling,¹⁵ Zoltán Tatar's essay on forensic phonetics¹⁶ and Levente Nagy's definition of the status of a linguistics expert.¹⁷

Unlike the situation abroad, in Hungary there are no possibilities to study forensic linguistics at any university. It is obvious that there is a huge need to establish a special institute for training forensic linguist professionals.

Conclusion

It is a positive fact that forensic linguistics in Hungary is getting more and more significant. However, it is obvious that Hungary has made only the first steps in using this rapidly developing discipline in investigations. There has been a growing demand for university BA and MA courses offering an overview of forensic linguistics, which is a relatively new branch of applied linguistics.

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ABSZTRAKT

Interdiszciplináris kapcsolatok a rendészettudományok és az alkalmazott nyelvészet között – különös tekintettel a törvényszéki nyelvészetre

TOLNAINÉ KABÓK Zsuzsanna

A rendészettudomány szerteágazó tudományközi, interdiszciplináris kapcsolatrendszerrel rendelkezik a rendészettudomány és az alkalmazott nyelvészet viszonylatában is. A törvényszéki nyelvészet önálló tudományterületként segíti a bűnüldözési tevékenységet. Egészen bizonyos, hogy a jövőben Magyarországon is kulcsfontosságú lesz a törvényszéki nyelvészek szerepe a nyomozásban. Éppen ezért látszik elkerülhetetlennek egy hiánypótló és innovatív törvényszéki nyelvészszakértő-képzés beindítása. A legmegfelelőbb intézmény ehhez a Nemzeti Közsolgálati Egyetem lenne.

Kulcsszavak: tudományközi kapcsolatok, törvényszéki nyelvészeti vizsgálatok megbízhatósága, törvényszéki nyelvészet főbb feladatai, a törvényszéki nyelvészettel foglalkozó nemzetközi szervezetek