



### D53 Forensic Linguistics: An Overview With Emphasis on Questioned Authorship

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The goal of this presentation is to introduce the discipline of forensic linguistics (FL), to present a brief overview of present progress in the field, and to focus in some detail on the practice of one important sub-area of FL - authorship identification.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by informing attendees of the nature of linguistic analysis and the ways in which it is being applied to forensic questions. It will provide a brief history of FL, specific sub areas of the discipline, including important publications and resources, and the example of linguistic analysis as applied to questioned authorship.

Forensic linguistics is the scientific study of language as applied to forensic ends. With the exception of forensic phonetics, forensic linguistics is a relatively new application of general linguistics and therefore a growing area of modern applied linguistics. While the subareas of FL and their classification are evolving as the field grows, they generally follow given taxonomies for the study of the structure and function of language. Recent research and practice in FL include various forensic analyses of language: *Spoken Language* – auditory and acoustic voice identification, dialect identification, and oral inter-language interpretation; *Written Language* – stylistics and authorship identification, written inter-language translation, legal discourse, product labeling and advertisement, trade marks, legal language, and plagiarism; *Spoken or Written Language* – semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, defamation, and jury instructions; and, *Transcribed Language* – transcripts of recorded language, of recorded testimony, perjury, and language of various courtroom participants (e.g., vulnerable witnesses, cross examiners, etc.).

Authorship identification is an important part of FL and is based on the theory and practice of forensic stylistics as a technique that utilizes the linguistic analysis of writing style for the purpose of authorship identification. Such analysis is known as linguistic stylistics, briefly summarized as follows: *Language* is the internal system human speakers and writers develop and use to communicate. A *dialect* is a variety of language that appears when a particular group of speakers develops consistent patterns (“class characteristics”) of language use. An *idiolect* is a variety of language developed by the individual speaker as a uniquely patterned aggregate of linguistic characteristics (“individual characteristics”) observed in his or her language use. *Linguistics* studies the nature and development of this internal system of language and examines the ways groups and individuals use language in all its communicative contexts. The study of *linguistic variation* identifies linguistic and non-linguistic forces that lead to linguistic diversity among speakers and writers. *Style* is seen as that part of human behavior that reflects individual variation in activities that are otherwise invariant. While style in spoken language is linguistic variation that is directly related to the social context of conversation, style in written language reflects both the writer’s conscious response to the requirements of genre and context as well as the result of his or her unconscious and habituated choices of the grammatical elements acquired through the long term, experiential process of writing. *Written style* is in part, then, the sum of the recurrent choices the writer makes in the writing process. Finally, *stylistics* is a broad approach to the study of style in language, and *linguistic stylistics* is the scientific interpretation of style-variables as observed, described and analyzed in the language of groups and individuals.

It is important to distinguish between linguistic stylistics and document examination. The focus of forensic stylistics is on the consistent, variable, idiosyncratic use of language as such. The focus of forensic document examination is on handwriting, typewriting, computer-generated documents, paper, ink, etc. While there is some overlap between these two fields of inquiry (e.g., typing habits that reflect underlying language patterns), their practitioners find little practical difficulty keeping the two fields separate.

**Forensic Linguistics, Stylistics, Questioned Authorship**