

## World Forensic Linguistics: An Overview of Research

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### ABSTRACT

*This article is devoted to studying the history of the emergence and institutionalization of forensic linguistics in world linguistics. It reviews the four main stages of development of this scientific field – its emergence, growth, institutionalization, and modern stage – along with highlighting prominent scholars and their research contributions.*

**Keywords:** Forensic linguistics (FL), four stages of forensic linguistics development, Roger W. Shuy, Stanley Ellis and Jack Windsor Lewis, John Baldwin, Peter French, Hermann J. Künzel, Peter Tiersma, Malcolm Coulthard and Tim Grant, Roger W. Shuy, Robert A. Leonard, James R. Fitzgerald, Carole Chaski, Susan Ehrlich, Shlomo Argamon, Tim Grant, Adrian Leemann, John Olsson, J. Gibbons and L. M. Solan.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The history of forensic linguistics as a field of study began in the second half of the twentieth century and was established as an independent discipline at the intersection of law and linguistics. The development of this field, which emerged from the interaction between language and law – namely, the functioning of law through language and the influence of language on law – can be analyzed through four important “stages.” Specifically, the appearance of forensic linguistics (FL) in world linguistics, its development, the process of institutionalization, and its

activity as a modern scientific discipline with theoretical foundations in the international arena can be identified in the following periods:

1. The emergence of FL (1960-1970s);
  2. The developmental stage of FL (1970-1990s);
  3. The institutionalization and international expansion of FL (1990-2000s);
  4. The modern period of FL (from the 2000s to the present).
2. THE EMERGENCE OF FL (1960-1970s)

The emergence of forensic linguistics is associated with the name of Jan Svartvik [1], who worked actively during this period. The term “forensic linguistics,” which came into scientific use to designate this research direction, owes its “birth” and introduction into scholarly circulation to the studies of this American linguist. In particular, in 1968, Jan Svartvik wrote *Evans Statements: A Case for Forensic Linguistics* [1]. This work and its analysis are of great importance as they represent the first step toward proving how significant language can be in legal proceedings.

In the work, Svartvik analyzes the statements given by a person named Timothy John Evans to the police. Evans was accused of committing two murders in 1949 – killing his wife and infant daughter – and, according to the court verdict, was executed by hanging in 1950. Later, it was revealed that the crime had been committed by a man named Christie, and Evans was posthumously exonerated.

It was established that Evans had given four statements to the police. These were written on different dates and under different circumstances – some of them included parts of “confession,” while others did not. Svartvik analyzed the police reports and written statements submitted to the defense from a linguistic perspective and discovered that the texts contained additions made by the police. The scholar studied stylistic and syntactic differences – language and sentence structures, the use of subjectless sentences (i.e., the absence of an expressed subject),

grammatical styles, and sentence order. The analysis was conducted according to the principle of “maximum objectivity,” meaning that the linguistic elements examined had to be verifiable by external experts.

Among the analytical methods, statistical analysis was primarily emphasized. Specifically, he calculated the frequency of linguistic features and identified which sentence types and grammatical constructions were used more often. As a result, crucial discrepancies were revealed: in the “disputed confession” parts of the statements, linguistic patterns typical of the police officers who prepared the written statements were identified – such as subject ellipsis, specific sentence orders, and “mobile relator clauses” (relative clauses that can freely change position within the sentence, thereby altering stylistic and syntactic emphasis and meaning). Based on Evans’s level of education and writing ability, Svartvik expected his statements to exhibit simpler linguistic structures; however, more complex syntactic constructions appeared specifically in the confession sections. This strongly suggested that additions had been made to the statements.

It must be acknowledged that through Svartvik’s remarkable efforts, this analysis laid the foundation for linguistic expertise in judicial practice – particularly for authorship analysis aimed at determining the author of a text. He expanded the process of distinguishing between the language of the person giving the statement and that of the police officer recording it, demonstrating that such linguistic analyses could serve as valid legal evidence in criminal trials and investigations.

Based on Svartvik’s pioneering work, it is appropriate to highlight three aspects that theoretically enriched forensic linguistics as an established field of study:

1. **The terminology of forensic linguistics:** The term “forensic linguistics” was introduced into scientific use for the first time, paving the way for the development of this discipline;
2. **Authorship analysis:** Linguistic methods were applied to the analysis of legal statements – through stylistic, syntactic, and grammatical criteria such as sentence type and the use of

subjectless clauses, evidence was gathered to determine by whom a statement was composed or whose linguistic style it reflected;

3. **Methodological aspects:** Through scientific–analytical and statistical methodology, the analysis aimed not only to clarify the judicial situation but also to understand the linguistic and stylistic “signature” of the statements [1].

### 3. THE DEVELOPMENT STAGE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS (1970-1990)

During this period, forensic linguistics began to take shape as a distinct field in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Naturally, the “innovations” of this stage show a certain advancement compared to the period of emergence. In particular, the establishment of linguistic expert practice in court proceedings, the examination of police protocols, the further refinement of authorship analysis methods, the study of the comprehensibility of legal texts, issues of legal terminology, and the norms of language in legislative discourse – all these indicate the rise of theoretical and practical integration within the field.

Undoubtedly, the development stage of forensic linguistics is associated with the names of scholars who were active during these years. Between 1970 and 1990, scholars such as Roger W. Shuy, Stanley Ellis, Jack Windsor Lewis, John Baldwin, Peter French, Peter Tiersma, Malcolm Coulthard, and Tim Grant made significant contributions to the growth of the field. Below we will illustrate this point through an analysis of their main scientific works.

Roger W. Shuy’s research in forensic linguistics began to develop actively in the 1980s and continues to this day. The linguist participated in his first case as an expert witness in 1979, and since then he has been involved in over 600 court cases, serving as an expert witness in more than 50 criminal and civil cases. It is also noteworthy that Shuy has testified before the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, as well as the International Criminal Court. The value of Shuy’s works lies in his synthesis of theoretical insights with practical experience gained directly

from real legal cases. Using a “from the specific to the general” approach, he harmonizes theoretical perspectives in forensic linguistics with real-world judicial practice. For example, he presents linguistic approaches for identifying offenders through the analysis of extortion letters or anonymous writings.

Shuy’s works such as *Language Crimes: The Use and Abuse of Language Evidence in the Courtroom* (1993) and *The Language of Confession, Interrogation, and Deception* (1998) are of great importance in consolidating forensic linguistics as a distinct field. In particular, the book *Language Crimes: The Use and Abuse of Language Evidence in the Courtroom* [2] represents one of the key turning points in the development of FL. In this work, Shuy clearly defines the boundaries and functions of forensic linguistics. He explains the possible roles of linguistic experts in legal processes, demonstrating how linguistic analysis can be used to determine whether a crime has been committed based on written or spoken statements, telephone conversations, or threatening letters. This aspect became a driving force in shaping forensic linguistics as an independent academic discipline.

In the same book, Shuy introduced the term “language crimes” into scientific usage, uniting his theoretical perspectives under this concept. He uses this term to refer to violations of the law through language – that is, crimes such as threats, extortion, or false statements, whether oral or written. He analyzes these phenomena from both legal and linguistic perspectives, thereby broadening the thematic scope of forensic linguistic research. The work also focuses on subtle aspects such as the role of linguistic experts in court and courtroom discourse itself. Discussing the role of linguistic experts, Shuy emphasizes their participation in trials and their ability to establish facts through scientific linguistic expertise. He argues that experts must maintain neutrality, present linguistic evidence on a scientific basis, and that their analysis can directly influence the course of legal proceedings. Especially significant is his detailed examination of authorship identification through phonetic analysis, stylistic features, and pragmatic strategies.

Regarding courtroom language, Shuy analyzes the interaction between lawyers, witnesses, judges, and experts, showing how manipulation and misinterpretation can occur through certain linguistic units. These insights underscore that language should be studied not only as a vehicle of information but also as a social and psychological force.

Shuy's later work, *The Language of Confession, Interrogation, and Deception* [2], demonstrates the decisive role of linguistics in ensuring fairness in legal processes by analyzing communication in criminal proceedings – particularly the language of police interrogations, confessions by suspects, and deceptive statements. Much of the book is based on real case studies. Drawing on his extensive practical experience as a linguistic expert, Shuy supports his theoretical conclusions with analyses of interrogation transcripts and confession documents. The core focus of the book includes: (a) exposing manipulative linguistic tools used in interrogations; (b) establishing linguistic criteria for assessing the voluntariness of confessions; (c) identifying distinctive features of deceptive language; and (d) highlighting linguistics' social responsibility by analyzing the clarity of legal language. This work enriched the methodological and practical foundations of forensic linguistics internationally and contributed greatly to the formation of modern legal-linguistic analysis.

Forensic linguistics further developed through the works of Stanley Ellis and Jack Windsor Lewis, who focused on accent and dialect analysis, and on issues of voice identification. These two British researchers were specialists in phonetics and forensic phonetics. They conducted methodological studies on voice identification, written text analysis, examination of police protocols, and other types of language/voice-based evidence [3]. For instance, they analyzed an audio recording sent to the police in the case of the serial killer known as the "Yorkshire Ripper." Ellis identified that the voice on the recording carried a North East England accent. Their work was aimed at classifying a speaker's probable region of residence or dialect based on voice recordings [4].

Another prominent American scholar, Peter Tiersma, also contributed to forensic linguistics by studying how language is used in court. His research is notable for clarifying the features of courtroom language and its role in the legal system [5]. Tiersma's book *Forensic Linguistics* provided important theoretical and practical foundations for the development of the field. The book highlights effective ways of integrating linguistics and law and offers a deep analysis of the role and significance of language in judicial processes.

First, Tiersma defines the concept of forensic linguistics clearly and reveals how linguistic methods can be applied in legal expertise. This opens the way for objective, scientifically grounded analysis of legal texts, speech, and linguistic features during trials – thereby distinguishing between clear and ambiguous expressions and reducing misinterpretations. Second, the book comprehensively examines the role of language in legal documents, contracts, and certificates. Tiersma analyzes the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of legal language, scientifically explaining how these elements can lead to ambiguity or misunderstanding in legal documents. This contributes to making legal texts more precise and understandable, ultimately helping prevent disputes. Third, the book emphasizes the importance of discourse analysis in court proceedings, demonstrating that linguistic features, logical inconsistencies, or ambiguities in participants' speech can serve as valuable sources of evidence, enabling experts to discern truth from falsehood. Through these aspects, Tiersma's work significantly strengthened interdisciplinary connections between linguistics and legal practice, merging methods and concepts from different disciplines to solve complex problems comprehensively. Thus, Peter Tiersma consolidated the theoretical foundations of forensic linguistics and presented methodological approaches necessary for its application in practice, showing that linguistic expertise enhances judicial fairness and effectiveness.

British linguist Malcolm Coulthard was also active in the field of forensic linguistics during the 1980s and participated in numerous court cases. He collaborated with Alison Johnson on

various aspects of FL, resulting in their co-authored work *An Introduction to Forensic Linguistics: Language in Evidence* (2007) [6]. This book is now regarded as one of the most important and fundamental theoretical sources in modern forensic linguistics. It provides a thorough examination of the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and methodologies of linguistic expertise. Specifically, it addresses issues such as: (a) the establishment of forensic linguistics as an independent discipline; (b) authorship identification; (c) the analysis of interrogation and statement language; (d) voice recordings and phonetic analysis; (e) courtroom discourse – statements, testimony, and expert speech; and (f) the role of linguistics in analyzing false confessions.

Furthermore, in cases such as the “Birmingham Six” and “Bridgewater Four” [6], Coulthard analyzed how language was used in court and how it was frequently misinterpreted. His analyses demonstrated that the linguistic structures, sentence patterns, and pragmatic aspects of statements, questions, and legal documents used during police investigations and trials are of crucial importance. These studies revealed that ambiguous, decontextualized, or misinterpreted language can lead to violations of human rights and wrongful convictions – thus reinforcing the practical necessity of forensic linguistic analysis. In short, Coulthard’s work brought methodological rigor, terminological precision, and practical depth to the field.

Another British scholar, Tim Grant, also made his mark on the field with his book *Forensic Linguistics* (2009) [8], written in collaboration with Malcolm Coulthard. This work played an important role in deepening both the theoretical and practical approaches within FL. The book integrates insights and methods from various disciplines – linguistics, law, psychology, and communication – demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of forensic linguistics and its wide-ranging applications in legal processes. The authors emphasize that language in court serves not only as a medium of information but as a key element of socio-legal activity. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the pragmatics and discourse of courtroom language, witness testimony, and the manipulative potential of linguistic means. It

systematically describes the main directions of linguistic expertise – such as authorship analysis, accent and dialect analysis, and stylistic analysis of statements and interrogations. Moreover, attention is given to the contextual features of courtroom language, emphasizing the interaction between language and social environment, which enhances the social significance of forensic linguistic research. The works of Grant and Coulthard play a vital role in not only applying linguistic methods in practice but also ensuring greater fairness and effectiveness in legal proceedings.

#### 4. INSTITUTIONALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS (1990-2000)

It is well known that institutionalization refers to the process by which a system, order, custom, or activity attains a stable and permanent form through formal rules, organizations, or institutions [8]. In this sense, the process of institutionalizing forensic linguistics, relying on the achievements of the two stages described above, gained recognition in the international arena as a modern, theoretically grounded scientific discipline that attracted the attention of both linguists and legal scholars.

Between 1990 and 2000, particularly in 1993, the establishment of the *International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL)* confirms this claim. The main goal of IAFL's foundation was to create an international platform for professional standards, methodologies, and knowledge exchange in the field of forensic linguistics – ultimately aimed at advancing the discipline both scientifically and practically, and fostering cooperation among scholars, experts, and practitioners.

As a key step in the institutionalization of forensic linguistics, the IAFL performs four major functions on the international stage [9]:

1. Establishing the **scientific foundations** of forensic linguistics;
2. Developing a **network of experts and knowledge sharing**;

3. Enhancing the **quality of linguistic expertise** in legal proceedings;
4. Promoting the **expansion and popularization** of forensic linguistics.

The significance of the IAFL in the development of forensic linguistics is emphasized in the works of scholars such as R. W. Shuy, M. Coulthard, A. Johnson, and P. M. Tiersma. In particular, Shuy highlights that the IAFL serves as a crucial platform for introducing linguistic principles into global judicial practices [10]; Coulthard and Johnson provide a detailed discussion of its role in establishing disciplinary standards and fostering international scholarly cooperation [6]; while Tiersma, in his article [5], gives comprehensive information about the IAFL's academic conferences and its importance in the process of linguistic expert analysis.

In summary, the International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL) plays a central role in the development of forensic linguistics. It contributes not only to the advancement of scientific research but also to the implementation of modern, reliable, and effective methods in professional practice. By expanding and standardizing linguistic knowledge in global legal systems, IAFL significantly promotes fairer and more scientifically grounded judicial proceedings [11].

The institutionalization of forensic linguistics was further accelerated by the establishment of the academic journal *Forensic Linguistics (International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law)* [12]. First published in 1994, this journal has played an invaluable role in the development of the discipline. It serves as one of the leading international scientific publications in the field, providing a platform that unites research, theories, and practical applications of forensic linguistics. By widely covering both theoretical and practical aspects of the discipline, the journal has made a considerable contribution to its growth and progress.

The views of R. W. Shuy, M. Coulthard, and A. Johnson regarding this journal are particularly noteworthy. According to Shuy, "the *Forensic Linguistics* journal serves as an important

academic forum for studying the practical applications of linguistics in judicial proceedings, including the use of linguistic methods in investigations, interrogations, and the identification of false testimony” [10]. Coulthard and Johnson describe the journal as a “crucial source of information for the forensic linguistic community,” emphasizing that it “has played a vital role in shaping theoretical and methodological approaches in the field, as well as in advancing linguistic methods used in forensic analysis” [6]. Tiersma, in turn, calls the journal a “central medium for disseminating both theoretical and practical achievements in the field and for facilitating knowledge exchange among specialists” [5].

#### 5. THE MODERN STAGE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS (FROM THE 2000S TO THE PRESENT).

From the early 21st century to the present, forensic linguistics has rapidly integrated with expertology, criminology, psycholinguistics, pragmalinguistics, and computational linguistics in international research practice. Methods from corpus linguistics, statistical analysis, and artificial intelligence have begun to be actively applied in authorship identification.

Naturally, the modern stage of forensic linguistics is associated with the scholars who have been active from the beginning of this century up to the present. These include Roger W. Shuy, Hermann J. Künzel, Robert A. Leonard, James R. Fitzgerald, Carole Chaski, Susan Ehrlich, Shlomo Argamon, Tim Grant, Adrian Leemann, John Olsson, J. Gibbons, and L. M. Solan, whose contributions have been invaluable.

Today, the main fields of forensic linguistics encompass authorship analysis, linguistic examination of legal texts, analysis of legal and contractual language, investigation of writings and letters related to terrorism, analysis of courtroom questioning and testimony, and examination of false information and threatening communications.

## 6. RESULT

In conclusion, Jan Svartvik's research was of exceptional importance for the emergence of forensic linguistics. These studies are noteworthy primarily for introducing and consolidating the term "forensic linguistics" in scientific discourse, applying linguistic analysis to texts and speech in criminal cases, identifying authorship, and examining audio recordings.

In conclusion, the emergence and development of forensic linguistics are closely connected with the research conducted by American, British, and German scholars. These studies are particularly notable for introducing and consolidating the term "forensic linguistics" in academic usage, for applying linguistic analysis to texts and speech in criminal cases, for identifying authorship, and for analyzing audio recordings. It can be observed that during the development stage of FL, the field primarily employed linguistic approaches, thereby paving the way for subsequent anthropocentric perspectives and later stages of FL evolution. The contributions of American and British scholars were especially valuable at this stage. It was during this period that the field defined its scope more clearly and focused on the analysis of defense and prosecution speeches, the expert examination of interrogation records, linguistic analysis of texts and speech in criminal cases, authorship identification, and the study of audio recordings. The research discussed above continues to serve as both theoretical and practical sources for linguists, legal professionals, and researchers studying the use of language in criminal proceedings today.

In this regard, the journal can be described as a mirror reflecting the theoretical and practical achievements attained during the stages of emergence, development, and institutionalization of forensic linguistics. Today, it serves as a key platform for publishing research articles, case analyses, conference reports, and book reviews addressing anthropocentric paradigms such as linguistic, speech, and audio analysis within forensic contexts.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In the modern stage of forensic linguistics, which has gained international recognition, numerous renowned linguists continue to engage in scholarly debates and theoretical discussions. The world's most prominent experts, organizations, and academic centers contribute to the development of "modern forensic linguistics" through their practice-based theoretical findings.

Hence, studying these ongoing research efforts, summarizing and analyzing the methodological approaches being applied in forensic linguistics, holds great importance. Moreover, it is essential that the rich experiences and academic conclusions drawn from these studies be utilized in international forensic linguistic research – with due consideration of cultural aspects that influence legal and linguistic interpretation.

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