

○ **M. COULTHARD AND A. JOHNSON,
*THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF
FORENSIC LINGUISTICS***

(ROUTLEDGE: TAYLOR AND FRANCIS GROUP. 2010.
PP. XXVII, 616)

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The Routledge Handbook of Forensic Linguistics deals with the most recent and prominent discussions, debates, topics, research approaches and methodologies utilized in Forensic Linguistics, a discipline concerned with the study of language and the law. The editors commence the volume with a broad introduction to the field, and a clear outline of the purpose and structure of the book, followed by a compilation of thirty-seven original chapters by contributors from a wide range of professions and a range of different countries. The stated aim of the volume is to provide a handbook, not a textbook; as such it aims to be “a comprehensive advanced introduction to core issues and topics in contemporary forensic linguistics” (p. 2), as well as a specific resource for undergraduates or postgraduates new to the area.

The book is divided into three major sections: the language of the law and the legal process; the linguist as expert in legal processes; and new debates and new directions. Each of these sections is divided into sub-sections that attempt to cover the major themes and issues relevant to the area. By far the most comprehensive section, with twenty-one chapters, is that addressing the issues which basically dominate the published literature in the domain recognized as being forensic linguistics: the language of the law and the legal process. This section comprises a further four sub-divisions or collection of chapters dealing with legal language; the role and performance of the participants involved in police investigations, interviews, and interrogations; courtroom genres; and finally the role of lay participants in the judicial process.

The first collection of five chapters on legal language deals, typically, with written language in legal contexts; but there is a refreshing inclusion of the analysis of spoken interaction with the Holt and Johnson chapter on the socio-pragmatic aspects of legal talk. The six chapters collected on the role and performance of the participants involved in police investigations, interviews, and interrogations provide broad coverage, but mostly centre around the

interview in police and suspect/public interaction, with one other chapter dealing with emergency calls to police, and another on the issue of Miranda rights. A strength of this section however is that the papers presented draw upon a variety of discourse analysis methodologies which can provide those starting out in the area with an appreciation of the ways that legal participant interaction can be approached. Of particular interest to this reviewer were Rock and Haworth's excellent chapters dealing with police collecting evidence from suspects and witnesses via the interview; both are notable for their application to other contexts (such as hostage negotiations).

The sub-section on courtroom genres (four chapters) starts out with an interesting and novel historical approach to the changing levels of interactivity between judges and defendants over the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and the rise of an adversarial aspect in more modern courts. It then moves into chapters dealing with narrative in the courtroom, and sub-aspects of genres concerned with closing speeches and the associated plea for leniency. The final collection of six chapters on legal language provides an interesting coverage of various non-professionals who may appear in the courtroom: judges' instructions to jurors, the discourse aspects and cultural mythologies evident in the use of questioning of rape victims at trial, a critical justice discussion of sociolinguistic issues in gang-related prosecutions, three very interesting chapters which deal with vulnerable witnesses (children and those with communication disabilities), false confessions in an anti-terrorism trial, and finally a chapter (which interestingly allows the reader to go on-line for web-based support materials) on cross examinations conducted by lay people.

One of the most distinctive aspects of the discipline of forensic linguistics is that it truly is linguistics *applied*, and that many of those who conduct their research in this area are also called upon to be active participants in the legal process. The second major section in this handbook covers the areas where forensic linguists are called upon to give their expert opinions, based on and via the application of an expanding set of analytical tools, techniques, and understandings to do with what a linguist knows best: knowledge to do with semantics, syntax, sociolinguistics, text and discourse, genres, phonetics, lexicography and corpus linguistics (although there are aspects of multimodal meaning introduced in some of the discussions to do with trademarks).

The first of the three sub-sections in this section provide varied perspectives on the issue of trademarks, consumer product warnings (tobacco products), and speaker identification using the linguist's knowledge of phonetics. The Butters chapter on trademarks is worthy of note for showing that a forensic linguist can be consulted in two main areas: the first is the likelihood of trademark confusion, which draws upon insights to do with *SIGHT* (a multimodal

perspective bringing in issues with colour, typeface and design etc.), *SOUND*, and *MEANING*; the second is to do with what is referred to as the *STRENGTH* of the mark, and how it can be defined along a continuum of weak to strong categories: generic, descriptive, suggestive, fanciful, and arbitrary (pp.358-359). The chapters by Dumas and Jensen are also interesting for their application of the more ‘traditional’ understandings from linguistics: Dumas with speech acts, comprehensibility and the role of context in consumer product warnings, and Jessen on the use of phonetic techniques in forensic speaker identification (for profiling and comparison). The chapter by Solan however is a ‘must-read’ for any forensic linguist considering entering the world of litigation, and for the discipline as a whole. In this he discusses two related but very relevant problems: “the legal system is unrealistic about what science can do, and the forensic community has not adequately developed valid and reliable methods” (p. 406). He calls upon the academic and forensic linguistic community to address this issue via a ‘single approach methodology’, and suggests that proficiency testing may be a short-term solution. The future discussions on these should be interesting.

The next subsection addresses the issue of multilingualism in legal contexts via a small collection of case studies which illustrate the need to use forensic linguistic insights to address the potential for injustice via, for example, the misuse of language analysis to settle nationality (asylum-seeking) claims in immigration cases (Eades). This chapter is noteworthy for its clear explication of the investigative use by many government immigration departments of Language Analysis in the Determination of Origin (LADO), the problematic assumptions and practices often made (thorough follow-up references are given), and the presentation and discussion of an illustrative case study. The chapter by English covers the issue of assessing non-native speaking detainees’ English speaking proficiency in court cases, and is noteworthy because it supplies the reader (and researcher) with a testable methodology for conducting an assessment, and draws upon multimodal meaning as a way of assessing a detainee’s literacy skills via visual modes as an entry point into language expression (pp. 429-433). The final two chapters in this sub-section continue the overall theme of addressing potential injustice which may arise through the non-use of qualified interpreters in and out of the courtroom.

The final collection of chapters in the section on the linguist as expert in legal processes focuses on authorship and opinion, and continues Solan’s earlier discussion of the need for forensic linguistics to address issues of methodology, but in the context of the experience of actually being an expert witness in a courtroom. Coulthard’s excellent chapter draws upon his own and others’ reported experience, and should be an experiential ‘check’ to those considering entering the courtroom world of the expert witness. This is supported by a

discussion as to how expert opinions can be expressed via the use of scales of opinion-giving and probability. This is a seminal chapter, and also a must-read.

The remaining chapters in the subsection provide discussions on the issue of authorship identification, with an important chapter by McMenamin outlining the definition, scope and application of the principles of forensic stylistics, and providing a lucid discussion and rebuttal of its suggested limitations (p. 503). The chapters on text messaging forensics (Grant) and plagiarism (Coulthard et. al.) are also particularly informative, the latter especially so as the issue of detecting and then dealing with plagiarism by students in Australian universities is a growing and difficult one, given the growth of the internet as a source of material, and the approach to allegations of plagiarism adopting many of the interactive characteristics of the courtroom. The discussion by Coulthard et al. on the effective use of computational applications to forensic analysis supports this theme, as does the Woolls' chapter in the following section, which explicates and demonstrates the ways that corpora can be used for detection.

The third major section of the Handbook briefly deals with new debates and new directions. In many ways this is an excellent way to complete this volume, as these chapters draw upon on areas that have already been touched upon in previous chapters: multimodality (gesture and language in narrative), terrorism, computational applications, and cross-cultural communication. This is one of the strengths of this volume – in a comprehensive work of so many chapters it is often difficult to maintain coherence and avoid the look of conference proceedings; the editors have done a masterful job in providing the needed broad coverage in forensic linguistics, and helped the reader to draw connections and to cross-reference between the variety of papers presented. The access to on-line resources and data sources in a number of the chapters allows graduate students who may want to start research in the discipline access to much needed (and often hard to obtain) data, and the extensive reference list provided also supports the research process.