

John Gibbons and M. Teresa Turell (eds.) 2008. *Dimensions of Forensic Linguistics*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. ISBN 9789027205216

This collection of articles offers interesting insights into the field of Forensic Linguistics, focusing on its multidisciplinary and multidimensional nature. Indeed, the contributions clearly offer complementary perspectives on different dimensions of Forensic Linguistics, intended “in its broadest sense as the interface between language and the law” (p.1). The volume offers a clear introduction to the field and also focuses on innovative research questions.

In particular, the scholarly texts are grouped under three thematic subject areas, “The language of the law”, “The language of the court”, and “Forensic linguistic evidence”. The first section of “The language of the law” begins with Tiersma’s contribution “The nature of legal language”. It offers an interesting historical perspective on legal languages, which are seen as “products of the history of the nation or state in which they are used, as well as the peculiar developments of the legal system in question” (p.7). The focus is, in particular, on English legal language, but interesting observations regarding other legal languages are also introduced. The author discusses the most prominent features of legal English, focusing on pronunciation and spelling, morphology, syntax, lexicon, semantics and style. The author stresses the multifaceted nature of legal language and reflects upon how the features displayed by this type of language may depend on the strategic objectives of the drafter.

The second contribution in this subject area is by Northcott, who focuses on issues related to language education for law professionals. Indeed, the increasing use of English in legal contexts at the international level calls for a reflection upon the teaching of legal English for L2 learners, e.g. legal practitioners, interpreters, translators and students. More specifically, Northcott stresses the interrelation between different dimensions, such as learner context, methodology and teacher background and argues that “[t]he pragmatic approach and grounded interplay between theory and practice of ESP provides a good “home” for language education for legal professionals” (p.43).

In the following paper Heffer investigates the language and communication of jury instruction. First of all, he offers a clear distinction between ‘jury instructions’, i.e. the written legal texts that are delivered by the judges to the jurors, and ‘jury instruction’, intended as the communicative process of instructing the jurors about the law in a specific trial. Moreover, he analyses the complexity of pattern jury instructions and discusses the rewriting and reconceptualisation of these texts. The author also argues that instruction compliance on the part of the jurors is highly dependent on factors such as capability and willingness.

“Policeseak”, the contribution by Hall, investigates the under-researched area related to the spoken language of police communication. It examines how the language of police interviews can become clichéd, for instance through the use of characteristic vocabulary and set phrases. On the other hand, the study also focuses on linguistic features which are not necessarily associated with ‘policeseak’, and shows how they may derive, for instance, from the need to build a rapport with the suspects.

Issues related to legal translation are tackled by Alcaraz Varó. His study deals with problems arising in the translation of technical legal lexicon, with particular attention being devoted to the concept of linguistic and cultural anisomorphism. At the syntactic level the author also describes the concept of syntactic anfractuosity. Moreover, Alcaraz Varó discusses the use of ‘traduc-tological techniques’, such as transposition, modulation and amplification, as well as the application of communicative strategies and linguistic devices in the translation of legal texts.

The second section, entitled “The language of the court”, begins with Gibbons’s contribution concerning questioning in common law criminal courts. The study focuses on how courtroom questioning differs from everyday questions, by analysing different linguistic parameters. In particular, the author examines the discourse level, the exchange level and the question structure level and shows how courtroom questioning “seems more likely to distort the evidence of witnesses (particularly vulnerable witnesses) than test it” (p.128).

In the following paper Powell focuses on an emergent dimension of Forensic Linguistics, the context of bilingual courtrooms. He starts with an overview of different instances of bilingualism and also discusses interesting methodological issues related to the collection of such data. The study investigates some of the factors that affect code choice in this context, such as language proficiency and cultural preferences. Finally, the paper also attempts to evaluate a crucial issue: does bilingualism serve or subvert justice?

Kurzon’s paper, “The silent witness: pragmatic and literal interpretations”, also investigates courtroom language, with particular reference to the judicial system in Israel. More specifically, the author investigates the role played by silence in the legal system and focuses on the debate arising from the interpretation of silence among witnesses, reflecting in particular on pragmatic and literal approaches.

Eades’s contribution draws on sociolinguistic research to investigate the relationship between language and the concept of disadvantage before the law. She analyses different social groups who experience such disadvantage, e.g. children, intellectually disabled people, second language speakers, hearing-impaired people, second dialect speakers and other minority group members.

The paper also presents recent innovations in alternative legal process and discusses the impact they may have in reducing the condition of disadvantage before the law.

The section concerning courtroom language is concluded by Leung, with her paper entitled “Interpreting for the minority, interpreting for the power”. She analyses issues related to legal interpreting provided to linguistic minorities, focusing on non-Cantonese speaking groups in Hong Kong. In particular, Leung argues that legal interpreting as a means of providing the right to equal justice is still a “myth” and suggests a series of measures that could practically be implemented in order to facilitate the interpreter’s task.

Forensic linguistic evidence is the subject of the third section of the volume. The section begins with Grant’s contribution, which focuses on forensic authorship analysis. After describing the functions of authorship, the author discusses four of the fundamental questions of authorship analyses, i.e. ‘how was the text produced?’; ‘how many people wrote the text?’; ‘what kind of person wrote the text?’; and ‘what is the relationship of a queried text with comparison texts?’. It also offers an overview of techniques and approaches that have been applied in forensic casework and demonstrates how their diversity may be usefully exploited in order to answer different types of questions relating to authorship.

Drawing on his experience as an expert witness, Butter focuses on trademark and other proprietary terms, especially in light of the fact that nowadays trademark litigation constitutes an important area of applied linguistics. The author accurately describes categories of issues where the linguist’s expertise may be necessary, i.e. the likelihood of the confusion of two trademarks, the strength of a mark and the propriety of the mark.

Eggintog’s contribution deals with the concept of deception and fraud. After defining and describing these concepts, he investigates processes that may be used in deception detection, focusing on the Nigerian Advanced Fee Fraud scheme. He concludes that “accurate deception detection is currently unachievable through linguistic analysis” (p.263) but, on the other hand, he also demonstrates that linguistics can play an important role within deception and fraud legal issues.

The paper by Turell, focusing on plagiarism, concludes the volume. It examines the multidimensional nature of plagiarism and presents some of the linguistic principles and methodological aims that are relevant to this forensic linguistic context, with particular reference to cases of the plagiarism of ideas and linguistic plagiarism. Turell argues for the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative approaches to plagiarism detection. Indeed, she demonstrates that qualitative approaches can offer useful semantic and pragmatic information, while quantitative approaches can prove particularly helpful in establishing

statistical significance.

The overall impression is that the editors of this volume have brought together a well-balanced selection of papers, ranging across a variety of genres and contexts of production. Furthermore, the professional expertise displayed by some of the contributors adds further nuance to the investigation of the subject. The volume provides valuable insights into this emerging discipline and it is clearly of interest for all practitioners in the field, such as teachers, students and professionals.

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