UEA
University of East Anglia

FORENSIC LINGUISTICS AND TRANSLATION

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Forensic Linguistics and Translation

Course Overview

This course is aimed at professional translators, interpreters, legal and police professionals who rely extensively on linguistic knowledge in their investigative and data-gathering work. The focus is on language in language-driven activities such as interpreting legal contracts, witness testimony and translation, and witness interviewing with interpreters. The aim is to point out the relevant contrasts between different languages that cause misunderstandings and problems in translation and to suggest ways in which professional practice and services can be improved. The course provides training in forensic and critical analysis of witness statements in different languages as well as using linguistic evidence for legal purposes in both criminal and civil cases.

The course offers a cross-linguistic approach. We highlight the effects of language differences on the kind of information that is easy or hard to provide in spoken and written communication in different languages and in translation. The topics included in the course are pertinent to a number of research areas in linguistics and translation studies, the law, criminology, and psychology. An interdisciplinary view of language is strongly advocated because the effects of habitual tendencies of languages to package information in different ways go beyond the purely linguistic context. These tendencies can potentially affect the description and understanding of information given to the police as well as provide an invaluable source of expert arguments that can be used in court. The course also provides hands-on illustrations of different methodologies one can employ to the effect of using language as evidence.

This course will be an opportunity to gain and improve a number of transferable skills, such as synthetic and analytic skills in data analysis, effective structuring, supporting and presenting of specialist arguments. The training provided will enhance general presentation and communication skills, as well as lead to the acquisition of specialist linguistic knowledge that can be applied in everyday professional life.

Themes and areas of study

— What makes linguistics forensic?
— Words and sentences revealing crime
— When information fails to inform…
— Causes of communication problems in court
— Language as evidence
— Witness interviews in multilingual societies
— Do we really say what we mean: Pragmatics of language
— Language and disadvantage
— Cross-cultural challenges in forensic linguistics
— Translating and interpreting in the context of access to justice
— Language crimes: Famous perjury cases
— Language and memory in witness testimony
— The power of language

Questions to answer

— What are the practical advantages of using corpus and/or experimental methods in the analysis of forensic linguistic and translation data?
— What counts as linguistic evidence in court?
— How can we obtain the relevant information more efficiently from witnesses in different languages?
— Why is it important to know that certain languages make some pieces of information constantly more available than certain others?
— What are the consequences of translating from/into different languages?
— To what extent do language-specific effects condition information processing in witness interviews?
— What are the practical consequences of different language and communication habits for language policy makers in public institutions as well as for access to justice and equality in society?

Examples of Practical Work

— Forensic analysis of texts – threatening communication, emergency calls, etc.
— Investigative interviewing with an interpreter
— Control translation of interpreted interviews
— Legal case studies: Disputable brand names and contractual terms
— Analysis of real witness interviews and detecting language effects on judgement
— Mock trials with interpreters and juries
— Report on findings in the context of relevant literature and data sets
— Presentation and interpretation of linguistic data
— Debate between groups representing conflicting positions; anticipating and dealing with opponents' views in conflicting contexts.