

Review

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Forensic linguistics: An introduction to language, crime and the law. By JOHN OLSSON.
London: Continuum, 2004. Pp. 269. ISBN 0826461093. \$39.95.

Reviewed by PAUL NEWMAN, *Indiana University* and *University of Michigan*

The term 'forensic linguistics' is used in two different, but related, senses. In its broadest usage, it serves as a cover term for the entire field of language and law with its multifaceted endeavors and subfields. This broad meaning is manifested in the journal *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law: Forensic Linguistics* (which began publication in 1994), Sue Blackwell's forensic linguistics website at Birmingham University (<http://web.bham.ac.uk/forensic/>), and the e-mail discussion list for 'Language and the Law' (forensic-linguistics@jiscmail.ac.uk; see <http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/archives/forensic-linguistics.html>).

A much narrower notion of forensic linguistics (which parallels the term 'forensic medicine') focuses on the 'study of any text or item of spoken language which has relevance to a criminal or civil dispute' (see <http://www.thetext.co.uk/info.html>). This usage derives from the classic work by Svartvik (1968), which may be the first appearance of the term 'forensic linguistics'. Olsson's *Forensic linguistics* takes a very narrow approach to this already narrow conception and thus has to be a disappointment to anyone who might be looking for a broad introduction to language and law that could, for example, be adopted for a general course on the subject.

Most of O's book is devoted to describing how authorship inquiry can be carried out through textual analysis, what is now often called forensic stylistics (see e.g. the excellent volumes by McMenamin (1993, 2002)). The essential issue in all cases is whether the text is authentic and

whether some individual was or was not the author of the questionable document. This text could be a will, a suicide note, or a piece of hate mail, the forensic text type being a critical factor in the analysis (Ch. 10, 143–69). Variables to consider include linguistic factors such as word choice, morphological formations, and syntax, plus written language features such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. O points out that the analysis can be qualitative, that is, identifying idiosyncratic individualistic markers or characteristics, or quantitative, that is, requiring large samples and sophisticated statistical analysis. O is at his best when he illustrates the use of statistical techniques for determining authorship, but unfortunately he invariably backs away when the discussion begins to get really interesting for fear that even simple math might be over the heads of his readers. An essential point that O touches on, but does not emphasize nearly enough, is that the real contribution of forensic linguistics to authorship determination is often in being able to state clearly that some individual could NOT have been the author of the document in question even when the real author has not been identified.

Ch. 3 (41–48) discusses legal requirements concerning the admissibility of expert evidence in court. This chapter is pointless for at least three reasons. First, as O himself notes, the rules vary from country to country and thus anything he says here (e.g. his discussion of the American *Daubert* rule) wouldn't apply elsewhere. Second, in a trial it is up to the attorneys and the judge to understand and apply the rules governing expert testimony, not the forensic linguist. Third, and this important point is often neglected, most legal matters never go to court and thus the potential contribution of a forensic linguist in helping to solve a problem will never be affected by admissibility rules.

Plagiarism is a topic of enormous interest these days both from analytical/theoretical and from practical points of view. It is a topic about which forensic linguistics potentially has a tremendous amount to contribute. Thus, when one finds that O devotes only ten pages to the subject (Ch. 8, 109–18), one wonders why he even bothered, especially since he buys into the totally misguided notion—unfortunately, shared by many university administrators—that plagiarism is a form of THEFT when the only sensible characterization of plagiarism is cheating and FRAUD.

The chapter on phonetics (Ch. 11, 173–89) consists almost entirely of a simplified explanation of spectrograms. Since O starts out with the claim that 'the smallest sound unit of speech is known as the phoneme' (174), it is no wonder that he has nothing interesting to say regarding the possible significance of PHONETICS to voice identification, which is the quintessential task of forensic phonetics. Significantly missing from this chapter is any mention of dialect variation and regional speech stereotypes in identifying (or misidentifying) speakers.

The book contains a reasonably good-sized, useful bibliography. However, it annoyingly omits a number of works that are cited in the text and/or in footnotes. Not only does O not provide a list of cases in the bibliography, but when cases are mentioned in the text, he also fails to give the standard citation that would enable anyone who might be interested to access these cases in their entirety.

The author should be complimented for his efforts in making technical material accessible to a wide array of readers by explaining things in straightforward and simple terms. Praise is also due to the publisher for the extremely attractive and readable typography and book design. Unfortunately, however, the simplicity in explanation often comes out as simplistic and O's concern for his readers' presumed lack of any knowledge verges on the condescending. According to O, 'This book is intended for students of forensic linguistics at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. . . . [It] is also intended for non-specialists, such as law enforcement officers [and] legal professionals at all levels' (7). But I cannot imagine that any of these people would get much out of the book apart from a tempting hint of what forensic linguistics entails. I for one would be embarrassed to use the book for university freshmen, much less upperclassmen or graduate students. The book is interesting in places and it does touch on a number of language and law issues; but, by trying to please everyone with no expectation that the reader has any knowledge in the least about linguistics or law, the author ends up pleasing no one. It is the nonfit between the very elementary nature of the book and the author's stated audience that constitutes its most serious shortcoming.

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The syntax of (in)dependence. By KEN SAFIR. (Linguistic inquiry monographs.) Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004. Pp. ix, 194. ISBN 0262693003. \$25.

Reviewed by ULI SAUERLAND, *Centre for General Linguistics (ZAS)*

This monograph explores the interaction between structural properties of sentences and the reference of nominal expressions occurring in them. Safir begins by stating that ‘one of the most important discoveries in modern linguistics’ (1) has been the interaction between syntax and interpretation in determining nominal reference. Indeed, this area is probably the most advanced topic in the syntax-semantics literature. Many nontrivial predictions of subtle principles have been obtained and a very rich theoretical understanding of the interaction between syntax and semantics can be found in the work of Noam Chomsky, Tanya Reinhart, Irene Heim, James Higginbotham, and many others including S himself. Some of this research is presented in a recent textbook by Büring (2005). At the same time, some tough problems loom in this area—hard problems that have withstood several attempts to find an elegant and convincing account over a number of years. These problems are the challenges this book takes on.

S’s central claim is that binding theory is not about binding per se, but about DEPENDENT IDENTITY. Dependent identity is indicated by the arrow notation of Higginbotham 1980 (S actually draws \uparrow instead of \downarrow). The key difference between binding and S’s dependent identity concerns c-command. From common assumptions about the interpretative mechanism, such as those presented in the textbook by Heim and Kratzer (1998), it follows that binding is subject to a c-command requirement: the binder must c-command the bound element. S claims that dependent identity is subject to a weaker c-command prohibition, his extended independence principle (EINP). The EINP states that the dependent element or any nominal that contains it must not c-command the binder (52). The EINP predicts that the pronoun can be dependent on the name *Bill* in 1a and 1b, but not in 1c and 1d (56–57).

- (1) a. Bill likes his mother.
 ↑ |
 b. Bill’s mother likes him.
 ↑ |
 c. *He likes Bill’s mother.
 ↑ |
 d. *His mother likes Bill.
 ↑ |

The EINP is designed to allow a dependency between a name and a pronoun exactly when ellipsis allows a sloppy interpretation. For example, the restriction that a dependency be blocked if a nominal containing the dependent c-commands the element it depends on is motivated by the absence of a sloppy interpretation in 2a. A small shortcoming here seems to be that examples like 2b are not considered. Here the EINP would allow a dependency, but a sloppy interpretation