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Quantifying Awareness And Attitudes Towards Forensic Linguistics: A Survey Of Young Legal Professionals

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Abstract

This research explored young lawyers' opinions of forensic linguistics in District Court Khairpur. A qualitative approach was used, targeting a population of attorneys. One hundred lawyers (both male and female) were selected via random sampling. Data was collected using a short, two-part questionnaire. The first part gathered demographic information, while the second comprised five Close-ended questions. The brief questionnaire format was chosen to accommodate respondents' busy schedules. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from the participating lawyers. The collected data of informant responses was guided by the framework that Bucholtz and Hall (2005) established and presented numerically in tables. The findings indicate that most participants were familiar with forensic linguistics, recognized its importance in legal proceedings, and acknowledged its successful application in developed nations. However, opinions varied regarding whether utilizing forensic linguistics suggests professional weakness. Based on these results, the researchers offered recommendations for future research and found a dire need for more studies from the same perspective.

Keywords: Forensic Linguistics, Legal representatives, lawyers' opinions, Survey research

INTRODUCTION

On the globe, several languages are spoken and written and the scientific study of these languages is known as linguistics. The use of these studies in the context of law, crime investigation, trial, and judicial procedure is identified as forensic linguistics (Coulthard, Johnson & Wright, 2016). Forensic linguistics is significant for crime investigation; because it helps in

identifying the criminal nature of language. Moreover, it paves the way for justice with the help of technological innovations, as voice recordings are used as evidence (Tiersma & Solan, 2002). . Forensic linguistics, also considered as legal linguistics and the law, applies linguistic knowledge, approaches, and insights to the forensic contexts of law, crime investigation, trials, and judicial procedures. A branch of applied linguistics, it serves as an umbrella term encompassing various applications in legal contexts. It is often divided into written and spoken language. As forensic linguistics typically refers to written text, the analysis of speech samples falls under forensic speech science. Forensic linguists working with written texts focus on three main areas: understanding the language of written law, analyzing language use in forensic and judicial processes, and providing linguistic evidence. Forensic speech science, however, focuses on multiple applications, including speaker comparison, disputed utterance analysis, voice parades, speaker profiling, audio enhancement, and authentication. The discipline of forensic linguistics is not homogeneous; it involves a range of experts and researchers in different areas of the field (Shuy, 2006). There are two main areas of forensic linguistics: the language of legal texts and the language of legal processes. The first area focuses on the language and vocabulary of written legal texts, while the second examines language use by judges, lawyers, police, and criminal in legal process. Emergency calls, ransom demands or other threat communication, suicide letters, and death row statements are forensic text types (Naznin, Bashir & Khan, 2022). While many Western countries are actively developing and improving the use of forensic linguistic evidence in their courts, including establishing stricter qualifications for forensic linguists (Clarke, 2016; Clarke & Kredens, 2018; Coulthard, Johnson & Wright, 2016), the idea of Pakistani lawyers utilizing such specialists has remained largely unexplored. Forensic linguistics short courses, degrees (Clarke & Kredens, 2018), and labs (e.g., <https://www.jpffrench.com/>) are common in the UK, USA, Australia, and Europe, but unknown in Pakistan. The way medical experts and lawyers need language specialists to interpret legal texts and provide expert views in their reports (Udina, 2017). These specialists can also analyze plagiarism (Silva, 2013), evaluate interpreter accuracy, identify defamatory language (Nieto, 2020), and address bias in legal situations. The survey collected through a questionnaire assesses the state of forensic linguistics in Sindh province, focusing on lawyers' knowledge of forensic linguists' work and their insights on the use and admissibility of forensic linguistic proofs in Khairpur District courts. The study gathered views from several lawyers, primarily younger practitioners, using questionnaires to explore the main questions.

- How familiar are lawyers with forensic linguistics?
- What are their attitudes towards forensic linguists?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The present research study aims to evaluate the young legal representatives' opinions and awareness of forensic linguistics.

RESEARCH QUESTION

RQ: 1. what are young legal professionals' opinions on forensic linguistics, including their awareness and attitudes?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study analyzed lawyers' survey responses through the theoretical lenses of identity and power/knowledge. Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework of identity construction, which posits identity as the social positioning of self and other, provides a key analytical tool. As Djite (2006) explains, identity refers to "the everyday word for people's sense of who they are as an individual or as a member of a group" (p. 6). This understanding of identity, as both individual and socially situated, is crucial for interpreting the lawyers' perspectives. Furthermore, the analysis incorporates Foucault's (1980) concept of power/knowledge, which emphasizes the inextricable link between knowledge and power. This framework, combined with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) assertion that "identity is the social positioning of self and other" (p. 586), allows for a nuanced exploration of how lawyers' perceptions of forensic linguistics might be shaped by their professional identities and the power dynamics within the legal field. By considering both how lawyers position themselves and others concerning forensic linguistics and how knowledge about this field influences their power within the legal system, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of their awareness and opinions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature presents a comprehensive and relevant source in a structured manner. It aims to assess previous studies related to the topic of study (Ahmad et al., 2021, p.3; Maitlo et al., 2025). The jargon *forensic linguistics* (FL) was first applied by linguistics professor Jan Svartvik in Sweden in 1968. He introduced the term during the analysis of Timothy John Evans's statements, who was a suspected murderer of his child and wife, in a case at an English police station. Svartvik studied the variations in stylistic markers in Evans' statements given to law enforcement and identified discrepancies from what was presented at trial. This case in the UK marked the origin of forensic linguistics (Ariani, Sajedi & Sajedi, 2014; Fares, 2023).

In the United States (USA), forensic linguistics is traced back to 1927, when a spelling error (the name McLure instead of McClure) was found in a ransom note of a kidnapping case. The abductors had addressed the uncle by the correct name, presenting their awareness of the spelling discrepancy. However, it was Ernesto Miranda's case in 1963 that truly helped establish forensic linguistics as a field to be considered, leading to the foundation of *Miranda rights* and shifting the focus of forensic linguistics toward witness questioning instead of police statements. In the 1980s, Australian linguists began debating the role of linguistics and sociolinguistics in legal issues (Correa, 2013; Ahmed, 2021).

The 2000s presented major growth in forensic linguistics, with the field expanding in many countries. Currently, myriads professional associations emerge to support the discipline, including the International Association for Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics (IAFPA), the International Association for Forensic Phonetics (IAFP), the International Association for Forensic and Legal Linguistics (IAFLL), the International Association of Forensic Linguists (IAFL), and the Austrian Association for Legal Linguistics (AALL). As pointed out by Guillén-Nieto & Stein (2022) and Anjum & Anwar (2023), forensic linguistics is now known globally as a discipline.

COINCIDING RESEARCH

Coulthard (2010), a professor of forensic linguistics at Aston University, analyzed the application of language description in legal contexts in his research article, *Forensic Linguistics: The Application of Language Description in Legal Contexts*. His study provides a foundational understanding of forensic linguistics; however, considering the importance of forensic linguistics in the context of the legal framework of Pakistan and knowing previous studies do not address its implications within the Pakistani context, the present study intends to fill this contextual gap by investigating forensic linguistics in Pakistan. the current study hence extends previous research into a new geographical and professional setting.

In the context of the United Arab Emirates, El-Sakran (2020), a prominent professor of linguistics at the American University of Sharjah, explored Arab lawyers' perceptions of forensic linguistic evidence in his article, *Lawyers' Perceptions of Forensic Linguistic Evidence in Arab Countries: A Call for Collaboration*. The study provides valuable insights into how forensic linguistic evidence is perceived in Arab legal systems, but it still leaves a gap concerning the Pakistani legal landscape, where no similar research has been conducted. The current study aims to address the gap by examining Pakistani legal professionals' opinions of forensic linguistics.

In 2020, Umiyati conducted a review on forensic linguistics using the descriptive qualitative method, The study included the content from the books, but practical application was missed. The present study aims to fill the gap as it includes the use in legal practice.

Nawaz and Hussain (2021) examined forensic linguistic elements in one of their contributions under the title: *A Forensic Linguistic Analysis of the Language of News Crime Reports in Pakistan*, in Pakistani newspaper crime reporting. They analyzed the ideological underpinnings of crime-related language in headlines through content analysis from the data of dawn newspaper. The findings showed that mass media wields a serious influence on perceptions of people, as the language used in crime news headlines influences readers' interpretations positively or negatively. While their study contributes to understanding forensic linguistics in media discourse, it does not reveal lawyers' perspectives on forensic linguistics—an area that the present study aims to investigate.

Khan and Ali (2023), in their article *Play of Legalese in Witness Examination: A Forensic Perspective on Courtroom Discourse*, conducted a study to examine courtroom discourse and found that lawyers strategically phrase questions to control witnesses' responses, exercising linguistic dominance within the courtroom environment. However, their study did not address legal professionals' broader perceptions of forensic linguistics. The current study aims to fill this gap by evaluating how Pakistani lawyers opine and engage with forensic linguistics in their practice.

Sagheer et al. (2024) conducted a forensic linguistic analysis of crime language in *The News International* newspaper. Their study employed content analysis to examine the ideological implications of crime-related language in newspaper headlines, concluding that such language can shape public perception in both positive and negative ways. While their research

contributes to forensic linguistic studies in media, it does not address forensic linguistics in legal practice. The present study extends forensic linguistic research beyond media discourse to focus on legal professionals' awareness and attitudes.

Recognizing the gaps in these previous studies, the present research builds upon existing literature by examining Pakistani lawyers' awareness and perceptions of forensic linguistics. Through this investigation, the study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of forensic linguistics within the Pakistani legal system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the process of identifying, analyzing, and processing information to study a topic. It includes procedures for selecting and collecting data (Shakir et al., 2011; Ahmad et al, 2025). This qualitative study surveyed 100 randomly selected lawyers both: male and female. A short questionnaire was administered for data collection, consisting of two parts: demographic information and five close-ended questions. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant sources, and the data was presented in numerical tables in a clear manner.

DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

The table below presents the demographic statistics of the research contributors who were the lawyers of the district court in Khairpur, Sindh, Pakistan.

TABLE 01: DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS OF THE PARTICIPANTS.

Frequency	Genders		Location	
Total	Male	Female	Urban	Rural
100	80	20	60	40

The total frequency of the research participants was one hundred young lawyers selected from district courts in Khairpur. Of these participants eighty were male and twenty were female lawyers. Sixty participants belong to the urban and forty participants belong to the rural areas and of District Khairpur.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results of the five close-ended items are presented below in the tables. The data was analyzed to solve the problem investigated in the research question.

TABLE 02: DO YOU KNOW FORENSIC LINGUISTICS?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	57	67.1%	67.1%	67.1%
	No	32	37.6%	37.6%	104.7%
	Neutral	11	12.9%	12.9%	117.6%
	Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Table number 02 shows the results of the first close-ended question, from the total frequency of 100(100%) participants, 57(67.1%) responded positively and 32(37.6%) responded negatively while 11(12.9%) remained neutral about the above-given statement.

TABLE 03: HOW MANY YEARS BEFORE YOU GET AN AWARENESS OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	One year	24	28.2%	28.2%	28.2%
	Two years	23	27.1%	27.1%	55.3%
	Three years	17	20.0%	20.0%	75.3%
	Four years	21	24.7%	24.7%	100.0%
	Five years	15	17.6%	17.6%	118%
	Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Table number 03 shows the results of the second close-ended question, from the total frequency of 100(100%) participants, 24(28.2%) responded one year 23(27.1%) responded two years, 17(20.0%) responded three years, the 21(24.7%) four years and the 15(17.6%) responded five years about the above-given statement.

TABLE 04: DO YOU THINK FORENSIC LINGUISTICS PERFORMS A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE LEGAL PROCESS?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	58	68.2%	68.2%	68.2%
	No	29	34.1%	34.1%	102.4%
	Neutral	13	15.3%	15.3%	117.6%
	Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Table 4 04 shows the results of the third close-ended question, from the total frequency of 100(100%) participants, 58(68.2%) responded positively 29(34.1%) responded negatively and 13(15.3%) remained neutral about the above-given statement.

TABLE 05: DO YOU AGREE FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IS A SIGN OF PROFESSIONAL WEAKNESS?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	66	77.6%	77.6%	77.6%
	Neutral	7	8.2%	8.2%	85.9%
	Agree	27	31.8%	31.8%	117.6%
	Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Table number 05 shows the results of the fourth close-ended question, from the total frequency of 100(100%) participants, 66(77.6%) responded positively 27(31.8%) responded negatively, and 7(8.2%) remained neutral about the above-given statement.

TABLE 06: DO YOU AGREE THAT DEVELOPED NATIONS USE FORENSIC LINGUISTICS SUCCESSFULLY?

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	56	65.9%	65.9%	65.9%
	Disagree	32	37.6%	37.6%	103.5%
	Neutral	12	14.1%	14.1%	117.6%
	Total	100	100%	100%	100%

Table number 06 shows the results of the fifth close-ended question, from the total frequency of 100(100%) participants, 56(65.9%) responded positively and 32(37.6%) responded negatively while 12(14.1%) remained neutral about the above-given statement.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings reveal that most participants were aware of forensic linguistics, with many having been aware of it for at least three years. Most of the participants acknowledged its crucial role in legal proceedings and rejected the notion that its use signals professional weakness. Additionally, participants recognized that developed nations effectively integrate forensic linguistics into their legal systems.

These findings underscore the growing significance of forensic linguistics within legal practice. The result therefore aligns with the study of Ahmed (2021), who examined its role in crime investigation and legal proceedings. Still, Ahmed's study focused on forensic linguistics in investigative contexts, the current study explores lawyers' perceptions, differing in setting and data collection methods. Similarly, this study diverges from the works of Nawaz and Hussain (2021) and Sagheer et al. (2024), who analyzed forensic linguistic elements in crime reports. Unlike those studies, this research directly captures lawyers' opinions from district courts in Khairpur, providing legal professional insight into the discipline.

CONCLUSION AND COMMENDATIONS

Forensic linguistics is a cross-discipline between language, crime, and law involving law enforcement officials, court affairs, legislation, court disputes, and so on. With forensic linguistics, legal cases caused by language can be handled more easily. Recently, forensic linguistics has been an arena of significance in many fields of study especially in judicial systems, legal and forensic matters, investigation, and open-source intelligence across the globe. The term typically refers to legal and professional analysis of recorded language by experts (forensic linguists) to provide expert and correct interpretation. It is particularly used in legal matters, especially in the court and criminal justice systems. In the court system, forensic linguistics is heavily applied to examine language evidence – either recorded in voice or handwritten in civil matters or crimes. The analysis or examination is carried out for two major reasons.

First, the analysis is utilized when relevant investigations are carried out with a focus to help in identifying witnesses or suspects in specific cases or scenes, or the determination of the significance of or utterance to a case.

Secondly, forensic linguistics plays a pivotal role when written or spoken language samples are presented to a court as evidence. In such contexts, forensic linguists provide expert testimonies of correct interpretation of the samples. As such, language analysis is significant in any judicial matters and systems provided the questionable language constitutes crimes. In most cases, crimes such as threats, hate speech, bribery, hate literature, and coercion among others necessitate the use of a linguist expert for correct and most importantly professional interpretation. The concept of forensic linguistics is ascribed to providing the truth from recorded speeches or voices and written languages in the face of a crime or relevant legal investigation matters. This paper will posit the different ways and methods that forensic linguistics is applied to investigate and provide professional interpretation of recorded and written languages in evidentiary and investigative contexts.

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