

On the Application of Forensic Linguistics in the Iranian Context: Insights from ELT and Law Experts

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Original Research

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Abstract:

Forensic Linguistics (Henceforth, FL) recognizes the pivotal role that language plays in legal cases, particularly in the analysis of documents and similar evidence. This means that language can be applied as an investigatory tool to solve legal problems. The objective of this qualitative study was to conceptualize and construct a comprehensive model for the applications of FL in Iranian EFL context. To this end, some face to face and focus group interviews were performed. Twenty-three university professors (including 12 associate and assistant professors in the field of TEFL and 11 associate and assistant professors in the field of law) with diverse profile of experience from three distinct provinces of Iran participated in the interviews. Codifying and transcribing the data according to (Corbin and Strauss, 2014)'s systematic steps of open, axial and selective coding, the results demonstrated five main themes (balancing asymmetrical power, clarifying the courtroom discourse, recognizing one's personal identity, promoting fair and just language, interpreting legal documents soundly) and twenty categories. The findings suggest we can effectively harness advantages of FL to elevate and foster justice, and to ensure linguistic precision in legal and forensic proceedings of Iranian context.

Keywords: Asymmetrical power; Forensic linguistics; Legal texts

Introduction

Language and communication are substantial to human evolution. According to Gumono (2015) language is a tool to attain various goals and solve several problems in real life which can turn abstract notions into tangible data (Sakakini, 2020). Also, Al-Sabbagh et al. (2025), emphasized the significant impact of language in shaping societal perspectives and stresses the importance of continued efforts to counter discriminatory narratives while fostering inclusivity and mutual understanding.

Hence, utilization of language in legal systems in no exception and is a fundamental and indispensable aspect of it and judicial process in every society, as functioning of law, judgments and legal proceedings are undeniably operated through language (Sanni, 2016). Mirkovic (2016) states that in the legal system, everything is language: statutes, warrants, questions, testimony, contracts, decisions, confessions, and other similar things.

Further, language of the courtroom and legal system has always been very complex and layered and is quite different from everyday language. (Maley (1994), p.57) remarked that legal language is "a means, procedure and outcome across diverse legal and law domains, where legal texts, whether spoken or written, are regenerated with the purpose of governing and regulating social behavior". Therefore, as Clarke and Kredens (2018) contended individuals which employed and worked within judicial system must posse a comprehensive understanding of both pertinent court system and its associated language to fulfill their duties effectively and satisfactorily.

Given the countless cases that arise within the community, it is essential to utilize various tools and media to provide support, interpretation, and resolution. Consequently, social issues that cannot be definitively solved within a single discipline can be addressed by engaging experts from different fields to tackle their unique challenges. In other words, interdisciplinary refers to "The combination of two

or more academic disciplines into one” (Mishra, 2019), p.1). Linguistics a multidisciplinary field encompassing and the scientific study of language and FL, which scrutinizes language in the context of law and legal proceedings can support each other (Alhumsi, 2019).

Linguistics when utilized in the legal field is called FL (Mortensen, 2020). FL, being a subfield of applied linguistics, provides an extensive area of forensic analysis techniques and systematic theories related to the language collections. It ensures that the obtained results are suitably prepared for utilization and acceptance in the legal, official and judicial domains (Sakakini, 2020). In addition, it is a specialized discipline that focuses on the use of language within legal systems. As a result, it encompasses all issues where language and law intersect (Ranosa-Madrurnio and Martin, 2023), which ascertain that forensic linguistics analysis is very important in legal cases (Haryanto and Arimi, 2022).

Equally important, it discusses the applications of language within the legal domain, in terms of how it is employed throughout the judicial process, encompassing linguistic analysis during the interrogation of witnesses and defendants conducted by law enforcement and police, extending to the language applied by lawyers, judges, prosecutors and legal representatives in the courtroom (Yuliastuti et al., 2024). This can be applied in Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Speech Act Theory, Theory of Grammar, Cognitive Linguistics, and the similar framework. Hence, the advancement of FL serves as an application aimed at accomplishing goals and intentions in encountering various criminal cases within the community (Erdian et al., 2019).

The development of FL in recent years has created a demand within the academic community and society at large which is due to the expertise possessed by language researchers in creating effective teaching materials. It has emerged as a rapidly advancing practice in legal proceedings. Scholars regard such a trend is correlated with the substantial rise in multimodal communication among organizations and individuals (Gorbatenko, 2021).

In addition, Ahmed (2020) emphasized the considerable importance of this relatively new interdisciplinary field, particularly for individuals engaged in court-related work and legal proceedings or those studying the intersection of law and language. In addition, it offers language with aspects for solving linguistic problems and presents language as a communal tool to enhance better communication.

Currently, a forensic linguist is recognized as a highly skilled specialist in their particular field, with corresponding requirements for professional expertise and experience (Solan, 2020). Also, Onoja and Oguche (2021) underscored the role of forensic linguist in analyzing linguistics responses, actions, and utterances to assist legal professionals in the effective transmission of their evidentiary and proof to address and resolve legal cases.

Subsequently, linguists are systematically trained and educated to discern, hear and identify structures that remain imperceptible to lay person. Likewise, the designation of university majors to this field of study reflects the significance of forensic linguistics as a crucial academic disci-

pline in the contemporary global world (Seyari and Bagheri, 2019). In the line with the development of legal cases, universities emulate to open departments or study programs related to the forensic linguistics.

Developing this science within higher education is an academic necessity in today’s era (Erdian et al., 2019). Additionally, it can be argued that this is one of the most practical applications of linguistics to address real-world challenges and issues. On the other hand, the expansion of postgraduate courses specializing in forensic linguistics, alongside the rise in the number of students pursuing degree in linguistics or law, indicates that the modern world demands new interdisciplinary approaches to meet its evolving needs (Gorbatenko, 2021).

Despite of its already vast use, FL is still underutilized tool (Leonard et al., 2017). Given the significance of this field, it is imperative that the incorporation and instruction of this field is deemed essential in university curricula as well as individuals engaged in legal proceedings (Ali, 2020). Accordingly, the requirement of interdisciplinary views necessitates the establishing of the practical field of forensic linguistics for the Iranian academic settings (Seyari and Bagheri, 2019).

As Seyari and Bagheri (2019) reported this interdisciplinary field has the potential to enhance the legal standing of country by providing support to those who are truthful and just. This science is quite new for academic society in Iran but it is not new anymore for the academic society in other universities.; it can be employed to any legal case in which language could be regarded as an admissible evidence. Nowadays, modern and advanced legal systems extensively rely on the expertise of forensic linguists for the elucidation of linguistic evidence in legal proceedings and contribute to the process of making determinations and decisions.

The importance of how language forms our society and serves to adjust social behavior makes forensic linguistics a very significant topic to study (Khoiyi and Behnam, 2014). This inquiry is beneficial in guiding the legal system to provide notable advantage in guiding legal system towards the development of improved and equitable practices (Christensen and Mortensen, 2018).

Furthermore, they can be a point of reference for individuals employed in legal settings, such as court professionals, law and linguistic educators. Furthermore, the results of this study can be employed by numerous professionals: law enforcement can utilize them as proof to more accurately decode crime. Also, police officers can use them to conduct interviews with suspects and witnesses more efficiently. Public defenders, judges and jury members can employ the results to more equitable decisions of guilt or innocence. In addition, translators and interpreters can use such results more precisely to convey information.

Review of related literature

Forensic linguistics “is a subfield of linguistics that applies to language as used in the legal and judicial fields” ((Fromkin et al., 2014), p. 518). This multidisciplinary area focuses on various ways in which linguistic analysis can be

applied to legal and judicial contexts (Anglesos, 2023).

In accordance with these definitions, FL is intricately connected to the interdisciplinary knowledge that establishes a connection between law, language and criminal activities ((Olsson, 2008), p. 11). As Ahmed (2020) stated, FL proves to be advantageous in the analysis of courtroom discourse, judicial procedures and specifically legal disputes. Furthermore, it holds potential for the analysis of legal documents with a focus on assessing their clarity, understandability and readability. Sanni (2016) mentioned that FL determine instances of face-threatening activities and proposes remedies for their mitigation and elimination.

In her study, Harupe (2019) noted that courtroom discourse functions as a means of exerting power. She emphasized the significance of employing FL analysis in enhancing our comprehension of court societal accuracy in the courtroom. Also, Onoja and Oguche (2021) cited that professionals in forensic discourse have a pivotal responsibility in formulating written reports and presenting oral testimony in the context of courtroom.

In a similar vein, Syam (2018) asserted how FL instruments lead to solve crime investigation and administration of the identical in Policing. The results revealed that FL assists police to discover the real intentions of crimes through the analysis of sounds or texts of the accused by applying Linguistics theories.

Irimba et al. (2021) commented that a linguist is able to distinguish potentially hateful speech acts from the neutral ones by use of linguistic criteria. Also, Juodkaite-Granskiene et al. (2017) point out that in the context of FL different approaches such as individual's style of writing and speaking and idiolect styles are applied in plagiarism detection. In addition, Catoto (2022) posited that the comprehension of courtroom interrogation can be seen as an expression that lawyers from both sides working together to depict the details of the crime event. Lawyers make sure that the type of questions confidently defend their own witness and client and does not imperil them.

More recently, Krassa (2020) claimed that FL uses various features such as lexical, structural and syntactic to recognize an author during author attribution. In a study, Alhums (2019) explored some fundamental aspects of FL. For instance, the issue of disputed authorship can be examined from a theoretical perspective by linguists. In the field of forensic stylistics, both written and spoken texts are inferior to scientific analysis to assess content, identify speakers, ascertain meaning, and determine authorship, particularly in cases of plagiarism.

In conclusion, the study proposed that there should be an interaction between judges, lawyers and legal interpreters and linguists. The legal community can derive valuable benefits from the utilization of legal documents, texts and the expertise of translators. The collaboration between these individuals is crucial for fostering the advancement and growth of forensic science.

Equally, Ramezani et al. (2016) concluded the significance of FL for security experts, judges working in courts and police officers to acquaint themselves with its application. Understanding FL roles is essential for the effective-

ness and success of legal investigations and ultimately facilitates the attainment of truth within the judicial process.

In another study, Momeni and Azizi (2015) examined an investigation into the influence of topic shift and the violation of Grice principles in the context of interrogations. The study suggests that the accused deliberately employed linguistic strategies to deceive the interrogator. Moreover, Najafi and Haghbin (2020) conducted a study regarding pragmatic strategies in cross-examination in courtroom and legal discourse. The result of this study suggested that pragmatic strategies are influential in determining the types of question forms utilized in an interrogation process, and also closed questions have the most usage due to their ability to maintain high level of control over the respondent's statements. In another study Al-Deen et al. (2024) focused on directive speech acts to explore how incitement operates as either an illocutionary or perlocutionary act and examines the techniques used to craft both direct and indirect provocation. By employing speech act theory and political linguistics, the study investigates how provocation encourages action, influences public opinion, and shapes collective behavior. It underscored the importance of understanding the linguistic and rhetorical elements of political discourse, especially in conflict-driven narratives, offering valuable insights for linguists, political analysts, educators, and policymakers about the pragmatic features and strategies of incitement.

Further, Umiyati (2020) analyzed the form and meaning of several utterances in Youtube. The findings of the analysis demonstrated that the utterances were full of insulting and degrading words that were identified through the lexical and grammatical analyses.

In the same manner, in Mehrabani et al. (2022) inquiry, the persuasive methods employed by lawyers to influence judges within the Iranian judicial systems and courts were explored. The study utilized the critical discourse analysis approach to analyze this phenomenon and its data collection involved court visits, interactions with lawyers at their office, as well as an in-depth study of hundred cases throughout the years 2018 and 2019. The research revealed that lawyers utilized a technique called backgrounding to highlight the weaknesses of their opponents with a negative bias, aiming to persuade judges to support their clients. At the same time, they employed foregrounding to emphasize the positive attributes and strengths of their clients with a positive bias.

In an investigation, Balcells (2023) referred to various distinguished FL and their contributions to resolving legal and criminal cases. He confirmed that FL is essential in ascertaining the authorship of contested texts or recordings.

In a recent study, Sobhani et al. (2023) performed a linguistic analysis on the discourse markers of two types of written and spoken documents presented in courtroom. they found that discourse markers could be used to identify the criminal.

Furthermore, Anesa (2022) emphasized the importance of FL, highlighting its substantial role in legal contexts. In other words, linguists, through their expertise and professionalism offer opinions that can be applied as credible evidence. Further, the presence of certain international and

professional associations affirmed the significance of this emerging discipline (FL). Also, the International FL association, founded in 1993, has been established with the purpose of uniting individuals involved in various aspects of law and language (Perkins and Grant, 2013). Consequently, the above pieces of research have ascertained the significance of using linguistic strategies and analysis in the legal proceedings.

Thus, it is imperative to acknowledge and address the indispensable requirement for the inclusion of FL in the legal system (Nur, 2016). The effective handling of legal challenges necessitates the collaboration of multiple disciplines. Therefore, it is vital to engage in interdisciplinary research in order to foster sustainable and innovative solutions and promote the advancement of government and educational institutions (Ali et al., 2022).

This interdisciplinary approach is crucial for addressing complex legal issues and achieving long-term progress in various sectors. FL encompasses a remarkably wide range of concentrations and much research conducted in various areas in other countries includes, aspects of forensic linguistics in police investigation (Sumaljag, 2018), analyzing suicide note cases (Sudjana, 2013), the role of forensic linguistics in a modern judicial system (Zgonnikova and Mikaelian, 2017), forensic linguistics in detecting of deviant teaching in Malaysia (Nordin, 2016), reviewing the literature of forensic linguistics (Umiyati, 2020) and forensic linguistics and Language issues in multilingual-oriented legal discourse (Usman, 2023). Unfortunately, the comprehensive and thorough progression of this interdisciplinary field has been somewhat neglected (Houtman and Suryati, 2018).

Accordingly, the literature has unveiled different purposes for forensic linguistics and a number of studies have, so far, explored this science in Iran, including key elements of forensic linguistics (Ariani et al., 2014), the role of topic shift and violence of Grice principles in interrogation (Momeni and Azizi, 2015), forensic linguistics in the light of crime (Ramezani et al., 2016), spoken features of the robbery defendants in court (Razavian and Jalil, 2018), analyzing discursal style of judges and defendants in courtroom based on forensic linguistics (Sobhani et al., 2023) and identifying defendant's spoken and written authorship in courts based on forensic linguistics (Sobhani et al., 2023). It seems although previous investigates have uncovered various aspects for forensic linguistics, to the best of researchers' knowledge, few scholars have worked on the applications of forensic linguistics in the Iranian context.

For example, Seyari and Bagheri (2019) highlighted the various functions of FL, which involve the intersection of law and language. These functions include training linguists on discerning the dynamics of language in legal contexts, analyzing the reasons behind the intricacies of comprehension and misunderstanding among individuals, exploring how language operates in legal settings and examining the strategic utilization of language by legal practitioners, including lawyers and judges, for successful courtroom outcomes.

Yet, it appears that none of these prior investigations have focused on the interdisciplinary aspect of forensic

linguistics. Put it differently, they have not evaluated the opinions of both language and law professors to construct and design a model for the applicability of FL in the Iranian context. Thus, due to the paucity of such studies, a study is needed to address the following questions:

Research questions:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of ELT teachers about the forensic linguistics in the educational context of Iran?

RQ2: What are the perspectives of Law experts about the applicability of forensic linguistics in the legal system of Iran?

RQ3: What comprehensive model for the application of forensic linguistics in Iran can be derived from the perceptions of experts in ELT and Law?

Methodology

Participants

Twenty-three university professors (including 12 both associate and assistant professors in the field of TEFL and 11 associate and assistant professors in the field of law) stated their consent to cooperate in this study. The reason why these 23 university professors were chosen refers to the fact that they were familiar with FL and in order for the researchers to ensure participants' genuine data, they were given a pamphlet about FL. Both male and female professors took part in the interview sessions. The participants enjoyed diverse profile of experience in teaching (8 to beyond 17). Their age ranged from 36 to 51. The participants were selected from three Azad Universities in Kerman, Bandar-Abbas and Yazd provinces based on purposive sampling. The criteria that researchers set for selecting participants from across three various universities can be simply having varied length of teaching experience. It is important to note that the selection and number of participants was determined based on the criterion of data saturation, where no new theme was likely to set up from running extra interviews, as a result, the interview processes were concluded. Therefore, the selection of participants was limited to this specific number.

Kolb (2012) asserted that achieving data saturation is imperative as it ensures the adequacy of data according to the perspectives of respondents. Furthermore, in the context of focus-group interviews, participants were chosen on the basis of their explicit consent and willingness to participate in the interview process. Therefore, the number of participants of focus-group interviews was limited to 10 ELT and Law professors. Additionally, participants were notified about the approximate time for their attendance at interview sessions. Each interview session was a bit different in length in order for the interviewer to make sure that the interviewee's responses provide adequate information. Moreover, it was the researchers' duty to change the names of participants into pseudonyms or codes to hide their identities.

Materials and instruments

To gather data about the application of forensic linguistics in the educational and legal contexts of Iran, this study benefited from semi-structured interviews and reflective journals which are explained as in-depth follow:

Semi-structured interviews

Before conducting the initial semi-structured interview sessions (Rahimi and Askari Bigdeli, 2016), the researchers formulated a preliminary interview guide (Izadi, 2022) consisting of a set of comprehensive guiding questions (Appendix 1) which can also be referred to as the tentative interview protocol/guide. According to McCracken (1988), employing an interview guide is necessary for researchers as it enables them to address multiple issues while simultaneously achieving their desired objective.

In addition, the consideration of an interview protocol offers particular benefits: firstly, it determined that the researchers thoroughly addressed the scope of domain, ensuring that no significant issues were overlooked. Secondly, appropriate questions were formulated, avoiding impromptu questions (Samimi and Sahragard, 2018). Therefore, after reviewing the relevant literatures and papers on FL along similar lines (Seyari and Bagheri, 2019; Gorbatenko, 2021), the researchers were ultimately able to identify 7 open-ended questions that would be included in the interview guide.

Afterwards, the questions were pretested and piloted with the assistance of four university professors from Islamic Azad university of Bandar-Abbas who were experts in the field of TEFL and Law. Finally, upon receiving the feedback, 3 out of 7 questions were removed and the final interview guide included 4 questions. Also, for eliciting participants' perception in the application of forensic linguistics two focus-groups were coordinated. Furthermore, to provide more ethical considerations of researchers, all the interviewees were reminded that they had the freedom to discontinue their participation in the interview session at any moment they wanted without any negative results Ary et al. (2014). The interviews were designed to adopt a conversational and informal approach, thereby facilitating an environment in which participants felt free and unrestricted to express their viewpoints.

Reflective journals

Besides interviews, the ELT and law professors were kindly requested to write reflective journals as to the application of forensic linguistics in the Iranian context right after their interview was over and hand it down to the researcher during a one-month priority. Reflective journals (RL) allow the participants to freely express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, on the topic. Equally important, reflective journals provide flexibility and allow participants to elaborate on their perceptions over time, potentially capturing changes or developments in their thinking.

This approach allowed for the collection of written records that captured the nuances and personal insights of the participants, which may not have been captured through other data collection methods such as personal and face-to-

face interviews. After a period of one month, 17 (10 ELT & 7 law profs) out of 23 participants submitted their journals to the researchers.

Procedure and data analysis

After the interview guide was designed and piloted, the initial interview started with ELT and law professors notified of the recording of their responses. Prior to each interview, the objectives of the study were orally illustrated to every participant. Also, for their convenience, they were free to use any language, either Persian or English to effectively express and convey their ideas and thoughts. Moreover, in order to maintain their motivation and avoid a sense of monologue, they were consistently given feedback to keep them engaged. First, individual interviews were done with 23 professors and then the focus group interviews were conducted.

After each participant was interviewed, they were kindly requested to write reflective journals as to the applicability of the FL in the Iranian context within a period of a month. During the period, participant's interviews were analyzed. As soon as the reflective journals were received, the researchers kept analyzing and interpreting them too. After that, the interviewees were provided with a summary of main ideas and key points they expressed in interviews and wrote in their journals, allowing them to identify any inconsistencies between their perspectives and the notes which were taken by the researchers.

To clarify accuracy and remove misunderstanding of the findings following (Ary et al., 2014) the credibility/trustworthiness of the findings was performed through peer debriefing and member checking/participants' feedback. Ary et al. (2014) proposed trustworthiness as an important concept for attaining rigor. Peer debriefing was established using consensus among the coders regarding the themes drawn from the raw data. Through member checking, the concepts and transcribed data were returned to the interviewees to confirm the accuracy of the transcriptions and highlight inconsistencies, if any, between their notes and opinions taken by the researchers.

All of them affirmed and verified the veracity and accuracy of the analysis. In terms of transferability, the study furnishes readers with evidence that its results could be transferable and applicable to diverse contexts, populations and time within the field of FL by other researchers. This is done through thick and vivid descriptions of the participants and the research process from the formulation of the study up to the presentation of the significant results (Zhu et al., 2020). On the other hand, dependability or reliability, signifies that the methodology employed by researchers remains consistent when applied by various researchers in distinct projects (Gibbs, 2007).

Reliability or dependability was obtained using three steps. First, through intra-coder, the researchers themselves rechecked the data with verified codes and the follow up memos to ensure that the codes confirm the segments of sentences/ phrases. Second, through inter-coder agreement, twenty percent of data were cross-checked by two other coders (outside of the data collection and data analysis)

and compared regarding stability and consistency upon the given codes. Then, the Kappa Coefficient was found to be .82, which shows an acceptable agreement in the coding.

Third, the remaining differences were eliminated through further discussions. Also, confirmability allows the present study to confirm or negate previous researchers. On the aspect of confirmability, the researchers made it sure that the findings were derived from the participants' words and narratives rather than researchers' potential biases to decrease the subjectivity of data codification (Rose and Johnson, 2020). Therefore, the audit trial was presented which enabled the auditor to affirm the transparency of the way of research. Also, to minimize potential biases triangulation of the data sources and perspectives, extended engagement with the participants and keeping journal were conducted. Finally, the collected data from face to face interviews focused group discussions and reflective journals were transcribed and entered into MAXQDA software.

The initial stage of data analysis involved organizing and becoming familiar with the data. The researchers transcribed the audio files and reflective journals, repeatedly reading and rereading the data (Ary et al., 2014). Additionally, the field notes from each interview session were incorporated and cross-checked with the relevant transcriptions. The transcribed data was then imported into MAXQDA software, with each transcription assigned a name reflecting the interview location and participant. After organizing the data, the recorded interviews were transcribed, and a grounded theory approach was implemented. The systematic steps of open, axial, and selective coding were employed to derive categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2014; Fallah et al., 2024).

During the open coding step, the transcripts were broken down into smaller units, such as keywords, phrases, and sentences. Multiple codes or labels were assigned to these data fragments, which were then condensed into manageable groups. This process resulted in a substantial number of codes and their respective frequencies (224 codes) by the end of this phase.

Once the initial coding was completed, the axial phase focused on establishing links and interrelationships between the codes and concepts. Similar and related codes were grouped under specific categories, which were given appropriate names. This strategy reduced the codes into workable categories and subcategories, and the coherence and interrelation of the codes were double-checked by two colleagues.

In the final stage, selective coding was performed. This approach was used to define how the emerging categories were connected, and themes were supported by relevant quotations, representing the final integration of the data (Creswell, 2013). Themes, categories, and subcategories were derived through the evaluation and reevaluation of the transcripts, and they were refined and modified until finalized. These strategies resulted in the identification of five themes (three for ELTs and two for Law experts), forming two models for the application of forensic linguistics in ELT contexts.

Results

The results consist of 3 parts. The first part deals with the results of ELT professors' interviews and reflective journals, and the second part reports the results of law professors' interviews and reflective journals. The third part deals with the overall model of the applicability of FL in the Iranian context. Based on the findings, five main themes were extracted as the consequence of applying grounded theory. These themes and follow up examples were summarized in details, respectively, as follows:

ELT teachers' results as to the applicability of FL

Balancing asymmetrical power

In this study, the first theme that emerged from running interviews and ELT professors' reflective journals was "balancing asymmetrical power". This theme further deals with 6 categories, namely, avoidance of biased language, revision of the question forms, preserving the rights of minority people, detection of the insult speech, regulation of the interruptions and finally recognition of face-threatening acts. The following participants' viewpoints and reflective journals shed more light on this theme and its categories:

ELT teacher 12 stated in Reflective Journal that: Some words have negative meanings, that is people with power use their position and influence to get advantages. Using negative words can be problematic as they may create a stigma on someone. Therefore, it is imperative to avoid using such negative words to prevent a potential defamation to a person's reputation. A forensic linguist possesses the ability to identify and analyze potential insults within speech messages, thereby assisting in the detection of insulting meanings. In addition, **ELT teacher 2** argued in his interview that: In a courtroom setting, the ability to ask questions can serve as a source of power, as it is typically only court professional privilege. Put it differently, interrogators usually ask questions to get their intended assumptions. The forensic linguists suggest questioning strategies that allows the defendant to explain himself rather than yes or no questions that limit the power of defendants. Furthermore, **ELT teacher 11** said in his interview that: A judge or prosecutor interrupts to exert control or authority. Excessive interruption during legal proceedings can impede defendants' ability to fully express themselves and creates negative effects which can be regarded as a display of power and control. So, forensic linguists can help to balance and forbid too much interruptions.

ELT teacher 5 noted in his journal that: people are inevitably biased, so any system that relies on people to ascertain guilt or innocence is subject to bias. When a bias, such as social bias enters court decisions, it can jeopardize impartial results. To minimize this problem, it is necessary to obtain a better understanding of these biases. Forensic Linguists allows legal professionals to recognize and manage their unconscious biases and the utterances can be produced by the linguists in an unbiased manner.

ELT teacher 10 commented in the focus-group interview that: Forensic linguists express increasing concern about how the legal rights of minority speakers should be protected throughout the legal proceedings. Forensic lin-

guistics' participation in interpreting courtroom proceedings would give minority individuals (plaintiffs, defendants and witnesses) more chances to be heard. Thus, they can preserve the rights of minority people.

ELT professor 1 said in the focus group that: the courtroom is a place of power struggle. In order to show their power and authority, courtroom participants apply strategies such as face-threatening acts obviously. Forensic linguists are certified language experts who can recognize such face-threatening acts (Izadi, 2022) and suggest ways for their removal.

Another ELT professor said in a face to face interview that: Forensic linguists contribute to the identification of different types of questions, ensuring that the comfort of suspects/defendants are not compromised.

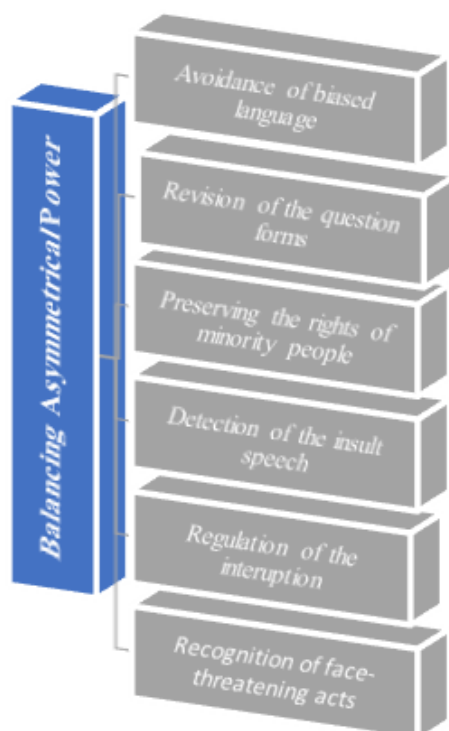


Figure 1. Categories of balancing asymmetrical power.

Clarifying the courtroom discourse

Another highly reported theme by ELT teachers was to clarify the courtroom discourse. This factor, in brief, involves 5 categories of “clarification of arguable and ambiguous sentences” “making inferences about the speakers’ intentions”, “specification of tricky discourse markers, modification of poor written report, and “contextualization of legal discourse”. below are some comments referring to the very matter:

ELT professor 1 commented in the face to face interview that: forensic linguists may assist law enforcement in examining criminal assumptions and elucidating any ambiguities and uncertainties that have risen from linguistic evidence during criminal investigations.

ELT professor 3 wrote in her reflective journal that: As some police reports are poorly written to courtrooms, the linguists can improve the quality of them. Improving

the quality of police reports can aid the court system in resolving cases quickly and efficiently. Unfortunately, some reports are not well-written, leading to an increased amount of time and effort to decode them.

ELT professor 4 noted in the focus group that: sometimes people can use discourse markers in certain ways to elicit answers they want to trick or confuse others. forensic linguistics aims to reveal these tricky discourse markers and bring transparency to the legal process.

ELT professor 6 mentioned in reflective journal that: Forensic linguists provide assistance in describing and interpreting communication, making inferences about the intended meaning of speakers within the specific contexts in which they engage in communication.

ELT Professor 8 said: in focus group that a forensic linguist may reduce the problem of contextualization that is related to the interpretation of discourse to indicate relevant aspects of an interactional or communicative situation in legal proceedings. In other words, some texts minimize or omit details or factors that are relevant to understanding the full meaning or implications of a message, potentially leading to a partial or incomplete interpretation. A forensic linguist helps to contextualize the message in order to interpret it.

Focus-group interview: written laws can often be lengthy, complex and old because of this, laws can often be filled with lexical ambiguities. forensic linguists may look for ambiguities within laws to help prove their cases. any lexical ambiguities or poorly-written text must be interpreted in the way that is most favorable to the defendants.

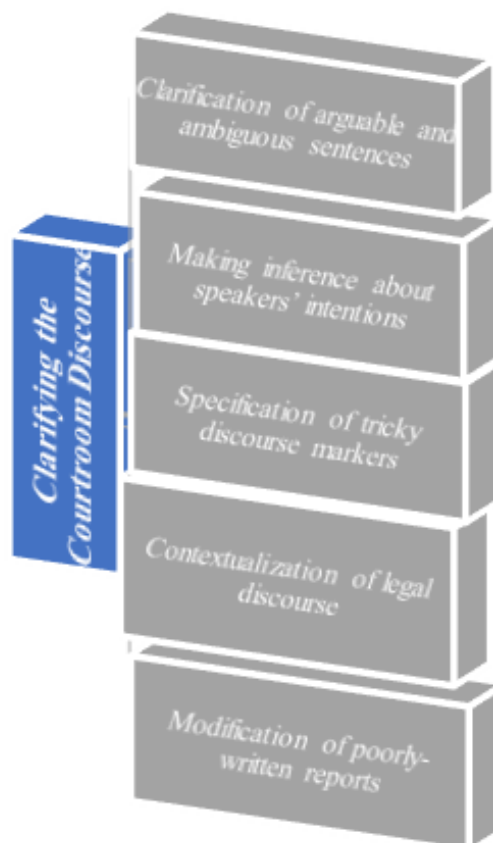


Figure 2. Categories of clarifying the courtroom discourse.

Personal identity recognition

As elicited from participants' view-points, and reflective journals, the third theme was personal identity recognition which encompassed "Authorship analysis of multiple distinct documents", "disclosure of the speaker's sociolinguistic and regional profile", and also "dialect identification". certain utterances of participants are listed below:

ELT teacher 9 stated in face to face interview that forensic linguists provide exact transcriptions of what was being said. Therefore, they can give information about speakers' social and regional background. **ELT teacher 4** commented in face to face interview that forensic linguists play a crucial role in examining and comparing documents authored by suspects with various items of evidence. Their task is to determine whether these documents are written by the same individuals. This analysis becomes feasible because each person has their unique linguistic style and characteristics in written language.

ELT teacher 10 wrote in a reflective journal that certain specialized vocabulary used in specific domains assists the court or police in uncovering clues. By examining the dialect used by suspects, linguists provide insights into the identity of the individuals involved.

Another Focus-group interview: The forensic linguist will assess the probability of the same person being the author of the questioned text by comparing it to other texts known to be written by the suspected individual. This involves examining and analyzing the provided evidence text alongside the known writings of the suspect.

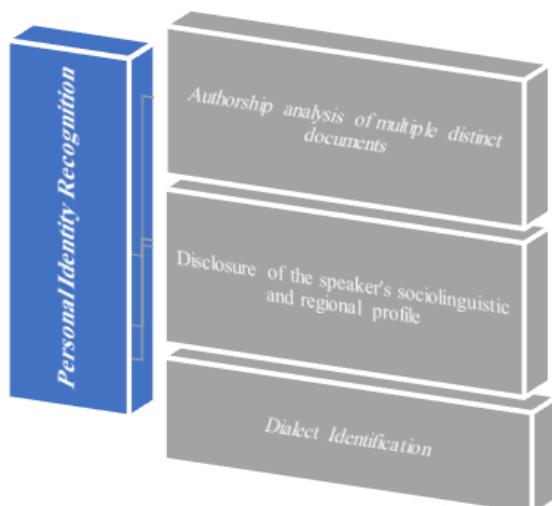


Figure 3. Categories of personal identity identification.

Law teachers' findings as to the applicability of FL

Regarding the second research question, the results indicated that from the law experts' points of view, promoting fair and just language, interpreting the comprehensibility of legal documents and personal identity recognition are the outcomes of the application of forensic linguistics.

Promoting fair and just language

As it is understood from the participants' responses, majority of them believed that FL can "prevention of unjust

convictions or acquittals of criminals". They also argued that it can "declaration of innocence or guilt." and "designation of appropriate speech acts". the following comments pinpoint the above-mentioned issues:

Law teacher 7 said in face to face interviews that in certain criminal proceedings, there is lack of definitive evidence to resolve the matter and sometimes innocent people are wrongly accused. it appears that the types of speech acts and answers given by defendants in response to interrogators questions can lead to inadequate evidence that could result in an unjust conviction. therefore, the forensic linguist determines how appropriate speech acts used in criminal courts can help to provide better solutions, and also help to avoid any misunderstanding.

Law teacher 23 noted in his reflective journal that through scientific education, linguists are able to recognize similar structures and compare or contrast those that are different. it is used to assert whether a work is plagiarism or not through examining the level of similarity style of writing. Law teacher 3 stated in focus group discussions that public defenders, judges and jury members can employ linguists' analyses to arrive at more equitable decisions of guilt or innocence. furthermore, they consider such analysis more precisely to serve justice.

Law professor 17 said forensic linguists use linguistic factors to provide an objective analysis to legal community in order to stop unfair conviction or prevent acquittal of criminals. So, they will assist judges and juries to make more accurate, clear and factual judgment.

In another focus-group interview, one of law teachers said that the forensic linguist's opinion will determine whether someone is guilty or not and thus, the final judicial decision of declaring a person criminal is moderated by the power of a language expert's opinions. in other words, the forensic linguists' analysis will make the legal proceeding fair, practicable and completely professional through the power of language and legal awareness.

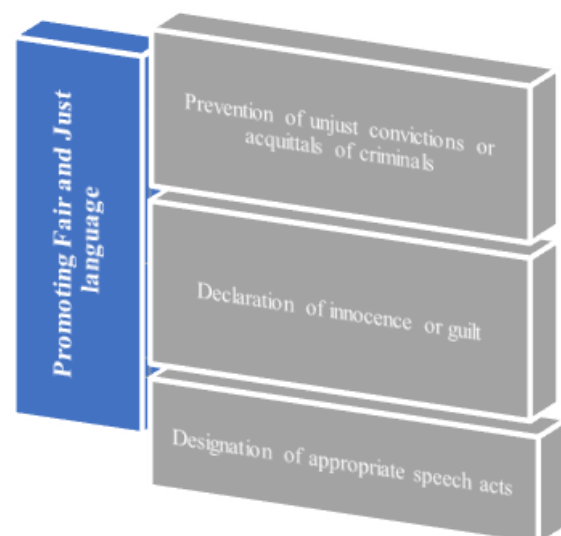


Figure 4. Promoting fair and just language categories.

Interpreting legal documents soundly

The second main theme of law teachers was labeled as interpreting the comprehensibility of legal documents. It includes a variety of factors, for instance, “simplified legal language, “sound choice of words”, “precise interpretation of evidence” accurate analysis of language. below are certain utterances pertained to these particular categories:

Law teacher 5 commented: Having a linguist present to simplify language barriers and ensure reliable communication is deemed essential.

Law teacher 23 mentioned: In the field of law, legal professionals work hard to create strategies that avoid using complicated language that makes legal terms confusing. This confusion can make it harder for one side to understand and present their case in court. Linguists have the skills to simplify and make the language of law easier to understand.

Law teacher 15 said, people often don't realize that certain aspects of language can greatly impact their defenses. When words are used incorrectly, it can deviate from linguistic norms. Forensic linguistics should focus on identifying the right choice of words. Using the correct words leads to clear and effective communication.

Law teacher 9 wrote in his journal that linguistic analysis is highly valuable in criminal cases, demanding precise interpretation. Language plays a crucial role in determining guilt or innocence within the legal field. Through meticulous linguistic analysis, legal professionals examine the language used in evidence, statements, and testimonies to uncover hidden meanings, inconsistencies, or deception. This thorough examination helps establish a clearer understanding of the facts, identifies intentions behind statements, and contributes to a more accurate and just resolution of criminal cases.

Law teacher 22 mentioned: the role of linguists in a courtroom is sometimes to ascertain the meaning of an agreement or contract. Forensic linguists analyze the text so, they can determine the range of possible meanings and the range of possible comprehension that the reader can have.

Law teacher 11 stated: Modal verbs are vague and confusing words in legal discourse. Their usage in legal documents are improper and incorrect. Therefore, a linguist can help legal practitioners to pay more attention to semantic and pragmatic functions of modal verbs.

Focus-group interview: forensic linguist can make legal language easy to comprehend by following certain principles of communication. Also, they help to better understanding of how a legal language works.

Personal identity recognition

It is the third theme that emerged from the data, it embodies two categories, which ranges from “voice identity recognition” to “sociolinguistic profiling of speakers”. In the following lines, the results of the interviews referring to these notions are summarized:

Law teacher 8 expressed: forensic linguist can distinguish if a suspected speaker is the origin of an unknown voice recording. The Linguist can determine whether a speaker is using his/her own voice or imitating someone

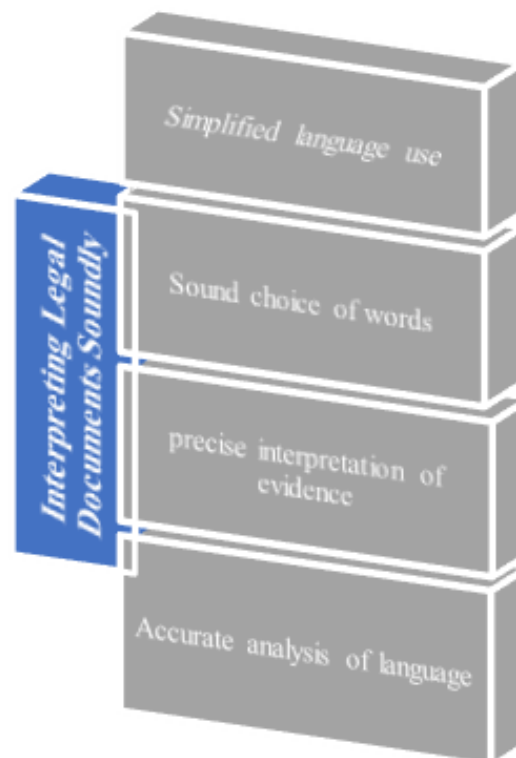


Figure 5. Sound interpretation of legal documents' categories.

else's by merging and analyzing data from phonetics.

Focus-group interview: A forensic linguist can utilize linguistic evidence in criminal and legal investigations to determine the characteristics of a speaker based on recorded conversations. Specific jargon or specialized vocabulary used in particular fields can assist in this process. By analyzing the dialect employed by suspects, linguists offer valuable insights into the identities of the individuals implicated in the case.

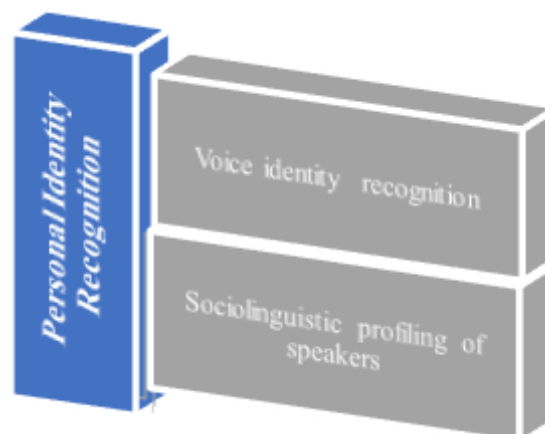


Figure 6. Personal identity recognition categories.

What comprehensive model for the application of forensic linguistics in Iran can be derived from the perceptions of experts in ELT and Law?

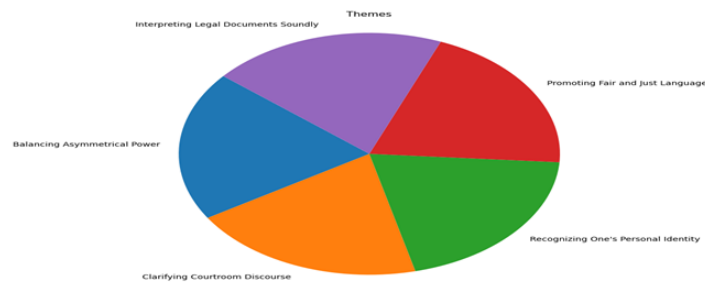


Figure 7. Overall model for the applicability of FL in the Iranian context.

Table 1. Themes and categories of the overall model of FL.

Themes	Categories
1. Balancing Asymmetrical Power	1. Avoidance of biased language, 2. Revision of the question forms, 3. Preserving the rights of minority people, 4. Detection of the insult speech, 5. Regulation of the interruptions and 6. Recognition of face-threatening acts
2. Clarifying the Courtroom Discourse	7. Clarification of arguable and ambiguous sentences, 8. Making inferences about the speakers' intentions, 9. Specification of tricky discourse markers, 10. Modification of poor written report, and 11. Contextualization of legal discourse".
3. Recognising one's Personal identity	12. Authorship analysis of multiple distinct documents, 13. Disclosure of the speaker's sociolinguistic and regional profile, 14. Dialect identification, and 15. Voice identity recognition
4. Promoting Fair and Just language	15. Prevention of unjust convictions or acquittals of criminals, 16. Declaration of innocence or guilt and, 17. Designation of appropriate speech acts.
5. Interpreting Legal Documents Soundly	18. Simplified legal language, 19. Sound choice of words, 20. Precise interpretation of evidence and, 21. Accurate analysis of language.

Discussion

The results of this study pointed out differing perceptions among law and English professors. Five main application of FL appeared. Three themes emerged out of the responses of the ELT teachers and three out of Law teachers. Due to the fact that one theme was common among law and English professors, the overall model for the application of FL in the Iranian context encompassed five main themes.

Regarding research question 1, as to the applicability of FL from ELT teachers' viewpoints, balancing asymmetrical power, clarifying the courtroom discourse and after which

came personal identity identification. Balancing asymmetrical power is the factor that evolved from interviews and reflective journals. According to Van Dijk (1993) critical discourse analysis is a qualitative analytical approach that is interested in describing and interpreting written and spoken texts to depict the source of power asymmetries, inequality and bias. One reason might be that forensic linguists can offer objective insights into language use, which can help judges and juries understand complex linguistic evidence, thus ensuring that all parties and individuals, regardless of their power or resources, are treated fairly. By interpreting linguistic insights into legal proceeding, the potential for

power imbalance can be mitigated, fostering a more equitable judicial process. Therefore, power differentiation in the court can and might be resolved through these linguistic features. That is, the courtroom talk can be analyzed in the form of speech acts, politeness markers and face-threatening acts which can be mitigated by a forensic linguist, because in the courtroom, each member exhibits varying degree of asymmetrical power relations with others (Bourdieu, 1998).

Regarding the revision of question forms, the present study findings are in line with Najafi and Haghbin (2020). They maintained that pragmatic strategies determine the types of question forms during interrogation process in the court. Along the same line, Seuren (2019)'s research confirms that the selection of a particular type and form of question is driven by pragmatic considerations. Such a result can be justified in terms of how properly-formulated questions prevent bias and ensure that the testimony is based on the witness's knowledge rather than suggestions. By carefully structuring questions, legal professionals can minimize leading questions that might suggest a desired answer. This helps to reduce bias during testimonies, ensuring that all parties have a fair chance to present their side of the story. Also, by revising questions to be more neutral, the legal system can mitigate the power imbalance often present between attorneys and witnesses, thus fostering a more just environment. Overall, revising question forms is a vital step toward creating a more equitable judicial process, helping to balance power dynamics and ensuring that justice is served fairly.

Moreover, with regard to the preserving the rights of minority people, the findings are in agreement with Rock (2007) which claimed linguistic experts involved in forensic analysis are becoming increasingly concerned about how the legal rights of minority or non-dominant language speakers can be protected and respected. One explanation for such a finding is that a forensic linguist offers insights into the cultural context of language use among minority groups. This understanding can inform the court about specific expressions, idioms, or communication styles that may be misinterpreted, thereby protecting the rights of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, a forensic linguist assists to ensure that minority individuals receive fair treatment in the legal system, safeguarding their rights and promoting justice.

Categories such as avoiding biased language, recognition of face-threatening acts and interruptions are barely reported in the literature. Nonetheless, they can be working solution to balancing power asymmetry. Hence, the findings might add to the body of knowledge in this regard. Furthermore, the findings corroborate Ang (2015)'s claim that linguistic features help transmit the intended meaning of the message. Linguistic attributes are extensively employed within legal proceedings to benefit either the defense or prosecution (Wagner and Zheng, 2021).

The findings are also consistent with the study by Sobhani et al. (2023), in which they noted that forensic linguistics relies on theoretical linguistics to ascertain the intended meaning of language in courts and to identify defendants or accused individuals through written or spoken evidence.

This result underscores how understanding language in context—such as implicature and presupposition—helps reveal deeper meanings beyond the literal text. They apply principles of pragmatics, considering factors like tone, inflection, and non-verbal cues to grasp what the speaker intended beyond the literal meaning of the words.

As for the third theme, personal identity recognition, the results align with Perkins (2021)'s study, which claimed that forensic linguists analyze language and evidence as part of their investigative work. This involves various tasks, such as comparative authorship analysis to determine the likely author of a text and sociolinguistic profiling to infer information about the author. Similarly, Balcells (2023) reported that forensic linguistics is essential in ascertaining the authorship of contested texts or recordings. This finding is also supported by Ahmed (2020), who noted that forensic linguistics can be beneficial for authorship attribution of written or spoken texts. This factor is reflected in the studies by Gupta2019<empty citation> and Krassa (2020), which indicate that forensic linguists analyze the features and linguistic patterns found in questioned documents or texts and then compare them to known works by suspected authors to promote fair and just language. Forensic linguists examine specific linguistic features such as vocabulary, syntax, grammar, and style to identify unique patterns that may characterize a particular author. Regarding research question 2, the promotion of fair and just language and the sound interpretation of legal documents evolved from the interviews and reflective journals. The fourth factor of this study, "promoting fair and just language," is supported by Ramezani et al. (2016), whose results showed that discourse analysis greatly assists the judicial system in uncovering the truth. This factor is also affirmed in Joshua (2023)'s study, which indicates that linguists can aid suspects in attaining social justice that has been impeded by linguistic constraints and misrepresentations. Additionally, simplified legal language is emphasized in Sagheer et al. (2024)'s study, which refers to forensic linguistics as a field that combines the study of language with the intricacies of the legal system. There was a close agreement between the responses of ELT and Law teachers only in one theme that was personal identity recognition. The findings of this study are supported by a couple of studies in literature (Ramezani et al., 2016; Syam, 2018; Harupe, 2019; Seyari and Bagheri, 2019; Umiyati, 2020). The examination of the findings through a comprehensive and integrated lens, alongside the review of the available literature, and the application of grounded theory approach, has led to the formulation of this theoretical model. As it can be seen, the model posited in the present research discerns a more explicit picture of how forensic linguistics can be applied in the courtroom and EFL contexts.

Conclusion

This study has advanced the boundaries of knowledge in the field of forensic linguistics within Iranian EFL contexts and Legal settings by presenting a qualitative model of the applications of FL for Law and English teachers. From balancing asymmetrical power, clarifying the courtroom dis-

course, recognizing one's personal identity, promoting fair and just language, to interpreting legal documents soundly are among the main themes of a forensic linguists according to the perspectives of law and English professors in the Iranian context.

The incorporation of FL within EFL contexts can provide significant advantages for pedagogy and the judiciary of Iran. Forensic linguistics can shine in Iran if linguists and legal experts cooperate together to solve current legal problems. The former can be achieved through the inclusion of an interdisciplinary major at M.A level which admits law and English B.A graduates to continue their studies in the field of forensic linguistics. That is, they acquire the required skills, knowledge and competencies to resolve ambiguous cases in the courtrooms. After graduation in this field, the Forensic Linguists to the judiciary can be employed by the legal system of Iran to work side by side of judges, lawyers and attorneys in courtrooms to bring about more clarity and justice. Moreover, FL can promote the position of our legal system by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the legal issues and language rights. In conclusion, the utilization of forensic linguistics in the Iranian EFL context offers substantial promise. As this study has shown, forensic linguistics can be a powerful tool in understanding the nuances of language, in both educational and legal contexts. Through analyzing language patterns, discourse analysis, and employing speech recognition technology, forensic linguistics can significantly aid in identifying and resolving linguistic issues within legal and forensic domains. It can provide valuable support for language analysis, authorship attribution, and the authentication of documents. By applying forensic linguistics techniques, learners can develop their skills in evaluating evidence and drawing conclusions based on linguistic cues. The acquisition of these skills not only contributes to their comprehensive linguistic and language proficiency but also augments their efficacy as communicators. Apart from implications, this paper has its limitations. The absence of enough previous research in Iranian context posed a challenge for the researchers to obtain relatable and enough data that one can identify with on forensic investigation. Also, future researchers may also explore this phenomenon through attendance in the courtroom to record and observe the courtroom's discourse and discussions.

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Information on informed consent or any data privacy statements

The data collection process was conducted in accordance

with informed consent protocols. Participants in the current study were provided with clear information prior to the interviews and reflective journal entries regarding what they were expected to express and document. Furthermore, they were made fully aware that the findings would be utilized for scientific purposes. Their participation was voluntary, and they had the opportunity to ask questions and withdraw at any time.

Authors contributions

All authors have contributed equally to prepare the paper.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview questions:

1. Are you familiar with Forensic Linguistics? Explain more.
2. Can it be used in the Iranian courtrooms? What benefits does it have?
3. what do you think about the inclusion of FL in the syllabus of Linguistics students?
4. How raising awareness regarding the FL can help the Judiciary system bring justice?
5. what do you think about the inclusion of a Forensic Linguist beside a lawyer in our judiciary system?