

Forensic linguistics in a criminal investigation

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The paper deals with forensic linguistics, a discipline that is scarcely known in Slovenia. It presents its more important areas, such as forensic phonetics, semantics, pragmatics and, above all, forensic stylistics, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. Forensic stylistics is used to establish the authorship of a given text, while the findings of sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics are applied in writing a personality profile of an unknown offender if he communicates with the police, mass media or victims (threatening letters, various messages). The paper also presents some recent analyses of SMS messages.

The paper also contains the results of a pilot study, conducted to discover the extent to which lay persons are capable of establishing certain demographic and other personality characteristics in the text of an anonymous writer. Although students of the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security were able to establish the gender, age and education of an unknown writer, they were less successful in establishing other personality characteristics of writers.

The results of the study indicate that criminal investigators could, with appropriate education and training, undertake at least basic sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic analysis themselves.

Key words: forensic linguistics, forensic stylistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, writer's profile

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