LING 4338_001 Forensic Linguistics
TR 9:30-10:45 in F373
Fall 2023
Stephen F. Austin State University
Department of Languages, Cultures, and Communication

Instructor: Dr. Chris Sams
Office: Liberal Arts North (LAN) 255
Office phone: (936) 468-2270 (no voicemail activated)
Email: samsc@sfasu.edu (please indicate LING 4338 in the subject line of your message)

Office hours: MWF 8:00-9:00 and TR 8:00-9:30

Course Description

Linguistic study of texts and recordings to determine authorship, evasion strategies, possible coercion in writings/recordings, stylistic changes, deception and so on. Linguistic tools include phonetic analysis and word choice. Texts analyzed include hate mail, suicide letters, ransom notes, and confessions; recordings include interviews, interrogations and confessions.

This course is 3 credit hours and meets 150 minutes per week for the full semester, typically twice per week for 75 minutes or three times per week for 50 minutes. Students complete a variety of formal and informal assignments, which require, on average, six hours of work outside the classroom each week and may include outside readings, data analyses, written responses, projects, and/or exams.

Prerequisite(s) None.

Required Texts

All course materials will be provided by the instructor.

Student Course Learning Outcomes

1. The student will demonstrate the ability to think critically about the scientific study of language and the major subfields covered in the course: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics.

2. The student will demonstrate higher-order thinking skills (application and synthesis/correlation) by observing how the core areas of linguistics work within the various subfields.

3. The student will demonstrate the ability to comprehend and apply both traditional and contemporary methods in linguistics to language.

4. The student will demonstrate the ability to integrate theories and methodologies of the linguistics course with that of other disciplines taught at the university.
5. The student will demonstrate the ability to perform data analysis relevant to linguistic study.

6. The student will demonstrate the ability to effectively communicate results of data analysis in a medium appropriate for the academic level.

**Coursework Requirements and Grading Policy**

- The final course grade will be determined by 4 take-home assignments which will be announced in class and posted on D2L at least one week in advance of the due date (indicated on the tentative schedule below).

- I only accept late work under extreme circumstances (which almost always will include prior notice) and for a penalty of my discretion.

- Assignments are based on my lectures and classroom discussion. General discussion among students regarding assignments is fine, but students are to submit their own work with their own wording and unique examples. **Students must type the name(s) of any student(s) with whom they worked at the top of the assignment (this includes my name if students see me in office hours).** If you work with another student, I do not discuss their grade if it differs from yours. It is possible that students who work together receive different grades since often times one student may go back and polish or add more examples to clarify their work. Outside sources should only be used when specifically directed and they must be properly cited. I am not interested in a summary of an outside source; I am interested in each individual student’s understanding of the material based on what was covered in class. Failure to comply with any of the above will result in a violation of SFA’s Academic Integrity policy (see below). I reserve the right to change all take-home assignments to timed in-class exams at any time.

- Students are encouraged to go over drafts of assignments with me in office hours. I am here to clarify directions on the assignments—not to do them. I do not pre-grade and I do not look at assignments via email; however, questions that I can answer in a sentence or two via email are fine.

**Final Course Grade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100%-90%</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>High Honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94.9%-90%</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89.9%-88%</td>
<td>High Honor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87.9%-80%</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>83.9%-79%</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>78.9%-70%</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>74.9%-69%</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>69.9%-60%</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>65.9%-60%</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>61.9%-59%</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>55.9% and below</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each assignment is worth 100 points and will be graded as follows:

A+ 100; A 95; A- 92; B+ 88; B 85; B- 82; C+ 78; C 75; C- 72; D+ 68; D 65; D- 62

Scores lower than 62 will receive a score in accordance with the quality of work which was submitted.
When I go over the assignment in class a week before it is due, I highlight what I am looking for. I take the assignment as a whole; I have found that using a rubric in this course to grade assignments consistently results in lower scores as it doesn’t allow me to look at the big picture.

**Definition of Grades**

An assignment which receives an A far exceeds my expectations. It shows mastery all of the content, it is well organized and professionally presented, offers plentiful critical analysis and original insight, and contains plenty of examples. I think, “This is exemplary work.”

An assignment which receives a B exceeds my expectations. It shows near mastery of all of the content, it is generally well organized and presented, it offers some critical analysis and insight, and contains sufficient examples. I think, “This is excellent work, but needs some polish.”

An assignment which receives a C meets my expectations. It shows more or less a general mastery of most of the content, has organization and some facets of a professional presentation, relies more on repeating information rather than offering critical analysis and insight, and could benefit from examples. I think, “This is the average of what I expected.”

An assignment which receives a D falls below my expectations. It shows a sketchy mastery of content, isn’t very well organized or presented professionally, doesn’t offer much (if any) critical analysis or insight, and lacks sufficient examples. I think, “This doesn’t demonstrate that the student is confident in the material.”

An assignment which receives an F usually doesn’t follow the assignment directions, is plagiarized, or is incomplete. It shows little or no mastery of content, lacks organization and professional presentation, relies only on repeating what others have said, and offers very few or no examples.

**Course Policies**

- Adults make arrangements. They also take responsibility, are held accountable, and accept the consequences of their actions.

- Attendance, Participation, and Preparation
  - Regular, prompt attendance, active participation, preparation, and adherence to the syllabus policies are expected.
  - If a you miss class, you are responsible to find out from a classmate what you missed, get notes, and see if you missed any announcements. After speaking to a classmate, if you have specific questions or need clarification, please see me.

- I post all assignments on D2L. I do not monitor or respond to emails sent via D2L; all emails should be sent to samsc@sfasu.edu. For D2L technical support, contact student support in The Center for Teaching and Learning at d2l@sfasu.edu or 936-468-1919. If you call after regular business hours or on a weekend, please leave a voicemail.
• You should check your SFA email account daily during the week. I return most emails within 24 hours. If you don’t hear back from me within 24 hours on a weekday, please resend your email—I may not have received it.

• During office hours, due to privacy, I only permit one student at a time in my office. If you are waiting, please ensure that I see you and I’ll divide up my time by how many students are waiting. Students with assignment-related questions are given priority. You can wait outside my door or sit in the main office. If you have non-assignment related questions or discussion topics and need to see me, stopping by during a week when no assignments are due works best.

Some important notes about this particular class:

• For every assignment that you do for this class, please make sure to write the following at the top of each page in 18 pt bold font:

LING 4338 FORENSIC LINGUISTICS CLASS EXERCISE

• This course is largely about detail and objectivity; avoid being vague and be sure to offer examples for any claims that are made. Assignments should be clear, precise, and professional.

• Our job as forensic linguists is to evaluate language; we are not responsible for the role of the legal system, law enforcement, or, to a large extent, psychologists. The less extra information we know about a case, the better. Please don’t spend time in class discussing specifics and outcomes of cases that we examine.

• Some of the material in the course is profane, graphic, melancholy, controversial, or violent in nature; I do not censor the material.

• None of the material used in this class is to be published in any form (e.g. online, as part of a story, a research paper) without my express permission. Material is not to be discussed with or shown to anyone not in the class without my express permission.

• There is an understanding that students will not use any of the skills you acquire in this course to directly or indirectly violate the law.
Academic Integrity (4.1)

The Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outlines the prohibited conduct by any student enrolled in a course at SFA. It is the responsibility of all members of all faculty, staff, and students to adhere to and uphold this policy.

Articles IV, VI, and VII of the new Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outline the violations and procedures concerning academic conduct, including cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and misrepresentation. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) Copying from the test paper (or other assignment) of another student, (2) Possession and/or use during a test of materials that are not authorized by the person giving the test, (3) Using, obtaining, or attempting to obtain by any means the whole or any part of a non-administered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program, or using a test that has been administered in prior classes or semesters without permission of the Faculty member, (4) Substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for one’s self, to take a test, (5) Falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other records or computer program, or academic work offered for credit, (6) Using any sort of unauthorized resources or technology in completion of educational activities.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of material that is attributable in whole or in part to another source or the use of one’s own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously, without any indication of the original source, including words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer code, and other expression or media, and presenting that material as one’s own academic work being offered for credit or in conjunction with a program course or degree requirements.

Collusion is the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any provision of the rules on academic dishonesty, including disclosing and/or distributing the contents of an exam.

Misrepresentation is providing false grades or résumés; providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit for oneself or another individual or to injure another student academically or financially.

Withheld Grades Policy (5.5)

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the coursework because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course to compute the grade point average. For additional information, go to https://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf.
Students with Disabilities

To obtain disability-related accommodations, alternate formats, and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services promptly may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

Student Wellness and Well-Being

SFA values students’ overall well-being, mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, emotional well-being, alcohol and other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help, SFA provides a variety of resources to support students’ mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

On-campus Resources:

The Dean of Students Office (Rusk Building, 3rd floor lobby)
[www.sfasu.edu/deanofstudents](http://www.sfasu.edu/deanofstudents)
936.468.7249
dos@sfasu.edu

SFA Human Services Counseling Clinic Human Services, Room 202
[www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp)
936.468.1041

The Health and Wellness Hub “The Hub”
Location: corner of E. College and Raguet St.

To support the health and well-being of every Lumberjack, the Health and Wellness Hub offers comprehensive services that treat the whole person – mind, body and spirit. Services include: Health Services, Counseling Services, Student Outreach and Support, Food Pantry, Wellness Coaching, Alcohol and Other Drug Education
[www.sfasu.edu/thehub](http://www.sfasu.edu/thehub)
936.468.4008
thehub@sfasu.edu
Crisis Resources:
Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343
National Suicide Crisis Prevention: 9-8-8
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741

Tentative Course Outline

This course is an introduction to Forensic Linguistics— the scientific study of language and the law. We will spend approximately 3 weeks of the semester examining each of the following core areas of Forensic Linguistics: Authorship Inquiry, Discourse Analysis and Transcription, Veracity, and Forensic Semantics.

Authorship Assignment due: Thursday, September 21
Discourse Analysis and Transcription Assignment due: Thursday, October 12
Veracity Assignment due: Thursday, November 2
Forensic Semantics Assignment due: Thursday, December 7

End-of-Semester Procedures

For final course grades, an 89.9 is a B and a 79.9 is a C and so on. Students should not expect or request that grades be rounded up. All grades are final and students should not email asking to redo an assignment, do corrections, do extra credit etc. I do not take into special consideration loss of scholarships, financial aid, financial assistance from parents, program admission requirements, probation, suspension, athletic requirements etc. Final assignment and course grades will be posted on D2L and uploaded to mySFA during finals week.

“JackText grade notification is available to students who sign up for it. This service sends a text to the student each time a grade is posted to their account. This should eliminate some of their anxiety when awaiting grades posting, as they will be notified the moment the grade is rolled into their academic history. Instructions for signing up for JackText can be accessed at http://www.sfasu.edu/5418.asp.”