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John Olsson and June Luchjenbroers, Forensic Linguistics, 3rd edn, London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014; xviii + 348 pp., £27.99 (pbk).

Reviewed by: Chris Rizza, School of Education, Oxford Brookes University, UK

Now in its third edition, Olsson and Luchjenbroers' popular textbook presents a general introduction to the field of forensic linguistics (FL). The book is divided into 17 chapters arranged in four sections: 'Language as forensic evidence', which focuses on the topics of authorship, genre, linguistic variation at the individual and text level, forensic phonetics (this chapter authored by Harry Hollien) and cybercrime; 'Dealing with linguistic evidence', which considers inter alia the types and nature of forensic texts, transcription practices and FL evidence in court; 'The legal process', which discusses the institutional power of the court and police, as well as the topic of vulnerable Book reviews 241 witnesses; and 'Language of the law', which presents a discussion of legal terminology and the language of statutes. Taken together, the topics covered by the volume provide a good overview of the nature and focus of the subdiscipline, and this third edition offers several improvements on previous versions, particularly with regard to the extended discussion of language in and of the law, as well as the role that FL can play in relation to cybercrime. A key strength of Forensic Linguistics is the presentation of a wide of variety of reallife cases and forensic text types that successfully demonstrate the practical contribution of FL in matters of crime and the law, many of them based on the authors' own work; these include police statements, courtroom transcripts, text messages and conversations from Internet chat rooms. There are also a number of exercises with guided questions which allow the reader to put into practice those principles of analysis discussed by the authors. Suggested interpretations are provided in an appendix, along with further forensic texts for consideration. Forensic Linguistics seems to aim to present an overall practical introduction to the discipline for students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as individuals working in the legal or law enforcement professions, and the authors should be commended for attempting to make the book as inclusive as possible in this regard. It is arguably the stated breadth of readership, however, that is the book's principal weakness, resulting in a certain amount of inconsistency in terms of both assumed knowledge on the part of the reader and the depth of description and analysis. Hollien's comprehensive chapter on forensic phonetics, for example, is highly detailed and illuminating in its discussion of speech signals, speech behaviour and techniques of transcription, but arguably requires from the reader a working knowledge of acoustics for a full understanding. Conversely, other topics are left comparatively underdeveloped. In the chapter on cybercrime, the authors focus almost exclusively on an overview of the different types of such crime, ranging from hacking to identity theft and cyber-bullying, while offering little explanation of the applicability and relevance of FL for its detection and prosecution. The discussion of online communication between paedophiles, for example, would have benefited from a more extensive treatment; the reader is informed that one such case 'required a form of authorship analysis to track identities' (p. 151), yet the nature and application of this form of analysis are left unexplained. This is a shame, as the authors' expertise in this area would have made for interesting reading, and contrasts notably with the chapter dealing with 'Forensic linguistic evidence in court', which presents in some detail a particular case involving one of the authors. Similar inconsistencies can be seen to apply to the explanation and application of linguistic theory, again presumably due to the breadth of coverage and intended readership. The authors do well to illustrate the potential relevance of a variety of linguistic approaches to forensics (this being a notable improvement on the previous edition), but

there is often a lack of sufficient explanation as to what such approaches entail, or how they can be readily applied in an FL analysis. Thus, the chapter dealing with textual variation considers a wide range of factors, discussing issues such as the competence/performance distinction, register, Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and the effects of alcohol and narcotics on the brain, as well as first language acquisition and Accommodation Theory. While the attempt to present such a wide range of perspectives is admirable, 242 Discourse & Society 27(2) these are generally not discussed in sufficient detail to clearly understand their mutual relations, and those readers without a background in language studies may struggle to interpret them. This, indeed, is a feature of Forensic Linguistics as a whole – a breadth of diverse and interesting topics are given throughout, when a more detailed and systematic approach might have worked better. A number of oversights at the proofreading and editing stages (including typographical errors, tables and diagrams that lack sufficient explanation or are incorrectly labelled and an Appendix 3 that repeats word-for-word earlier pages in the book) further mar the volume. Despite these flaws, Forensic Linguistics presents an interesting general overview of the field, covering a broad variety of topics and displaying the real-world relevance of the discipline, and would probably work best as an introductory text for undergraduate students. It suffers, unfortunately, from varying levels of detail, explanation and assumed prior knowledge, this arguably due to the authors' laudable attempts to present the discipline to a wide readership and to cover a range of different subjects from diverse theoretical perspectives.