

## Lesson Plan “CYA IN CORT: An Introduction to Forensic Linguistics”

**Overview:** This workshop is designed to introduce students into the discipline of Linguistics, via the subdiscipline of Forensic Linguistics: how linguistic knowledge is being used to help solve criminal cases. It does not assume any prior knowledge about Linguistics, though concepts might be related to those studied in English Language at school.

During the session, students will step into the shoes of a Forensic Linguist who has been asked to testify in court on a real-life murder trial from 2008. As the Forensic Linguist would do, they will analyse the evidence given to them (a series of text messages in this case) and will have to report on how likely it is that the text messages were written by the person whose phone they were sent from. The session is based on information from Dr Clare Hardaker’s [blog](#) – she is an academic researcher in Forensic Linguistics at Lancaster University. The case is well known in the research field of Forensic Linguistics and has also received media attention – you can see this if you google the case.

**Age:** The workshop is most appropriate for pupils from Year 10 through to Sixth Form. However, it has been done successfully with year 8 pupils before (in real life rather than virtually), so the teacher can assess whether they think it is suitable for a younger age group.

### Materials needed:

- Pen & paper
- Print out of the text messages to analyse (attached). See note – it can be done without printing if need be.
- Highlighters (if possible)

### Learning objectives:

- To understand what Linguistics is and how it can help to solve criminal cases
- To understand the term ‘idiolect’ (an individual’s unique, distinctive use of language)
- To have a go at being a forensic linguist!

### Outline of the session

Time on video		Notes/Explanation	Possible adjustments or alternatives
00:00	<b>Introduction</b>	Intro to myself and how the session will work: I indicate in the video when it should be paused for an activity.	
00:44	<b>Ice breaker:</b> Word Association Game “Linguistics”	This activity is to get an idea of what students think Linguistics is about. <b>Action:</b> Pause the video (at 01:52). Going around the room, students must say a word that they associate with Linguistics, or the previous word given by their classmate. Students should shout	Don’t necessarily need to go around in a circle, could get them to shout them out as they think of them, and write a

		<p>their word as quick as possible, and the class should <b>try to go round in a circle giving new words for as long as possible and try to reach the target of 30 words – keep a tally (or ask a student to),</b> as we will play the game again at the end of the session.</p>	<p>collective list on the board.</p>
02:00	<b>Aims</b>	<p>I talk through the aims of the session.</p>	
02:22	<b>Activity 1:</b> Write 4 words down to describe the room.	<p>We now move on to start thinking about how a person’s use of language is unique. Activity 1 is designed to demonstrate just that.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Pause the video. Give pupils 30 seconds to write down 4 words describing the room, they <b>MUST NOT</b> look at anyone else’s words. They could write on paper, or sticky notes, etc.</p> <p>Once the 30 seconds is up, and pupils have got at least 3 words go through the feedback (keeping video on pause).</p>	<p>This activity assumes students are in the same room. IF they are not, use the picture of the room on the slides.</p>
	<b>Activity 1 Feedback (2-3 minutes)</b>	<p>The game should show that no two people will have exactly the same four words, <u>in exactly the same order</u>, despite all being asked to describe the same thing. Unveil this to the students by asking them what words they have as below.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Ask one student to share with the class the first word that they wrote down &gt; Ask the rest of the class to put their hand up if they had same word &gt; If anyone did, ask them whether that word was their 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> word. If two students have the same word in the same place, ask them to share their full list, which should show that each students list is not exactly the same.</p>	<p>If you’ve used sticky notes, an alternative way of showing this would be to get students to put their sticky notes on the board, so pupils can read them and see that no two people have the exact same words in the exact same order.</p>

		Repeat this questioning with other students until it is evident that no one has the same list. Replay the video.	
03:54	<b>Idiolect</b> Explanation	I explain what an idiolect is.  <b>Action:</b> pause the video (05:38) when I ask “what is distinct about this character’s use of language?”, and see if students have an answer. Replay the video, and I’ll explain that it is the word order – the technical term for this in Linguistics is syntax.	
06:03	<b>Forensic Linguistics</b>	Here I start talking about how the use of idiolect can help us in legal cases. I set the scene for the real-life case study.	
07:34  10:30	<b>Activity 2: Analysing Jenny’s texts</b>	<b>Action:</b> Pause the video after I explain the task. Hand out the sheets with the texts on them. Get students to work in pairs or small groups, highlighting anything that they notice is different between the GROUP A texts (the ones sent by Jenny before she went missing), and the GROUP B texts (the ones which were sent after she went missing, and may not have been sent by her). Give students around 5-7 mins to work in pairs or small groups.  <b>Action:</b> Replay the video: I give some hints & tips and remind them what they will need to feed back on. Then pause the video and give students a further 2-3 minutes to continue their work.	If you cannot print them out, you could open the word document with the texts on the screen.
	<b>Activity 2: Class feedback</b>	<b>Action:</b> Ask for feedback from students. They should comment on:	

12:25		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• whether they think there is evidence that the Group A and Group B texts were written by different people, or the same person.</li> <li>• How strong the evidence is: is it a consistent feature and is it a distinctive feature?</li> </ul> <p>See Appendix 2 for a full bullet point list of the analysis of the texts – students may think of additional things too though! You can use this as a crib sheet when going through feedback or helping students during the task. I will summarise the key points when you replay the video below and I give the verdict.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Replay the video once you have had a class discussion of each group’s evidence and verdict. I will go over the feedback that students could have picked up on about the analysis of the texts.</p>	
17:15	<b>Activity 2: The Verdict</b>	<p><b>Action:</b> Replay the video. I will go over the feedback that students could have picked up on about the analysis of the texts. I will then tell them the outcome of the case, and what role forensic linguistics played in it.</p>	
18:29	<b>[Plenary: Word Association “Linguistics”]</b>	<p>[This can be omitted if you run out of time!]</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Pause the video and repeat the word association game - see if the class can beat their score from the first time.</p>	
18:58	<b>Conclusion</b>	<p><b>Action:</b> Replay the video.</p> <p>This section contains concluding information, and some links to further information about Linguistics, Forensic Linguistics,</p>	

		some TV show recommendations etc. The links mentioned on the video are contained below in Appendix 3.	
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## APPENDIX 1: TEXTS FOR ANALYSIS

### GROUP A: Texts definitely from Jenny

01

Sum black+pink k swiss shoes and all the other shit like socks.We r goin2the indian.Only16quid.What u doin x

02

Shit is it.crap icant2day ive allready booked2go bowling.cant realy pull out wil go2shop and get her sumet soon.thanx4tdlin me x

03

No reason just seing what ur up2.want2go shopping on fri and2will's on sun if ur up2it

04

Sorry im not out2nite havnt seen u 4a while aswel ru free2moro at all x

05

No im out wiv jak sorry it took me so long ive had fone off coz havnt got much battery

06

Only just turned my fone havnt lied bout anything.no it doesnt look good but ur obviously jst as judgemental than the rest.cu wen i cu&i hope its not soon

07

I havnt lied2u.anyway im off back2sleep

08

I know i waved at her we wer supposed2go at4but was a buffet on later on so waited.

09

Im tierd of defending myself theres no point.bye

010

Happy bday!will b round wiv ur pressent2moz sorry i cant make it2day.cu2moz xxx

### GROUP B: Texts sent from Jenny's phone after Jenny went missing

11

Thought u wer grassing me up.mite b in trub wiv me dad told mum i was lving didnt give a shit.been2 kessick camping was great.ave2 go cya

12

Hi jen tel jak i am ok know ever 1 s gona b mad tell them i am sorry.living in scotland wiv my boyfriend.shitting meself dads gona kill me mum dont give a shite.hope nik didnt grass me up.keeping phone of.tell dad car jumps out of gear and stalls put it back in auction.tell him i am sorry

13

Y do u h8 me i know mum does.told her i was goin.i aint cumin back and the pigs wont find me.i am happy living up here.every1 h8s me in rich only m8 i got is jak.txt u couple wks tell pigs i am nearly 20 aint cumin back they can shite off

14

She got me in this shit its her fault not mine get blame 4evrything.i am sorry ok just had 2 lve shes a bitch no food in always searching me room eating me sweets.ave2 go ok i am very sorry x

## APPENDIX 2: ANNOTATED TEXTS FOR ANALYSIS

### GROUP A: Texts definitely from Jenny

01

Sum black+pink k swiss shoes and all the other  
shit like socks. We r goin2the  
indian. Only16quid. What u doin x

02

Shit is it.crap i cant2day ive already booked2go  
bowling.cant really pull out wil go2shop and get  
her sumet soon.thanx4tdlin me x

03

No reason just seing what ur up2.want2go  
shopping on fri and2will s on sun if ur up2it

04

Sorry im not out2nite havnt seen u 4a while aswel  
ru free2moro at all x

05

No im out wiv jak sorry it took me so long ive had  
fone off coz havnt got much battery

06

Only just turned my fone havnt lied bout  
anything.no it doesnt look good but ur obviously  
jst as judgemental than the rest.cu wen i cu&i  
hope its not soon

07

I havnt lied2u.anyway im off back2sleep

08

I know i waved at her we wer supposed2go  
at4but was a buffet on later on so waited.

09

Im tierd of defending myself theres no point.bye

10

Happy bday!will b round wiv ur present2moz  
sorry i cant make it2day.cu2moz xxx

### GROUP B: Texts sent from Jenny's phone after Jenny went missing

11

Thought u wer grassing me up.mite b in trub wiv  
me dad told mum i was lving didnt give a  
shit.been2 kessick camping was great.ave2 go  
cya

12

Hi jen tel jak i am ok know ever 1 s gona b mad  
tell them i am sorry.living in scotland wiv my  
boyfriend.shitting meself dads gona kill me mum  
dont give a shite.hope nik didnt grass me  
up.keeping phone of.tell dad car jumps out of  
gear and stails put it back in auction.tell him i am  
sorry

13

Y do u h8 me i know mum does.told her i was  
goin.i aint cumin back and the pigs wont find me.i  
am happy living up here.every1 h8s me in rich  
only m8 i got is jak.txt u couple wks tell pigs i am  
nearly 20 aint cumin back they can shite off

14

She got me in this shit its her fault not mine get  
blame 4evrything.I am sorry ok just had 2 lve  
shes a bitch no food in always searching me  
room eating me sweets.ave2 go ok i am very  
sorry x

## Crib sheet for text analysis

### General points

- The linguistic question is: How likely is it that the texts in Group A and Group B were written by the same person?
  - Evidence for this must be based on the linguistic features of the texts: are they **distinctive** features in one or other of them, that distinguish them? And if so, how **consistent** are these features?
  - The Forensic linguist will have to give a judgement on the likelihood on this. They cannot ever be 100% sure though.
- The job of the forensic linguist is to focus on the language and remain objective, not hypothesise about how Jenny may have been feeling etc.

	Evidence	Strength
<b>Punctuation</b>	Group A consistently has no space either side when there's a number (apart from once, in 04), and when there's punctuation like a full stop.	This is very consistent which makes the evidence stronger.
<b>Sign off</b>	Group A Jenny often signs off with one kiss.  Text 10 from Group A Jenny says "c u" Text 11 from Group B says "cya"	It is a bit more variable (in some she signs off with three kisses, and some she doesn't)
<b>Spelling</b>	<i>fone vs phone</i> <i>shit vs. shite</i>	Group A uses only "shit", Group B uses "shite" but also uses "shit" once.
<b>Accent</b>	Group A texts use "my/myself", Group B texts use "me/meself"	Group A never says "me/meself" but Group B more often says "me/meself", however does say "myself"
<b>Contractions</b>	Group A uses contractions e.g. "im" "havnt" whereas Group B does not: "I am"	This is consistent but not a particularly unique/distinctive feature.
<b>Negative</b>	Group A express the negative with "havnt" or "im not" Group B says "aint", which Group A never uses	"aint" isn't found in any of Group A texts, but it is a few times in Group B.

- The forensic linguist's analysis of the texts alone is not enough for a conviction (and would probably never be), but it offers evidence in a trial which helps to build the whole picture and supports the argument made by the lawyers that David Hodgson may have stolen Jenny's phone
- The data is limited, but this is the reality that forensic linguists face – they would rarely be given lots of data