

Perspectives of Forensic Linguistics Research in Iran¹

Abdoreza Seyari²

Mohammad Sadegh Bagheri*³

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Abstract

Forensic linguistics tackles legal ends through linguistic means and it has established a sublime place for itself in international academic centers. In the past 10 years, some studies have been conducted on forensic linguistics in Iran and it has been approved by the ministry of education as a two-unit course at PhD level in Linguistics programs and it is offered in the field of Criminology at PhD level at Iran's Police Academy; however, it has room for advancement in a range of domains. This research aimed to study the perspective and functions of forensic linguistics in Iran. The research rationale lay in the fact that the exigencies of the era we live in prompt us to practice majors that can practically serve the current and future Iranian society. The participants of this qualitative study were 13 university lecturers in TEFL and law. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. To meet the aims of the study, the research provided an introduction to the history and development of forensic linguistics and highlighted its perspectives in Iran. The data were analyzed based on the codes derived from the questionnaires and interviews. The findings showed that all the participants deemed the localization of forensic linguistics as quintessential in Iran and provided

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² PhD Candidate of TEFL, Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran; rezsey@gmail.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shiraz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shiraz, Iran; (Corresponding author); bagheries@isums.ac.ir

some suggestions for the areas in which this field of study can serve great purposes. The findings of this research can be suitable for those involved in language- and law-related research. Further research can be carried out on teaching, learning, assessment and materials development for forensic linguistics in the Iranian academic setting.

Keywords: Forensic linguistics, Iranian academic setting, Localization, Perspective, Research

Introduction

Our life is highly affected by different forms of legal and linguistic issues; be it so narrow in scope to influence our daily activities or so broad to affect the country. Forensic linguistics is a field in which language meets the law. The scope, application, and usefulness of forensic linguistics have been meticulously noticed in internationally recognized European and American academic settings in the past four decades and its study has been rapidly growing in the world. The allocation of university majors to this field of study is indicative of the fact that forensic linguistics is an important field of study in the world today. The necessity of interdisciplinary thoughts necessitates the idea of establishing more interdisciplinary fields of study such as forensic linguistics in the Iranian academic setting which is in line with the goals and policies of Iran's Ministry of Higher Education that promotes the establishment and dissemination of new and practical interdisciplinary fields for the Iranian academic setting. Over the past 10 years, some progress has been made in terms of forensic linguistics research in Iran. Some national conferences have been held in this field and it has also been offered as a two-unit module at PhD in linguistics program and Iran's Police Academy in the field of criminology. Furthermore, many dissertations and research papers, with a focus on legal phonology, morphology, semantics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics, have dealt with the practice of forensic linguistics in Iran. Moreover, in the past decade, due to the national and international needs of the country, some other law-related programs such as 'International Trade Law', 'Humanitarian Rights', and 'Oil and Gas Law' have been added to other available programs in the Iranian higher education system. This study reviews the history and development of forensic linguistics, elaborates on how forensic linguistics has worked so far worldwide and the way it can function nationwide. Based on the studies on the applications of forensic linguistics in the world, it attempts to find out if it is necessary to establish this field of study as an independent discipline in Iran and how it can adequately function in Iranian academic and non-academic settings.

This qualitative study probed the following questions:

1. Is there a demand for localization of forensic linguistics as an independent field of study in the Iranian academic setting?
2. How can forensic linguistics adequately function in the Iranian academic setting?
3. What is the applicability of localization of forensic linguistic for the Iranian society?

Literature Review

What is Forensic Linguistics?

Forensic linguistics is a branch of applied linguistics. Applied linguistics, per se, deals with real problems of language and communication and centers on problem-solving. Therefore, first language acquisition, computational linguistics, forensic linguistics, neurolinguistics, sociolinguistics, second language acquisition research, and some other fields are building blocks of applied linguistics (Brumfit, 1995). Black's Law Dictionary defines forensic linguistics as the science or technique that evaluates the linguistic characteristics of written or oral communication, usually to determine identity or authorship (Garner, 2004, p. 676). Forensic linguistics is the interface between linguistics and law and deals with nearly all areas where language and law overlap, including the language used in legal settings by judges, lawyers, police officers, legal interpreters, translators, and anyone who works in the legal domain. Forensic linguistics as an umbrella term includes law enforcement, judicial matters, legislation, disputes, ethics, courtroom discourse, and plagiarism (Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). In the past 40 years, many books and academic papers have been published on theoretical and practical dimensions of forensic linguistics. Theoretical studies have mostly centered on subject orientation, contents and methods and the link between language and law. Practical studies have mainly focused on linguistic analysis, the language of the court, court interpreting and translation, expert witness, and standardization of legal language.

Forensic linguistics functions where law and language converge and aims to train linguists, discover how and where language works in legal settings, how and why people understand and misunderstand each other, and how lawyers and judges use language to win court cases. Forensic linguistics pursues transparency and comprehensibility and plays an arbitrary role in the legal process. Besides, forensic linguistics tries to alleviate language- and law-related inequality in legal systems and is after the prevention of injustice and promotion of ethics in societies. Forensic linguistics deals with voice identification, authorship attribution, ambiguous jury instructions, discourse strategies to influence witnesses, lawyer-client communication breakdown, perjury, defamation, trademark infringements, courtroom interpretations, translation difficulties, and the nature of tape-recorded conversation as evidence (Levi, 1994).

Theoretical Studies

The importance of forensic linguistics has been acknowledged in Europe, England, America, Australia, and many other countries. The works of Labov (1984, 1988, 1989), Roger Shuy (1990, 1993, 1997, 1998, 2001), Solan (1993, 1998, 2005), Malcolm Coulthard (1992, 1994, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008), Olsson (2004), Redlich (1997), Tiersma (1999, 2010), Eades (1994, 2003, 2004, 2010), Mcmenamain (1993, 2002, 2003), Maley (1994), Walker (1990), Charrow (1979, 1982), Ainsworth (2010), Chaski (1997, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005), Gibbons (1994, 1996), Leonard (2003, 2004, 2005) and many others can be cited as ex-

amples in this regard. They have proved the importance of linguistic evidence and analysis to be an essential part of the legal proceedings. The above studies have established the importance of the use of linguistic aspects of language such as phonology, sociolinguistics, pragmatics, syntax, discourse analysis, and recently critical discourse analysis, in legal settings.

Theoretical research in forensic linguistics studies in the past three decades has centered mainly on legal language, standardization of oral and written legal language, legislative language, judicial and administrative execution of language, language conflict, language structure, style and features of legal language and analyzing of speech acts. All the mentioned areas of studies fall into three categories of the language of the law, the language of the judicial process and language as evidence. In the area of the language of the law, the most outstanding works are by Alcaraz and Hughes (2002), Kniffka (2007), Levi (1994), Mellinkoff (1982), Schane (2006) and Tiersma (1999). Several books have been published in the area of the language of the judicial process, including Berk-Seligson (1990), Conley and O'Barr (1998), Cotterill (2003), Edwards (1995), Heffer (2005), Laster and Taylor (1994), Kurzon (1997), O'Barr (1982), Rock (2007), Shuy (1993, 1998, 2005), Solan (1993) and Stygall (1995), and in the area of language, as evidence, Eades (1995), Ehrlich (2001), Foster (2000), Haenlein (1999), Hollien (2001), McMenamin (1994), Nolan (1983), Rose (2002) and Shuy (2002) are worth mentioning. One of the most comprehensive books on forensic linguistics which reflects its international conceptual growth and diverse nature is Coulthard and Johnson's *An Introduction to Forensic Linguistics: Language in Evidence* (Routledge, 2007). Solan (1993) compiled a book about the language of judges to highlight the combination of linguistic theory and the field of law. Walsh (1994) shows different interactional styles of lawyers and aboriginal people posing a great problem to understanding, which resulted in miscommunication between them. Mcmenamin (1993) worked in the field of author identification in written documents. Eades (1994) worked on the promotion and application of forensic linguistics in Australia. Moreover, Levi (1994) wrote a guide for the researchers in social sciences at the interface of law and language. '*Language in the Judicial Process*' (Levi & Walker, 1990); '*Language Crimes-The Use and Abuse of Language Evidence in the Courtroom*' (Shuy, 1993); '*Language and the Law*' (Gibbons, 1994); '*Just Words: Law, Language, and Power*' (Conley & O'Barr, 1998) and '*Legal Language*' (Tiersma, 1999) are among the outstanding books published in the 1990s.

History and Development of Forensic Linguistics

Initially, forensic linguistics research was found within a wide range of disciplines namely linguistics, law, sociology, psychology and anthropology. The development of forensic linguistics research can be divided into before and after the 1970s. The first stage focused on the research of law-making language and legal texts which mostly centered on its syntactic characteristics and the second phase focused on pragmatic research and discourse analysis. Forensic linguistics firstly tried to discover its scope and effectiveness within the court

system and secondly tried to improve methodologies to make this discipline comprehensible to non-experts. Nowadays, forensic linguistic studies include the use of language as evidence for the forensic comparison of oral and written texts to achieve different objectives of forensic practice.

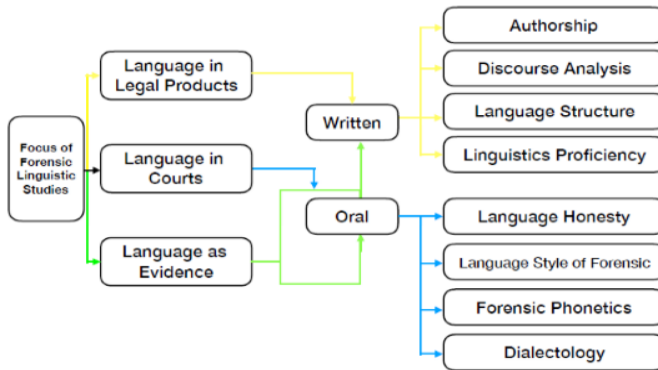


Figure 1. The scope of forensic linguistic studies, adapted from the source: *Guidance of Forensic Linguistic Studies* (Center for Strategy Development and Linguistic Diplomacy, 2016)

Many researchers trace the birth of forensic linguistics back to the publication in 1968 of *The Evans Statements: A Case for Forensic Linguistics* by Jan Svartvik, who showed that the disputed parts of Evans' confessions were linguistically different from the non-disputed parts. In ancient Greece, the focal point was law-making language and legal texts which were related to the rhetoric and the representative work was *'The Language of the Law'*, written by David Mellinkoff. In the 1960s, sociologists, linguists, psychologists and legal scholars realized the crucial role of language in judicial proceedings. In 1993, the first congress of *International Association of Forensic Linguists* (IAFL) convened in Germany which marks the birth of the first international professional academic organization of language and law. Later, *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law* commenced in 1994.

Afterwards, research and practice on forensic linguistics in the Western world gained a rapid momentum of development. Between the 1960s to the 1980s, mainly in the US and Canada, law professionals were devoted to the investigation of crime and asked linguists to use their expertise in relation to common issues between language and the law. Between 1988 and 1992, European forensic linguists met at conferences in different European universities and institutes. The first British seminar on forensic linguistics was held at the University of Birmingham in 1992. Under Coulthard, the journal of 'forensic linguistics/language and the law' was published in 1994. The journal is now published by Equinox as *'The International Journal of Speech', 'Language and the Law'*. In Western Europe, leading studies on forensic linguistics can be traced back to 1985, mainly in Birmingham, when experts were called into court to

contribute their expertise in handwriting analysis and authorship attribution of both spoken and written texts. In the UK, many cases involved questioning the authenticity of police statements. The common issues which emerged in the early days of forensic linguistics in Germany involved authorship attribution and the development of methodologies. In the US, an early review of forensic linguistics was written by Judith Levi in 1994. The forensic work in the US mostly concerned the rights of individuals in legal procedures and the status of trademarks as words or phrases in the language which mostly involved a dispute surrounding an aspect of the brand name 'McDonalds'.

In the 1980s, in Australia, linguists studied the application of linguistics and sociolinguistics to legal issues. Like US linguists, they were basically concerned with the rights of individuals in the legal process, in particular, difficulties faced by aboriginal suspects when being questioned by police and on expert evidence given by linguists in Australian courts. In Asia, the rise of forensic linguistics in China dates back to nearly two decades ago. Chen Jiong (1985) proposed the establishment of forensic linguistics in China. Since then, many Chinese scholars carried out research on the relationship between law and language. Legal language and philosophy, legal pragmatics, legal language and culture and the language of the court, the court translator and expert witness received more attention in China. Forensic linguistics research in China mostly focuses on theory construction, methodology, practice and application. Liu Suzhen (2002) argued that the subject orientation of forensic linguistics should take the basic point on its studying object, the relationship between law and language. Du Jinbang (2003) studied theoretical research on legal language and philosophy, legal pragmatics, legal language and culture, etc. and applied research on the language of the court, the court translator, expert testifying, etc.. Ji Mingzhu (2005) analyzed problems on legislative language, judicial and administrative execution language, and standardization of legal oral language. In India, some universities currently offer courses in forensic linguistics and, in Pakistan (Anjum, 2007), steps have been taken to establish forensic linguistics in academic settings since they have felt the necessity for the establishment of forensic linguistics as an independent discipline in their country.

Forensic Linguistics in Iran

As mentioned earlier, over the past 10 years, some progress has been made on forensic linguistics research in Iran. To disseminate forensic linguistic research, some national conferences have been held in Iran and some books have been published. The books and articles published in Iranian academic setting have mostly focused on creative patterns in linguistics in judicial analysis, stylistic characteristics of legal texts, plain legal language, Iranian legal discourse, crime, language and law, prevention of crime, improving the quality of translation, and the analysis of English-Persian legal translation and interpreting. Forensic linguistics has also been offered as a two-unit module in the PhD program for linguistics and at Iran's Police Academy, and an array of dissertations and research papers have dealt with the localization of forensic linguistics in Iran.

Forensic linguistic research in Iran can expand in a wide range of domains. Currently, the ambiguity of language of lawyers and judges in interactions with their clients, police investigations, plagiarism, crime detection in cyberspace and language crimes have received more attention, and more studies can be carried out on the role of forensic linguistic issues in designing educational materials, bilingualism, multilingualism, bilingual dictionaries and legal translation and interpreting. Forensic linguistics can assist Iranian courts and the police in attaining fair judgment, creating a safer society and preserving the rights of legal and real entities. Forensic linguistics is a fairly new concept in Iran and surely further research is required to be carried out in this context. Many studies can be conducted on potential areas of cooperation for Iranian lawyers and linguists, the way forensic linguistics can contribute to solving language problems in Iranian legal contexts, contract analysis and the use of language in Iranian judicial system, linguistic evidence, author/speaker identification, forensic stylistics, linguistic dialectology, trademark issues and plagiarism. Forensic linguistics can provide excellent opportunities for comparative, inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research aligned to Iranian local needs and its stakeholders.

Practice of Forensic Linguistics

Forensic linguistics has a range of practices in judicial systems, businesses and education. In judicial systems, forensic linguists draft and analyze official documents and help courts in arriving at fair verdicts by providing linguistic information and analyses. Forensic linguists draw on knowledge and techniques derived from one or more of the sub-areas of descriptive linguistics: phonetics and phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse and text analysis (Coulthard, 2005, p. 1) to verify the authenticity of a text and voices. Generally, forensic linguists work in authorship analysis, language in the legal settings, speech crimes, linguistic identification of nationality and trademarks, legal consultancy, interpretation and translation. To show the importance of the role of interpreters and translators, we can point that today, in the US and the UK, non-English-speaking offenders and criminals have a constitutional right to the assistance of a translator throughout legal proceedings. Besides, linguists are asked to play a role during the investigation phase of a trial by helping the courts to identify real offenders through linguistic means. They can also work as an expert witness with specialist knowledge or experience in a field or discipline considered to be beyond the ken of a typical layman. Forensic linguists' overriding duty to the court is based on prior knowledge, evidence, testing results or reasoning. Furthermore, a forensic linguist must be able to communicate complex concepts to a lay audience in a comprehensible manner. In business settings, forensic linguists work in drafting agreements and contracts as contract law specialists. They can also work as interpreters and translators in international trade. The ability to understand and draft business contracts and linguistic analysis are among the key skills a forensic linguist can offer to an employer or a lawyer to solve legal disputes. In education, a triumvirate of

practice, research and pedagogy defines forensic linguistics as a subject in universities around the world. There has been a growth in both the number of postgraduate courses in forensic linguistics, and the number of linguistics or law degrees. This shows that the modern world today calls for new interdisciplinary approaches to education. Many countries such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom have acknowledged the importance of forensic linguistics and have paid the due attention it merits in their higher education. The importance of forensic linguistics and the linguist as a professional expert has been acknowledged since long in Europe, England, the United States, Australia and many other countries of the world. Forensic linguistics programs are now mostly offered at MA/MSc level and a couple of universities offer PhD programs. Currently, University of Wales (Bangor), Cambridge University, University of New South Wales, University of Melbourne, Georgetown University, Cardiff University, University of California (San Diego), San Diego State, California State University (Fresno) and many others offer forensic linguistics as an independent program.

Method

Participants

The participants fall into two categories: the 'questionnaire participants' and the 'interview participants'. The researcher asked nine university lecturers in applied linguistics and law to answer the questionnaire and four university lecturers in law participated in the interview section of the study. Seven of the questionnaire participants were assistant professors of applied linguistics (TEFL) at the Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, and the two other participants were assistant professors of law at Bar Association University and Islamic Azad University. Most of the participants have published books and have presented papers at national and international conferences. The questionnaire participants spoke Persian as their mother tongue and they ranged from 35 years of age to 61. Five of the questionnaire participants were male and four female. All of the questionnaire participants' experience in teaching was more than 10 semesters. The questionnaire was administered in English and the questionnaire participants were proficient enough to answer the questions in English. The following table details the information about questionnaire participants.

The interview section consists of interviews with four participants. All the interview participants spoke Persian as their mother tongue. They ranged from 38 years of age to 53. All the interview participants were male. The interviews were conducted face to face and were transcribed for analysis. At the time of the interview, one of the interview participants was a lecturer at Tehran University, Faculty of Law, one taught at Islamic Azad University and ran courses on arbitration, prevention of crime and language rights of vulnerable children and also ran an NGO (<http://pav.legal.com>) dealing with legal issues, one lectured at Tehran Bar Association University and the other one was the manager and lecturer at Tarhenovin Andishe Higher Education Institute

(<http://www.tnovin.com/>) which is the leading institute in offering law courses for university entrance examination at MA and PhD levels across the country and head of a notary public office in Tehran. The following table details the interview participants' information.

Table 1.
Background Information on Questionnaire Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Years of teaching experience	Type of school/university	Grade taught	Academic degree	Nationality
1	49	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA, MA, PhD	PhD	Iranian
2	35	Female	More than 10 semesters	State University	BA	PhD candidate	Iranian
3	43	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA	PhD	Iranian
4	42	Female	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA	PhD candidate	Iranian
5	47	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA, PhD	PhD	Iranian
6	61	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA	MA	Iranian
7	38	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA	MA	Iranian
8	39	Female	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA	PhD	Iranian
9	37	Female	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA	PhD	Iranian

Table 2.
Background Information on Interview Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Years of teaching experience	Type of school/university	Grade taught	Academic degree	Nationality
1	53	Male	More than 10 semesters	State University	BA,MA, PhD	PhD	Iranian
2	38	Male	More than 10 semesters	Bar Association University, Tehran Branch	BA	PhD candidate	Iranian
3	40	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University, Pav Legal Firm	BA	PhD candidate	Iranian
4	43	Male	More than 10 semesters	Manager of Tarhenovin Higher Education Institute	BA	MA	Iranian

Materials and Instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this study were an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Interviews have widely been used as a method of data collection in recent linguistic research. Various studies (e.g. Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Nazari, 2007; Talmy, 2010) show that interviews are one method of investigating linguistic phenomena. By setting up semi-structured interviews, the researcher tried to generate rich, descriptive data to answer the research questions. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were assessed to reassure the researcher about the truthfulness of the data obtained through it. The validation process of the questionnaire was based on Alderson (1996) and also Converse and Presser (1986). The three main validation processes for the questionnaire were face, content, and construct validity. In order to establish the face, content and construct validity of the questionnaire, a pilot questionnaire was administered to three applied linguists who teach at Islamic Azad University, Tehran, South Branch to pass their judgment on how far the questions were the representative of and in line with the aims of the study. The pilot questionnaire aimed at identifying possible items which were possibly ambiguous, repetitive, and unnecessary. The experts commented on the content, construct, wording, punctuations, and instructions of the questionnaire. With some recommendations, they approved the questionnaire.

Open-Ended Questionnaire

Thirty items relevant to the purpose of the study were prepared and given to the questionnaire participants of the study in order to elicit responses from them about (a) their personal and academic background, (b) the countries where they have taught, (c) objectives and the topics they have taught, (d) their experience on localization of language learning materials, (e) the way forensic linguistics can adequately function in the Iranian academic setting, (f) if there is a demand for localization of forensic linguistics as an independent field of study in Iranian academic setting, and finally (g) the perspectives of forensic linguistics for Iranian academic and non-academic settings.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews combined a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewees to explain their experiences, opinions and interpretations on the aims of the research. The interview section consists of interviews with four participants. The researcher tried to be clear as to what information he wanted to obtain and also tried to be transparent with the interviewees regarding the purpose of questions and how the information would be used.

Procedure

The expected data was derived from the researcher's library readings, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires and consultations with some law experts and applied linguists. Using more than one data collection instrument helped the researcher obtain richer data and validate the research findings. To have a useful data collection and in order to store, retrieve, and analyze the data, the researcher allocated unique identifiers to the participants and their transcripts. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were told that they would not directly benefit from the study. The researcher assured the participants that the information collected in the research would be completely anonymous. They were also informed of the approximate time of answering the questionnaire and attending the interviews. Their participation in this research was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. The participants' consent was obtained so that the data could be used for the purpose of this study. The researcher shared some information about what the research was generally about and how the participants came to be selected.

The questionnaires were distributed online among the participants and they were asked to submit their answers by email at an appointed time. All the interviews were conducted in Persian and the researcher translated them into English. The researcher was sensitive to any misunderstandings in translation and tried to be sure he had captured the true intent of each interview participant's contribution and tried to be clear as to what information he wanted to obtain. By preparing an outline of questions in advance, the researcher facilitated the discussion in a flexible manner to allow the participants to lead the conversation and freely express their opinions. The questions in this section were designed in a way to lead to detailed answers rather than one-word answers. The nature of interviews was conversational and informal so that the participants would feel free to express their opinions and experiences in relation to the research questions. Each interview took about 30 minutes. The researcher came up with some follow-up questions to look for more detailed information when necessary. The answers were recorded mostly by taking notes. Taking notes allowed the researcher to highlight key points to probe further. The researcher tried to collect the data he needed to match the research questions but did not come up with guiding questions.

Data Analysis

Analysis in qualitative research is a process of successive approximation toward an accurate description and interpretation of phenomena (Wiersma, 1995). Accordingly, first, the researcher classified the responses and identified recurrent themes. Then, the relevant themes and their codes were identified. The researcher then assembled and reconstructed the data in a meaningful and comprehensible way. Since the process of qualitative data analysis is cyclical in nature, the researcher returned again and again to the data to seek deeper lev-

els of meaning. Once the researcher captured the themes that described what the participants had told in the questionnaires and interviews, he attempted to uncover deeper meanings. For some questions, the researcher coded responses into whether they were positive or negative with regards to the questions. The method of reporting the qualitative data in this study is based on the recurrent themes stated by the participants; Rubin and Rubin (1995) believe that by putting ideas into coherent themes, the underlying ideas and themes emerge. The themes and coding categories in this study were derived from a thorough examination of the data by reviewing the completed questionnaires and the transcripts of semi-structured interviews. The codes achieved through questionnaires were ranked according to the number of the participants who had pointed out to them. It is worthwhile to note that all stages of the data analysis process were inter-rated by the supervisor of this study.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaire Results

The most frequently stated idea from the questionnaire participants regarding the demand for localization of forensic linguistics as an independent field of study in the Iranian academic setting based on a 5-point Likert scale produced the polarized opinion that localization of forensic linguistics for Iranian academic setting is a necessity. Those resounding 'Yes' to this question comprised approximately 88% of the responses and only one of the participants was not sure about the necessity of establishing forensic linguistics in the Iranian academic setting. Those who agreed believed that many court cases in Iran are linguistic, not just financial, familial, or criminal. They stated that there should be new divisions in the judiciary and special case courts to better and faster help people with their legal problems, and added that, by the same token, universities can also launch new fields of studies such as forensic linguistics to train specialists. They held that widespread dissemination of forensic linguistics can make those working in courts familiar with application of this interdisciplinary field of study and its role in the success of legal investigations and the pointed that this can ameliorate the legal status of the country in favor of those who are right. Some of the participants complained that the legal system does not properly preserve the legal rights of people. Another frequently stated point was the need for such a program due to the legal problems that Iran is currently facing at the international level, and that localization of forensic linguistics can offer broad applicability for the country at its international interactions in dealing with international agreements, contracts, and covenants. It was also highlighted that forensic linguistics can help prevent crime by developing educational materials and programs that raise the awareness of citizens on topics such as individual rights, rule of law, peace, justice, respect, tolerance, fundamental freedoms, human rights, civil rights, criminal justice, money-laundering, human dignity, vulnerable citizens, right to education, women status, gender equality, linguistic rights and environment. They added that forensic linguistics can shine in Iran if linguists and law experts collaborate in deal-

ing with current legal challenges of the society by obtaining the required skills, knowledge and qualifications.

Table 3.

The Questionnaire Participants' Answers on the Need for Localization of Forensic Linguistics as an Independent Field of Study for Iranian Academic Setting

Totally agree	5
Agree	3
Neutral	1
Disagree	0

Table 4.

The Themes Extracted from the Questionnaires

1	The necessity of localization of forensic linguistics in current Iran society
2	Training specialists
3	Preserving the legal and linguistic rights of people and the country
4	Loads of court cases
5	Prevention of crime by designing educational materials

Interview Results

On the need for localization of forensic linguistics and its perspectives in Iranian academic and non-academic settings, the first interview participant stated that we can no longer solve our legal problems merely through the lens of law and added that forensic linguistics, forensic psychology, sports law, international trade law and many other interdisciplinary fields can bring about positive changes in the legal affairs of people and the country. He stated that we have serious problems in writing, drafting and managing contracts and international covenants and we need a new lease of life in our legal settings in order to better deal with these complex challenges. He emphasized that we need to systematically train specialists in international laws and make people aware of their legal rights and obligations; in order to attain this end, there should be educational programs for school and university students and educational centers should focus on the teaching of basic knowledge of language rights and legal issues and highlight the role they have in preserving the rights of people from different ages, genders, ethnicities, social classes, education levels, and occupations.

Table 5.

The Themes Extracted from the First Interview

The need for interdisciplinary fields of study in the country
Serious problems in drafting international contracts and agreements
Training specialists in international law
The need for legal awareness among the public
Teaching basic legal issues in educational programs

The second interview participant stated that the complexity of legal language in our judicial system has brought about legal problems for many people. He stressed that forensic linguistics programs, among other solutions to legal problems, should provide simpler equivalents for complicated legal terms. This is because there are lots of legal terms with subtle legal differences that are hard to understand and may cause misunderstanding. It was further explained that when people are not familiar with basic legal terms and concepts, they surely cannot understand the words of judges and lawyers because their language is quite different from the language used by people, whereas they interact with them quite regularly. The interview concluded with the point that it is the language rights of people to understand the laws of their country which directly affect their lives and the above-said problems call for offering plain language when drafting laws and agreements through academic studies by language and law experts.

Table 6.

The Themes Extracted from the Second Interview

Dealing with complexities of legal language
Language right of people
Offering plain language when drafting laws and agreements

The third interview began by the notion that law basically aims to bring about equality and promote justice in societies; unfortunately, however, the complexity of legal language has turned it into a tool to abuse those who cannot properly understand and use it. It was discussed that we need a movement to make the legal language more comprehensible to a wider population in the society because one of the major problems of our law is having vague and ambiguous terms that are open to interpretation, and it is on forensic linguists to make legal language more comprehensible for people by providing simpler equivalents. Lack of understanding of legal documents has resulted in the violation of linguistic and legal rights of people in legal interactions such as contracts, agreements, title deeds, proxy letters, and the like. The interview concluded with the point that establishing forensic linguistics can set the scene for language and law experts to scientifically deal with legal issues of the society, and it can provide constant training for public and private sectors on issues such as decriminalization, rights of criminals, language crimes, and motive for committing crimes. The participant emphasized that the more we educate people in this regard, the more we can help them deal with their legal problems because more knowledge about law and language will lead to less crime, delinquency, and offense, and this cannot be gained unless our education system can provide appropriate courses and programs in schools and universities.

The fourth interview participant stated that localization of law-related programs in Iran is not a new phenomenon, and currently there are different MA programs that are of interdisciplinary nature and have been added to our education system because of the need felt in the country; the localization of fo-

rensic linguistics is not an exception to this rule. It was also added that contemporary history shows that any industrial, commercial and scientific phenomenon in the Western world has become localized in Iran, and because forensic linguistics has been well-studied and researched in the past 30 years in Europe and the US and because it has gained some breakthroughs in these countries, it will be implemented in the Iranian academic setting as well. To illustrate this point, the participant referred to some newly established interdisciplinary fields of study at the MA level in Iran such as MA in 'Oil and Gas Law' and added that the establishment of an MA in 'Oil' and 'Gas' in Iran was because of the interaction between Iranian and foreign oil companies and governments and the need for scientifically dealing with existing legal challenges. Currently, there are 18 law-related MAs in the Iranian education system, and the newly established MAs in Iran are 'Oil and Gas Law', 'International Trade Law', 'Human Rights Law', 'Humanitarian Law', 'Sports Law', and 'Arbitration Law'. The participant underscored that forensic linguistics might be an efficient companion to other academic programs because it adds more vitality to the Iranian academic community, and localization of forensic linguistics can help the Iranian society to reduce its many legal problems, and predicted that forensic linguistics will be widely practiced in Iran soon since it can improve the status quo of our legal system by means of a better understanding of the legal challenges and language rights. The interview was concluded by the point that proper implementation of forensic linguistics can alleviate injustice in the society and can be a positive endeavor to scientifically deal with the legal problems of Iranian legal and real entities in the country and in the world. The participant emphasized that in order to obtain better results from the localization of forensic linguistics, the stakeholders of this field of study should pay meticulous attention to international languages because they are the language of international organizations, and forensic linguistics is closely tied with language, translation and commercial contracts and correspondence.

Table 7.

The Themes Extracted from the Third Interview

Making the legal language more comprehensible
Widespread violation of linguistic and legal rights of people
Constant training
Appropriate courses and programs at schools and universities

Table 8.

The Themes Extracted from the Fourth Interview

Localization of law-related programs in Iran is not a new phenomenon
The need to scientifically deal with legal challenges
Alleviating injustice in society via constant education
Attention to international languages as the language of international organizations

Discussion

This research aimed to investigate the perspectives and the practicum of forensic linguistic in Iran. In order to discuss the findings, the finalized codes obtained through the data analysis of questionnaires and interviews were considered as the areas in which forensic linguistics can function in Iran. Altogether, by detecting the codes, the areas which need to receive more attention in Iran were identified. As seen in the review of the related literature, forensic linguistics, as a branch of applied linguistics, deals with real problems of language and communication and centers on problem-solving. This, coupled with what the participants mentioned in response to the research questions shows that forensic linguistics can help the Iranian society in judicial, legal, ethical, educational and public domains.

The need for the localization of forensic linguistics as an independent field of study in the Iranian academic setting was determined as the most important code highlighted by the participants. Discovering the scope of forensic linguistics for the Iranian society and providing approaches and strategies to make this field of study more available to a wider audience can top the priority for the localization of forensic linguistics in Iran. Linguists should play a more tangible role in the Iranian legal system and court cases by cooperating with lawyers and contributing their expertise to courts. To institutionalize the theory and practice of forensic linguistics in the Iranian society, the scholars of the field should publish journals, hold more conferences, and collaborate with related international organizations to discover what forensic linguistics can offer to the Iranian academic society and the general public. It is axiomatic that forensic linguistics can grow out of academic work by engagement with research communities and advances in understanding this field of study. Localization of law-related programs in Iran is not a new phenomenon, and currently there are different MA programs that are of an interdisciplinary nature and have been added to our education system because of the need felt in Iran, and the localization of forensic linguistics is no exception. Nearly all the participants stated that Iranian academic setting needs to take the localization of forensic linguistics into serious consideration. They stressed that the current status of legal problems in Iran is alarming, and loads of court cases, high rates of crime, large number of prisoners, and corruption seek prompt action and call for academic approaches to scientifically deal with the current situation by means of research-based solutions.

Indubitably, forensic linguistics is not a panacea to all Iranian legal challenges, but can pave the way for educating people on their rights and responsibilities in legal documentation and business interactions and can provide constant education and research in legal issues, thus serving the country both domestically and internationally. The rights of individuals in legal procedures, the relationship between law and language, the language of the court, standardization of legal language, analysis of legal documents, and materials development for school and university courses and programs are the areas that require academic research. Forensic linguistics courses and programs can train lawyer-

linguists to help materials developers train people on their rights and responsibilities and give public awareness on liabilities of governments and people. More specifically, the educational materials for different academic programs that take educational, sociological, economic, psychological and anthropological factors into consideration can have a preventive effect on legal problems. Further novel research on future avenues of forensic linguistic can be carried out in domains such as comprehensibility of legal language in the Iranian academic context, computational forensic linguistic, complexity of legal translation from English to Persian and Persian to English, language crimes in the contemporary Iranian society, simplification of legal terms in Iranian legal documents, linguistic interaction of Iranian officials and the people, language rights, linguistic profiling in judicial and police departments, the language of criminals and offenders in Iran, multilingualism and bilingualism in the Iranian legal system, and language minorities and their legal and linguistic rights in Iran. For further development, forensic linguistics in Iran should witness more academic organizations and journals and a close link with international associations. In general, forensic linguistics can add value to other academic disciplines for designing educational materials that can help prevent crime, raise the awareness of citizens on topics such as individual rights, rule of the law, peace, justice, respect, tolerance, fundamental freedoms, human rights, civil rights, criminal justice, money-laundering, human dignity, vulnerable citizens, right to education, women status, gender equality and linguistic rights. Besides, amelioration of serious problems in writing, drafting, and managing contracts both domestically and internationally by real and legal entities is a particularly serious burden on language and law scholars, and they can systematically train specialists in order to reduce such problems. In addition, since forensic linguistics is closely tied with language, translation, and commercial contracts and correspondence, language and law experts can provide simpler Persian equivalents and translations for complicated legal terms as bone of contention and root of many legal disputes.

Forensic linguistic research can also offer a great contribution to communities beyond the academia. Police, civil rights activists, legal consultancy agencies, law enforcement agencies, and any real and legal entities who in a way deal with language and law are active and potential stakeholders of forensic linguistics in Iran. Better public understanding of legal language can lead to less crime and legal disputes and, based on what forensic linguistics has proven so far at the international level, it can improve the status quo of the Iranian legal system and make it an inclusive legal system that can help people of different economic, educational, social and political backgrounds to receive fair access to justice and equality.

Conclusion and Implications

Legal challenges are embedded in different issues, and dealing with them requires the collaboration of interdisciplinary fields. Interdisciplinary research is the key to innovation and sustainable solutions, and governments and educa-

tion centers should support interdisciplinary programs that focus on existing social problems, be it in business, education, law, medicine, or any other field. This research firstly studied the need for the localization of forensic linguistics as an independent field of study in the Iranian academic setting; secondly, it tried to study the way forensic linguistics can adequately function in the Iranian academic setting; and finally, it investigated how forensic linguistics can serve the Iranian society. By asking the opinions of language and law experts, this qualitative study tried to prove that forensic linguistics, with many things in common with law, language, psychology, sociology, business, and many other fields, is indeed a basic need for every fabric of Iranian academic and non-academic settings. To this end, the study reviewed the development of forensic linguistics and discussed the needs for the localization of forensic linguistics in Iran and attempted to play a small yet significant part in introducing the potential applications of this field of study in Iran. Based on the review of the historical development of forensic linguistics, forensic linguistics has acquired an important status in internationally recognized academic settings, and localization of forensic linguistics in Iran is a natural flow of dissemination of this field of study in the world and in line with the goals of Iran's Ministry of Higher Education in establishing new interdisciplinary fields in the past decade. The humble contribution of this study is giving some directions for future research on the localization of forensic linguistics, moving one step towards materialization of the goals of forensic linguistics, and enriching the literature of this field of study. The results of this work might be of interest to anyone interested in language and law, ranging from teachers, students and researchers, linguists and lawyers, and can pave the way for young Iranian scholars to grasp the trend of forensic linguistics research and carry out further studies in this field.

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