“Linguistic theory and its forensic applications to authorship, linguistic profiling, counterterrorism, law enforcement and forensic linguistically-enhanced threat assessment”

Robert A. Leonard  
Department of Linguistics Hofstra University

Tanya Christiansen  
Linguistics Faculty, University of Copenhagen

Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic theory to issues of the law. And, what in the law is not language? E.g.,

- Police interviews and interrogations, courtroom interaction, contracts, and secretly recorded speech all require forensic linguistic analysis of the total speech events, as opposed to only linguistic “smoking guns,” unfortunately the chief evidence in many cases. Since lexemic semantic content vastly underdetermines pragmatic meaning, contextual information is necessary for valid interpretations of any linguistic feature, from conversations to utterances to words and morphemes. The architecture of speech events, the possibly conflicting schemas of participants, their conversational strategies, and speech acts are of importance.

- Bribery, perjury, solicitation to murder, and threats are all crimes committed through the use of language. Threat assessment is a crucial methodology, particularly re school and other mass shootings.

- In cases of anonymous death threats and ransom notes, dialectology, sociolinguistics, and linguistic variation analyses can indicate a writer’s regional and local geographic origin, education level, past travel, occupational training, etc., and vastly narrow the suspect pool, all the while guarding against disinformation. Once subjects are identified, authorship analysis can indicate or exclude likely possible authors.

Place: The Faculty House  
64 Morningside Drive  
Columbia University

Time: 4:00 PM

For directions to the Faculty House, please refer to the map at this URL:


RSVP: If you will attend the meeting on November 21, please send a note to:

Eunice Hong, Rapporteur  
eh2879@tc.columbia.edu

If you will join Professors Leonard and Christiansen for dinner at the Faculty House after the meeting, please indicate this in your rsvp.