
A Forensic Linguistic Analysis of Courtroom Language in the Case of an Australian Woman Convicted of Killing a Policeman in Bali

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Abstract- This study investigates the courtroom language used during the trial of an Australian woman convicted of killing a police officer in Bali, employing a forensic linguistic approach. The research aims to analyze how language was utilized by courtroom participants judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and the defendant to construct narratives, assert authority, and influence interpretation. Data were collected from courtroom transcripts, media coverage, and legal documents, and analyzed through discourse analysis and pragmatic frameworks. The findings reveal asymmetrical power relations reflected in turn-taking, lexical choices, and questioning techniques. Additionally, the study highlights the role of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic challenges in shaping courtroom communication. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how language impacts legal outcomes, particularly in multilingual and intercultural judicial contexts.

Keywords: Forensic Linguistics, Online Fraud, Fake Lottery, Short Messages, Linguistic Analysis.

I INTRODUCTION

Language plays a very important role in legal proceedings, particularly in trials involving cultural and linguistic differences (Piszcz & Sierocka, 2020). Language not only functions as a means of communication, but also as a tool to convey legal arguments, build narratives, and convey defenses or accusations appropriately (Rabiah, 2018). In the legal context, every word, phrase, and sentence structure has a very crucial meaning and can have a direct impact on the understanding of the parties, the judge's judgment, and the final outcome of the judicial process itself.

One of the cases that attracted international public attention was the case of an Australian woman who was convicted of the murder of a

police officer in Bali. This case is not only in the spotlight because of the severity of the lawsuits faced, but also because it involves two different cultures and legal systems, namely the Indonesian legal system and the cultural and linguistic background of the defendant who is from Australia. This situation places language as a crucial element in ensuring that every legal process is fair and transparent (Glogar, 2023).

In the trial process, the language used by defendants, witnesses, lawyers, prosecutors, and judges has a major impact on the understanding of facts, narrative construction, and the determination of legal decisions (Demeke, 2024). The way a question is asked, how the answer is delivered, and how the argument is constructed will affect the way the

judge and jury interpret the intent, truth, and credibility of the statement made. The choice of words, sentence structure, intonation, voice pressure, and communication strategies used have not only linguistic functions, but also psychological and persuasive, which can indirectly shape the perception of a defendant's intentions, guilt, or even ignorance.

Especially in cases involving foreigners, the complexity of communication is increasing. Issues such as lack of understanding of the court's official language, errors in the translation process, ambiguity of meaning, and differences in communication culture can be significant factors in influencing the course of the trial (Matulewska & Wagner, 2021). For example, certain cultures may consider eye contact as a sign of respect, while in other cultures it can be interpreted as a defiant or disrespectful attitude. Similarly, the way of conveying rejection, disapproval, or self-defense can differ between cultures. If these differences are not well understood by law enforcement, then there is a high probability of misinterpretation of the intention of the defendant's speech or behavior.

In addition, the translator who is in charge of the trial has a very vital role (Yi, 2025). Translators are not only required to translate literally, but also must understand the legal and cultural context of both sides. A small mistake in translating legal terms or intonation can be fatal, both to the judge's understanding and to the defendant's defense (Olsen et al., 2009). Therefore, the presence of forensic linguistic analysis is very important to identify the extent to which language influences the course of legal proceedings, especially in cross-cultural cases such as this case of the Australian woman being tried in Bali.

By understanding how language is used in the courtroom, the legal process can run more fairly, transparently, and accountably (Dugac & Altwicker, 2025). This also shows that the study of forensic linguistics is not only related to the analysis of texts or speech, but also directly related to justice and human rights, especially for those who face language barriers in judicial processes.

Linguistic forensics as an interdisciplinary field that examines the use of language in legal contexts is highly relevant to analyze how language is used in the trial of this case (Alduais et al., 2023). This field is not only the study of the structure of language, but also examines

how language shapes, influences, and even determines the course of legal processes. Linguistic forensics plays an important role in identifying communication patterns that can impact legal interpretation, including how questions are asked, how answers are given, and how narratives are constructed by each party in the courtroom (Ali, 2020). In the context of the case of an Australian woman convicted of murdering a police officer in Bali, forensic linguistic analysis is crucial to understanding the extent to which language is a tool for parties to build arguments, defend legal positions, and influence the views of judges and prosecutors.

This study aims to identify and analyze the linguistic features that appear in courtroom interactions, both verbal and non-verbal, which are represented through diction choices, sentence structure, question and answer patterns, and pragmatic strategies used. The study also examined how defendants, lawyers, and prosecutors use language to shape perceptions, both about the facts, intentions, and emotions related to the case. In addition, this study also examines the role of translation in trials, considering the language differences between defendants and law enforcement in Indonesia. Accuracy or inaccuracy in translating speech can have serious implications for the understanding of judges and prosecutors of the defendant's and witnesses' statements.

By analyzing available trial transcripts or excerpts from the media that record the course of the legal process, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of forensic linguistics studies, especially in understanding the dynamics of language use in judicial contexts involving cultural and linguistic differences. The findings of this study are not only important from an academic point of view, but also have practical implications for the justice system in Indonesia. Legal officers, such as judges, prosecutors, lawyers, and legal interpreters, can gain insight into how the use of appropriate and accurate language can affect substantive justice in the trial process. In addition, this research also contributes to identifying potential linguistic bias or communication inaccuracies that may occur in legal cases involving foreigners, so that the legal process can run more fairly, transparently, and accountably.

II. METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach by focusing on the analysis of trial transcripts and direct excerpts from Kompas.com reports related to the acquittal of Sara Connor, an Australian citizen convicted of the death of an Indonesian policeman in Bali. First, the researcher collected data from Kompas.com article dated July 17, 2020, titled "Australian Woman Convicted of Killing Indonesian Cop in Bali Released" (Wirajuda, 2020). The news contains a number of important details, such as the release date (July 16, 2020), the reason for remission (10 months of good behavior), and the chronology of the trial involving Sara Connor and her partner, David Taylor.

Furthermore, direct quotations from the perpetrator and witnesses were identified, such as Connor's statement that he was only trying to break up the fight, and also the judge's note stating that Sara was "holding the victim" when the beating occurred. All of these quotes are used as material for forensic linguistic analysis using critical discourse analysis techniques and forensic pragmatics. The researcher examined sentence structure, lexical selection, rhetorical style, as well as the use of strategies such as metaphors, euphemisms, or defensiveness in the trial.

Furthermore, the analysis was carried out contextually and comparatively, namely comparing Sara's way of speaking with the statements of the prosecutor and lawyer during the trial (which were also quoted in the news), and paying attention to possible narrative changes before and after the remission was imposed. The architecture of this method was conceived to uncover how these language features affect public perception and judges' decisions, as well as how the peculiarities of cross-cultural legal communication emerge in legal proceedings against foreign defendants. The results of the analysis are expected to provide useful insights in the development of forensic linguistics and legal practice in Indonesia, especially related to the issue of remission, trial language, and translation accuracy in cases of foreign nationality.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1) Defendant's Language Strategy in Trial

From the results of the news, Sara Connor uses a linguistic strategy based on denial and mitigation. Connor has consistently maintained

that he is "just trying to break up a fight", a form of self-distancing language commonly used by defendants to separate themselves from the main criminal act. The statement is an attempt to build a narrative that his involvement is inactive or passive.

In addition, the use of phrases such as "maintained her innocence" indicates a pattern of defense with a focus on intent, not the outcome of the action. This is a linguistic strategy often used in trials to shift the focus of judges and the public from consequences to motives or intentions.

2) Conditional Confession from David Taylor

David Taylor, Connor's lover, admitted to the fight at trial but used a self-defense narrative strategy, as written:

"He maintained he acted in self-defense, and that he was unaware that Wayan was a policeman."

This statement contains two defensive linguistic elements:

- Claim of ignorance (not knowing that the victim is a police) to reduce the impression of attacking state officials.
- Justification of action through self-defense, which in law can be the basis for a reduction of punishment.

3) Prosecutor's Narrative and Court Decision

The statement from the prosecutor and the judge was reflected in the decision that "prosecutors refused to convict them of murder because they did not intend to kill the officer." This shows that in the legal narrative, intention (mens rea) is key. That the absence of an element of intent to kill forms the limit of the categorization of criminal acts, from murder to lesser crimes such as fatal assault or manslaughter.

Judge I Made Pasek in the ruling emphasized Connor's involvement not as the main perpetrator of the physical violence, but as the party who "held the victim" when Taylor carried out the beating. This shows that in the courtroom, the construction of a narrative based on specific physical actions is the basis of the verdict.

4) Prominent Linguistic Features

- The use of passive claims: "tried to

break up the fight" to reduce the role.

- Euphemism in action: Not referred to as "murder" by prosecutors, but rather to an act of violence that causes death without the intent to kill.
- Role blurring: Connor admits not to committing an act of violence, but evidence such as "holding the victim" is a contradiction that prosecutors and judges use to determine the level of guilt.

5) The Role of Media and Narrative Impact

News from Kompas.com and AFP shows how the media narrative also takes a semi-neutral position, often using phrases such as "maintained her innocence" without including detailed rebuttals from the victim or family. This shows that media framing can contribute to the formation of public perception of the defendant, even to the point of accepting the reason for remission on the basis of "good behavior".

6) Cross-Cultural and Translation Issues

It was not explicitly mentioned in the news whether there were translation problems in the courtroom. However, from the narrative that emerges, the assumption can be built that the existence of different communication cultures (Australia and Indonesia) has the potential to affect how intent and intention are interpreted. For example, in Australian culture, self-defense may be more direct and defensive, while in Indonesian legal culture it can be interpreted differently.

The results of the analysis show that the use of language in the courtroom has a very significant role in building the legal narrative, especially in the case involving Sara Connor. The linguistic strategies used by the defendant are more likely to lead to a pattern of denial and self-distancing (distancing themselves from criminal acts). Phrases such as "tried to break up the fight" are a form of narrative that aims to minimize his active involvement in criminal acts. In the study of forensic linguistics, this strategy is included in the category of mitigation strategies, which is the defendant's efforts to reduce the perception of his guilt before the judge. This is in accordance with the pragmatic theory of forensics which explains that the perpetrator tends to construct a linguistic narrative that separates himself from the elements of the main criminal intent or act.

Meanwhile, the defendant's partner, David Taylor, built a defense narrative through self-defense claims and ignorance that the victim was a police officer. This shows a pattern of defensive narrative framing, in which the defendant tries to shift the focus from legal consequences to the motives or situations that trigger his actions. This kind of claim is common in various legal cases and is one of the main objects of forensic linguistic studies, particularly in the analysis of how perpetrators try to manipulate perception through language.

From the perspective of Indonesian law, narratives related to intent (mens rea) are the main factor in the categorization of criminal acts. It was evident that the prosecutor did not charge the two with premeditated murder, but with lighter charges because no element of intent to kill was found. This shows that there is a close relationship between the construction of language in the courtroom and the results of legal decisions. The judge in this case used a linguistic construct based on a description of a specific physical act—for example, the phrase "holding the victim" which is evidence of Sara's contribution to the crime, even though it did not directly commit the beating.

In addition, the difference in communication culture between foreign defendants and the Indonesian legal system is one of the challenges that is not explicitly mentioned in the news, but can be assumed to affect the course of communication at the trial. Factors such as language, intonation, word choice, and possible translation limitations can have an impact on how the message and intent of the defendant are understood by the judge, prosecutor, and other parties in the trial. This is in line with findings in previous forensic linguistics studies that highlight the importance of translation accuracy in cross-cultural legal processes.

On the other hand, the framing built by the media, especially Kompas.com and AFP, also shows a tendency to highlight the human aspect of the defendant with the use of phrases such as "maintained her innocence" and information about remission for good behavior. This kind of framing contributes to the formation of public opinion that may differ from the legal narrative that actually develops in the courtroom. The media has become an important actor in reproducing or even reconstructing the narrative that occurs in the courtroom into the public space.

verall, the findings of this study emphasize that language is not only a means of communication, but also a tool for the formation of legal reality. The use of language in the trial is not only to convey facts, but also as a means to build legal positions, influence perceptions, and ultimately have an impact on the outcome of the verdict. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of linguistic features in the courtroom is essential, especially in the context of cases involving cultural and linguistic differences such as the case of Sara Connor in Bali.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research shows that language plays a central role in the judicial process, particularly in cases involving foreign defendants such as Sara Connor in Bali. Through forensic linguistic analysis, it was found that the defendant used various language strategies such as denial and mitigation to reduce the impression of his active involvement in the crime. Phrases like "tried to break up the fight" are examples of trying to build a narrative that his involvement is passive.

Meanwhile, the defendant's partner, David Taylor, used a self-defense narrative and ignorance of the victim's status as a police officer, to strengthen his legal position. On the other hand, prosecutors and judges build legal constructions based on intent or intent (mens rea), not just on physical acts, which are the basis for determining the type of indictment and verdict.

This research also highlights the challenges of cross-cultural communication that have the potential to affect language interpretation in the courtroom. Factors such as word choice, intonation, and potential translation inaccuracies can have an impact on the understanding of the judge and related parties. In addition, media framing also plays a role in shaping public perception of the case, with narratives that tend to highlight the human side of the defendant.

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