

Towards Teaching Forensic Linguistics: An Iranian Perspective

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Abstract. Language and law are interwoven at many junctures. Language as an intrinsic part of human interactions has taken more legal effects and legal interactions are becoming globalized as societies develop new links. Teaching forensic linguistics as a vivid example of development of modern science, aiming at knowing, preserving and vindicating rights and responsibilities, has received a considerable attention and deals with language and law problems both in theory and practice and can enrich educational materials in different fields with the latest legal developments. Forensic linguistics is offered in many accredited universities and institutions as an independent field of study and research in teaching approaches of this field of study in Iranian university context takes more academic studies. The rationale for this study is exploring the dimensions of teaching forensic linguistics in Iranian academic setting. The participants of this qualitative study were 10 university lecturers in TEFL and Law. This study collected the required data through the study of forensic linguistics in accredited universities offering this field of study, library studies, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire. The data was analyzed based on the codes derived from the questionnaires and interviews. The findings show that

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teaching forensic linguistics in Iran should highlight the need for novelty and authentic content and topics, focus on practical skills and team teaching. The findings of this research can be suitable for those interested and involved in forensic linguistics. Further research can be carried out on assessment and materials development for teaching forensic linguistics in Iran.

Keywords: Linguistics, forensic linguistics, Iranian perspective

1. Introduction

Forensic linguistics as a fast-growing field contributes to a range of disciplines and has expanded its links with psychology, sociology, business, education and law. Forensic linguistic studies have gained increasing importance since the beginning of the 21st century and as a hybrid area covers diverse domains of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Today, political, economic, social, health, and environmental changes are generating new legal challenges that can be tackled through interdisciplinary approaches. Forensic linguistics can generate novel solutions to some of current and future global issues, thus pursuing this discipline as an empirical and ethical research field can be worth attempting. Forensic linguistics brings insights in linguistics and related fields to bear on topics including legal drafting and translation, statutory interpretation, expert evidence, language use and dynamics of courtroom interaction. The need for the development of forensic linguistics encourages linguists and legal practitioners to carry out further research on all topics of forensic linguistics like authorship identification; speaker identification; trademarks conflicts; plagiarism detection; language crimes and cybercrimes and paves the way for new vistas across a wide range of disciplines. The scope, application and usefulness of forensic linguistics have been meticulously noticed in internationally renowned academic settings in the past decades and its study has been rapidly growing in the world and allocation of university majors to this field of study is indicative of the fact that teaching forensic linguistics has acquired an important place.

Since current Iranian society is immensely touched by a wide range of interdisciplinary issues, teaching interdisciplinary fields which is in

line with the macro-policies of Iran's Ministry of Higher Education has received considerable attention in the past decade. Accordingly, due to the needs of the country at national and international levels, some new MA and PhD programs such as 'International Trade Law', 'Humanitarian Rights' and 'Oil and Gas Law' have been added to other available programs in Iranian education system and forensic linguistics for the role it can play in reducing an array of legal problems that Iran is currently facing, can be added to such programs as an independent field of study and research. The study of forensic linguistics research has gained rapid momentum in Iran and many researchers have carried out research on different aspects of forensic linguistics. Therefore, this study, inspired by the way forensic linguistics is being taught in in the world, tries to find out what can be appropriate for teaching forensic linguistics in Iranian academic context. As far as the review of the related literature allows us to know, no thorough research has been uniquely conducted on teaching forensic linguistics for Iranian university context. Thus, this research tries to discover the extent of similarity or difference of teaching forensic linguistics in Iran and the major modules that can better function and ultimately solve law and language-related problems in Iran. To this end, this study defines forensic linguistics, briefly reviews its history and development, reviews the highlights of forensic linguistics research in Iran and investigates the modules that are being taught in internationally recognized programs in forensic linguistics.

1.1. Research questions

This qualitative study probed the following questions:

1. How similar or different should teaching forensic linguistics in Iran with those of western countries be?
2. What are the major modules that need to be included in a program in forensic linguistics in Iranian university context?
3. How can teaching forensic linguistics adequately function in Iranian university context?
4. What skills can students learn from teaching forensic linguistics?

2. Literature Review

2.1. What is forensic linguistics?

The study of language and law has seen explosive growth in recent decades. Law and language meet in a wide range of settings. Language is an inseparable part of law and it shares common boundaries with other disciplines such as medicine, business, finance, history, sociology and psychology. Law has become inextricably intertwined with language and culture. Legal terms and concepts used in everyday talk are often not identified with clarity so they are interpreted with different implications. This calls for all the stakeholders of language and law to be alert to its consequences. Sometimes the differences in courtroom practices over one subject in two countries are highly significant. This challenge is surely well worth pondering by researchers who care about the functioning of legal systems mainly in civil-law and common-law traditions and those who can ask linguists to shed light on legal problems. Language mostly deals with human issues in legal discourse and it can tackle inequality, discrimination, violence, language rights, interpretation of laws, pragmatics of legal discourse, analytic approaches to power and justice and it is actually key in promulgation of laws, issuing subpoenas and warrants, questioning suspects, giving testimony, writing contracts and claiming.

Forensic linguistics is the application of linguistic knowledge, methods and insights to the context of crime investigation, trial, and judicial procedure. Forensic linguistics enhances an interdisciplinary reflection among researchers and students and promotes a closer understanding among different disciplines. Forensic linguistics deals with issues in the legal system that requires linguistic expertise. An early application of forensic linguistics in the United States was related to the status of trademarks as words or phrases in the language. During the early days of forensic linguistics in the United Kingdom, the legal defence for many criminal cases questioned the authenticity of police statements. The discipline of forensic linguistics involves a range of experts and researchers in different areas of the field. Creating the opportunity for scholars working in different disciplines to share their views and insights into various

dimensions underlying legal discourse can help expand the research domain in forensic linguistics. Political scientists, legal linguists, media specialists, sociologists and many others can add value to the study of forensic linguistics by considering law-related phenomena and processes in their fields. The phrase “forensic linguistics” first appeared in 1968 when Jan Svartvik, a professor of linguistics, used it in an analysis of statements by Timothy John Evans. An early application of forensic linguistics in the United States was related to the status of trademarks as words or phrases in the language. Forensic linguistics as a branch of Applied Linguistics centers on challenges of the interface between language and law and focuses on problem-solving and as an expertise can help analyze the language where it assumes a legal function. 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 as an umbrella term includes law enforcement, judicial matters, legislation, disputes, ethics, courtroom discourse, and plagiarism (Coulthard and Johnson, 2010). Forensic linguistics explores how and where language works in legal setting, how and why people understand and misunderstand each other and how lawyers and judges create meaning using legal words. In addition, 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). 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 prevention of injustice and promotion of ethics in societies. According to ‘Center for Strategy Development and Linguistic Diplomacy’ (2016), the scope of forensic linguistic studies has been generally on the language in legal products, language in courts and language as evidence and it covers issues pertaining to authorship, discourse analysis, language structure, linguistic proficiency, language honesty, language style of forensic, forensic pho-

netics and dialectology.

The development in forensic linguistics research can be divided into before and after 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 within the court system and secondly, tried to improve methodologies to make this discipline comprehensible to non-experts. In the past forty years, many books and academic papers have been published on theoretical and practical aspects of forensic linguistics. The theoretical studies mostly have centered on subject orientation, contents and methods and the link between language and law namely 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. The practical studies have mainly focused on linguistic analysis, the language of the court, court interpreting and translation and expert witness. Nowadays, forensic linguistics studies include the use of language as evidence for the forensic comparison of oral and written texts to achieve different objectives of its practice. Therefore, teaching forensic linguistics has generally centered on handwriting analysis and authorship attribution, development of methodologies, rights of individuals in legal procedures and the status of trademarks, the application of linguistics and sociolinguistics to legal issues, the relationship between law and language, legal pragmatics, legal language, the language of the court, the court translator/interpreter, expert witness, teaching methodology, practice and application, the language of the court, legislative language, judicial and administrative language. This shows that, practice and research define forensic linguistics as a subject in universities around the world.

2.2. Forensic linguistics research in Iran

In the past decade, research on different aspects of forensic linguistics has received more attention in Iran. Accordingly, some national conferences have been held and some books and many academic papers have

been published. The focus of the studies has been mostly on characteristics of legal texts, plain legal language, legal discourse, language and law, prevention of crime, improving the quality of translation, legal phonology, morphology, semantics, discourse analysis and pragmatics, the ambiguity of language of lawyers and judges in interactions with their clients, police investigations, plagiarism, crime detection in cyberspace and language crimes, the analysis of English-Persian legal translation and interpreting. Major topics in the field of forensic linguistics in the past decade by Iranian Linguists are 'A new approach to identify crimes in Iranian society: Forensic Linguistics' (Aghagolzadeh, Momeni, Asi, Farajiha, 2010), Linguistic analysis of language crimes: forensic linguistics approach, (Momeni, 2011, 'Forensic linguistics: A brief overview of the key elements' (Ariani, Sajedi. Sajedi, 2014), 'Forensic Linguistics in the Light of Crime Investigation' (Ramezani, Khosousi Sani, Moghadam, 2016), and 'Perspectives of forensic linguistic research in Iran' (Seyari, Bagheri, 2019). In addition, forensic linguistics has recently been offered as a two-unit module at PhD program in the field of Linguistics and at Iran's Police Academy in the field of criminology. This shows that forensic linguistics is fairly a new concept in Iran and surely further research is required to be carried out in this context and it can expand in a wide range of domains 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.

Considering all the academic efforts, the effectiveness of the role of forensic linguists is not yet clearly known both to the legal authorities and to the public. Thus, the necessity of the role of forensic linguists in legal challenges is vague. An expert in forensic linguistics can help detect crime by providing valid evidence and more importantly it can help prevent crime since it basically has more power to prevent than to cure. Forensic linguists can establish ethical and behavioral standards by creating common societal values, identities and norms. Forensic linguistics can help Iranian courts and police in attaining fair judgment, creating a safer society, solving language problems in legal context, drafting binding contracts and generally in preserving and vindicating the rights

of legal and real entities. In Iran, the official language is Farsi but it is not the mother tongue of many Iranians. Iran hosts a wide variety of local languages and dialects and this can make it difficult to vindicate justice in Iranian legal settings for many are not able to truly express their legal challenges and will to courts or even in notary public offices as the common setting for legal interactions. What seems to be necessary in Iranian legal setting is the presence of intralingual interpreters and translators so that people of different language backgrounds can experience justice. Those Iranians who are not able to speak and understand Farsi have this civil right to have chartered intralingual language experts in dealing with their legal affairs. Without the help of court interpreters and translators many lose their basic rights in knowing their rights and liabilities. It is unethical to expect every citizen from different academic backgrounds to understand complicated legal terms and concepts. Internet-related crimes such as unsolicited emails and text messages, cyber bullying, slander, calumny among many other crime types, are of the areas that forensic linguist can help people of the country and the authorities. The role and influence of social media on the society at large and the youth, in particular cannot be ignored and it takes experts to provide with prevention-based solutions. Teaching forensic linguistics in Iran should bring together law, linguistics, anthropology, psychology and other scholars so that they can find sustainable solutions for a wide range of language and law related challenges that currently exist in the country.

2.3. Teaching forensic linguistics

Educational policy is changing globally, and steps are now being taken, in some countries, to deliver legal competences in the curriculum, including in primary and secondary education. In a time of global, technological and societal change, it is important that today's students are adequately trained and equipped as active citizens of tomorrow. Accordingly, since legal issue are embedded in daily affairs of everyday life, the importance of delivering legal skills in different levels of education should win more attention. For instance, language tests as part of immigration policy are used to provide access to education and employ-

ment. Therefore, due to the frequency of legal issues in everyday life, it seems necessary to teach key law-related topics to learners via academic books. Legal language is frequently used in a number of ways so it would be ideal if it is covered in foreign language materials and textbooks.

Collaborative decision-making on legal cases, learning by doing where students can experience innovative and experiential learning opportunities, supporting and facilitating where educators provide opportunities for students to solve legal cases and allowing time for reflection where educators allow time for reflection both during and after the learning process are among principles in forensic linguistic modules. Whilst forensic linguistics is not an entirely new phenomenon, with some educators already familiar with some of legal practices, definitions of forensic linguistic education can to some degree differ from country to country. Many universities and institutions in the world either have directly turned to teaching forensic linguistics at undergraduate, masters and PhD levels or indirectly offer courses and programs linked with language and law. Review of such programs indicates that teaching forensic linguistics has generally centered on authorship attribution, development of methodologies, rights of individuals in legal procedures, trademarks, the application of linguistics and sociolinguistics to legal issues, the relationship between law and language, legal pragmatics, legal language and culture, the language of the court, court interpreting, legal translation and expert witness. Consequently, practice, research and pedagogy define forensic linguistics as an academic subject. More specifically, review of MA programs in forensic linguistics in the leading universities of the field such as Aston, Cardiff and Pompeu Fabra shows that teaching forensic linguistics provides the students with theory and practice to use language in legal contexts. In these programs, the students have the opportunity to undertake taught and practical modules where they can work on an authentic research project on a forensic linguistic topic. The teaching combines discussion of theoretical issues and practical challenges raised in legal settings with some focus on the development of practical research skills. The required skills are promoted via lectures, seminars, group discussions, and guidance is provided for research undertaken in a team project. The learning activities usually include interactive dis-

cussions of topics and student-led presentations mostly on phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, dialectology, and sociolinguistics.

Unlike other linguistics programs, teaching materials are drawn from forensic cases ensuring that the students will gain the best possible insight into the field and that the program is relevant, up to date, and based on the realities of professional practice. The teaching aims to explore the specific application of linguistics to cases involving legal and criminal activities and the students learn to critique judicial procedures from a linguistic point of view and learn how to perform analyses that investigate a wide variety of documents. Besides, such programs center on methods of data collection and analysis in the examination of legal evidence. The core modules offered in most of the internationally accredited MA programs are 'Linguistics in legal contexts', 'Analyzing discourse', 'Forensic inference and statistics, and research methodology', 'Practical applications in linguistics', 'Introduction to forensic speech science', 'Language as Evidence', 'Legal and Ethical Issues in Forensic Linguistics' and 'Dissertation'. Upon successful completion of such programs, the students are expected to receive a solid grounding in forensic linguistics and they have the chance to develop relevant practical skills and, they achieve data analysis skills in legal discourse contexts and obtain a critical understanding of the work of linguists as advisers and activists on legal contexts.

Teaching forensic linguistics should enable the students to display a systematic knowledge of legal discourse and pragmatics and an understanding of linguistic structures and their place within a system of communication with an awareness of current research trends in law. Forensic linguistics students should be aware of what is happening linguistically in legal interactions and be able to carry out and evaluate linguistic analysis for better understanding of legal procedures, gain knowledge of legal language and the way it might be exploited for different purposes, develop an understanding of legal speech acts, gain proficiency in reading and writing a variety of legal texts and in using computer software, develop interpreting and reasoning abilities to render solutions to legal problems. Forensic linguistics provides opportunities to enhance career in the

fields of international business, human resource management, Company Law and social policy. Interdisciplinary approaches to teaching seem to be quintessential in education and teaching forensic linguistics which on one hand, lies in the fact that the exigencies of current Iranian society, both domestically and internationally, prompt us to take the teaching of interdisciplinary fields of study such as forensic linguistics into serious consideration so that it can serve a wide range of practical purposes for the Iranian society both academically and non-academically. A range of key law-related concepts, such as “law” itself, “authority”, and others should be overtly discussed in forensic linguistics classes and seminars because they are polysemous and have semantic vagueness. A legal word might mean the same or different from what it means in ordinary usage, therefore, analysis of words in ordinary language and legal language with reference to recent cases should be taken into account. Another important item that calls for direct teaching is the translation of legal terms and concepts. Modernization of Iranian legal system summons some Western legal concepts that sometimes clash with the traditional assumptions that need to be translated. For teaching the grammar of law, it should be considered that the operation of law which is done through linguistic means is mostly controlled by structural features of the language on which it is operated. Considering all the items, forensic linguistic education relies on real-world learning experiences being delivered in a variety of settings and whilst this can include teaching in a more traditional classroom setting, it is also important to consider what opportunities exist for learning delivery beyond the classroom. Offering practical first-hand experience as a part of teaching and learning can offer new horizons and experiences to students.

3. Method

In this qualitative study, an ‘open-ended questionnaire’ and ‘semi-structured interviews’ as two qualitative data collection instruments were used to elicit information on the way forensic linguistics should be taught in Iranian university setting by taking local and global aspects of teaching forensic linguistics into consideration. Besides, the modules and the syl-

labus for the MSc program in forensic linguistics at Aston University, UK, as a valid backbone for this study was meticulously studied.

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study fall into the ‘questionnaire’ and the ‘interview’ participants. The researcher invited 10 university lecturers in TEFL and Law to answer the questionnaire of the study and participate in the interview section of the research. Half of the participants were assistant professors of TEFL at the Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch and the other half were assistant professors of Law at Tehran University, Bar Association University and Islamic Azad University. The participants spoke Farsi as their mother tongue and they ranged from 35 years of age to 53. Six of the participants were male and four females. All of the participants’ experience in teaching language and law programs was more than ten semesters. The questionnaire was administered in English and the participants were proficient enough in English to answer the questions. The interview section consists of interviews with four participants. All the interview participants were male. The interviews were conducted face to face and were transcribed for analysis. The following tables detail the interview and questionnaire participants’ information.

Table 1: Background Information of Questionnaire Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	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	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	Iranian
5	39	Female	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA	PhD	Iranian
6	37	Female	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA,MA	PhD	Iranian

Table 2: Background Information of Interview Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Years of teaching experience	Type of school/university	Grade taught	Academic Degree	Nationality
1	53	Male	More than 10 semesters	State University, Tehran University	BA,MA,PhD	PhD	Iranian
2	38	Male	More than 10 semesters	Bar Association University, Tehran Branch	BA	PhD	Iranian
3	40	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University, Karaj	BA	PhD	Iranian
4	43	Male	More than 10 semesters	Islamic Azad University	BA	PhD	Iranian

3.2. Materials and instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this study are an open-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

3.2.1. Open-ended questionnaires

The questionnaires were used because they have the potential to gather data quickly and cost effectively from the participants. The open-ended questions were designed to invite longer, individualized responses and allowed space for description. The questionnaire includes demographic questions and questions about teaching forensic linguistics in Iran. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was 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 two lecturers in TEFL who teach at Islamic Azad University, Tehran, South Branch to pass their judgment on how far the questions were the representative of 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. 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 teach, (d) their experience in teaching ESP/EAP, and (e) the potential modules for teaching forensic linguistics as an MA program in Iranian university context.

3.2.2. Semi-structured interviews

By setting up semi-structured interviews, the researcher tried to generate rich, descriptive data to answer the research questions. The semi-structured interviews combined a pre-determined set of open questions with the opportunity for the interviewees to explain their opinions on the aims of the research.

3.3. Procedure

The expected data was derived from the researcher's library readings, semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaire and consultations. Using more than one data collection instrument helped the researcher to obtain richer data and validate the research findings. The researcher reviewed the related literature on teaching forensic linguistics, identified the knowledge gap, and contextualized the aims of the study in the literature and more specifically studied the outlines, modules and teaching of MSc program in forensic linguistics at Aston University, UK, as the backbone of and guide for teaching forensic linguistics for Iranian academic setting. 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 about the purpose of the study and were told that they would not directly benefit from the study. The researcher assured the participants that the collected information in the research would be completely anonymous. They were also informed about the approximate time they wanted to spend for answering the questionnaire and attending the interviews. Their participation in this survey was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time. The participants' consent was obtained to use the data for the purpose of this study.

The questionnaires were conducted as online among the participants

of the study and they were asked to submit their answers by email at an appointed time. All the interviews were conducted in Farsi 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. 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. By preparing the outline of questions in advance, the researcher facilitated the discussion in a flexible manner to allow the interview participants to freely express their opinions. Recording the answers was done through taking notes. 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 so that the participants felt free to express their opinions and experiences in relation to the research questions. Each interview took some 30 minutes. The researcher came up with some follow-up questions to look for more detailed information when necessary. In order to add to the authenticity and veracity of the questionnaire, the researcher designed open-ended questions to obtain the participants' views and experiences on the issues pertaining to the aims of the study. The participants were encouraged to provide more meaningful answers based on their knowledge and feelings. The open-ended questions were designed to invite longer, individualized responses and allowed space for description.

4. Data Analysis

Analysis in qualitative research is a process of successive approximation toward an accurate description and interpretation of the phenomena (Wiersma, 1995). Accordingly, firstly, the researcher classified the responses and tried to identify 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 frequently returned to the data to seek deeper levels of meaning. The method of reporting the qualitative data in this study is based on the

recurrent themes stated by the participants; as 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 are derived from a thorough examination of the data by reviewing the completed questionnaires and the transcripts of semi-structured interviews.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Questionnaire results

The analysis of the collected data from the questionnaire participants show that teaching forensic linguistics should be based on authentic and practical materials that can help the students to get a good grasp of the skills they need when they want to apply their forensic linguistic understanding into practice and it should assure the students get what they are expected to deal with in practice. Therefore, teaching forensic linguistics in Iran should be mostly based on genuine cases available in Iranian legal settings such as courts, notary public offices and anywhere else that legal issues are of concern. Teaching forensic linguistics should take the nature of legal language into consideration and explore a range of theoretical and practical issues concerning this field of study so that the students understand the main theories and practices of forensic linguistics. Teaching forensic linguistics calls for teachers who have mastery on law and linguistics in order to include a set of real-life activities aiming at empowering the students to deal with legal challenges and it should focus on Iranian legal discourse since legal analysis can build practical and methodological frameworks for teaching this field of study. To be more precise, discourse analysis of legal documents should add psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic points for legal purposes, linguistic study of legal documents, legal stylistics, the effect of legal issues in professional life, analyzing different aspects of language crimes, teaching and testing of legal language and translating legal texts. The nature of forensic linguistics requires innovation in teaching. Therefore, legal issues, including civil and penal, with lots of subtleties and nuances should be included in teaching forensic linguistics in Iranian academic setting. The outcome of teaching forensic linguistics can contribute to the reduction of crime rate by familiarizing the students on common

language and legal rights, updating contents of teaching at universities, colleges and departments of language, law and other related fields by real-life materials that can be conducive to better public understanding of language and law. Finally, the questionnaire participants believed that due to the interdisciplinary nature of this field, team teaching is the best option for teaching it.

Table 3: The Themes Extracted from the Questionnaires

Authentic and practical materials
Teaching based on genuine cases available in Iranian legal setting
Teaching should be relevant, up to date, and based on the realities of professional practice
Focus on legal discourse for building practical and methodological frameworks for teaching forensic linguistics

5.2. Interview results

The interview participants held that teaching forensic linguistics, firstly, should cover issues pertaining to public law, civil rights, business law and some topics in personal relationships such as marriage and divorce. Secondly, it would be ideal if it covers concepts of freedom, responsibilities, rights, the development of legal language, legal writing, the ‘Plain Language Movement’ and the like. Thirdly, teaching forensic linguistics should not be confined to theories only; therefore, teachers who have mastery over law and language and know the legal challenges of current Iranian society should teach this field of study. The students under the supervision of their teachers should linguistically analyze a number of real legal cases on instances of language crimes. Fourthly, the materials and teaching should emphasize on the role of prevention and reinforcement for the culture of peace and compromise. Fifthly, the interview participants unanimously believed that due to the interdisciplinary nature of forensic linguistics, team teaching can be the best option for teaching this field of study yet they believed that since the practice of team teaching is not common in Iranian education system, it might take some time for it to be institutionalized but they strongly held that the collaboration between language and law experts can best serve the purpose of teaching forensic linguistics. On the extent of the similarities and differences in teaching forensic linguistics in Iran and that of western countries, the interview participants stated that the differences

in the objectives of the application of forensic linguistics in different judicial systems make educational administrators encourage materials developers to come up with context-specific materials and subsequently the teaching is expected to be in line with the needs of Iranian society both domestically and internationally. They pointed out that religious tenets, to some extent, affect the function, practice and the mechanism of application of forensic linguistics in different countries. As an example, they mentioned that Islamic jurisprudence has a maximum role in Iranian Constitution and subsequently, nearly all court verdicts and judgments are decided based on it while this is not the case with European legal system where in most of European countries, Civil Law is the benchmark and, in the UK, it is the Common Law that governs the legal affairs.

Table 4: The Themes Extracted from the Interviews

Mélange of theory and practice
Emphasis on the role of prevention
Covering issues pertaining to public law, civil rights, business law
Team teaching by the collaboration between language and law experts
Inclusion of concepts such as freedom, responsibilities, rights, legal language in the teaching materials

5.3. Discussion

Highlighting the need for novelty and authentic content and topics in teaching forensic linguistics means that delivering traditional lectures for such programs cannot guarantee quality results because teaching forensic linguistics requires both theoretical and practical skills and more cooperation, blended learning and team teaching. The collaboration between language and law experts can best serve the purpose of teaching functional aspects of forensic linguistics. Therefore, along with lectures on major theoretical aspects of forensic linguistics, the teaching should include seminars, practical work, workshop trainings, visiting courts, reviewing and analyzing court verdicts under the supervision of teachers by reporting back on what the students observe in courts and learn from court verdict analysis. To illustrate, samples of legal documents such as court verdicts, international covenants and the like should be used in classes so that the students put what they learn in classes into practice under the supervision of their teachers. Such practices enable the students to acquire the necessary experience to analyze disputed texts, and

recognize language crimes. Teaching forensic linguistics summons the use of digital materials and multimedia, therefore, blended learning should have a clear role in curriculum, syllabus and materials. To support the notion of blended learning, it can be mentioned that blended learning offers an opportunity to get to the core of practical aspects of forensic linguistics and the students can have the chance to produce some contents such as YouTube videos for their classes to independently explore and add to the contents because the learners' active participation is of paramount importance in such practice-oriented fields of study. Blended learning can be used for teaching most modules in forensic linguistics; thus, the teachers along with their abilities in teaching reading skills and law-related terminology, technical expressions and grammar used in legal language, are expected to be digitally literate.

The nature of forensic linguistics calls for novelty in teaching, learning, assessment, design and content of materials. In other words, learning outcomes and activities, teaching and the assessment should be inter-related. Teaching forensic linguistics can update contents of language teaching and it can better public understanding of language and law. In addition, exposure to meaningful input such as attention to pragmatic meaning, communicative purpose, relevance of tasks and student needs, the problems and themes arising from authentic legal interactions, legal aspects of language use and critical thinking should be taken into consideration for teaching forensic linguistics. Furthermore, carrying out discourse analysis of wills, speech, and language units such as syntax, lexicon, and phonology can add psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic notes to developing teaching materials and books, publishing articles and dissertations, designing lessons for legal purposes, developing dictionary of conceptual terms in law, discourse analysis of legal texts, linguistic study of legal documents, legal stylistics, the effect of legal issues in life, analyzing different aspects of language crimes, teaching and testing legal language and translating legal texts.

Knowledge of forensic linguistics is highly recommended in order for everyone to combat injustice in society. Therefore, forensic linguistics can be used as part of every curriculum for the purposes of awareness of linguistic rights and legal responsibilities. Forensic linguistics has played a

pivotal role in simplifying legal language, developing training programs, analyzing legal discourse and professionalizing court interpreting. Teaching forensic linguistics should combine a broad-based academic experience and applied workshops so that, students are equipped with an array of skills and experiences in the analysis of language in legal and other real-world settings. All materials and contents in such field are means to educate people on the rights and liabilities in legal documentation and interactions, to build capacity for constant education and research in legal issues and to contribute to communities beyond academia such as police, legal consultancy agencies, law enforcement agencies and any real and legal entities who in a way deal with language and law. Teaching forensic linguistics should improve professional attitude, public awareness and proper policy making and provide the students with appropriate training that leads to obtaining jobs in the field of forensic linguistics. Indubitably, in order to properly materialize the aims of teaching forensic linguistics, the teachers should have subject knowledge and high language competency and proficiency. Knowing law, and its vocabulary, having experienced law cases, thinking of holism in teaching, familiarity with ESP, being motivational and creative would be ideal qualifications for teachers of forensic linguistics. The teaching is expected to explore a range of theoretical and practical issues in forensic linguistics, guide the student through an examination of the main developments in forensic linguistics up to its current status and develop the student's critical understanding of research in forensic linguistics. More specifically, teachers of forensic linguistics programs in Iran need to have relative command in English, Farsi and Arabic because English is global in the sense that it is used in academic, business and political contexts. They need to know Farsi because it is the official language in Iran and nearly all legal documents are drafted in Farsi and finally, they need to know Arabic because many legal concepts and terms used in Iranian legal texts are based on Islamic jurisdiction.

6. Conclusion and Implications

Forensic linguistics has acquired an important place at internationally accredited universities and research institutions and it can bring about

a wide range of benefits for Iranian academic setting as well. Social challenges are embedded with complex issues and dealing with them requires collaboration of interdisciplinary thoughts. Teaching interdisciplinary programs that focus on social problems is key to innovation and sustainable solutions. This need is felt and partially met in Iranian education system by establishing a range of interdisciplinary fields of study in the past decade and the humble contribution of this study is in line with this academic movement and a small step towards materialization of the goals of forensic linguistic. Teaching forensic linguistics is indeed a dire need for every fabric of current Iranian academic context. Laying a reliable foundation for teaching forensic linguistics in Iranian academic setting can pave the way for tackling prevalent legal challenges in current Iranian society academically through functional modules that instill essential skills to the interests and ambitions of Iranian students to ameliorate the current legal status quo in Iranian legal system. Teaching forensic linguistics should train students to learn the key tools that serve as the base of linguistics including: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, dialectology, and sociolinguistics. However, unlike other linguistics programs, real life illustrations and teaching examples are drawn from an array of original law cases. Teaching forensic linguistics should prepare students for public and private sector employment in domestic and international arenas in careers relating to law and language in government and private organizations, academic institutions, business, industry, and communications. It is axiomatic that teaching forensic linguistics needs a bit of a customization in order to meet the needs of its Iranian stakeholders. Therefore, teaching forensic linguistics in Iran should, in general, be like other available programs in the world and in particular, it should meet the academic needs of Iranian university context by training experts that are able to carry out research in forensic linguistics, provide linguistic services in civil and criminal cases, know a detailed understanding of the principles of forensic linguistics research methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative analysis and demonstrate an applied understanding of the essential concepts, knowledge and skills to assist in legal investigations.

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