

2017

Language Use in Forensic Settings

Emily Faith Wiegers

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, ewiege1@lsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wiegers, Emily Faith, "Language Use in Forensic Settings" (2017). *LSU Master's Theses*. 4449.
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/4449

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.

LANGUAGE USE IN FORENSIC SETTINGS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of Geography and Anthropology

by

Emily Faith Wieggers

B.A., Queens College of the City University of New York, 2011

May 2017

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank all of the individuals that participated in this research. Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions, as well as for your patience with my first attempt at research. Your responses have helped me to expand my awareness of the many aspects of forensic science. This thesis would not have been possible without you.

I would also like to thank my committee for helping me to explore a topic that incorporated my interest in both forensic science and anthropology. I gained a deeper understanding of these concepts during our conversations, and I appreciate your expertise. I know that I could not have developed this thesis on my own. Thank you for taking the time to be my teachers.

Dr. Ginesse Listi, for nearly two years you have served as my advisor, Chair of my committee, and my mentor. Thank you for encouraging me to become a successful student; not only have you shared your knowledge with me, you have also taught me how to independently find and interpret information for myself. You have given me the tools I need to succeed in this challenging line of work, and I truly appreciate the open and honest learning experience that you have provided. With your guidance, graduate school has not just been another step in my education - I have become a better person because of it. Thank you for accepting me as your student.

Dr. Mary Jill Brody, it was your lecture on linguistic register that originally sparked the idea for this thesis. Thank you for serving as Co-Chair on my committee, and for providing the balance necessary to incorporate the scope of professional discourse into this topic. I always

looked forward to our “brainstorming” sessions because I knew I would walk out of your office a more capable researcher. I am grateful that you provided me with the mantra “*You* are the expert,” a statement that has helped me to find my confidence when I have felt overwhelmed.

Dr. Teresa Wilson, thank you agreeing to be a member of my committee and for taking the time to help me develop as an anthropologist. I realized early on that you would be an invaluable part of my education. On multiple occasions you introduced me to ideas that served as reminders of how intellectually stimulating and complex the field of anthropology can be. I am grateful for your mentorship, consistently offering guidance and advice throughout my time as a student. You have been the voice of reason during times of stress, your calm, reassuring demeanor serving as an ideal model that I hope to one day emulate.

I would like to thank the American Academy of Forensic Science for allowing me to survey its members for their knowledge on this topic. Without the help of the Academy, it would not have been possible for me to accumulate such a broad wealth of responses. Thank you for helping me with such an important step in my research.

During the defense portion of this thesis, the concept of mentorship was further discussed. My committee reminded me that some mentors may be hidden because they are identified by a different title. Nicki Klein, thank you for taking on this hidden role of mentor, I am sorry I did not recognize it sooner. You were there to walk me through many awkward moments as I slowly learned how to be a graduate student. Even though you moved on to your next adventure during my second year, you have had a lasting impact.

To the remaining staff of the FACES Laboratory, Maria Allaire and Larry Livaudais, thank you for your kindness and for allowing me into your professional work environment. A valuable part of my education was learned through my assistantship. Thank you.

I would also like to thank the staff and faculty members with the Louisiana State University Department of Geography and Anthropology. I appreciate that many of you took the time to inquire how my research was going, and for your continued interest in helping me do well in all of my classes.

Finally, I am thankful for all of my family members who provided support during my time in graduate school. Despite the physical distance between us, I always felt comforted by your words of encouragement during many of our conversations over the phone. Aunt Linda, when I first began to realize just how challenging this part of my education was going to be, you told me that I could eat an entire elephant, one bite at a time. Thank you for helping me to keep things in perspective, I hope I make you all proud.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments.....	ii
List of Figures.....	vii
Abstract.....	viii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	6
Discourse and Register in Linguistic Anthropology.....	9
The Body as an (In)active Participant.....	11
Chapter 3: Materials and Methods.....	14
Chapter 4: Survey Results.....	16
Question 1.....	16
Question 2.....	17
Question 3.....	18
Question 4.....	19
Question 5.....	20
Question 6.....	21
Question 7.....	22
Question 8.....	23
Question 9.....	25
Question 10.....	26
Question 11.....	27
Question 12.....	28
Question 13.....	28
Question 14.....	29
Question 15.....	31
Chapter 5: Interview Results.....	33
Interview 1.....	33
Interview 2.....	36
Interview 3.....	37
Interview 4.....	39
Interview 5.....	41
Chapter 6: Discussion.....	43

AAFS Survey.....	44
Interviews.....	47
Influence of Audience and Location.....	48
Mentorship.....	49
Common Sense.....	51
Experience.....	52
Use of Humor.....	54
Presence of the Deceased.....	56
Anthropology.....	58
 Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	 61
 References.....	 63
 Appendix 1: General Descriptions of AAFS Sections (Ubelaker, 2013; AAFS, 2016a).....	 65
Appendix 2: IRB Approval.....	66
Appendix 3: AAFS Survey Consent Form.....	67
Appendix 4: Interview Consent Form.....	68
Appendix 5: Questions for AAFS Survey and Interviews.....	70
 Vita.....	 73

List of Figures

1. AAFS survey respondents by sex.....	16
2. AAFS survey respondents versus membership by section.....	18
3. AAFS survey respondents grouped by primary position.....	19
4. AAFS survey respondents grouped by employment agency.....	20
5. AAFS survey respondents grouped by years of experience.....	21
6. Individuals that affect discourse when present.....	23
7. Top six response themes when asked how speech is affected by the presence of other individuals.....	24
8. Locations that affect discourse.....	25
9. Top six response themes when asked how speech is affected by location.....	26
10. Initial instruction for appropriate language use.....	27
11. Consequence for inappropriate language use.....	29
12. Contact in the work space.....	32

Abstract

Understanding what constitutes proper communication is an important component of interaction for forensic science professionals. Using concepts from linguistic anthropology, this thesis recognizes patterns of discourse and register among individuals working within a forensic setting. Data collected from a survey distributed to members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and from interviews with forensic professionals working in the state of Louisiana were used to analyze individual perceptions of language use in professional settings. Results show that variation among individuals within the forensic disciplines affects speech. Other determinants of proper speech include audience and the space within which the communication occurs. As an individual transitions into and accumulates experience within the profession of forensic science, various patterns of language use can be observed. This thesis concludes that professionals exhibit metadiscourse awareness in forensic settings.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Communication, in all forms, is present in all aspects of human interaction. One approach to better understand how individuals communicate is through the study of linguistic anthropology. As one of the four subdisciplines to the holistic study of humans, linguistic anthropology examines the broad and abstract concept of language use. For this thesis, one particular use of language within a professional setting is examined, specifically, forensic discourse and associated variations of register. As defined by Asif Agha (1999, p. 216), “a register is a linguistic repertoire that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices.” For all speakers, registers will vary depending on where and to whom they are speaking.

Linguistic registers, how we speak, are an important component of forensic science work. As described by Ubelaker (2013, p. 1), “the forensic sciences represent the application of knowledge and methodology in various scientific disciplines towards the resolution of legal issues.” To better understand how linguistic registers occur within a forensic context, discourse in the various disciplines will be observed. Within the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), a professional organization for the forensic science community, these various scientific disciplines are identified as eleven sections: Anthropology, Criminalistics, Digital and Multimedia Sciences, Engineering Sciences, General, Jurisprudence, Odontology, Pathology/ Biology, Psychiatry and Behavioral Science, Questioned Documents, and Toxicology (AAFS, 2016a) (table summary of general job descriptions is provided in Appendix 1). Forensic professionals that become members of the AAFS are required to affiliate with one of these

sections. These sections are outlined in *Forensic Science: Current Issues, Future Directions*, edited by Douglas Ubelaker (Ubelaker, 2013). In the chapters associated with each section, authors provide a summary of how they are involved with forensic science and ways in which they contribute to their respective discipline. These chapters depict the diversity that exists within forensic science, including a wide range of job titles, work environments, education requirements, and material analyzed (Ubelaker, 2013). Furthermore, each section varies regarding how often and whether or not the forensic scientist comes into contact with the body, the public, family members, students, or other professionals. Variation among the different forensic disciplines allows for the probability that the discourse and register used within each discipline will also vary. Although there exists a broader field of forensic science, this thesis will use concepts of discourse and register from linguistic anthropology to better understand language use among professionals within forensic settings.

Understanding the proper use of registers and the discourse that they represent are essential to professionals in order to conduct work in a respectful and ethical manner. An emphasis on speech is notable when considering that forensic science is an academic discipline dealing with the delicate subject matter of human life and death (Passalacqua et al., 2014). However, not all work within the discipline has equal exposure to death. Varying degrees of exposure to human remains is expected to influence an individual's use of language. The fluctuating nature of work conducted within forensic science will be reflected in the style of register and discourse used by different types of professionals in various situations.

While a student of forensic anthropology, my first day of employment as a Graduate Assistant for the forensic laboratory at Louisiana State University (LSU) involved a meet-and-

greet with co-workers as well as discussion of professional expectations. In addition to receiving a ring of keys and taking a tour of the facilities, the more formalized portion of the introduction involved a serious conversation regarding ethical discourse. It was made clear by laboratory staff that I was to be mindful of how and what to say and what not to say within the lab, and also to pay attention to whom I spoke about work related topics. The gravity of protocol was unmistakable as I read and signed release forms that outlined levels of academic and legal penalty should the rules be broken. It was through this discussion that I began to learn and utilize appropriate register.

For individuals starting forensic work, the discussion of how to properly speak may or may not be introduced in the form of ethical guidelines. While not specified in the Society of Forensic Anthropologists' (SOFA) "Guidelines for Professional Conduct," discussion regarding proper discourse is developed under the concept of conducting oneself respectfully in addition to keeping privileged communication confidential (SOFA, n.d.). Under the rubric of ethics it becomes possible to instruct what constitutes proper behavior and discourse topics, as well as where and when it is inappropriate to engage certain topics. Understanding what constitutes proper language use among forensic scientists can help to establish how individuals express their interpretation of ethical conduct, as well as how the individual is evaluated by the professional community. Responses to those who violate the nuanced norms of discourse may differ depending on the type of work being conducted.

Knowing which register is appropriate to each situation is partially determined by audience and the space in which it is being used. At times, transition between registers can be gradual as it reflects physical movement between spaces and a change of those present. During

my time as a student, I have been encouraged by my superiors to gain experience in a variety of settings and situations. By observing how the behavior and language use of professionals is perceived by other social participants within each setting, appropriate behavior and speech are learned. For example, one morning before attending a scheduled autopsy, a supervisor, an undergraduate student, and I took a moment for coffee while we waited in a break room. For the undergraduate, this was to be her first viewing of a forensic autopsy. When the time came for us to relocate to the designated autopsy room, our conversation changed from a casual discussion of weather and travel to a more somber, respectful use of silence and sparse exchanges as we walked down the hall. As we entered the room, our choice of register identified us as respectful observers and was proper for the new audience - those performing the autopsy and the decedent. Drawing on my previous experience with autopsies in this room, autopsies at similar locations, as well as observing the behavior of my supervisor, I had an understanding of how I should behave. The undergraduate spoke the least, following our cues as to when and how it was appropriate to speak. Our behavior was influenced by and reflective of the polite sign painted on the tiled wall, "Please Be Quiet."

Within linguistic studies, professional settings have been analyzed using discourse analysis methods (Candlin, 2002; Coulthard, 1992; Fox, 1993; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Trawick, 1988). Currently, there exists no analytical discussion regarding the use of registers within forensic discourse. The purpose of this thesis is to determine what, if any, patterns for linguistic register exist among the different forensic science disciplines. Data about language use in forensic settings was gathered using personal experience, surveys and interviews. Responses to direct questions will help determine what influences register use and what is considered

appropriate speech. Analysis for this thesis will take a holistic approach, utilizing concepts and methods from the four subdisciplines of anthropology. A literature review referencing archaeology (Mullins, 2016; Sofaer, 2006), biological anthropology (Dominguez & Ross, 2016; Mullins, 2016; Passalacqua et al., 2014; Roach, 2003; Sofaer, 2006), cultural anthropology (Roach, 2003; Sofaer, 2006), and linguistic anthropology (Agha, 1999; Agha, 2004; Agha, 2005; Candlin, 2002; Coulthard, 1992; Fox, 1993; Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Traweek, 1988), will help to discuss concepts presented in this thesis. By taking a holistic approach to examine language use amongst the multiple disciplines within forensic science, a pattern may emerge.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The term “Forensic discourse analysis” appeared as the title for a chapter authored by Malcolm Coulthard in 1992. However, Coulthard’s use of the term “forensic discourse” varies from what I am proposing as the basis of research for this thesis. Coulthard’s (1992, p. 242) concept of forensic discourse analysis only involves two kinds of text, “handwritten contemporaneous records made by police officers of interviews with witnesses and suspects, and statements dictated by witnesses and suspects to police officers.” In his chapter, Coulthard analyzes the likelihood of authenticity and rate of fabrication for both the accused and the officer within legal interview records (Coulthard, 1992). Although Coulthard uses a linguistic approach to analyze the influence that discourse has on the generation of forensic documents, he makes no reference to register use amongst the different forensic science disciplines in a professional setting.

The identification and use of proper and improper discourse within forensic professions has been directly discussed within the literature. In a 2014 issue of *Journal of Forensic Sciences* (JFS), the official journal of the AAFS, a letter to the editor was published that addressed the issue of title selection for forensic science articles published in the JFS between 1972-2013 (Passalacqua et al., 2014). The authors of the letter questioned the professional standards behind the use of language in the titles of several forensic science papers presented at both the annual AAFS meetings as well as titles of articles published in the JFS. Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 573) remind readers that “it is we who have the distinct responsibility of continually, consciously, and conscientiously shaping our public image.”

Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 573) define their use of the terms improper, unethical, and unprofessional; “titles that are uninformative or not reflective of the actual work being presented (improper), as well as those titles which are disrespectful to the dignity of the person or subject and therefore potentially inflammatory (unethical).” The authors combine these definitions to represent unprofessional (improper and/or unethical). The letter urges readers to ask themselves “how, as individuals and as a community, do we want to present ourselves to not only our colleagues, but also to others who may have interest in the issues addressed?” (Passalacqua et al., 2014, p. 573-574). The authors identified a number of articles with titles that they have deemed unprofessional (Passalacqua et al., 2014, p. 574). To give two examples, the authors include the titles “From this Day Forward: To Have and to Hold-Spousal Rape of Asian Immigrant wives,” and “The Case of the Frustrating Floater” (Passalacqua et al., 2014, p. 574).

Passalacqua et al. (2014) express concern not only for the publication of unprofessional titles, but also what these titles will communicate to individuals outside of the discipline. Concerned with public perception, the authors refer to the titles as “rather callous, sophomoric advertisement,” reminding readers that the AAFS proceedings are published online and available to the public (Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 573).

Looking at unprofessional titles by section published in AAFS proceedings between 2002 and 2012, Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 574) found that the section of Jurisprudence published the highest number of unprofessional titles (n=14/312, 4.5%), and that both Criminalistics (n=29/1940, 1.5%) and Toxicology (n=8/533, 1.5%) published the lowest number of unprofessional titles. However, there does not appear to be any pattern of change in the number of unprofessional titles published by the AAFS sections within this decade. In contrast,

Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 574) show that the number of unprofessional titles published in JFS between 1972 and 2013 decreases over time, dropping from 0.76% during the years of 1972-1979 to 0.16% during the years of 2010-2013. The letter serves as an example of how some members of the forensic community respond to individuals who violate norms of proper discourse use.

In 2016, Virginia Dominguez and Fiona Ross published a foreword to an issue of *American Anthropologist* that included a question and answer section for the field of forensic anthropology. Citing experience with “death, war, and dissidence” in their work as sociocultural anthropologists, both authors express interest in “those anthropologists who bridge the realm of the living and the dead...” (Dominguez & Ross, 2016, p. 602). Prior to publication, Dominguez and Ross (2016, p. 603) requested forensic anthropologists from different countries answer a series of five questions that resulted in what the authors refer to as a “wide-ranging repertoire.” Only five forensic anthropologists responded to the authors’ request. Interestingly, of the four who responded to the request, one forensic anthropologist agreed to participate only on the condition of anonymity. Dominguez and Ross (2016, p. 604) recognize that “clearly much of [forensic anthropology] also involves pedagogy and practice, not to mention professional organizing and responding to questions.” According to Dominguez and Ross (2016), the anonymous anthropologist stated that going public would threaten his/her ability to continue work in an already politically hostile environment. The authors point out similarities among the responses: for example, all contributors except the anonymous respondent noted that “anthropology offers a ‘holistic’ approach to the otherwise quite technical aspects of their work, enabling them to... situation their work within a broader context” (Dominguez & Ross, 2016, p.

603). Dominguez and Ross (2016, p. 604) also state that “several respondents describe their work as healing for individuals and communities.”

Overall, a holistic approach is regarded by the forensic anthropologists that responded to the questionnaire as beneficial to understand the situation of the deceased from multiple angles, an approach not often taken by other disciplines of forensic science (Dominguez & Ross, 2016). Despite an omission of forensic anthropologists working within the United States, the publication provides a basis for comparison between the interview results of this thesis and the responses received by Dominguez and Ross (2016). The requested anonymity of the fourth participant of Dominguez and Ross’ questionnaire was reflected in a similar desire for anonymity expressed by some individuals during the survey and interview process of this thesis.

Discourse and Register in Linguistic Anthropology

Linguistic research has been conducted on discourse in a number of other disciplines. The book *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physicists* by Sharon Traweek offers an anthropological view of the professional discourse of physicists (Traweek, 1988). Traweek’s prologue acts as a guide of how to methodologically discuss professional interaction and communication within a scientific community. Although the focus on “social organization, developmental cycle, cosmology, and material culture” is discussed from a cultural perspective (Traweek, 1988, p. 157), a linguistic understanding can be gleaned from the text. Traweek (1988, p. 8) writes about “how the physicists generate the shared ground that all members of the community stand upon,” and how reputations are strategized and contested can also be understood through use of language. Drawing on personal experience, I observe parallels

between the oral traditions of forensic scientists and physicists: Traweek (1988, p. 16) notes that “it is during apprenticeship that traditions of research are passed on.”

In 1993, Gwyneth Fox compared a register she designated as 'Policeseak' with what she called 'Normalspeak' (Fox, 1993). Fox reviewed police statements and recognized significant patterns in word choice and word order unique to police when compared with the general public. Emphasis on the use of time was noted, as she claims “police officers are obsessed by time” (Fox, 1993, p. 187). According to Fox, the inclusion of time is used by police officers as a method of imposing their own structure into official statements, and to precisely describe events relative to one another within these statements (Fox, 1993). Awareness of word preference and frequency can be useful in the discussion of thesis interview responses. Together these sources provide models for understanding and discussing an analysis of linguistic discourse with a scientific focus.

Similar methodology in addition to models for applied discourse analysis can be found within a collection of articles published in the book *Research and Practice in Professional Discourse*, edited by Christopher Candlin (Candlin, 2002). Within the first section, methods for data collection and analytical theory are addressed including issues and themes that commonly arise during discourse analyses (Candlin, 2002). The second section represents applied linguistics through the use of discourse analysis and how it can be used metapragmatically by the subjects (Candlin, 2002). These sections provide guidelines and examples of how linguistic analysis can be superimposed and analyzed in a forensic setting.

It is not uncommon for forensic professionals representing various disciplines to experience regular changes of emotional gravity in a workplace when human death is a steady

component of work related activity. In these forensic settings, humor is sometimes applied as a socially acceptable discourse strategy. A linguistic reference for the use of humor appears in the 2015 book, *Power and Politeness in the Workplace* by Janet Holmes and Maria Stubbe. The book discusses many aspects of workplace discourse, dedicating one section to the function of humor amongst colleagues. Holmes and Stubbe (2015) outline several purposes of humor, including the construction of group solidarity, sustaining positions of authority, acting as a buffer or relief in stressful situations, and maintaining good relations. In forensic settings, individuals can use a humorous register to alleviate stress among speakers.

For an understanding of register use within a language community, Agha (1999; 2004; 2005) contributes a clear introduction to the concept of register acquisition as well as how regularities within registers are publicly perceived and circulated. According to Agha (2004), the identification of metapragmatic regularities expressed by users of a particular register allows for the collection and analysis of linguistic data. To appropriately incorporate linguistic terms and concepts needed for the discussion of data obtained from surveys and interviews, Alessandro Duranti's book, *Linguistic Anthropology*, provides succinct definitions and explanations of linguistic terms and concepts (Duranti, 1997).

The Body as an (In)active Participant

In the book *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*, author Mary Roach discusses her experiences with exposure to human remains and the individuals who work with them (Roach, 2003). The book offers insight into the interpretation and subsequent discussion of ethics from a standpoint outside of forensic science. The words Roach uses to describe the

appearance of and interaction with cadavers were chosen with the intent to be humorous, providing literary examples not common to forensic publications. Her writing offers examples of talk reflecting the perception of the body either as an object or as a person by speakers from various levels of experience. During a conversation with a woman responsible for handling severed heads from surgical training sessions, Roach (2003, p. 21) observes that “[she] is practicing a time-honored coping method: objectification. For those who must deal with human corpses regularly, it is easier (and, I suppose, more accurate) to think of them as objects, not people”. By stating that the objectification of human remains becomes easier with time, Roach suggests that an individual’s perception of human remains is expected to change as experience accumulates. Additionally, how proximity to decedents affects behavior is also addressed. When telling of the irritation she felt towards the mortician during her mother’s funeral, Roach admits, “But of course I said nothing. Death makes us helplessly polite” (Roach, 2003, p. 13).

In a 2016 blog post titled “Abhorrent Bodies: Burying Evil,” Paul Mullins presents several examples of how societies respond to the corpses of individuals deemed “evil” during their lifetime. As a historical archaeologist interested in contemporary materiality, Mullins touches on the aspect of the human body continuing to represent a social actor after death. Additionally, the effacement or denial of burial sites is mentioned as a method to prevent the landscape from symbolizing the offensive ideology promulgated during an individual’s lifetime. As an example, Mullins (2016, para. 5) discusses the denial of formal burial places for Nazi war criminals, including the remains of Adolf Hitler, Eva Braun, Joseph Goebbels, Goebbels’ wife and their six children. Yet the nefarious legacy of an individual is not solely represented by their burial site, and Mullins (2016, para. 1) includes that the “literal corporeal remains hold a

persistent grip on our collective anxiety...” The intent of effacing graves is not to remove the memory of abhorrent individuals from society, but to separate their bodies from our own (Mullins, 2016).

Perception of the postmortem human body as a person or as an object is discussed in Joanna Sofaer’s 2006 book *The Body as Material Culture*. Material properties of the body allow the perception of a person to transition into an object once inanimate, while the biological properties involved in the recognition of a body as human also perpetuate the identification of a body as a once living person (Sofaer, 2006). Sofaer (2006, p. 10) reviews the position of the body within archaeological theory, which she views as “caught between the two poles of science and humanism.” However, this perception is not dichotomous, as human remains sometimes retain a social presence even after death despite the absence of qualities associated with the living (Sofaer, 2006). In this context, Sofaer (2006) compares death to an event horizon that results in a shift of the ontological perception of the body. Once this horizon is crossed, Sofaer (2006, p. 11) describes the body as remaining “simultaneously biological, representational and “material.” Even though Sofaer’s book pertains to human remains in an archaeological setting, the notion of what makes a decedent a person or an object persists in social and forensic settings. Forensic professionals who are in contact with the deceased are often required to reference the remains, and various concepts of personhood are expected to be reflected in their choice of register.

Chapter 3

Materials and Methods

The current research studies discourse and register among different disciplines in forensic science. Data were collected using both surveys and interviews during the summer of 2016. Survey data and interview responses were analyzed and compared to ascertain how registers are used among forensic professionals. In accordance with University guidelines for research involving human subject matter, an application to conduct this research was submitted on May 18, 2016, for review by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (American Public University System [APUS], 2016; LSU Office of Research and Economic Development [ORED], 2016) and was subsequently approved on June 3, 2016 (Appendix 2). Before participation in either survey or interview occurred, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendices 3 & 4).

The first type of data used in this research is based on an online survey titled “Language Use in Forensic Settings” that was disseminated to all members of the AAFS. Survey information collected in this study is anonymous. Participants were informed that although results of the study may be published, no names or any identifying information of individuals would be included. As of November 25, 2016, the AAFS consisted of 6,721 members and 885 applicants separated into eleven sections (AAFS, 2016b) (Appendix 1). Members representing all sections received the survey via an electronic mailing list provided by the AAFS directory. The survey engine was provided by SurveyMonkey.com. The survey consisted of six brief demographic questions as well as nine questions regarding language use related to forensic work for a total of fifteen questions (Appendix 5). Eleven of the fifteen survey questions allowed an

open-ended response in order to obtain the widest range of answers possible. Demographic questions were included to provide insight to the influence that sex, age, experience, work environment, and professional position has on language use. The remaining nine questions asking participants about language use were designed to elicit information regarding individual choice of register. The survey was intended for AAFS members over the age of eighteen.

The second type of data to be analyzed was collected from a series of interviews conducted with forensic professionals. Individuals were considered for interview based on professional recommendations and also from personal interaction in previous work settings. Five interviews with forensic professionals in the state of Louisiana were obtained for this thesis, including a forensic consultant, two death investigators, and two coroners. All interviews were conducted in person and at a location chosen by the interviewee. Discussion that took place during interviews was documented with the assistance of an audio recording device that was pre-approved by interviewees.

A total of ten questions were posed to interviewees, four of which requested an example or additional elaboration. Questions used for the interviews were similar to survey questions with the exclusion of inquiring about AAFS section affiliation (Appendix 5). A copy of the questions was given to interviewees as a reference during the interview process. Responses during the interview process led to additional points of discussion that were also considered during analysis. Answers collected via interview provided individual articulation as well as audible and visible reactions not available through electronic survey. Interviews are analyzed individually and provide a more personalized supplement to the survey responses.

Chapter 4 Survey Results

Nine hundred seventy-six individuals (14.5% of members) representing all sections participated in the electronic survey; however, not all questions were answered in every survey question, as participants were given the option to skip any question. The request for participants to provide open-ended responses resulted in thousands of answers ranging from a single word to a paragraph in length. All open-ended answers were reviewed individually (n=4,302) to discern any themes within the data for comparative purposes. In this chapter, data will be discussed in the order that the questions appeared in the survey.

Question 1

The first question of the survey asked participants to indicate their sex as either male or female. A total of 971 answers were received, with five individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 1). Of these, 40.78% (n=396) respondents selected male and 59.22% (n=575) selected female.

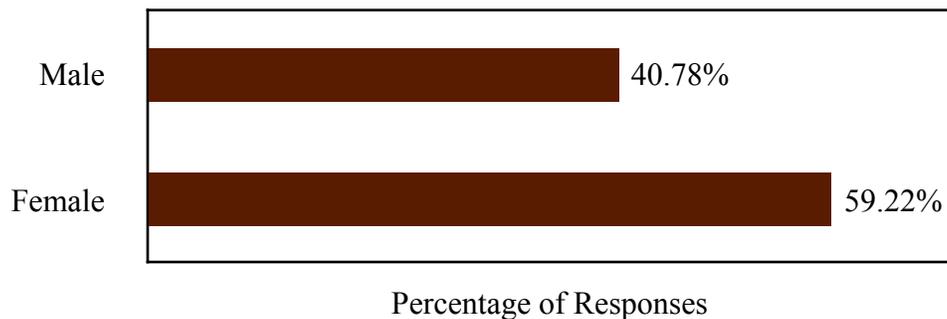


Figure 1: AAFS survey respondents by sex.

Question 2

The second survey question was open-ended, asking respondents to specify their highest level of education. A total of 971 answers were received, with five individuals opting to skip this question. Even though the numerical values reported below are taken directly from data received for Question 2, they may not accurately represent levels of education. For example, responses that only list “fellowship” (n=7) or “board” (n=3) do not disclose the education required to reach such achievements. Furthermore, a negligible number of responses was not associated with a level of education and will not be included in this discussion. More than twenty-five types of education were listed in the response, and each with a variety of appellations. Only thematic categories identified in the data will be discussed below.

The greatest portion of respondents stated that their highest level of education was a Master’s degree (n=388), some of which distinguished between a Master of Science (MS) (n=208) and a Master of Arts (MA) (n=26). The second most frequently listed was a Bachelor’s degree (n=170), again with some listed as either a Bachelor of Science (BS) (n=113) or a Bachelor of Arts (BA) (n=18). The third most frequent response was Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (n=134). Additionally, Doctor of Medicine (MD) (n=89), Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS) (n=28), and Juris Doctor (JD) (n=25) were routinely represented. The least mentioned levels of education were High School (n=1), an unspecified Associate’s degree (n=1), and Master of Public Health (n=1).

Question 3

Question 3 asked survey participants to select the AAFS section with which they primarily affiliate. A total of 975 answers were received, with only one individual opting to skip this question. According to statistics obtained from the AAFS website, membership numbers per section are reflective of section percentages for survey participation (AAFS, 2016b). Only the Anthropology section shows a notable increase between survey responses and membership values ($\Delta 3.63\%$); all remaining sections do not exceed a difference greater than 1.5% (Figure 2).

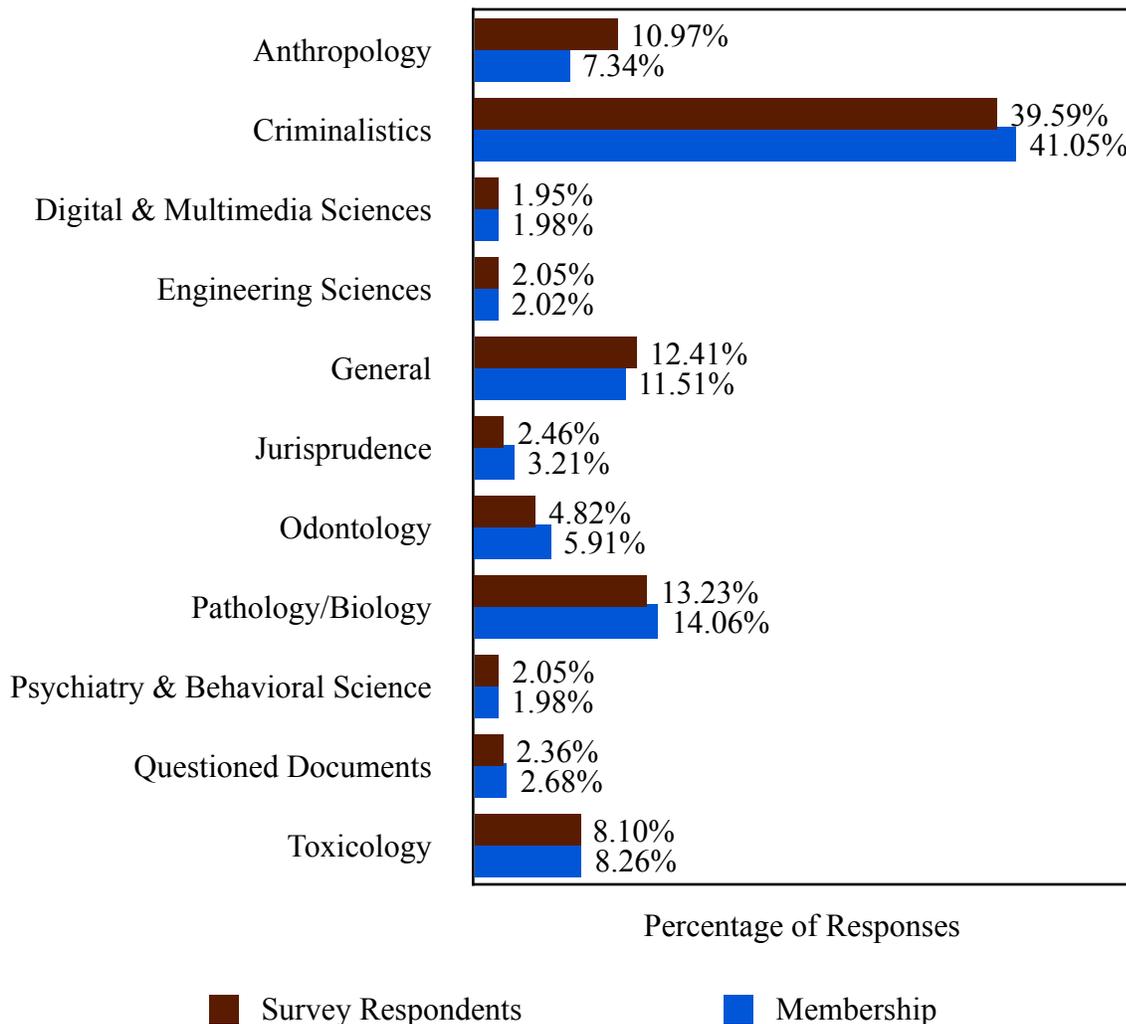


Figure 2: AAFS survey respondents versus membership by section.

Question 4

For Question 4, participants were asked to select what they consider to be their primary position and included an open-ended option listed as “Other.” A total of 963 answers were received, with 13 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 3). The largest percentage of survey respondents chose the “Other” option at 37.28% (n=359) with “Forensic Scientist” appearing the most frequently (n=37). The majority of respondents that chose “Other” also selected female for sex (n=29) and Criminalistics as their section (n=30). Of the listed options, Criminalist was most selected at 25.86% (n=249) with a vast majority representing the Criminalist section (n=209). Most of those that selected Criminalist stated their highest level of education as either a BS (n=54) or a MS (n=89). The second most selected position of the listed options was Professor at 14.02% (n=135), most of which corresponded with the Anthropology section (n=42) and followed by Criminalistics (n=36). Those who selected professor were

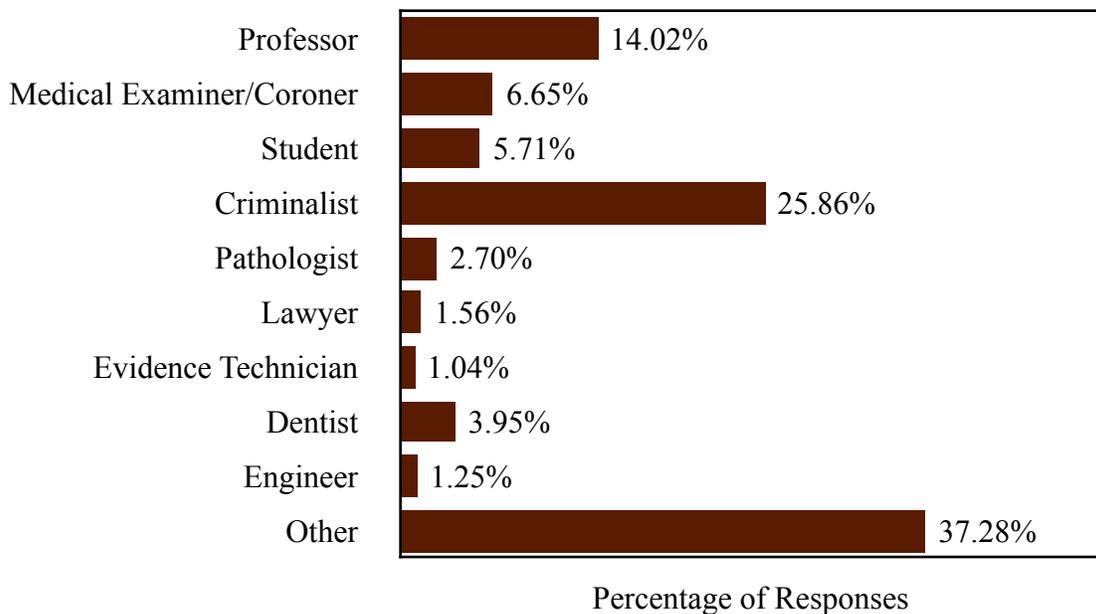


Figure 3: AAFS survey respondents grouped by primary position.

almost equally split between males (n=66) and females (n=69). The third most frequently selected position of those listed was Medical Examiner/Coroner at 6.65% (n=64). Student was selected by 5.7% (n=55), most representing the sections of Criminalistics (n=21) and Anthropology (n=17). A significant portion of those who identified as students were female (n=48) versus those that selected male (n=7). Following these were Dentist at 3.95% (n=38), Pathologist at 2.70% (n=26), Lawyer at 1.56% (n=15), Engineer at 1.25% (n=12), and Evidence Technician at 1.04% (n=10).

Question 5

Survey participants were asked to select with which type of agency they were employed for Question 5 with an open-ended option listed as “Other.” A total of 963 answers were received, with 13 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 4). Government was selected

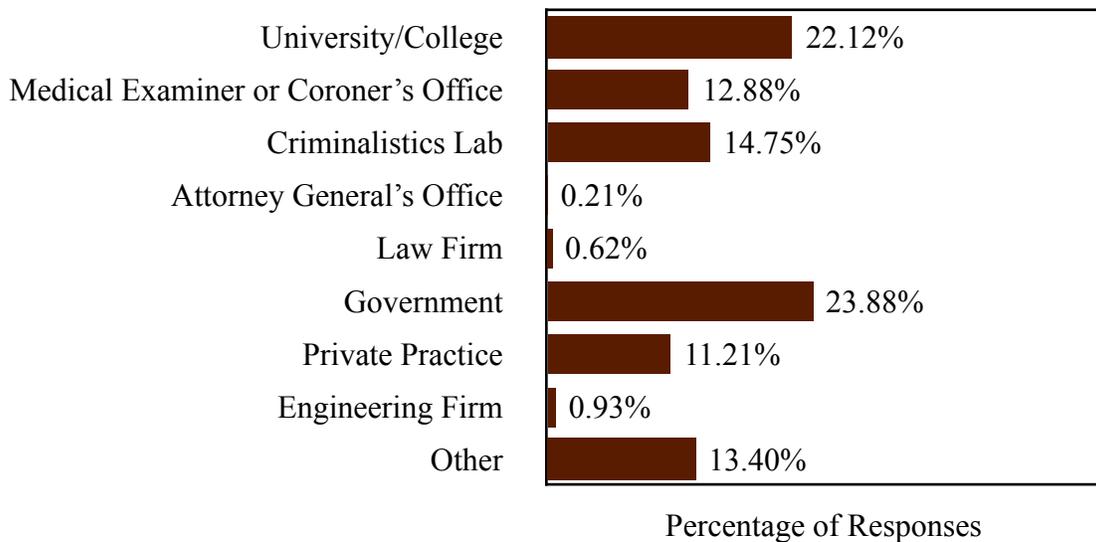


Figure 4: AAFS survey respondents grouped by employment agency.

the most at 23.88% (n=230), closely followed by University/College at 22.12% (n=213). Most individuals who selected Government also selected Criminalist (n=93) as their primary position, while those who selected University/College mostly chose Professor as their primary position (n=128). The option of “Other” was selected by 13.4% (n=129) and contained a wide variety of responses showing almost no repetition (n=112) with the exception of retirement (n=17). Other employment agencies selected from the options provided include Criminalistics Lab at 14.75% (n=142), Medical Examiner of Coroner’s Office at 12.88% (n=124), Private Practice at 11.21% (n=108), Engineering Firm at 0.93% (n=9), Law Firm at 0.62% (n=6), and Attorney General’s Office at 0.21% (n=2).

Question 6

For the final demographic question of the survey, Question 6, participants were asked to select a segment of years that best represented their experience. A total of 964 answers were received, with 12 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 5). The segment of 10-20 years

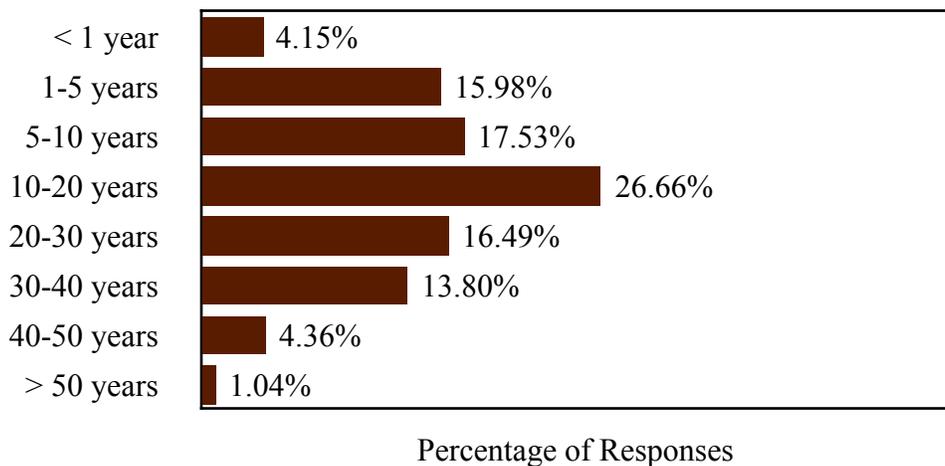


Figure 5: AAFS survey respondents grouped by years of experience.

was selected by 26.66% (n=257) individuals. Most individuals who selected 10-20 years of experience also selected Criminalist (n=91) and Professor (n=44) as their primary position. Those with less than one year of experience were mostly female (n=34) students (n=17) of the Criminalistics section (n=26), most of whom claimed either a University/College (n=12) or Government (n=9) as their employment agency. Individuals with less than one year of experience also claimed to be currently unemployed (n=7). Responses for Question 6 resulted in a bell curve of data for years extending from less than one to fifty. The option of selecting experience greater than fifty years represented 1.04% (n=10) of responses. Those with greater than 50 years of experience were all male (n=10), mostly employed by University or Colleges (n=4).

Question 7

Question 7 is the first of the survey questions to ask participants about language use. Question 7 asked participants to select all individuals whose presence they felt affected their speech with an open-ended option listed as “Other.” A total of 874 answers were received, with 102 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 6). The largest percentage of participants (45.54%, n=398) felt that their superior influenced how they spoke on the job. This response was closely followed by peers (42.79%, n=374) and students (42.68%, n=373). “Family member of decedent” was selected by 33.87% (n=296) participants, with the decedents themselves selected the least at 10.53% (n=92). Still, 29.41% (n=257) of participants felt that no individual affected the way they spoke.

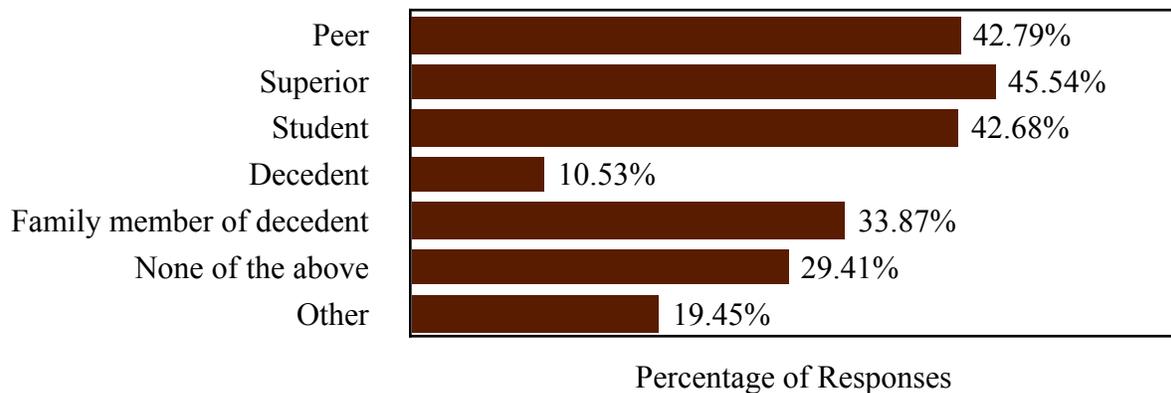


Figure 6: Individuals that affect discourse when present.

Some participants chose to include individuals in the “Other” option (19.45%, n=170), and a majority of these were listed as representatives of the legal system (i.e. “lawyer”) (n=64) and of the law (i.e. “police”) (n=45). Some survey participants indicated that they knowingly changed their terminology to ensure the comprehension of those present (n=13). Participants who stated they did not understand the question (n=6) placed this comment under the “Other” option and were mostly represented by those who stated Professor as their primary position (n=4) with a PhD as their highest level of education (n=4).

Question 8

Question 8 was open-ended, asking participants who had answered Question 7 to provide an example. A total of 537 answers were received, with 439 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 7). Several underlying themes can be identified despite the diversity of responses. Many participants took this opportunity to expand on how they altered their speech in relation to the individuals they selected for Question 7. The concept mentioned the most was the

use or avoidance of technical terms, appearing 213 times as various synonyms (i.e., “jargon”) in the response text for Question 8. Next, the concept of professionalism and formal discussion appeared 80 times within the text. Respectful or sympathetic behavior appeared 65 times with all but a few responses allocating this type of speech for family members, and occasionally, the decedent.

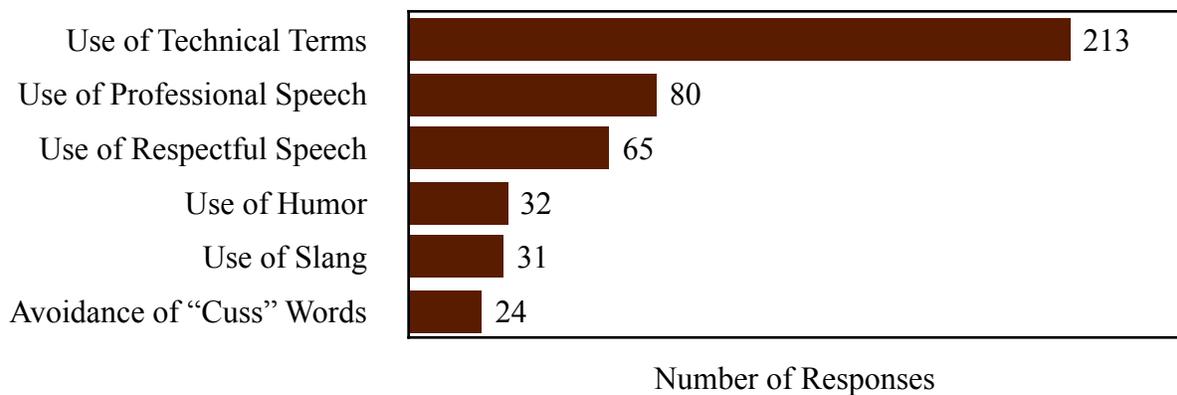


Figure 7: Top six response themes when asked how speech is affected by the presence of other individuals.

The use of humor and slang appeared nearly the same amount of times, with 32 individuals mentioning when humor was appropriate for use and 31 individuals discussing slang. Humor was occasionally referred to as “dark” or “macabre” in nature. Humor was also referred to by some as a coping mechanism and, by others, as always being unacceptable. The avoidance or use of “cuss” or “curse” words in the presence of certain individuals was mentioned 24 times. A few responses (n=10) interpreted the question to mean the language spoken, with several discussing their use of English, Spanish, Mandarin, etc.

Question 9

Question 9 asked participants to select work locations that affect their speech with an open-ended option listed as “Other.” A total of 830 answers were received, with 146 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 8). The location selected the most was Public Space at 40.12% (n=333) and was mostly represented by individuals who chose University/College (n=77), Government (n=70), Medical Examiner or Coroner’s Office (n=59), or Criminalistics Lab (n=51) as their agency of employment. Classroom followed next with 37.71% (n=313), mostly by those who also selected Criminalist (n=68) and Professor (n=54) as their primary position. Laboratory was the third most chosen location at 31.08% (n=258) selected mostly by individuals with Government chosen as their employment agency (n=63).

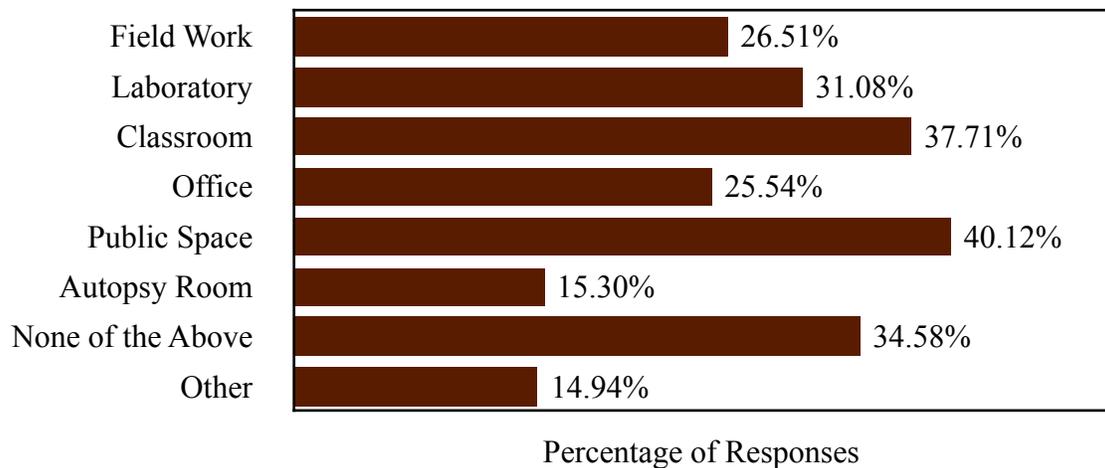


Figure 8: Locations that affect discourse.

Participants also selected Field Work at 26.51% (n=220), Office at 25.54% (n=212), and Autopsy Room at 15.30% (n=127). “None of the Above” was selected by 34.58% (n=287) of individuals. Of the ten individuals who previously selected a work experience greater than 50

years, eight also selected “None of the above” for locations that affected the way they spoke. The least selected for location was the open-ended option for “Other” at 14.94% (n=124) but primarily included a courtroom setting (n=84). Three individuals also listed in the “Other” option that they did not understand the question.

Question 10

Question 10 was open-ended and asked those participants who provided an answer for Question 9 to give an example. A total of 451 answers were received, with 525 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 9). Responses were reviewed in order to identify any underlying themes or concepts. Many participants took this as an opportunity to express how they would behave in their selected locations. Similar to Question 8, mention of technical terms was the most common topic in the response text (n=84). The notion of a place or situation being professional or formal was mentioned 66 times. Approximately 62 respondents stated that audience, and not location, is what influences the way they speak. However, this is a

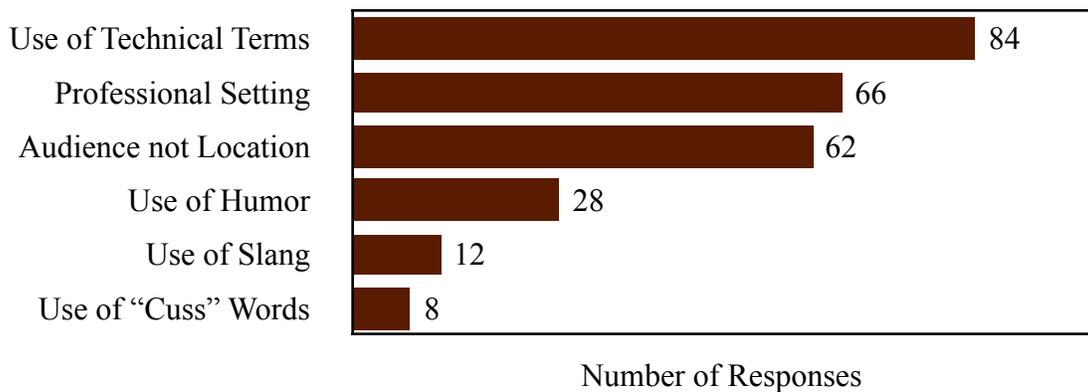


Figure 9: Top six response themes when asked how speech is affected by location.

conservative estimate to avoid speculation as audience is implied in additional responses but not clearly referenced. For example, concern with who may be listening was a common theme throughout the responses for Question 10 (n=41), although this may reference audience or characteristic of a location.

Humor (n=28), slang (n=12), and “cussing” (n=8) were again mentioned. The notion of where it was necessary to behave in a respectful manner appeared in nine responses and the term politically correct (PC) appears in four responses. Additionally, fewer individuals (n=2) than in Question 8 included a misinterpretation of speech as being either the English or Spanish language.

Question 11

Question 11 asked participants if they were given any instruction at the start of their career for appropriate language use with an open-ended option listed as “Other.” A total of 836 answers were received, with 140 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 10). The largest percentage of participants at 45.57% (n=381) selected “was not discussed,” followed by “verbal

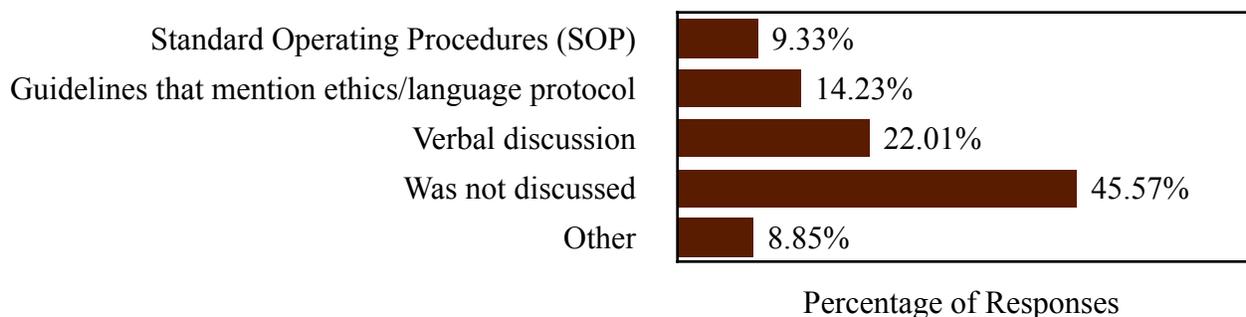


Figure 10: Initial instruction for appropriate language use.

discussion” (22.01%, n=184), guidelines that mention ethics or language protocol (14.23%, n=119), and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) (9.33%, n=78). The “Other” option was selected by 8.85% (n=74), with most adding training for a courtroom setting (n=18). Three individuals also stated within the “Other” option that they did not understand the question.

Question 12

Question 12 asked participants to elaborate on their response to Question 11. A total of 464 answers were received, with 512 individuals opting to skip this question. Responses were reviewed for additional concepts of training not available in Question 11. Most individuals reiterated their response for Question 11 in this segment while others added methods of instruction not listed in the previous question. Training for courtroom behavior and discourse was mentioned in 64 responses. Individuals who felt they had learned from their work environment or had modeled themselves after co-workers mention this 45 times in their response text, with some using the term “mentor” (n=13). Additionally, the term “common sense” appears 12 times, most often entered by individuals who also selected “Was not discussed” (n=9) or “Verbal discussion” (n=3) for Question 11.

Question 13

Question 13 asked participants to rank the severity of consequence should they use language that is considered inappropriate. A total of 675 answers were received, with 301 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 11). Of these responses, “minor reprimand” was selected by the most survey participants (48.89%, n=330), 26.81% of participants selected

“none” (n=181), 19.26% selected “moderate reprimand” (n=130), and the remaining 5.04% selected “termination” (n=34). There does not seem to be a correlation between either years of experience or section affiliation with these consequences.

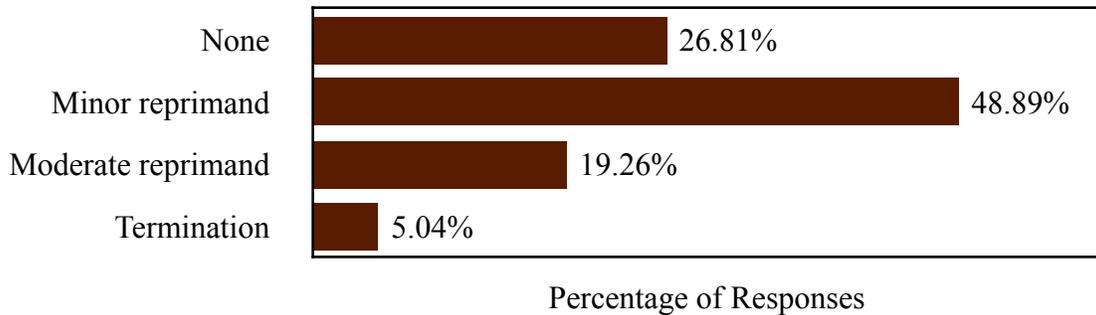


Figure 11: Consequence for inappropriate language use.

Question 14

Question 14 was an open-ended question with two parts, asking participants to list three words they consider appropriate and three words they consider inappropriate while at work. A total of 480 answers were received, with 496 individuals opting to skip this question. Of the two segments, slightly more individuals gave responses for the inappropriate section (n=461) than they did for the appropriate section (n=453). The choice to leave this question open-ended resulted in a wide range of responses which were reviewed for underlying concepts.

Consequently, many themes were identified but only those representing the greatest number of responses will be presented in the results. Responses that seem significant to the results and that were mentioned with some frequency will also be included.

The first segment asking for three appropriate words resulted in most participants including terms that represented the concept of death and human remains (n=111), with the top two reoccurring words of “decedent” (n=44) and “deceased” (n=28). The majority of participants who selected the term decedent or deceased represented the sections of anthropology (n=21) and general (n=18), with most of the general members listing death investigator as their position. The remainder of individuals who chose the words decedent and deceased as appropriate words for work represented the sections of the AAFS that work most often directly with human remains or indirectly via samples from the deceased (Criminalistics, Odontology, and Pathology/Biology). The concept that there are too many appropriate words to list (n=60) was entered with the second greatest frequency. What I have termed “simple word” responses (i.e., “yes,” “no,” “hello”) (n=58) as well as correct usage of work related terminology (n=57) follow closely as nearly equal for the third most commonly mentioned responses. Approximately 17 individuals chose to enter milder “cuss” words in this section (i.e., “hell,” “damn”). Twenty individuals entered that they were unclear as to how to answer, or did not understand the question.

For the second segment of Question 14, expletive language use was cited or alluded to the most as examples for inappropriate language in the work place (n=171), with highly offensive expletives listed as the top two mentions (i.e., “fuck,” n=84; “shit,” n=42). Some individuals chose to insinuate expletive words by replacing letters with symbols. For example, the word “fuck” is insinuated by “f*k” and “f-word” in the response text (n=13). Reflective of the first segment of this question, the concept of inappropriate terms for human remains was the

second most mentioned (n=75), often with manner of death related to the chosen terminology. Racial slurs were the third most frequently mentioned (n=70).

The categorization of several expletive terms that appeared repeatedly in the text could be interpreted in more than one way. For example, the term “bitch” (n=28) represents both an expletive as well as a derogatory female term. When added as a derogatory term, the number of examples for expletive language only increases from 171 to 173, as the term is often paired with other expletives. However, when paired with derogatory female terms, the number increases from 36 to a total of 64. A similar example is with the expletive term “cunt” (n=28), which can be categorized either as an expletive, a derogatory term for females, or as a slang term for female genitalia. When included with the expletive category, the number increases from 171 to 182. Added as a derogatory term for females would again increase the category from 36 to 64. If added as slang for female genitalia, the number of mentions would increase from seven to 35. In contrast, derogatory terms toward males were only mentioned 15 times, 13 of which were all inclusive concepts of any derogatory sex remark and the remaining two direct terms as “boy” and “bastard.” Nine individuals entered that they were unclear as to how to answer or did not understand the question. One individual claimed that they had “never used a bad word.”

Question 15

The final question of the survey asked participants about corporeal and non-corporeal contact for their position with an open-ended option listed at “Other.” A total of 702 answers were received, with 274 individuals opting to skip this question (Figure 12). The majority of individuals who responded to this question selected more than one response. The option selected

the most represented positions that require survey participants to work directly with the deceased body (42.17%, n=296), followed closely by indirect contact with the deceased via samples and fluids (41.74%, n=293). These results were followed by 39.6% of participants stating that they worked with living victims or relatives of victims (n=278), 32.62% with non-corporeal evidence (n=229), 32.05% working with alleged perpetrators or defendants (n=225), and 28.06 % working indirectly with human remains (n=197). A total of 15.53% of participants selected to include additional types of contact as an open ended-response under the “Other” option (n=109).

A few comments listed in the open-ended segment for the “Other” option reiterate options already made available for selection in Question 15 (n=16) with the greatest confusion stemming from what would qualify as non-corporeal evidence or human body fluid. The majority of answers provided in Question 15 represent this response repetition and are not expected to significantly alter the survey results shown in Figure 11. Working with law enforcement individuals occurs the most amongst answers provided in the “Other” option (n=22), followed by attorneys (n=19) and additional court personnel (n=9).

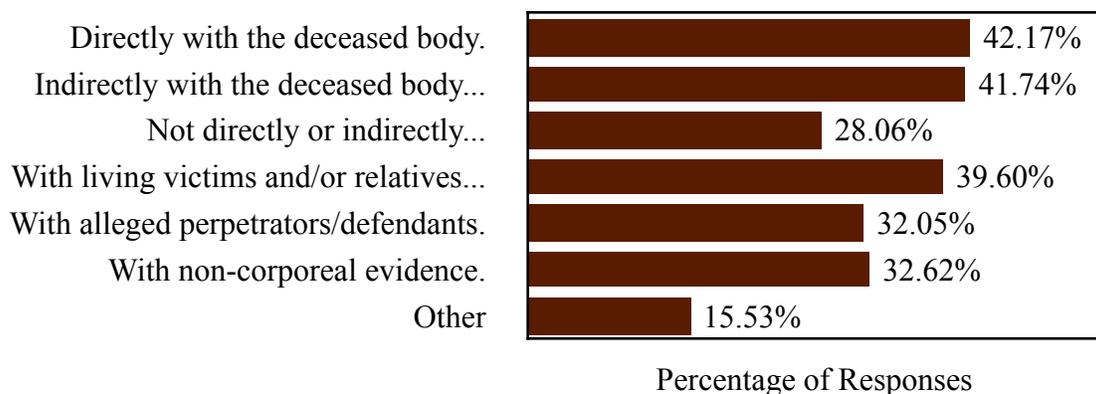


Figure 12: Contact in the work space.

Chapter 5

Interview Results

Of the eighteen individuals contacted for an interview, six did not respond to the request, four showed interest but did not follow through with scheduling an interview, three respectfully declined, and five allowed for an interview to take place. The length of time for each interview averaged approximately 15 minutes with the exception of one lasting almost 35 minutes. All of the questions presented in Appendix 5 were addressed in each interview. For the purpose of this thesis, identifying information regarding interview participants is excluded and only professional positions and statements will be mentioned. Demographic information for interview participants will be conveyed in general terms to avoid any identifiable information but with enough specificity to provide basic characterizations. Participants were assured that any statements during the interview process requested to be “off the record” would remain confidential, and that no part of these statements would be included in this thesis. Each interview is discussed individually below.

Interview 1

The first individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Interviewee 1, is a male with just under 40 years of experience assisting with forensic case work. Interviewee 1 also stated that he had experience as a forensic consultant and with teaching students in a university setting. The first interview lasted for 34 minutes and 32 seconds, the longest time out of all five interviews. When asked if the presence of certain individuals affected his speech, Interviewee 1 responded that he would certainly speak differently in the presence of family members, and that

he is mindful about what is said in front of a supervisor. Interviewee 1 added that he becomes more careful while in the presence of the public, but is concerned more so with the press, stating that “you pay more attention to language” (personal communication, July 1, 2016).

Regarding location, Interviewee 1 did not consider the various spaces in which he works as having an influence on how he speaks, but rather the audience. As an example, Interviewee 1 asserted that he always thinks of “spectators” in “eyesight or earshot” when working in the field (personal communication, July 1, 2016). Regarding instruction on appropriate language use toward the start of his career, Interviewee 1 defined SOPs as reference documents mostly for technical writing guidelines, and that general demeanor while performing the work was not discussed as much. When asked to further explain, Interviewee 1 maintained that “in some ways [conduct] wasn’t important... things weren’t as public back then... didn’t have the ever present television crew” (personal communication, July 1, 2016). Interviewee 1 continued that you “didn’t have people with cell phones... you weren’t in the public eye” and that “you accept that you’re in the public eye today” (personal communication, July 1, 2016).

While discussing this concept of an augmented public eye on forensic professionals, Interviewee 1 explained that “things weren’t cool. Now you gotta lot of young people wanna do [forensics], but they’re all getting what’s based on television...” (personal communication, July 1, 2016). In contrast to the mentorship he experienced during his early years of forensic work, Interviewee 1 continued that “today people that have a class... they consider themselves to be trained, and that’s the trouble... that one-on-one exchange is not there” (personal communication, July 1, 2016). As a result, Interviewee 1 acknowledged that he cannot trust how individuals who

never had a mentor will react in certain forensic situations, because “...the pieces that’ll make you do it and do it well are sorta done face-to-face” (personal communication, July 1, 2016).

Feeling that the response options for Question 9 of the interview were too narrow in scope (Appendix 5), an example of consequence resulting from inappropriate language use was discussed instead. In the example, speaking about a case to the press without the consent of the presiding Coroner could result in no longer being the preferred contact for future case work. A loss of preferential position is not necessarily considered a reprimand or termination, but rather a form of professional stigma. When asked about contact with the body, Interviewee 1 stated that he worked directly with the deceased, indirectly with the deceased via samples and fluids from the body, occasionally with relatives of victims to obtain personal photographs for comparative purposes, and with non-corporeal evidence in the form of clinical records. Interviewee 1 also included having contact with investigators, the DA, the press, and attorneys.

As an example of how he might interact with other professions, Interviewee 1 discussed a hypothetical trial in which he is called to testify. As a forensic consultant, Interviewee 1 is often called on to present evidence related to the deceased, stating that “the lawyer, or the DA in some cases, is not going to have as much experience with that, so in order to present it, in a way that the jury understands and believes it, they’ll often times leave it up to us to explain to them how - this is what I found, this is what I need to show, you gotta get me up there and lead me through this testimony” (personal communication, July 1, 2016). By an exchange of information between coworkers for how to properly use language in work settings, the forensic professionals in the example are able to learn, as Interviewee 1 puts it, “what kind of questions to ask and how to answer them” (personal communication, July 1, 2016).

Interview 2

The second individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Interviewee 2, is a female with between one and five years of experience working as a Death Investigator for a Coroner's Office. The second interview lasted for 17 minutes and 30 seconds. When asked if the presence of individuals affected the way she spoke on the job, Interviewee 2 responded with, "family members of the decedent, for sure," adding that a superior would influence the way she spoke but "not quite as much as a family member" (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Regarding the presence of the decedent, Interviewee 2 felt that the influence depends more on the particular case, stating that if she and her co-workers were at a "bad crime scene" they would be "all talking, and it may not always be about the case, but... you kinda have to though... everybody's, like, separating from it" (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Interviewee 2 also expressed awareness that the use of casual conversation to mentally remove oneself while working with human remains may seem unacceptable to individuals not familiar with daily exposure to death.

When asked about what work-related locations influence the way she speaks, Interviewee 2 responded that it was "more about who [is] around than about where we are," giving the example that when she thinks about a classroom she thinks about how to speak in relation to the students in a public setting (personal communication, July 21, 2016). However, in terms of interns, Interviewee 2 states that she is "not going to be sensitive... this is how things are" so that the interns can quickly determine if they are capable of handling what a position working in a Coroner's Office requires of them (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Further discussing the physical and mental requirements of her profession, Interviewee 2 adds that it is "not only the

work, but the interacting with different people, and the things that you hear... you need to be able to handle all of it or you can't do it" (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

In response to Question 8 asking how instruction was given on appropriate language use at the beginning of her current position, Interviewee 2 responded that she was "definitely told not to talk to the media" (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Advice for how to talk in different situations at work is given through verbal discussions, although most employee knowledge of language use is learned by observation. Interviewee 2 states that this knowledge eventually becomes "common sense," and although every investigation is different, you "just go and do it... with a little bit of guidance along the way" (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Question 9 during the interview process was again considered too broad for the participant to select a single response. Interviewee 2 felt that most occurrences of inappropriate language would be addressed with both minor and moderate reprimand, and that speaking to the media would possibly result in termination. From the list of responses provided under Question 10, Interviewee 2 selected that her position involved direct contact with deceased bodies, with the relatives of victims, and with the documentation of non-corporeal evidence related to the deceased (e.g. medicine, personal belongings) (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Interview 3

The third individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Interviewee 3, is a male with between five and ten years of experience in his current role as a Death Investigator for a Coroner's Office. The third interview lasted for 11 minutes and 19 seconds, the shortest time out of all five interviews. When asked whether the presence of other individuals affected the way he

spoke, Interviewee 3 responded that it would be a family member of the decedent. When dealing with family members, Interviewee 3 felt that he has “found through many years of experience... that the best thing [he] can do for you is the truth, and [he] will try to be straightforward and respectful” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Furthermore, Interviewee 3 stated that he does not really alter the way he speaks other than when family members are present, because “if you sensitively deliver the truth, you build trust” (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Public space was mentioned as a work location that would affect the way he spoke, but only because of the potential for a public audience. When speaking to the public, Interviewee 3 prefers to use “laymen terms,” because “on top of all of the bad things, grief, anger, that a family may feel when you’re talking to them about the death of a loved one, we don’t want them to feel belittled because they don’t understand the language” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Interviewee 3 added that he also uses plain, “crystal clear” terms when testifying in a courtroom, so as to communicate exactly what he means to a jury instead of them “having to guess what a subclavian vein is” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Interviewee 3 commented that previous work experience prior to his current position in a Coroner’s Office bypassed the need for any instruction on appropriate language use. However, as an example where verbal discussion is necessary, Interviewee 3 mentioned a fellow employee that has been repeatedly reminded to not “get on Google and look up medical terms to put in a report” that is ultimately created for “juries, attorneys, and family” (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Interviewee 3 felt that Question 9 did not accurately reflect “an escalating disciplinary system” and should instead include no consequence, verbal, written, written with a loss of pay, and termination (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Interviewee 3 added that his

recommendations for Question 9 would not be used if the problem was ethical, and that individuals are promptly terminated from the Coroner's Office if inappropriate ethics are involved. To provide an example, Interviewee 3 suggests that if an on-scene investigator is unaware that the family of the deceased is present and uses inappropriate language, the investigator will be reminded that "you gotta be aware, of who can hear what you say... maybe that conversation needed to occur but you better be sure that they can't hear you" (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

Also concerning the presence of the public, Interviewee 3 adds that "everybody's got a cellphone," so you have to be aware "just even being at a death scene and smiling outside" (personal communication, July 21, 2016). In his current position, Interviewee 3 stated that he had regular contact directly with the deceased, indirectly with body fluids from the deceased, with relatives of the victims, with alleged perpetrators and defendants, and with non-corporeal evidence.

Interview 4

The fourth individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Interviewee 4, is a male with 30-40 years working as a medical doctor and less than 10 years as a Coroner. Interviewee 4 also has experience teaching students at a medical center. The fourth interview lasted for 17 minutes and 17 seconds. When asked if the presence of other individuals affected the way he spoke, Interviewee 4 responded, "family members definitely," but that all options listed under Question 6 would be applicable. Adding also that various combinations of who is present will result in additional reasons to adjust speech. As an example, Interviewee 4 mentioned that he has

been “hardened” from years of exposure and experience with death, “so I have to be conscious of people that it does affect so that I don’t say anything irreverent or flippant in a situation” (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

Interviewee 4 is also aware of his capability to quickly change his use of language as he moves between working within a trauma bay at a medical facility to speaking with a group of nurses as a colleague, then back to the trauma bay to speaking as a professional. Providing an additional example of how humor is used in the workplace, Interviewee 4 states that when he feels that his peers are becoming too “frantic” during moments of heightened stress, he will use humor to regain control of the situation. Interviewee 4 adds that he would never use this same humor if a family member of the victim were to be present, but that “it’s sometimes therapeutic to do that because I can recognize that the tensions are high” (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

When asked if any locations influenced the way he spoke, Interviewee 4 felt that his speech was influenced by audience and not location. For Question 8, Interviewee 4 stated that instruction for appropriate language use was not discussed, but was rather “trial by fire.” To further explain, Interviewee 4 states that as a result of previous media training, he knows “how to turn on that face and be the public person” (personal communication, August 10, 2016). In his position as Coroner, the SOPs for the office were written by Interviewee 4, and that he “demands” all employees of his office be professional. To reinforce professionalism, quarterly meetings are held to review what Interviewee 4 refers to as “our face with the public,” as well as “how we interact with colleagues and other agencies” (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

For Question 9, Interviewee 4 felt that all of the options for reprimand were possible, but as a Coroner his punishment is negative press and public judgement. As an elected position, a negative public image has the potential to prevent his re-election. Responding to Question 10, Interviewee 4 identified his position as having direct contact with the deceased body, indirect contact with the deceased via body fluid, with the family members of the deceased, rarely with perpetrators, and anything on the body to represent non-corporeal evidence.

Interview 5

The fifth individual to be interviewed, hereafter referred to as Interviewee 5, is a male with just over 25 years of experience as a medical doctor and less than 10 years as a Coroner. The fifth interview lasted for 12 minutes and 18 seconds. When asked if any individuals influenced the way he spoke with their presence, Interviewee 5 selected family members, stating “I tread very gingerly and gently around family members... they’ve already got enough upset” (personal communication, August 10, 2016). When asked if location influenced his speech, audience was implied to have more significance than location. Providing an example, Interviewee 5 remarked, “if I were on the death scene and there were news reporters there, I would keep my trap shut... when I’m out there with my investigators... I try to speak freely and sometimes very off the cuff” (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

At the start of his career, Interviewee 5 discussed not having received instruction for appropriate language use, asserting that “it’s more common sense and common courtesy” (personal communication, August 10, 2016). After reviewing Question 9, Interviewee 5 remarked that he would not be terminated, but “it would trickle back to me... that I had said

something that may be inappropriate or I've said something meaning one thing and it came out... different from what was originally meant" (personal communication, August 10, 2016). Should a scenario similar to this occur, Interviewee 5 suspects that advice would be offered to not repeat the mistake, although not in the form of a reprimand. Providing an example involving one of his investigators, when something wrong was said on scene it would be discussed off to the side, what Interviewee 5 referred to as a "straight forward come to Jesus meeting about it" (personal communication, August 10, 2016). Interviewee 5 also mentioned that "politically correct terms" are an example of how language can be used appropriately in a work setting.

In his position as Coroner, Interviewee 5 comes into contact directly with the deceased, indirectly with the deceased via body fluids, and with relatives of the deceased. Interviewee 5 also claims to actively seek out non-corporeal evidence on the scene, which he considers as anything that is touching the body or related to the manner of death.

Chapter 6 Discussion

By examining the data acquired for this thesis, a general understanding of inner and outer social forces acting to influence the discourse of forensic professionals can be realized. Results from both survey and interview responses show that patterns of how individuals use language in various environments can be observed, regardless if the speaker is conscious or unconscious of this use. Yet these results do not suggest an explanation for language use in forensic settings; as stated by Agha (2005, p. 38), “registers are not static facts about a language but reflexive models of language use.”

Conscious use of different types of register with identifiable locations was identified in responses for both survey and interviews. This ability to recognize and describe register use in a social group is referred to by Agha as metadiscursive awareness. Although forensic professionals undergo unique paths of socialization in learning proper register use, values associated with a register promoted by metadiscourse can be shared within a social group (Agha, 1999). Stereotypes of accepted language use recognized by members of a language group can be observed by researchers as data, therefore assisting in the documentation process. As discussed by Agha in 2004 (p. 26-27), “To speak of metapragmatic stereotypes is to say that social regularities of metapragmatic typification can be observed and documented as data... many persons typify criterial speech forms in the same way, for example, assigning the same metalinguistic predicates to the forms at issue.” Response cues from the data obtained through survey and interview can be observed directly or interpreted as indexing such stereotypes of

language use in forensic settings. Awareness of speakers regarding what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate language use allows the recognition of patterns in data collected for this thesis.

Differences in task and communication between professional positions throughout the sections of the AAFS are expected to influence individual paths of socialization to learn proper register use. A review of data from the AAFS survey displayed greater variation of language use among the eleven sections of forensic science than originally anticipated. Unexpected variation can also be a result of how registers are distributed socially amongst forensic disciplines, so that, according to Agha (1999, p. 216), even “members of a language community are not equally familiar with all of its registers.” Alternatively, interviews with forensic professionals reinforced some learning experiences parallel to those experienced by this researcher. Thematic differences between survey and interview responses, as well as the similarities, are discussed in this chapter.

AAFS Survey

Although the term “register” did not appear in any of the survey responses, many participants showed various levels of awareness that their choice of language was in some way dependent on situation and audience. Some common registers that appear in responses include technical jargon, professional, respectful, and humorous. How these registers are defined within survey responses appears to be related to the discipline of forensic science with which an individual associates. For example, the use of professional register as mentioned by a survey participant associated with forensic anthropology is that “with superiors I tend [sic] to speak with less animation, or more professionally I suppose.” On the other hand, professional register for a

participant working within criminalistics states that they “try to be more professional using scientific words rather than slang when giving presentations.”

Survey data can be used to gain insight into a number of professional scenarios of language use. For example, 18 of the 34 survey participants in the Criminalistics section of the AAFS who claimed to work with living victims or the relatives of victims also stated that proper language use was not discussed at the beginning of their career. As an additional example, of the 68 survey participants with the Anthropology section who indicated that they worked directly with the deceased body, only seven stated that they had received SOPs at the beginning of their career. For these seven participants, their years of experience (ranging between one and 30 years) do not seem to correlate with the reception of SOPs. The decision to leave some questions in the survey open-ended resulted in a myriad of replies, yet patterns of language use could still be discerned within the text. Additionally, an open-ended format displayed various ways in which individuals with different backgrounds of education and professional experience define language use. Although registers are social formations, the distribution of metapragmatic stereotypes are not homogenous amongst forensic professionals. The division of forensic science into eleven sections seems to reflect competing models of appropriate register use in forensic settings.

For example, one individual, who self-identified as a member of the Engineering Sciences section of the AAFS, opted to communicate his frustration via email, stating, “I found your questionnaire to be inappropriate to address to the general AAFS membership. Initially it sounded like you were looking into technical language communication differences. In reality, you want to know if professionals use ‘dirty’ words in the workplace.” Only intending to

express a complaint, the individual provided an inadvertent example of how one might directly interpret questions of the survey. Assuming that the individual was referring to Question 14 of the survey, which asks participants to “Please list 3 words you consider appropriate and 3 words you consider inappropriate while at work,” it would seem that his concept of appropriate language use is technical terminology, while his immediate interpretation of inappropriate language use is “dirty” words.

The idea that “dirty words” constitute what it means to be inappropriate within the workplace was not a concept shared by members in other sections of the AAFS. Diverse categories of what is considered inappropriate language use in the work place were identified in response data. For Question 14, the idea of appropriate language in the work place evoked respectful terms for human remains for most individuals (n=111), and the response mentioned second most when asked about inappropriate language (n=75). Greatly outnumbering the responses received for other categories (n=171), the use of expletives at work was felt to be the most inappropriate form of language use in the work place, regardless of section affiliation or position.

Although anonymity was provided for survey participants, some members of the AAFS chose to revoke their anonymity by sending an e-mail to discuss the survey. The intent of making the survey anonymous was to increase the number of individuals willing to respond to questions of potentially unfavorable workplace behavior, that anonymity would allow a degree of liberation from social evaluation or reprisal. However, discomfort of discussing workplace discourse was indicated by some individuals. As one individual disclosed in an email, “I am not comfortable in using inappropriate words, regardless of the circumstances, including a

confidential survey.” This concern was echoed in answers to survey questions as well (n=5), with one individual repeatedly stating “you must be kidding, my name is associated with this” throughout the survey.

Interviews

The five interviews obtained for this thesis do not represent the eleven sections of the AAFS. Instead, positions held by interviewees were professionally related to the position of myself and those that assisted me in securing interviews. As a result, interviews that required previously established professional connections affected the scope of positions represented in interview data. Four of the five individuals that agreed to be interviewed all had previous experience working with my graduate advisor. The remaining fifth individual was personally contacted by another interviewee once the interview had concluded.

Individuals that lacked this same extent of professional connection did not respond to requests for an interview. Some of these individuals who requested more information about the research ultimately decided against an interview, perhaps because only confidentiality and not true anonymity could be promised. During the interview process, conversation occurred outside of the interview questions and helped to reinforce professional relationships as well as demonstrate the benign intent of the research. Three of the five interviewees offered personal assistance once their interviews concluded, offering the mention of their name to aid in securing additional interviews. Additionally, “off the record” content discussed during interviews indexed a certain level of trust between myself and the interviewee. Perhaps as a result of the similar types of positions held by each professional, similarities in responses could be observed among

the five interviews. All of these trends observed, however, could also be detected in survey results.

Influence of Audience and Location

All five interviewees and some survey respondents claimed that they felt audience was more influential than location in terms of register affect. This sentiment was expressed regardless of sex, years of experience, position, or agency of employment. As outlined by one AAFS survey participant, “Public spaces require reservation, particularly when I have a presentation for non students. An autopsy room will vary. If we have ‘outsiders’ there, we are all fairly reserved. If it is just us (pathologists, techs and Anthro), we may get quite silly. The whole demeanor will change if there is a decedent who should have been protected but some system failed them (kids, elderly, etc.)” It should also be noted, however, that only certain locations were associated with audiences that necessitated a conscious change in register. The provided options of fieldwork, classroom, and public space were the locations most often used as examples when discussing audience.

Particular attention was paid to the idea of the public audience within these locations, of which all interviewees additionally seemed to have a heightened sense of potential presence. As summarized by one participant, “Field work - Careful about what i say at a crime scene. The public is listening.” When discussing audiences, the group representing family members of the deceased was unanimously selected by all interviewees to be the most influential on speech. When family members of the decedent are present, a general consensus among the various forensic disciplines seemed to be that a respectful tone should be used. An example of this

connection of family members with respect is succinctly expressed in one survey response, “Family of decedent - professional & respectful.” As pointed out by Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 573), “consequently, as forensic scientists, our work is, and will be scrutinized, not just by our peers, but also by the affected families, and the public at large.”

Mentorship

In response to Question 8 of the interview, all five interviewees responded that instruction of appropriate language use was either received as a verbal discussion or was not received at all. The general consensus was that language use was learned either by discussion with co-workers or by repeated observation. This instructional method was also reiterated in some responses received in the survey, with one participant stating, “You tend to pick up on the jargon of the field when you're talking to, or listening to others, speak. Since I'm just shy of my one year mark at my lab I'm still learning and the best way to really learn is to listen.” When survey participants were asked to select if the presence of individuals affected their way of speaking for Question 7, 29.41% responded that they do not alter their speech for individuals present. The remaining 70.59% of participants selected one or more of the provided options, indirectly implying that the presence of individuals does affect speech. However, when survey participants were asked if they were given instruction for proper language use in Question 11, 45.57% selected that instruction “was not discussed.” Additionally, all five interviewees mentioned that the way in which they speak changes depending on the presence of one or more type of individual, although instruction for appropriate language use was not discussed.

These responses to Questions 7 and 11 would suggest that an understanding of proper language use is acquired through an additional mode of learning for both survey and interview participants. According to Agha (2005, p. 55), individuals learning a register “are performing a kind of role alignment with the characterological figures linked to [register].” One survey participant stated that he was not given instruction for language use, but that his method of learning appropriate behavior was “generally an emulation of the language employed by senior mentors in the discipline.” The notion of mentorship is reflected in Agha’s (2004, p. 27) statement that a group awareness of “distinctive forms and values, must be communicable to new members of the group in order for the register to persist in some relatively constant way over time.” In survey data, the concept of mentorship is mentioned a total of 17 times. Another survey participant explains, “I was not given any formal instruction on appropriate language, however over the course of my education and employment, I had informal discussions with mentors and was able to pickup on what was acceptable through observation.” Adding to how an individual learns language use through observation, Agha (1999, p. 216) mentions that “switching to the register may itself reconfigure the sense of occasion, indexically entailing that the associated social practice is now under way.”

Of all five interviews, the notion of mentorship only appears in the discussion with Interviewee 1. Having learned from a mentor during the start of his career in forensic science, Interviewee 1 expressed his opinion that, although students educated in a classroom setting “consider themselves to be trained,” they lack the “one-on-one exchange” of mentoring that he considers vital to “make you do [the job] and do it well” (personal communication, July 1, 2016).

Common Sense

Forensic professionals may not always recognize that their comprehension of language use in forensic settings as the result of role alignment (Agha, 2005). An unconscious accumulation of social knowledge from continued interaction between members of a language community may result in what some research participants referred to as “common sense.” The passing of knowledge between members of a social group results in a creation of consensus, and ultimately how registers are shared within a group. Mention of “common sense” implies a universal understanding among professionals within the forensic science community, yet the term is without universal definition. The concept of mentorship and “common sense” do not appear together in a single survey or interview, yet there appears to be overlap in the way that participants describe how proper language use is learned. For example, a survey participant responded that “no formal discussions were held, but common sense and the reactions of various people formed the manner in which I speak now. I do pass these conventions on to my students.”

The term “common sense” appears most often within survey responses to Question 12 from individuals who also selected that instruction for appropriate language use was either not discussed or that they had received instruction by means of verbal discussion. One participant, who identified as a Psychologist with 30 to 40 years of experience, selected that appropriate language use was not discussed at the beginning of his career, but that “common sense provided the ability to discriminate what was appropriate in various settings.” For interview data, “common sense” is directly referenced by Interviewees 2 and 5 to explain how appropriate language use is learned and when it is used. In her work as a Death Investigator, Interviewee 2

describes her knowledge of language use as learned mostly by observation, which she states will eventually become “common sense” (personal communication, July 21, 2016).

For Interviewee 5, instruction for appropriate language use was not discussed, yet he feels that his understanding of language use is “more common sense” but does not elaborate (personal communication, August 10, 2016). Interviewee 5 also includes that if he were to make a mistake with language, that the correction for saying something inappropriate “would trickle back” (personal communication, August 10, 2016). Adding a personal example of how he has previously corrected one of his investigators for using inappropriate language, Interviewee 5 stated that his approach was verbal discussion, “a straightforward come to Jesus meeting” (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

Experience

The term “experience” is used by participants to describe different notions of professional knowledge, and appears in the data as a measurement of language competency, a shared level of language competency, and the influence inexperienced individuals have on language.

In both survey and interview responses, participants cited their professional experience as an explanation for not having received instruction on appropriate language use at the beginning of their current position. In this way, mention of experience is used to express an individual’s competency with professional language use in forensic settings. Of the survey responses, one individual provided an explanation for why he did not need initial instruction for appropriate language use, stating, “when I started in forensic science I had many years of experience talking to scientific and non-scientific audiences.” Forensic professionals with accumulated experience

can also be observed as models for language use by individuals with less experience. As an example, a survey participant with between one and five years of experience in digital forensics stated that “when multiple persons whose experience and knowledge I respect use a particular term, phrase, or manner of expression, I tend to adopt it in order to be more immediately or more fully understood.”

During our discussion, Interviewee 3 commented that when he began his current position as a Death Investigator, he did not need instruction for appropriate language use because of his previous work experience in forensic settings (personal communication, July 21, 2016). Interviewee 3 gave quick, concise responses during the interview process, reflecting his competency of professional language use. Previous experience was also mentioned by Interviewee 4, in which he claimed that as a result of previous media training, he was not expected to discuss appropriate language use when he began his position as Coroner (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

Awareness of a shared level of language competency between individuals of similar experience in forensic settings also appeared in survey responses, and can be accompanied by the idea of relaxed language use. For one participant, “speaking with peers affords the ability to speak more freely and without concern of comments being misconstrued since they will have the same knowledge, training, and similar experience to 'read between the lines.'” Similarly, another survey participant adds that “with peers, because of our similar level of education and experience, we communicate in a more technical fashion and usually with a more varied vocabulary and more precise grammar.”

When an individual's experience with language use in a forensic context is perceived to be lower than that of other participants, a review of survey and interview responses suggest that register choice will reflect the lowest level of language competency. As one survey participant states, "I tend to monitor my speech around those with less experience in the field who might misconstrue a short hand statement," whereas another participant briefly mentions that they "will speak to the level of experience of the audience." Of the interview data, Interviewee 1 provides an example of testifying in court when the legal team, his audience, "is not going to have as much experience" (personal communication, July 1, 2016). To effectively communicate his forensic work to his audience, Interviewee 1 is aware that he must alter the way he uses language.

Use of Humor

The function of humor in the workplace appeared in both survey and interview responses. Whether used as a coping mechanism as mentioned by survey participants (n=94), or as a method to re-establish group harmony as discussed by Interviewee 4, humorous register can be used as a way of maintaining good professional relationships. One survey participant responded that "inside the lab I feel that people are a little more relaxed and try to joke around throughout the day. Forensics can be an intense and stressful field at times." When tension in a work environment becomes too high, Interviewee 4 stated that he may jokingly ask for a crowbar while listing off the medical equipment he needs, and that by introducing a joke into a stressful moment he is able to regain control of the situation (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

For forensic positions that require individuals to work in high stress work environments, Holmes and Stubbe (2015, p. 134) describe humor as a way to “release tension at strategic points in workplace interaction.” Holmes and Stubbe (2015, p. 134) go on to describe humor as “a valuable resource in workplace interaction, a highly flexible discourse strategy which typically builds and maintains good relationships at work.” Concepts of professional humor as discussed by Holmes and Stubbe are also directly referenced and discussed by participants in survey and interviews.

The extent to which humor is allowed is also recognized, as one participant adds that “overly colloquial and joking terminology (referring to the body as a stiff, etc.). humor should [sic] be allowed but some individuals use coarse language to cover up discomfort / be funny etc. That should not be allowed.” Although a humorous register can be used to help forensic professionals release the tension of a stressful work environment, the use of humor is not appropriate in all forensic settings. The limitation of humor is addressed by Holmes and Stubbe (2015, p. 122), as “the quantity of humor... varies in different workplaces, in different teams and in different contexts within a workplace.”

As a reference, Passalacqua et al. (2014) directly address member recognition of inappropriate humor in unprofessional titles of forensic research. The authors outline the social consequences that an inappropriate use of humor can have on forensic anthropology. Interestingly, the authors maintain a steady reference to public perception of forensic anthropology, including a responsibility to the family members of the decedent. Passalacqua et al. (2014, p. 574) ask readers, “how would a layperson (one not in the forensic field) or family members of the decedent possibly perceive this title?” The authors lament the presence of

“morbid humor” among forensic anthropologists, suggesting that it “could point to one ignoring or losing the awareness of the dignity and respect that human remains, in particular, rightly deserve” (Passalacqua et al., 2014, p. 573).

Referring to the influence of audience discussed earlier in this chapter, forensic professionals seem to correlate inappropriate humor with audience. Passalacqua et al. (2015, p. 573) remind readers that “the AAFS proceedings are in fact published online, and the annual AAFS meetings are attended by not only many different professionals... but also various media sources, and family members.” The idea of how a humorous register in forensic settings may be misinterpreted by the public was also mentioned by a survey participant, who said that “to an outsider, we can would [sic] seem inappropriate because we may appear to discuss things lightly or with humor that we actually take very seriously because of psychologically difficult things we deal with daily.”

Presence of the Deceased

In my experience as a student working directly with human remains, I have noticed that the presence of the deceased influences my choice of language. Even when skeletonized, the physical structure of a dead body represents the human form, blurring the distinction between personhood and the body as an object (Sofaer, 2006). When viewing a deceased individual, I am inclined to recognize the social presence of the body as an inactive participant in discourse. Roach (2003, p. 98) elaborates this idea, stating that the deceased “are the same sort of company as people across from you on the subways or in airport lounges, there but not there.” Similarly, social identity persisting after death is discussed by Mullins (2016), where physical remains and

the landscape that surrounds them are considered symbolic of individuals regarded as “evil” during life. For this reason, the term “Decedent” was included as an option when participants of this research were asked if the presence of other individuals affected the way they spoke.

Of the 874 responses received for Question 7 of the survey, “Decedent” was the least selected option, chosen by only 92 participants (10.53%). These 92 participants represented all but two sections of the AAFS: Digital and Multimedia Sciences and Questioned Documents. Interestingly, of the 296 survey participants who claimed they worked directly with the deceased body, only 51 (17.23%) also stated that the presence of the decedent affected the way they spoke. The Anthropology section was represented the most by 23 of the 92 participants (25.00%), with 18 of these 23 participants (78.26%) also selecting University/College as their agency of employment. Also, of the 23 participants representing the Anthropology section, just under half (n=11, 47.83%) selected their level of experience as between one and five years. One participant, a Professor of Anthropology with between one and five years of experience, chose to elaborate her response, stating “in the laboratory, if I am only with the decedent I will sometimes verbalize my thoughts to the decedent with no filter and no thoughts as to the type of language.” Other participants who did not state that they verbally communicated with the deceased body mentioned that they preferred language they identified as respectful to the deceased (n=8). For example, one participant stated that they avoid “idle chit chat out of respect for the decedent.”

Of the five individuals interviewed, only Interviewees 2 and 4 mentioned that the presence of the decedent affected the way they spoke. Both Interviewees 2 and 4 stated that they are employed at a Coroner’s Office where they work directly with human remains on a regular basis. For Interviewee 2, the presence of a decedent at what she considers a “bad crime scene”

would influence her and her coworkers to engage in talk as a coping mechanism, which she referred to as “separating from it” (personal communication, July 21, 2016). When Interviewee 4 was asked what individuals affected the way he spoke on the job, he responded that all options (including “Decedent”) would be applicable but did not elaborate further (personal communication, August 10, 2016).

Anthropology

In the field of anthropology, we promote a holistic approach to the study of humans. As forensic anthropologists, we work to maintain a sense of humanity in forensic science. According to Dominguez and Ross (2016, p. 603), “anthropology offers a “holistic” approach to the otherwise quite technical aspects of [a forensic anthropologist’s] work, enabling them to pay attention to local customs of the mourning and loss and to situate their work within a broader context.” This image of forensic anthropology is echoed by Passalacqua et al., (2014, p. 573), that our academic discipline “must be held to an exceptionally high standard of scholarship which reflects the sensitive, humanitarian mission, and work in which we participate.”

Out of the 976 individuals that participated in the survey for this thesis, 107 stated they were affiliated with the Anthropology section of the AAFS. Participants in the Anthropology section consisted of more females (n=80) than males (n=25), with 74 participants indicating a University/College as their agency of employment. The Anthropology section was represented by a broad range for years of experience, with 71 participants stating that they worked directly with the deceased.

Of note, the term “holistic” did not appear in any of the open-ended responses from participants that affiliated with the Anthropology section of the AAFS. Only one participant, an Investigator/Forensic Anthropologist with between five and 10 years of experience working for a Medical Examiner, gave a response that mentioned a general sense of a holistic approach. She mentions that “we handle cases for decedents from all walks of life and need to tailor our language to the kinds of families... So, I'm always looking for good ways to make death, dying, and bones more realistic to everyone - from smart doctors to laymen.”

Only seven participants stated that they received guidelines mentioning ethics and/or language protocol, whereas 41 participants stated that instruction for appropriate language use was not discussed at the beginning of their career in forensic anthropology. One participant, a professor with a university, stated that language use was not discussed, but that “it should have been.” She continues that her “background in anthropology... really helped [her] to be able to work with folks from all walks of life.” Additionally, the notion of ethics was only mentioned three times in the open-ended responses. A lack of ethics mentioned in survey data differs from the tone of Passalacqua et al.’s 2016 (p. 573) Letter to the Editor, stating that “to further define the level of professionalism expected of members, the AAFS bylaws embrace a code of ethics and conduct”

Although the mention of ethics is sparse in responses, some Anthropology affiliates still express awareness for ethical language use. With regard to the presence of a decedent, use of negative language towards the deceased was listed as inappropriate by 29 participants, whereas use of the term “decedent” was listed as appropriate language use by 22 participants. Furthermore, the majority of participants affiliated with the Anthropology section showed an

awareness for sensitivity to family members of the decedent. Sensitivity to the surviving family is also discussed by Dominguez and Ross (2016, p. 607), in that “we have a significant role to play in the anxiety of the individual, a family, a community, a nation, and ultimately internationally.”

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The significance of register use can be interpreted by both professionals of the forensic science community and individuals outside of this community. For non-forensic individuals, data presented within this thesis represent how language use changes as an individual transitions from a layperson to being a professional in the field of forensics, and continuing on to accumulated professional experiences. Individual trajectories in the socialization process can also be understood by the variation of register use among the different disciplines of forensic science. Within a forensic community, register use can be influenced by a number of factors. These factors include, but are not limited to, awareness of the public, sensitivity to the living, coping mechanisms, community perception, as well as how discourse and expected behavior is modeled for students of the various disciplines.

The location of interviews predominantly took place in an office setting, yet interviews taking place in other locations (e.g. field, autopsy room) are expected to lead to different responses. Change of either researcher or location could produce results dissimilar to the results of this thesis, appropriately reflecting how many participants felt that audience and location influenced the way in which they spoke. Furthermore, forensic professions in the United States are not representative of how forensic science is defined and utilized in other countries. It can therefore be expected that methodology similar to that used for this thesis can be applied to forensic speech communities in other cultures and would yield divergent results. How language is used and expressed can be expected to differ from the observations of this thesis as cultural constructs of forensic science vary. The social existence of a register is not static (Agha, 1999),

so how forensic professionals use language is expected to change over time. Due to change in register use, survey and interviews questions similar to the ones used for this thesis are expected to yield different results in future research.

Silence can also be utilized as correct discourse is learned, or as a way of communicating without speaking. According to Saville-Troike (2006, p. 379), “members of the same speech community share as much in the uses and interpretations they give to silence as they do in regard to the linguistic forms that they use.” Further research on the use of nonverbal communication within forensic settings, such as eye contact, body language, and when silence is expected, would provide an interesting addition to this thesis.

To conclude, this thesis shows that professionals in forensic settings do, in fact, exhibit metadiscourse awareness (Agha, 1999). A review of survey and interview data shows that language patterns of discourse and register use exist among professionals within the forensic science community. This thesis examines the use and transmission of registers in forensic settings in order to better understand the dynamic relationships between individuals and their work environments. Although responses were varied, the majority of survey participants, as well as all interviewees, expressed a level of awareness for adjusted language use. Patterns of register use observed in the data of both survey and interviews have been discussed. Overall, this thesis demonstrates that an awareness of proper and improper language use exists among professionals representing a variety of forensic disciplines and levels of experience, which has a direct impact on their professional lives.

References

- American Academy of Forensic Sciences. (2016a). About AAFS. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.aafs.org/about-aafs/>
- American Academy of Forensic Sciences. (2016b, November 25). American Academy of Forensic Sciences: Membership Statistics [Data file]. Available from <https://www.aafs.org/about-aafs/sections/>
- American Public University System. (2016). Institutional Review Board (IRB). Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://www.apus.edu/community-scholars/institutional-review-board/>
- Agha, A. (1999). Register. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 9, 216-219.
- Agha, A. (2004). Registers of Language. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (pp. 23-45). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Agha, A. (2005). Voice, Footing, Enregisterment. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 15, 38-59.
- Candlin, C.N. (Ed.). (2002). *Research and Practice in Professional Discourse*. Hong Kong: City University of Hong Kong Press.
- Coulthard, M. (1992). Forensic Discourse Analysis. In M. Coulthard (Ed.), *Advances in Spoken Discourse Analysis* (pp. 242-258). London: Routledge.
- Dominguez, V. & Ross, F. (2016). Foreword to the Subsection on Forensic Anthropology. *American Anthropologist*, 118(3), 602-613.
- Duranti, A. (1997). *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fox, G. (1993). A Comparison of 'PolicSpeak' and 'Normalspeak': A Preliminary Study. In J. Sinclair, M. Hoey, & G. Fox (Eds.), *Techniques of Description: Spoken and Written Discourse* (pp. 183-195). New York: Routledge.
- Holmes, J., & Stubbe, M. (2015). *Power and Politeness in the Workplace*. London: Routledge.
- Louisiana State University Office of Research and Economic Development. (2016). IRB - Researchers. Retrieved February 23, 2016, from <http://sites01.lsu.edu/wp/ored/institutional-review-board/irb-researchers>

- Mullins, P. (2016, May 5). Abhorrent Bodies: Burying Evil [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://paulmullins.wordpress.com/2016/05/05/abhorrent-bodies-burying-evil/>
- Passalacqua, N., Pilloud, M., & Gruters, G. (2014). Letter to the Editor. *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 59(2), 573-575.
- Roach, M. (2003). *Stiff: The Curious Lives of Human Cadavers*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Saville-Troike, M. (2006). Silence: Cultural Aspects. In K. Brown (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (pp. 379-381). Boston: Elsevier.
- Society of Forensic Anthropologists. (n.d.). SOFA: Guidelines for Professional Conduct. Retrieved February 28, 2016, from <http://www.sofainc.org/code-of-ethics>
- Sofaer, J. (2006). *The Body as Material Culture: A Theoretical Osteoarchaeology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Traweek, S. (1988). *Beamtimes and Lifetimes: The World of High Energy Physicists*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Ubelaker, D. (Ed.). (2013). *Forensic Science: Current Issues, Future Directions*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Appendix 1
General Descriptions of AAFS Sections (Ubelaker, 2013; AAFS, 2016a)

General	Forensic experts in 18 accepted forensic sub-disciplines (e.g. medicolegal death investigation, crime scene investigation, forensic nursing).
Criminalistics	Collection and interpretation of physical evidence.
Pathology/Biology	Autopsies and associated science (e.g. DNA analysis, genetic diagnostics, advanced radiologic techniques).
Anthropology	Scientific study of the origin and physical and cultural variation of humans across space and time.
Toxicology	Study of adverse effects of drugs and chemicals on biological systems.
Odontology	Analogous term for forensic dentistry.
Psychiatry and Behavioral Science	Explication of psychiatric and psychological issues as they pertain to an issue in the legal arena.
Questioned Documents	Examination of documentary evidence in order to determine authenticity or authorship.
Digital and Multimedia Sciences	Examination of technological evidence.
Engineering Sciences	Analysis of engineering system failure.
Jurisprudence	Legal decisions, ‘skill in law’, including trial law.

Appendix 2 IRB Approval

ACTION ON PROTOCOL APPROVAL REQUEST



Institutional Review Board
Dr. Dennis Landin, Chair
130 David Boyd Hall
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
P: 225.578.8692
F: 225.578.5983
irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

TO: Ginesse Listi
Anthropology

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: June 3, 2016

RE: IRB# 3735

TITLE: Language Use in Forensic Settings

New Protocol/Modification/Continuation: New Protocol

Review type: Full Expedited **Review date:** 6/3/2016

Risk Factor: Minimal Uncertain Greater Than Minimal

Approved **Disapproved**

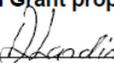
Approval Date: 6/3/2016 **Approval Expiration Date:** 6/2/2017

Re-review frequency: (annual unless otherwise stated)

Number of subjects approved: 1000

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable) _____

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman 

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:**

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
7. Notification of the IRB of a serious compliance failure.
8. **SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc.**

**All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU's Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at <http://www.lsu.edu/irb>*

Appendix 3

AAFS Survey Consent Form

Subject: You are invited to a research survey - Language Use in Forensic Settings

Dear AAFS Member,

My name is Emily Wieggers and I am a graduate student currently enrolled in the Master of Arts program in Anthropology at Louisiana State University. As part of my Master's Thesis, I am collecting survey data that is designed to determine what, if any, language patterns exist among the different forensic science disciplines. I invite you to please participate in a research study entitled Language Use in Forensic Settings. The questionnaire linked below has been designed to collect information on what influences language in various professional situations.

Participants should spend approximately 15 minutes completing the questionnaire. Questions will consist of 6 brief demographic questions as well as 9 questions regarding language related to forensic work. This survey is intended for individuals over the age of 18 who are members of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). Individuals under the age of 18 are excluded. To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

No known risk is expected to occur to individuals who participate in this study. You may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. Survey information collected in this study is anonymous. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

For questions concerning survey content, please contact Emily Wieggers at (816) 716-8877, ewieggers@hotmail.com, or Dr. Ginesse Listi at (225) 578-3906, glisti1@lsu.edu. This study has been approved by the LSU IRB. For questions concerning participant rights, please contact the IRB Chair, Dr. Dennis Landin, (225) 578-8692, or irb@lsu.edu.

By continuing this survey, you are giving consent to participate in this study.

Please click on the survey link below and submit your responses no later than August 15th, 2016.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LSR2FHH>

Appendix 4

Interview Consent Form

1. Study Title: Language Use in Forensic Settings

2. Performance Site: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College

3. Investigators: The following investigators are available for questions about this study,

M-F, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30p.m.
Dr. Ginesse Listi (225) 578-3906
Emily Wiegers (816) 716-8877

4. Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to determine what, if any, communication patterns exist among the different forensic science disciplines.

5. Subject Inclusion: Individuals over the age of 18 who work with forensic science in the state of Louisiana. Individuals under the age of 18 and those who do not work with forensic science or related matter will be excluded. To participate in this study you must meet the requirements of both the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

6. Number of subjects: Maximum 5

7. Study Procedures: The interview will be conducted in person. Subjects should spend approximately 10 minutes completing the questionnaire. Questions will consist of 5 brief demographic questions as well as 5 questions regarding language related to forensic work.

8. Benefits: The study may yield valuable information about professional discourse in a forensic setting.

9. Risks: No known risk is expected to occur to individuals who participate in this study. Files will be kept in secure cabinets to which only the investigator has access.

10. Right to Refuse: Subjects may choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

11. Privacy: Information regarding interview participants will be confidential if requested. Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

12. Signatures:

The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigators. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I agree to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Subject Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5

Questions for AAFS Survey and Interviews

1. Indicate your sex:
 1. Male
 2. Female

2. What is your highest level of education? Please specify: _____

3. With what AAFS section do you primarily affiliate?
 1. Anthropology
 2. Criminalistics
 3. Digital & Multimedia Sciences
 4. Engineering Sciences
 5. General
 6. Jurisprudence
 7. Odontology
 8. Pathology/Biology
 9. Psychiatry & Behavioral Science
 10. Questioned Documents
 11. Toxicology

4. What is your primary position?
 1. Professor
 2. Medical Examiner/Coroner
 3. Student
 4. Criminalist
 5. Pathologist
 6. Lawyer
 7. Evidence Technician
 8. Dentist
 9. Engineer
 10. Other (please specify): _____

5. In what type of agency are you employed?
 1. University/College
 2. Medical Examiner or Coroner's Office
 3. Criminalistics Lab
 4. Attorney General's Office
 5. Law Firm
 6. Government

7. Private Practice
8. Engineering Firm
9. Other (please specify): _____

6. How many years have you worked in your current field?

1. < 1 year
2. 1 - 5 years
3. 5 - 10 years
4. 10 - 20 years
5. 20 - 30 years
6. 30 - 40 years
7. 40 - 50 years
8. > 50 years

7. Does the presence of other individuals affect the way you speak on the job? Select all that apply.

1. Peer
2. Superior
3. Student
4. Decedent
5. Family member of decedent
6. None of the above
7. Other (please specify): _____

8. If you provided an answer for Question 7, please provide an example (anecdotes are welcome): _____

9. Does the location of where you are working affect the way you speak? Select all that apply.

1. Field work
2. Laboratory
3. Classroom
4. Office
5. Public space
6. Autopsy room
7. None of the above
8. Other (please specify): _____

10. If you provided an answer for Question 9, please provide an example (anecdotes are welcome): _____

11. At the start of your career in forensic science, were you given instruction on appropriate language use?

1. Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)

2. Guidelines that mention ethics/language protocol.
3. Verbal discussion
4. Was not discussed
5. Other (please specify): _____

12. Please elaborate your answer to Question 11: _____

13. If you were to use language considered inappropriate, what would be the consequences?

1. None
2. Minor reprimand
3. Moderate reprimand
4. Termination

14. Please list 3 words you consider appropriate and 3 words you consider inappropriate while at work.

1. Appropriate: _____
2. Inappropriate: _____

15. In your position, do you have contact (select all that apply):

1. Directly with the deceased body
2. Indirectly with the deceased body via samples/fluids from the body
3. I do not work directly or indirectly with human remains/tissues
4. With living victims and/or relatives of victims
5. With alleged perpetrators/defendants
6. With non-corporeal evidence
7. Other - please elaborate: _____

Vita

Emily Faith Wieggers was born in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1985. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Anthropology at Queens College of the City University of New York in 2011. Thereafter, she worked as an archaeologist in Guatemala and Louisiana. As her interest in biological anthropology grew, she made the decision to pursue forensic anthropology and entered graduate school in the Department of Geography and Anthropology at Louisiana State University in the fall of 2015. She expects to graduate in May 2017, with a Master of Arts in Anthropology. She plans to pursue a career in forensic anthropology.