

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Legal and Linguistic Examination of Texts Containing Defamatory Content

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Abstract

In this context, forensic linguistics has emerged as an essential interdisciplinary field that integrates linguistic analysis with legal evaluation. This article examines the theoretical and methodological foundations of the legal and linguistic examination of texts containing defamatory content. The study explores the criteria used to distinguish factual assertions from value judgments, the identification of negative evaluative markers, and the role of contextual, pragmatic, and discourse-level analysis in determining defamatory meaning. Particular attention is given to diagnostic indicators of insult, including attribution of negative information to an identifiable person, the degree of reputational harm, and the communicative context in which the statement is produced. The research emphasizes that defamatory meaning often arises not only from explicit accusations but also from implicit insinuations, metaphorical constructions, and communicative intent.

KEYWORDS

Forensic linguistics, defamation, legal discourse, expert opinion, pragmatic analysis, semantic evaluation, judicial linguistics.

INTRODUCTION

In global linguistics, forensic linguistic expertise is recognized as a significant scientific and practical tool in criminal investigations, particularly in analyzing texts, uncovering implicit meanings, and establishing evidentiary foundations. Linguistic analysis plays a crucial role in assessing cases involving defamation, insult, damage to personal honor and dignity, threats, and extremist discourse, serving as one of the key forms of expert evidence in legal proceedings.

Numerous scholarly studies in this field have developed methodologies for clarifying ambiguous or disputable linguistic elements arising in criminal contexts through forensic analysis. Such research enables experts to determine the pragmatic orientation of a text, the communicative intent of the speaker

or author, implicit meanings, and contextual implications, thereby supporting well-grounded judicial conclusions.

In particular, in the United Kingdom and other developed countries, forensic linguistics has emerged as an independent academic discipline. Specialized master's and doctoral programs have been established within higher education institutions to train professional linguistic experts. Moreover, a comprehensive body of scientific and methodological literature has been developed, outlining the theoretical foundations, methodological principles, and practical guidelines for producing forensic linguistic conclusions.

Defamation cases often involve the interpretation of ambiguous language, figurative expressions, evaluative

judgments, and implicit meanings. Consequently, purely legal analysis may be insufficient without linguistic examination. The integration of linguistic methodology into judicial practice has given rise to a specialized interdisciplinary field, forensic linguistics, which provides analytical tools for examining contested texts.

METHODS

The interrelationship between linguistics and jurisprudence was initially examined in the works of Russian linguists Y.L. Ziyangirova and Y.A. Grishenkova, who provided a theoretical framework for understanding the role of linguistic units in regulating legal relations and the juridical consequences of speech activity.

Issues related to the forensic linguistic examination of extremist texts were thoroughly analyzed in the research of M.V. Ablin, where semantic, pragmatic, and ideological criteria for identifying radical discourse were developed [1].

The theoretical formation of forensic linguistics, its methodological foundations, and its implementation in judicial practice were systematically described by A.N. Baranov, K.I. Brinev, I.V. Zharkov, and Y.N. Bondarenko [2]. Their studies addressed the structure of expert conclusions, linguistic interpretation of evidence, and the procedural boundaries of expert activity.

The classification and criteria of linguistic expertise in cases involving insult and damage to honor and dignity were developed by N.D. Golev and Y.I. Galyashina. Their research proposed principles for providing legal assessment based on semantic and pragmatic analysis of disputed linguistic units [3].

At the international level, the principles of forensic linguistic analysis of social media messages, anonymous letters, and authorship attribution were developed by M. Coulthard, Tim Grant, and N. Smith. They substantiated methods of authorship attribution, stylometric analysis, and discourse-based identification. Furthermore, issues related to organizing forensic linguistic expertise in criminal investigations, systematizing expert procedures, and integrating linguistic evidence into legal processes were extensively explored in the studies of A. Nini.

A text may be considered defamatory when it contains statements presented as factual claims rather than subjective

opinions, conveys negative information capable of damaging an individual's honor, dignity, or business reputation, refers to an identifiable person (explicitly or implicitly), and is communicated to third parties. In addition, such statements typically lack evidentiary support or contain false information that can be objectively verified. Within the framework of forensic linguistic analysis, particular attention is paid to distinguishing between statements of fact and value judgments, since legal liability in defamation cases largely depends on whether the disputed content constitutes a verifiable factual assertion or merely an expression of opinion.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

The analysis demonstrates that an effective legal and linguistic examination of texts containing defamatory content requires a comprehensive multi-level approach. At the lexical-semantic level, experts examine the specific vocabulary used in the disputed text, paying particular attention to negatively evaluative words, metaphorical or hyperbolic expressions, and lexical markers that signal accusation. They also analyze presuppositions and implicit meanings embedded in the wording. Even when a text does not contain a direct allegation, expressions that imply criminal or unethical behavior may still produce defamatory implications depending on their semantic structure and contextual interpretation.

At the pragmatic level, the focus shifts to the communicative intention of the author and the illocutionary force of the statement. Linguistic experts assess whether the utterance functions as an act of accusation, whether it contains insinuations, or whether it indirectly attributes unlawful or immoral conduct to the person concerned. Indirect speech acts, including irony, sarcasm, or suggestive formulations, may cause reputational harm even in the absence of explicit allegations. Therefore, pragmatic analysis is essential for determining how meaning is constructed beyond the literal level.

The contextual and discourse level of analysis further refines interpretation by considering the broader communicative environment in which the statement appears. A phrase that may seem neutral when isolated can acquire defamatory meaning within a specific discourse. Factors such as the publication platform, the target audience's perception, the sociocultural background, and accompanying visual elements (such as headlines, images, or captions) significantly influence how the message is understood. In digital communication,

these contextual elements often intensify the potential impact of defamatory content.

From a legal perspective, the linguistic expert does not determine legal liability or guilt but clarifies specific linguistic aspects relevant to judicial evaluation. This includes determining whether the disputed content constitutes a factual assertion or a value judgment, whether the information presented is capable of objective verification, and whether the wording implies unlawful conduct. The findings confirm that linguistic analysis plays a crucial role in enhancing judicial objectivity by systematically clarifying ambiguous, implicit, or contested statements in defamation cases.

In most cases, the expert is compelled to provide a conclusion based on a hypothesis that corresponds to the textual situation and the nature of the speech act. This, in turn, may lead to serious objections from the defendant. Based on the considerations outlined above, it can be stated that in organizing a forensic linguistic examination of texts containing insulting content, the following issues must be clarified:

1. The direction and content of the speech act. It is necessary to determine to whom or to what the insulting text is addressed. The expert must establish whether the insult is directed at a specific individual or expressed indirectly. It is also important to clarify whether the insulting content was used publicly or in an individual context. For example, in the sentence "You idiot, don't talk to me at all," the insult is clearly directed at a specific person. In contrast, in the sentence "Some clients behave shamelessly," the statement is aimed at a particular individual or a group of persons in a more generalized manner.
2. A conclusion must be drawn regarding the speaker's attitude within the speech act, that is, how the subject of the speech is evaluated and what type of attitude is expressed

toward it. For instance, statements such as "It's outright theft—how can people tolerate this?" or expressions comparing someone to an animal in a derogatory way demonstrate negative evaluative attitudes toward the subject of speech.

3. The communicative purpose must be assessed, namely, why the information was conveyed. In this regard, the expert evaluates the communicative intention. It is necessary to determine whether the content was intentionally aimed at discrediting a person's reputation. For example, highly aggressive and offensive statements containing calls for social humiliation or public contempt may indicate deliberate intent to damage reputation.

In accordance with these structural components, the linguistic expert selects appropriate analytical methods.

During forensic linguistic examinations of insulting texts, various indicators expressing insulting meaning are identified and analyzed separately. These indicators are typically systematized in analytical tables to facilitate clear diagnosis. Based on such classification, situations involving insult are evaluated diagnostically. Affirmative markers indicate the presence of insulting features. In cases requiring linguistic substantiation, the necessity of conducting a forensic linguistic examination arises.

In such instances, a comprehensive expert analysis may clarify the author's gender, age, level of education, as well as social, professional, and regional affiliation, and overall social status. The legal aspect of the situation involves determining the form in which the insult or defamation was committed (for example, whether it occurred publicly) and clarifying elements of legal risk. In cases where the text contains ambiguous issues that require further clarification, a forensic linguistic examination is formally назначается to resolve those uncertainties [4.8].

Table 4. Diagnostic indicators of insult.

| Diagnostic Indicators of Insult | Qualification as Insult |
|--|--------------------------------|
| Evidentiary nature of insulting texts (presentation as factual statements) | ✓ |
| Attribution of negative information related to insult to a specific | ✓ |

| | |
|---|---|
| natural or legal person | |
| High degree of infringement upon a person's honor, dignity, or reputation within the linguistic unit | ✓ |
| Context in which the insulting word or statement is used: publicly, through mass media appearances, in written form (letters), via social networks, or directly addressed to the individual | ✓ |

The necessity of revisiting the diagnostic indicators of insult in forensic linguistic examination has also been emphasized by M.L. Podkatilina. In her view, it is essential to systematize the contextual and conceptual semantic components of words carrying insulting meaning. Furthermore, she argues that proper consideration should be given to how the addressee perceives the message, including an adequate assessment of the role played by psychological and psychophysiological factors in the interpretation and impact of the utterance [5.389].

CONCLUSION

Special attention must be paid to distinguishing factual assertions from value judgments, as this distinction remains central to determining legal liability. The diagnostic indicators of insult, including attribution of negative information to an identifiable person, the degree of reputational harm, evidentiary presentation, and the communicative context (public or private), serve as key analytical criteria in forensic linguistic practice. At the same time, as emphasized by contemporary scholars, these indicators require constant methodological refinement, particularly with regard to contextual semantics and the psychological perception of the addressee.

The findings further indicate that the role of the linguistic expert is not to determine legal guilt but to clarify linguistically relevant aspects of disputed texts in a neutral and evidence-based manner. A well-structured forensic linguistic conclusion enhances judicial objectivity, minimizes subjective interpretation, and strengthens the evidentiary foundation of court decisions.

In conclusion, the development of unified methodological standards, the integration of digital linguistic tools, and the expansion of interdisciplinary collaboration remain priority

directions for advancing forensic linguistic expertise in defamation cases. As public communication continues to transform in the digital era, the demand for scientifically grounded legal-linguistic examination will inevitably increase, reinforcing its significance within modern judicial systems.

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