EXPLORING THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND FORENSIC SCIENCE IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS; WITH A CASE STUDY ON THE BURARI MASS SUICIDES

Riddhi Kalan[*]

ABSTRACT

In criminal investigations and court cases, forensic linguistics is important. It covers the linguistic analysis of language used as evidence in court, such as in cases involving anonymous threat letters, suicide notes, audio or video recordings, or other language submissions. Our human qualities are the result of the development of language. In actuality, no one can truly characterise us by our language. In the backdrop of the Burari fatalities, a mass suicide that occurred on July 1, 2018, in Burari, Delhi, India, eleven persons committed suicide. This research attempts to investigate the role that language plays in forensic investigations. There are parallels between the Burari murders case and other well-known instances. It has garnered a lot of attention and prompted many inquiries concerning the use of language and forensic linguistics in criminal investigations. One famous example is the Unabomber Case, in which Ted Kaczynski's identity was established by linguistic analysis of his manifesto.[1]In legal contexts, language can be extremely important in illuminating hidden meanings, intents, and linkages. The examination of linguistic patterns in the letters left by the departed illuminated potential motives and psychological states of the individuals associated with the Burari killings. With linguistic analysis providing as strong evidence in court processes, as in the Burari killings case, these contributions have been essential in solving crimes and explaining the causes of incidents. To show the intricate relationship between language and forensic

---

[*]BA LLB, FOURTH YEAR, SYMBIOSIS LAW SCHOOL, PUNE.
[1] Sudjana, E. T., & Fitri, N. (2013). Kurt Cobain's Suicide Note Case: Forensic Linguistic Profiling. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*. Retrieved from https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:142685100

investigation in the process of uncovering the truth about this tragedy, this study offers a deeper look at specific linguistic discoveries from the Burari Death case. [2]

Keywords: Mass Suicide, Forensic Linguistics, Linguistic Evidence, Language Analysis.

FACTS OF THE CASE

In 2018, there was a discovery of 11 Chudawat family members, blindfolded, dead in their Sant Nagar, Burari, Delhi, house. The same residence housed three generations of people. Each member was a well-read and socially adept individual. The family residing in the Burari, Delhi, home was eleven in number. The matriarch, Narayani Devi, was a widow who had raised three sons and two daughters, two of whom had lived in the house with her at one point. Lalit was the youngest son, and Bhuvnesh was the older. Both were wed, one to Tina and the other to Savita. Lalit and Tina were raising only Shivam, their lone child, while Bhuvnesh and Savita had two daughters and one son (Maneka, Neetu, and Dhruv). Priyanka, the sole daughter of Narayani Devi, was born to Pratibha, her daughter.[3]

On 1st July 2018, when the neighbours went to check on the Bhatia family (originally Chundawat). As they went upstairs, they were left shocked to discover nine family members hanging from an iron grill on the ceiling of the roof in a circular formation. The tenth member, a lady, was hanging right opposite them, and their mother was lying in the other room, on the floor, near her bed. The family members were blindfolded, hands and feet bound, and they had hanged themselves. The family's dog, the only member alive, was tied to the roof and was said to be barking continuously.[4]

By examining the diaries discovered at the scene, forensic linguistics was essential in assisting the police in making sense of the strange "mass suicides" in the Burari case. The linguistic information from these diaries enabled specialists to examine the language's substance, tone, and directives. Investigators may be able to learn more about the motivations, mental states, and possible influences on the individuals involved in the sad incident by using forensic

---

[2] Ahmed, H. (2021). THE ROLE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION: USES IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4609333

[3] Bagade, P. R. (2019). IMPORTANCE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION. Retrieved from https://lgandlt.blogspot.com/2019/01/importance-of-forensic-linguistics-in.html

[4] Chand, S. (2021). *The Times of India.* Retrieved from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/

linguistics to examine these diaries. This language analysis provided light on the fundamental causes of the Burari mass suicides and helped to sort through the case's intricacies.

DELHI POLICE AND CRIME BRANCH INVESTIGATIONS

The family's former neighbour, Rajeev Tomar, the Head Constable of the Burari Police Station from 2017 to 2020, was the first to learn about the horrifying tragedy, which was initially thought to be a suicide. Having observed the aforementioned events, Tomar believed that the mass suicide formation represented a banyan tree. The police officers were left with more questions than answers after witnessing a lack of circumstantial evidence supporting the alleged mass killing, no burglary sign because the women were wearing all of their ornaments, no signs indicating that the incident was a suicide because the members were blindfolded, and no suicide note. Reporters from the media and those who were curious about the strange occurrence had gathered to witness it. As a result, managing the throng and protecting the crime scene was crucial, and the Delhi Police faithfully accomplished both.

After receiving news of the terrifying incident, the Forensic Science Laboratory, Delhi (FSL) sent a team of experts to Delhi. During the inquiry, the police authorities reviewed the footage from a CCTV camera that was installed on one of the house's walls facing the lane. The camera had been examined from the night before until the occurrence, to make sure that there was no chance of an outsider entering and that nobody outside was involved in the occurrence. [5] The entire incident and the evidence that was collected were described in full in the police authorities' filed police report (FIR). The post-mortem reports revealed that the deaths of the members were due to hanging only. The eldest member of the family, Narayani Devi, had died due to partial hearing. [6]

FORENSIC LINGUISTICS

The field of forensic linguistics offers useful methods and instruments for evaluating language evidence in criminal investigations. Using methods like authorship analysis, discourse analysis, and linguistic profiling, forensic linguists can examine written and spoken texts to look for

---

[5] Digital, Mirror Now. (2018). *Delhi Burari deaths case: Read exact lines from the diary found at crime scene.* Times Now. Retrieved from https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/delhi-burari-deaths-case-exact-linesdiary-crime-scene-lalit-bhatia-bhatia-family-mass-suicide/249973

[6] Yadav, L., & Chopra, A. (Directors). (2021). *The House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths [TV series]* [Motion Picture].

trends, identify specific people, and reveal hidden meanings. Furthermore, forensic science, which includes toxicology tests, DNA analysis, and crime scene reconstruction, supplements linguistic research by offering factual data to back up investigation conclusions.

The field of forensic linguistics, often known as legal linguistics or language and the law, applies linguistic theories and techniques to legal situations such as criminal investigations, court cases, and trial proceedings. To produce linguistic evidence, analyse written laws, comprehend language use in legal and investigative processes, and ascertain the authorship, authenticity, and purpose of writings used as evidence in criminal cases, involves analysing language in legal situations.[7]

Numerous forensic linguists research to apply linguistic analysis to legal contexts, supporting legal proceedings and criminal investigations. Their study focuses on methods such as authorship attribution, deceptive language analysis, and voice identification. Through the analysis of linguistic data, researchers can identify authors, detect dishonesty, and offer valuable insights for judicial cases in the field of crime research. All things considered, their work improves the comprehension of language in the criminal justice system and is essential to the investigation of crimes and the administration of justice.[8]

Ramezani et al. (2016) investigate how linguistic fingerprints in forensic linguistics can be examined using a variety of techniques, such as the average word length hypothesis and syntactic structures. To provide professional judgments that support the assessment of linguistic evidence, the study focuses on the linguistic analysis of writings connected to criminal activity, suicide notes, and threatening letters. By using these techniques, forensic linguists examine language data to refute criminal theories and make sense of any ambiguities in the linguistic context. The study also discusses how forensic linguistics has limits when it comes to analysing speech patterns, such as tone, accent, and pauses, which might have an impact on the analysis's accuracy. Forensic analysis requires careful consideration of word usage to prevent misconceptions. [9]

---

[7] Dewdrop. (2016). What is Forensic Linguistics? Retrieved from https://lama.hypotheses.org/70

[8] Digital, Mirror Now. (2018). *Delhi Burari deaths case: Read exact lines from the diary found at crime scene.* Times Now. Retrieved from https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/delhi-burari-deaths-case-exact-lines-diary-crime-scene-lalit-bhatia-bhatia-family-mass-suicide/249973

[9] (Ramezani et al., 2016)

Forensic linguists primarily focus on three areas of inquiry:

1. The language used in written legal materials: linguists are interested in the complex syntax, esoteric vocabulary, and sparse punctuation that are common in legal texts, as well as the issues that result for general readers.[10]

2. The spoken language of the legal system: linguists study the nature of police interrogations of suspects, the unique rules that regulate communication in courts of law, the issues that arise for witnesses who are at risk, and the challenges faced by individuals who do not understand the court language.[11]

3. The linguist as expert witness: In this case, linguists provide their opinions on a variety of topics, including the origins of asylum seekers, the meaning of words and expressions, the confusability of competing trademarks, and the authorship of documents.[12]

A variety of approaches and procedures are used in linguistic forensics to examine language and extract important data for criminal investigations. These methods, which include voice analysis, linguistic profiling, and authorship attribution, each have a unique function in revealing important information. In linguistic forensics, a stylometric study is a potent method for identifying anonymous authors. It looks at several linguistic elements, including grammar, vocabulary, and writing style, to create a distinct authorial fingerprint. Experts can assess the possibility that a specific person is the author of a piece by comparing these characteristics with databases or known writing examples.

IMPLICATIONS OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS

Speech and language are frequently admissible as forensic evidence. Forensic linguistics is frequently used in criminal investigations to identify suspects, exclude suspects, and determine the authorship of written evidence. In court, linguistic evidence is frequently presented by both the prosecution and the defence. Jan Svartvik's book The Evans Statements: A Case for Forensic Linguistics demonstrated how the grammatical style of the parts of four linked statements that Timothy Evans allegedly dictated to police officers and implicated him in the murder of his wife and infant daughter differed noticeably from the uncontested parts of the same statements. John Christie, Evans' landlord, was later proven to have been accountable for the murders of both victims after Evans was found guilty of the double homicide and executed.

---

[10] Tiersma 1999; Stygall 2010
[11] Haworth 2010; Heffer 2005; Aldridge 2010; Hale 2010
[12] Shuy 2002; Coulthard and Johnson 2007, chapter 6; Eades 2010

Svartvik's analysis led to the establishment of forensic linguistics. For the next twenty-five years, not much happened, with the notable exception of Roger Shuy's expert witness work in the United States.[13]

Using a qualitative study methodology, the function of language and forensic linguistics was examined; in particular, the content of diaries found at the Burari deaths case crime scene was examined. These diaries talk about a necessary rite as well as the things that happened before the death. Forensic linguistics has a role in interpreting linguistic data from crime scenes. [14]

The Chundawat family presented itself as the happy, peaceful, and complete "Indian family."

However, their portrayal of the situation is far worse than that of other families worldwide. The truth behind the odd "mass suicides" that the investigators have uncovered from the diaries was revealed. Authorities received assistance in explaining the strange "mass suicides" from the diaries found at the "house of horror" in Sant Nagar.

A diary near a shrine was found by the involved detectives after conducting a thorough investigation of the crime scene. The content of the diary explained everything to the investigators. Eleven journals were found by Delhi's crime division after searching the entire residence. The most important piece of evidence in the case, therefore, turned out to be the diaries that were found.[15]

Eleven family members passed away at a Burari home, and diaries with entries from eleven previous years were found within. Based on the notes, which were written over 11 years in 11 journals, one of the final paragraphs indicates the family was getting ready for an experience that would be "earth-shattering" when they hanged themselves to finish their "religious ritual".[16]

Lalit (47) was the youngest of his brothers, yet hardly one paid him any attention. His words were considered final by the family. All the family members blindly followed his instructions, as they believed they were instructions from Lalit's father.[17]

---

[13] (Dewdrop, 2016)

[14] Mahwar, S. (2022). Burari death case : an insight.

[15] Namratha, P., Kishor, M., Sathyanarayana , R., T, S., &Rajesh, R. (2015). Mysore study: A study of suicide notes. *Indian journal of psychiatry*. https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.171831

[16] Mahwar (2022)

[17] Narayan, P. (2022). The Burari Deaths: The Psychopathology of Lalit, a Biopsychosocial

The police claim that the ritualistic activities began in July 2007, shortly after the death of Bhopal Singh, the family patriarch.[18] The notebook, which also included guidelines for the family's way of life and a daily plan, was centred around Lalit. This may be observed in statements like "*If you want solutions to your problems, then you must follow Lalit's instructions*".[19]

The police found other diaries, which led to the release of further information. It was subsequently disclosed that Lalit had been experiencing visits from his late father, Bhopal Das, in his nightmares since 2007. He started giving the family these instructions as he was talking to his father, who had passed away. Lalit was able to mimic his father's words and deeds and have conversations with his spirit.[20]

Everything found at the crime scene lined up with the information recorded in the diaries. The diaries' language was sometimes conversational and occasionally instructive. They were talking about a ceremony they were dubbing "Badh Pooja" that would endure for the following seven days, according to the diary entry dated June 24, 2018. The Badh tree's roots are suspended from its branches. It is implied by the terminology that they have to behave like the roots hanging out of the branches. Even the timing, which is set for roughly 1:00 in the morning, was written down.[21]

The police concluded that the family did as they were told in the journals since it had improved their life in the past and worked for them. Following the directions led to significant success for the family, which increased their confidence in it.

CONCLUSION

This study observed the significance of linguistic evidence uncovered during the Burari case inquiry and how it helped the investigators comprehend the unusual mass suicide in Delhi, where 11 suicides were performed by members of the same family. The field of linguistic forensics has enormous potential for growth in the future. Linguistic analysis methods need to advance and adapt as communication technologies and language change. [22] The diaries found

---

Perspective. Retrieved from https://clinicalpsychologyashoka.blogspot.com/2022/02/the-burari-deathspsychopathology-of.html

[18] Narayan, P. (2022). The Burari Deaths: The Psychopathology of Lalit, a Biopsychosocial Perspective.

[19] (Yadav & Chopra, 2021).

[20] Gothi (2018)

[21] (2018), Mirror Now, Digital.

[22] Shaikh, I. (2019). The power of language. How can language create Individual identities?

throughout the inquiry were the most important and trustworthy information to help explain this mass suicide. Their murders were caused by strange and unsettling details found in the journals, which appeared to allude to witchcraft and other occult practices.[2324] The crime branch, forensics, police investigators, and other state actors concluded that Lalit's altered social context following his father's death, the pressures placed on him as the head of the family, and the existence of a shared psychosis were the reasons behind what transpired inside the Burari residence.[2526]

In this sense, the uses of linguistic forensics are extensive, ranging from voice analysis to the creation of criminal profiles based on linguistic traits and the identification of anonymous writers through stylometric analysis. Case studies from real-world situations have demonstrated how language analysis may be effectively used to solve a variety of crimes, from terrorism to fraud and cybercrime.[27]

REFERANCES

Bagade, 2019

Pilen (2016)

Sudjana, E. T., & Fitri, N. (2013). Kurt Cobain's Suicide Note Case: Forensic Linguistic Profiling. *International Journal of Criminology and Sociological Theory*. Retrieved from https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:142685100

Ahmed, H. (2021). THE ROLE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION: USES IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4609333

---

[23] Ramezani, F., Sani, A. K., & Moghadam, K. (2016). Forensic Linguistics in the Light of Crime Investigation. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24*.

[24] Ramezani, F., Sani, A. K., & Moghadam, K. (2016). Forensic Linguistics in the Light of Crime Investigation. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24*.

[25] (Narayan, 2022)

[26] Ahmed, H. (2021). THE ROLE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION: USES IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4609333

[27] Perkins, R. C. (2018). The Application of Forensic Linguistics in Cybercrime Investigations. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pay097

Bagade, P. R. (2019). IMPORTANCE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION.

Retrieved from https://lgandlt.blogspot.com/2019/01/importance-of-forensic-linguistics-in.html

Chand, S. (2021). *The Times of India.* Retrieved from https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/

Digital, Mirror Now. (2018). *Delhi Burari deaths case: Read the exact lines from the diary found at the crime scene.* Times Now. Retrieved from https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/delhi-burari-deaths-case-exact-linesdiary-crime-scene-lalit-bhatia-bhatia-family-mass-suicide/249973

Yadav, L., & Chopra, A. (Directors). (2021). *The House of Secrets: The Burari Deaths [TV series]* [Motion Picture].

Dewdrop. (2016). What is Forensic Linguistics? Retrieved from https://lama.hypotheses.org/70

Digital, Mirror Now. (2018). *Delhi Burari deaths case: Read the exact lines from the diary found at the crime scene*

scene. Times Now. Retrieved from https://www.timesnownews.com/mirror-now/crime/article/delhi-burari-deaths-case-exact-lines-diary-crime-scene-lalit-bhatia-bhatia-family-mass-suicide/249973

(Ramezani et al., 2016)

Tiersma 1999; Stygall 2010

Haworth 2010; Heffer 2005; Aldridge 2010; Hale 2010

Shuy 2002; Coulthard and Johnson 2007, chapter 6; Eades 2010

Dewdrop, 2016

Mahwar, S. (2022). Burari death case: an insight.

Namratha, P., Kishor, M., Sathyanarayana, R., T. S., &Rajesh, R. (2015). Mysore study: A study of suicide notes. *Indian journal of psychiatry*. https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.171831

Narayan, P. (2022). The Burari Deaths: The Psychopathology of Lalit, a Biopsychosocial

Perspective. Retrieved from https://clinicalpsychologyashoka.blogspot.com/2022/02/the-burari-deathspsychopathology-of.html

Narayan, P. (2022). The Burari Deaths: The Psychopathology of Lalit, a Biopsychosocial Perspective.

 (Yadav & Chopra, 2021).

Shaikh, I. (2019). The power of language. How can language create Individual identities?

Ramezani, F., Sani, A. K., & Moghadam, K. (2016). Forensic Linguistics in the Light of Crime

Investigation. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24*.

Ramezani, F., Sani, A. K., & Moghadam, K. (2016). Forensic Linguistics in the Light of Crime Investigation. *Pertanika J. Soc. Sci. & Hum. 24*.

Ahmed, H. (2021). THE ROLE OF FORENSIC LINGUISTICS IN CRIME INVESTIGATION: USES IN LEGAL PROCEEDINGS. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4609333

Perkins, R. C. (2018). The Application of Forensic Linguistics in Cybercrime Investigations. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pay097

Gothi, C. (2018). Burari deaths: Notes suggest Lalit Bhatia was acting on 'directions' of dead father.

Retrieved from https://www.indiatoday.in/amp/india/story/burari-deaths-notes-suggest-lalit-was-acting-on-the-directions-of-his-dead-father-1276918-20180704#amp_tf=From%20%251%24s&aoh=16737990663484&referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com