

Linguist and writer who applies a deep understanding of language and communication to real-world situations. Technical writer since 1995, Master's degree in Linguistics in 2008. Lifelong passion for words and language.

Professional Experience

Native US English Linguistics Expert, Defined Crowd Corporation. Semantic analysis of short paragraphs, to be used for training data for artificial intelligence software. May–June 2019.

English tutor. I help non-native speakers of English to improve their written English.

Linguist, IBM Watson. Researched news articles on assigned topics, then wrote questions based on the articles. The questions were used for training for IBM's artificial intelligence engine, called Watson. May–June 2015.

Adjunct Instructor in Linguistics, Holy Names University, Oakland, California. Taught an introductory course in linguistics to undergraduates. Main topics covered were morphology, phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, language acquisition, pidgins and creoles, and dialects. Supplemental material included videos and a class session devoted to forensic linguistics. 2012.

Lecturer in Technical and Professional Writing, San Francisco State University. Taught “Visual Rhetoric and Document Design,” a class that focused on the concepts and tools of design that supports the communication goals of the document (paper or online). Topics included typography, use of grids, use of colors, use of photos, and other tools. The students also learned to use Adobe InDesign to create the documents. San Francisco State University, 2014.

Senior Technical Writer/Editor, self-employed. Produce documentation for technology, primarily computer software, for both technical and non-technical audiences. 2005–present. (Sabbatical for graduate school, 2007–2008.)

Publications

- “Conversational Maxims and Technical Documentation: Using a tool from linguistics in technical writing.” October 2018 issue of *Intercom*, published by the Society for Technical Communication.
- “Managing Multiple Information Channels: Strategies for Designing Effective Presentations.” October 2013 issue of *Intercom*, published by the Society for Technical Communication.
- Book Note for *Bastard tongues: A trailblazing linguist finds clues to our common humanity in the world's lowliest languages* by Derek Bickerton. *Language in Society*, volume 38, issue 05, pp. 646-647, November 2009.

Presentations

- “Making Contract Language More Comprehensible.” A review of research into features of legal language that might slow down the reader's comprehension, and advice for anyone who writes, edits, or approves contracts. Paper presented to the biannual conference of the International Association of Forensic and Legal Linguistics, July 2023 (Manila, Philippines).
- “Forensic Linguistics: Wait, What Did He Mean?” An examination of the difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning in language, using three potential criminal cases as examples. Regional Gathering, San Francisco Regional Mensa, Pleasanton, CA. November 2022.

- “What was in those Affidavits? A Linguist Examines Claims of Election Fraud.” An analysis of the affidavits submitted in a lawsuit challenging the vote count in Michigan for the 2020 presidential election. Regional Gathering, San Francisco Regional Mensa, November 2021.
- “Forensic Linguistics: Language Issues in Three Murder Cases.” A discussion of the place of linguistics in criminal trials, with three real-life cases as examples. Online presentation, San Francisco Regional Mensa. July 2021.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtmNrVjwaks>
- “How your Audience Reads your Writing: Insights from Psycholinguistics.” Practical applications of psycholinguistics research for an audience of technical writers. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, February 2020.
- “Did 110 People Die because of Poor Communication? Discourse Analysis of Technical Documentation.” A case study to show how linguists can analyze technical documentation that might be at issue in a civil lawsuit. Forensic Linguistic Conference, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona, October 2019.
- “Linguistic Analysis: Are You Cooperating with Your Readers?” A webinar sponsored by the Society for Technical Communication. An explanation of how the maxims of conversational cooperation, a tool used by linguists in pragmatics and discourse analysis, can be applied to analyze the effectiveness of technical writing. December 2018.
- “Evaluating (and Improving) Your Technical Documentation: Save Money, Reduce Risk.” How to use Grice’s maxims of conversational cooperation to make user manuals and other technical documentation more effective. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, December 2017.
- “A teenage mother in a police interview: did she implicate her own mother in her baby’s death?” Discourse analysis of a police interview. Paper presented to the conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, July 2017 (Porto, Portugal).
- “Clarity Above All: Writing to be Understood.” An explanation for technical writers about techniques to improve comprehensibility. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, April 2016.
- “Forensic Linguistics: Discourse Analysis.” An explanation of the linguistic subdiscipline of discourse analysis, and how it can be of use in the justice system, using real-life examples. Alameda County Law Library, November 2016. (Continuing education credit for California lawyers.)
- “Semantics and Pragmatics in a Florida Shooting.” A linguistic analysis of a portion of a conversation between a police dispatcher and a man later charged with murder. Paper presented to the conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, July 2015 (Guangzhou, Guangdong, China).
- “Forensic Linguistics: Law and the Science of Language.” Introduction for lawyers to the use of linguistics in civil and criminal cases. Includes overviews of some of the subdisciplines of linguistics, and real-life examples of linguistics applied to evidence. Alameda County Law Library, July 2012, July 2013, July 2014; San Francisco Bar Association, October 2012. A shorter version of the same class delivered to the Alameda County Legal Secretaries’ Association, September 2013; Livermore Amador Valley Legal Professionals Association, September 2013. (Continuing education credit for California lawyers.)
- “Clarity in Death Penalty Jury Instructions.” Presented a paper about writing more effective jury instructions to the International Association of Forensic Linguists, 2009 (Amsterdam, Netherlands).
- “Forensic Linguistics: Discourse Analysis and the Law.” An explanation of semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis, and how these concepts can be applied to legal evidence. Joint Regional Gathering, San Francisco and Monterey Mensa, November 2014.
- “Forensic Linguistics: Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say?” An explanation of the difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning, using a particular incident from a U.S. election as a case study. For general audiences. Richmond, California, Rotary Club, April 2014.
- “Forensic Linguistics: Real-life CSI with Word People.” Wrote and delivered (multiple times) a presentation explaining the basic concepts of forensic linguistic analysis to non-specialist audiences,

using evidence from real-life crimes as examples. The presentation includes lots of audience participation, and is always well received.

- “Language and Law: The Breadth of Forensic Linguistics.” A short overview of the many areas of law in which Linguistics can add value. Audience was undergraduate students in an introductory linguistics class. San Francisco State University, April 2014.

Other

Panelist, “Careers in Technical Documentation.” Linguistics Career Launch, sponsored by the Linguistics Beyond Academia special interest group, part of the Linguistic Society of America. Online event. July 2021.

Pro bono linguistic research for a non-profit organization initiating a lawsuit. My task was to track the meaning of a particular phrase going back to the 19th century. I used both multiple dictionaries and linguistic corpus research.

Pro bono work as a forensic linguist (discourse analysis of a police interrogation), The Project for the Innocent, Los Angeles, California.

Guest, *The Colin McEnroe Show*, WNPR-FM (Connecticut), 25 June 2012. Discussion of the Supreme Court’s June 2012 ruling on FCC regulations about broadcast indecency.

Technical consultant for *Off the Edge* by Carolyn Crane, 2013. A novelist created a character who was a linguist, and I made sure that the linguistic elements of the story were realistic.

Active participant on Q&A social media site Quora.com, often answering questions about language and linguistics. “Why do we have silent letters in English?” An answer I wrote for Quora.com was reprinted in *The Independent* (U.K.) on 3 January 2015.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/why-do-we-have-silent-letters-in-the-english-language-9952944.html>

Education

M.A., Linguistics, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. The *Master’s in Language and Communication* program provided a foundation in the technical aspects of linguistics, including phonology, syntax, and computational linguistics. But the program’s focus was on sociolinguistics, including discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and linguistics in the legal realm. My personal focus was language and law. I am the only person ever to complete this program in only two semesters.

Certificate in Forensic Linguistics, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. 2014. “Discourse Analysis in Law Case Evidence.” Discourse analysis of warning labels, recorded conversations in criminal cases, trademark disputes, and other civil and criminal contexts.

Certificate in Forensic Linguistics, Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. 2009 This course focused on linguistic analysis of criminally oriented communications: stalker letters, telephoned threats, ransom notes, etc. The material the class analyzed came from actual criminal cases. One of the two instructors is a former FBI Special Agent, and its first linguistic profiler; the other instructor directs the Forensic Linguistics Project at Hofstra.

Multiple classes at the Linguistic Institute, sponsored by the Linguistic Society of America and the University of California, Berkeley. Topics included gesture, historical linguistics, language contact.

B.A., Humanities (minor in Communication Arts), Holy Names College, Oakland, CA. *Magna cum laude*. The core of the major was English, Philosophy, and History; minor included Linguistics, Graphic Arts, Public Speaking, and other Communications courses.

“Presenting Data and Information.” One-day course taught by Edward Tufte, professor emeritus from Yale University and pioneer in the field of information design. Addressed the most effective ways of getting information across to an audience visually.

Professional Activities

Member, Linguistic Society of America.

Member, International Association of Forensic Linguists.

Member, American Dialect Society.

Member, American Name Society.

Fellow, Society for Technical Communication.