

Forensic Linguistics Seminar

hosted by the *International Linguistic Association*

Saturday, April 6, 2024

10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Eastern Time (US and Canada)
on Zoom

Interactive Workshop with

Dr. Mo Matarese, *Professor, BMCC, CUNY*



Linguistic Discretion in Law Enforcement Settings: An Interactive Workshop

Lipsky (1980/2010) demonstrated that street-level workers of all stripes, whether they are “cops, teachers, [or] counselors” (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), share an “analytically similar” palette of strategies for managing a common set of workplace challenges. Lipsky argues workers’ collective discretionary choices become de facto policy. Law enforcement face seemingly infinite discretionary choices each day, including choosing which speeding car to pull over, which actions are crimes warranting arrest (Portillo & Rudes, 2014). Gray areas in policy and procedure open law enforcement to discretionary choices, and police officers, like all street-level workers, use standardized routines and heuristics to make decisions. New York City’s Stop and Frisk policy, for example, involves discretionary choices (Portillo & Rudes, 2014). Likewise, racial profiling rarely surfaces in policy; instead, officers make decisions based on racialized heuristics drawn from negative stereotypes (Raaphorst and Groeneveld, 2018). Matarese (forthcoming) examines street-level workers’ linguistic discretion—the linguistic and discursive choices workers make, sometimes drawing on racialized stereotypes, that become de facto policy.

This workshop invites participants to explore linguistic data in multiple forensic contexts asking the question: “Why this, now?” (Sacks, 1990). After discussing a variety of forensic linguistic choices, we will close by addressing what responsibility we take for discretionary choices in law enforcement.

Dr. Mo Matarese (he/him) explores the discourse practices of street-level workers. His forthcoming book *The Subtlety of the Street* and his conference keynote at the Street-Level Bureaucracy conference in Copenhagen brings linguistic and discourse analytic rigor to the analysis of the social construction of discretion in everyday, institutional, street-level practice. He teaches Forensic Linguistics, among other courses, at BMCC.

For more information: <https://www.bmcc.cuny.edu/faculty/maureen-matarese/>