

Forensic Linguistics Seminar

hosted by the *International Linguistic Association*

Sunday, April 7, 2024

10:30 a.m. to 11:45 p.m. Eastern Time (US and Canada)

on Zoom

Closing Plenary

Dr. Tammy Gales

Director of Research at the Forensic Linguistics Institute at Hofstra University



Requesting and Expressing Remorse: An Analysis of Speech Acts in Indigenous Parole Board Hearings

According to a recent report, many U.S. detention centers are underfunded, neglected, and in disrepair; in some states, more prisoners are incarcerated for longer periods of time and, of those denied parole, there are a disproportionate number of American Indians (ACLU, 2015). During the parole process, it is expected that the inmate will make a statement of contrition for the convicted crime. However, in complex legal contexts, there is wide variation in how such speech acts are linguistically expressed (e.g., Gruber, 2014), how interpersonal stances are individually negotiated (e.g., Gales, 2011), and how differences in cross-cultural communicative strategies can cause grave misunderstandings (e.g., Eades, 2013). Using Gruber's (2014) framework for categorizing expressions of remorse, this study examines speech acts in contrition statements from 64 parole board hearings in Montana in 2016. The samples are all cases of sexual assault and were matched, as closely as possible, for inmate gender, age, psychological diagnosis, and parole eligibility status. Half of the cases are from Anglo Americans and the other half are from American Indians; within each of those groups, half were denied and half were granted parole. The results reveal subtle differences in expressions of remorse in the statements and a large lack of opportunity to provide such expressions, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive examination of the parole hearing process.

Tammy Gales is a Professor of Linguistics and the Director of Research at the Forensic Linguistics Institute at Hofstra University, NY. Her research interests apply corpus and discourse analytic methods to the examination of stance in threatening communications and parole board hearings of disadvantaged populations. Gales is co-editor of the Elements in Forensic Linguistics series from Cambridge, and the current VP (president-elect) of the International Association for Forensic and Legal Linguistics. For more information:

<https://tammygales.com/>

<https://www.hofstra.edu/faculty-staff/faculty-profile.html?id=3587>