

The new development and characteristics of Chinese forensic linguistics in the past two decades¹

QING ZHANG, Prof.
School of Foreign Studies
China University of Political Science and Law
No. 25, Xitucheng Road, Haidian District, Beijing 100088,
China
qingzh@cupl.edu.cn
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5053-3428>

Abstract: Forensic Linguistics as a discipline has gone through more than 30 years of development in China, which can be divided into the brewing period, the establishment and development period, and the comprehensive improvement period. In the past decade, the study of forensic linguistics has mainly focused on the theoretical research of forensic linguistics, the application of legislative and judicial language, the translation and teaching of legal language. This paper will use the literature review method, supplemented by CNKI visual analysis function and bibliometric visual analysis of

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VOSviewer software, aiming to summarize the development status and characteristics of Chinese forensic linguistics in the past 20 years, combined with the current research characteristics and hot spots of the times, and make a prospect for the future development direction of forensic linguistics, in order to provide literature reference for the current theoretical development and application practice of forensic linguistics, so as to better guide the future development of the discipline.

Key Words: Legal Language Study; Forensic Linguistics; Application of Legal Language; Legal Translation; Legal English Teaching

近二十年中国法律语言学的新发展与新特点

摘要: 法律语言学在我国历经了三十多年的发展,以十年左右为分界线,可以分为酝酿时期、创立发展时期、全面提高时期。学者们将法律语言学的起源和发展状况以论文、专著、译著、教材、研讨会等形式呈现出来,促进了未来法律语言学的发展。近十年来,法律语言学的研究主要集中在法律语言学理论研究、立法及司法语言应用研究、法律语言翻译研究和法律语言教学研究等四个方面。文章将运用文献综述法,同时辅以知网可视化分析功能和 VOSviewer 软件的文献计量视觉分析,旨在概括、总结过去二十多年中国法律语言学的发展状况及特点,结合当下研究特色与时代热点,对法律语言学未来的发展方向做出展望,以期为当下法律语言学的理论发展与应用实践提供文献参考,以更好地指导未来的学科发展。

关键词: 法律语言研究; 法律语言学; 法律语言应用; 法律翻译; 法律英语教学

1. Introduction

The study of forensic linguistics abroad started in the 1960s², and after more than 30 years of study and development in this field, the International Association of Forensic Linguistics (IAFL) was officially established in 1993, signifying that Forensic Linguistics³ became an independent discipline abroad. “Forensic Linguistics” elaborated in this paper refers to the “Forensic Linguistics” of IAFL, namely, Forensic Linguistics in its broadest sense. In China, the study of contemporary forensic linguistics⁴ originated in the 1980s, nearly 20 years later than in Europe and America. Nonetheless, the study of Chinese forensic linguistics developed rapidly. In the early stage, Chinese teachers and legal scholars of universities and colleges began to pay attention to the study of legal texts. Later, foreign language scholars introduced the western research results of forensic linguistics to China. From then on, there was a thriving trend in the study of Chinese forensic linguistics. A close correlation and continuity between the study of Chinese forensic linguistics and that of forensic linguistics abroad existed. In particular, foreign forensic linguistics classics translated and introduced by foreign language scholars inspired and enriched the domestic study of forensic linguistics, which made it not only relate to the study abroad but have its own characteristics. However, although relevant studies in legal language have been in full blossom since the twentieth century, it is necessary to review and classify the current study of forensic linguistics in China. Thus, this paper intends to review the development of Chinese forensic linguistics with a focus on its past two-decade study and probe

² This paper focuses on the study of Chinese forensic linguistics, so details about the study of forensic linguistics abroad will not be pursued here.

³ In this paper, forensic linguistics is discussed from the perspective of a discipline,

that it be understood in a broad sense as “法律语言学.” The author adopts the translation of “法律语言学,” which does not mean the exclusion of the use of “legal linguistics” representing “法律语言学.” It is not the focus of this paper and needs no further elaboration.

⁴ This paper is based on the study of contemporary forensic linguistics and does not dabble in the study of ancient forensic linguistics.

into its future development trend⁵.

2. Development Periods of Forensic Linguistics

In China, the development of forensic Linguistics as a discipline can be divided into three stages, namely, the brewing period, the establishment and development period, and the comprehensive improvement period.

2.1 The Brewing Period of Forensic Linguistics (prior to 1994)

Since a gradual progress was made in developing democracy and the rule of law in China, and awareness of law interacted with linguistic theories, foreshadowing the emergence of forensic linguistics. After the reform and opening up, exchanges between China and foreign countries gradually increased, with Chinese scholars actively learning from advanced concepts and theories abroad, beginning to have access to forensic linguistics. However, Chinese forensic linguistics at that time was still in the brewing period, having no systemic theories and framework.

2.2 The Establishment and Development Period of Forensic Linguistics (1994-2006)

After the founding of IAFL (International Association of Forensic Linguistics), the period between 1994 and 2006 was the establishment and development period for Chinese forensic linguistics. Scholars in this period were mostly engaged in basic research, and the results were mainly an introduction to forensic linguistics from a macro perspective.

Dr. Wu Weiping (1994) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong wrote a paper named “Forensic Linguistics: Conference,

⁵ As the author is a scholar and researcher of the foreign language community, the discussion in this paper about the development trend of forensic linguistics study is mainly based on the field of foreign language research.

Organization and Journal” in Chinese, which was published in *Linguistics Abroad* in 1994, introducing the concepts and theories of forensic linguistics to China for the first time. In his paper, to China’s legal and linguistic communities, he introduced the origins and development of international forensic linguistics from a macro perspective, outlined its academic conferences, research organizations and academic journals, and analyzed its latest trends. This paper expands forensic linguists’ research perspectives abroad, opening up new horizons for the study of forensic linguistics. In 1994, *Forensic Linguistics* started publication, which later changed its name to *The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*. In June 2002, “The First Academic Seminar on Language and Law” was held in Beijing. In the 1990s, the study of Chinese forensic linguistics developed by leaps and bounds: Yu Zhichun edited the textbook *Forensic Linguistics* in 1990; Sun Yihua and Zhou Guangran compiled *Forensic Linguistics* in 1997; Wang Jie edited the textbook *Forensic Linguistics Course Book* in 1997; Li Zhenyu published the monograph *Preliminary Exploration of Forensic Linguistics* in 1998; Chen Jiong published the monograph *Introduction to Forensic Linguistics* in 1998. Chinese forensic linguistics, as a discipline, began to take shape (Zou Yuhua, 2020:1). According to Li Zhenyu (2011:3; 2012:71), prior to 1998, most research focused on Chinese legal language. Nevertheless, this research marked Chinese forensic linguistics became a relatively independent science, entering a new stage, during which the study of legal language enabled Chinese scholars to gradually learn about and be familiar with forensic linguistics.

After 1999, English legal language studies gradually became emerging (Li Zhenyu, 2011:3), which broadened the research field of forensic linguistics. Under the exchange of Chinese and foreign legal languages, legal linguistic treatises with Western linguistic colors have been produced, and the differences in Chinese and foreign legal linguistic research are distinguished from the perspective of comparison. Some scholars in the field of foreign languages began to write books to introduce, compare, and localize the study of legal linguistics. For instance, Wu Weiping’s *Language and the Law: Linguistic Research in the Legal Field* (2002), Liao Meizhen’s *A Study on Courtroom Questions, Responses and Their Interaction* (2003), Du Jinbang’s *Forensic Linguistics* (a, 2004) and so forth (Zou Yuhua, 2020:1). Liu

Weiming's (2003) monograph *Forensic Linguistics Research* took forensic linguistics as the main context and combined the research on Chinese forensic linguistics to conduct a comprehensive and macro comparative study of foreign and domestic forensic linguistics. In the same year, his paper "On the Chinese Translated Terms of Forensic Linguistics" (2003), starting from the Chinese translation of "forensic linguistics", actually explored the origin of forensic linguistics abroad, the general situation when it was introduced into China, the difficulties encountered by the Chinese translation and the essential attributes of forensic linguistics, enabling the academic community to further understand "forensic linguistics". Especially after 2003, the study of legal language has shown a strong momentum of development, and the number of publications has soared (Zhang Falian & Jiang Yujing, 2023:31). In 2003, Professor Liao Meizhen transcribed recordings of court trials, forming a corpus of more than 900,000 words, and revealed the significance of questions and responses in a trial by analyzing their interaction. *A Study on Courtroom Questions, Responses and Their Interaction* not only revealed China's court trial situation at that time but also broadened Chinese scholars' research vision of forensic linguistics. In the same year, Liao Meizhen introduced the research of foreign legal language in "Review of Forensic Linguistics Study Abroad", focusing on the countries that implemented the common law system after the 1970s, and conducted a comprehensive review according to the typical development process (i.e. three levels) of legal language as an object, legal language as a process, and legal language as a tool, which enabled us to clarify the development and research context of forensic linguistics abroad. With the development of China's legal system, the study of trial language gradually became the focus of the research on the application of legal language. Again in 2004, Du Jinbang's book *Forensic Linguistics*, which is by far the most comprehensive and latest work on forensic linguistics in China, put many factors involved in this field in order and elaborated on thinking and outlook of future development of this field⁶ (Liu Weiming, 2014).

It is clear from the aforementioned works and papers on forensic linguistics that, during the establishment period, from

⁶ Liu Weiming. 2014. An Overview of Forensic Linguistics Research in China [DB/OL]. <http://www.flrchina.com/002/0032.htm>. (Last access at 31/05/2023.)

preliminary research to gradually deeper research, on the original theoretical basis and continuous integration of their own views and insights, scholars formed their distinctive systems and research methods. During this time, scholars explored forensic linguistics theories and comparatively studied Chinese and foreign legal languages, laying the groundwork for the future development of forensic linguistics.

In June 2006, the legal scholar Li Zhenyu's *New Theories of Forensic Linguistics* offered a comprehensive review of the theory and practice of forensic linguistics. This book not only summarized the establishment period but also looked forward to the future and proposed a new development direction for forensic linguistics.

In July 2000, the China Association of Forensic Linguistics (CAFL) was formally established. Since then, the legal language community in China has had its own national academic organization and a specialized platform for expressing academic views. At the same time, scholars in China gradually realized that the development of forensic linguistics required a collision of ideas and exchanges. Therefore, academic conferences and seminars on forensic linguistics have been held continuously in China and gradually attracted attention. Take the 4th National Symposium on Forensic Linguistics and the Annual Conference of China Association of Forensic Linguistics in 2006 as an example, participants of which included foreign language scholars, Chinese scholars, legal scholars and practitioners. Conference topics included the following four aspects: theoretical research on forensic linguistics, application of legislative and judicial language, and study of the translation and teaching of legal language, which indicated the development trend and direction of Chinese forensic linguistics.

2.3 The Comprehensive Improvement Period of Forensic Linguistics (2006-2020)

With greater exchanges between the legal language communities at home and abroad, the number of scholars studying forensic linguistics in China has gradually increased, and the research field of legal language has also been expanded. Domestic forensic linguists have gradually begun undertaking monographic studies based on the

theoretical research in forensic linguistics conducted during the establishment and development period, with a particular emphasis on the studies of theories of forensic linguistics, the application of legislative and judicial language, and the translation and teaching of legal language. Relevant papers, monographs, translations, textbooks and academic conferences laid the foundation for the comprehensive improvement of forensic linguistics and marked the end of the establishment and development period. Since 2007, forensic linguistics has entered a period of comprehensive improvement, during which the research on forensic linguistics can be described as “a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend.”

2.3.1 Theoretical Research on Forensic Linguistics

Based on the theoretical research results achieved during the establishment and development period, scholars have developed the theoretical research in the new period by integrating their fresh ideas and discoveries, constantly enriching the theoretical systems and broadening the theoretical research field. Du Jinbang established a linguistic model of the information structure of legal discourse, filling the research gap in the information structure of legal discourse. In 2009, by analyzing the function of questions and responses during a trial, Du Jinbang (2009:360) studied how courtroom litigators achieved the goal of communication. This paper is an example of the study of oral legal discourse. After a series of papers on legal discourse was released, Du Jinbang's monograph *On Legal Discourse Information* was published in 2015, in which he proposed the Discourse Information Theory (DIT), which was an innovation in the theoretical research of forensic linguistics and provided theoretical support for the construction of legal language discipline. Theoretical work in this area was further enriched during this period by the doctoral dissertations of students specializing in forensic linguistics at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. In his article, “The New Research Field of International Forensic Linguistics”, from the perspectives of the global background resources of asylum seekers, the responsibilities and missions of linguists and eleven guiding principles, Liu Weiming (2007) examined the causes and development of the new research field of international forensic

linguistics. *Research on the Legal Culture of Legal Language* written by Liu Suzhen (2007) combined Chinese cultural elements and studied the legal cultural symbol system of legal language, emphasizing that legal language is, in essence, the meaning and value system of a nation. Dong Xiaobo (2007) elaborated on the uncertainty in legislative language from the perspective of the philosophy of law, which was conducive to people's correct understanding of the causes and values of the ambiguity in China's legislative language during the transition period and its influence on the construction of the rule of law. Zhang Qing and Duan Min (2019) analyzed legal discourse from the perspectives of research subjects, research objects and research methods and proved that the system of legal discourse is a special kind of discourse system.

As a discipline formed by the intersection of linguistics and law, the research methods of forensic linguistics can certainly adopt the research methods of law and linguistics. Nevertheless, forensic linguistics has its unique research methods as an independent discipline. In 2011, Du Jinbang published an article in "Chinese Social Sciences Today", proposing that discourse information analysis is a new approach to language analysis. The tree information structure of legal discourse provided a new method for forensic linguistics research. In 2016, Du Jinbang and Ge Yunfeng published a monograph named *On Methodology of Forensic Linguistics*, which systematically, deeply and comprehensively discussed the research methods of forensic linguistics and proposed a systematic methodology of forensic linguistics. Theoretical and applied research methods were also discussed. Research methods should be selected according to different research contents, tasks, objectives, characteristics and so forth. It is generally believed that semantic analysis and critical discourse analysis are relatively mature research methods of forensic linguistics (Zou Yuhua, 2020).

Since 2010, an increasing number of scholars have joined in the theoretical research of forensic linguistics, and more and more books and textbooks related to forensic linguistics have been published; for instance, *Legal English* (2016) edited by Yang Dexiang, *Study on Legal English Linguistics* (2016) edited by Zhu Jie, *Forensic Linguistics* (2017) edited by Pan Qingyun, *Legal English* (2017) edited by Chen Jing, etc.

2.3.2 Applied Research in Forensic Linguistics

In the 1990s, forensic linguistics research in China mainly focused on theoretical research, supplemented by applied research, whereas since the 21st century, with theory guiding practice, applied research in forensic linguistics has been developing by leaps and bounds. As the research results of forensic linguistics have gradually been accepted and recognized by the legal community, more and more legal scholars and students have become interested in the research of forensic linguistics. We discovered that “applied research in forensic linguistics” received greater attention from legal researchers for the following reasons: (1) Combined with judicial practice. Law is an applied discipline. The combination of the applied research of legal language and legal practice produces research results of novelty and dual perspective that hold strong attraction. (2) A lower research threshold. Theoretical research of legal language requires a background in interdisciplinary research such as linguistics, which is a “high threshold” for law researchers. And characteristics of applied research, such as “strong practicality” and “great fit,” lower the threshold of legal language research to a certain extent.

The applied research of forensic linguistics in legislation and judicature is the requirement for building democracy and the legal system and the policy needed for law-based governance. Hu Zhiguo (2007) was the judge of the Research Office of the People’s Court of Qingpu District in Shanghai. In his article “The System of People’s Assessors Needs to be Perfected—from the Perspective of Legal Language”, combined with relevant laws and regulations and from the aspects of pragmatics, meaning, legal terminology, etc., he elaborated on questions about people’s assessors’ function and power, the scope of trial, labor remuneration and exemption from service, etc., indicating that the people’s assessor system still needed to be improved. Tian Lizhi (2007) of Shandong University Law School pointed out in the article “On the Contextual Constraints of Legislative Language: Starting from the Use of Language in China’s 2004 Constitutional Amendment” that actual contextual factors affect the use, selection and adjustment of legislative language, and analyzes the role of contextual factors through examples of language adjustment in the 2004 constitutional amendment. Wang Yongjie (2007) of East China University of Political Science and Law wrote “From Solitary Language to Dialogue: The Aesthetic of Procedural Justice in the Language of Legal Publicity”. In this article, he proposed that legal publicity had a rational communication process

from solitary language to dialogue, that the purpose, idea and way of legal publicity would undergo new changes, and that it was necessary to fundamentally establish a legal publicity mode with dialogue at its core, and only in this way could procedural justice be achieved. Zhang Jianjun and Chen Yuxiu (2017) of Law School of Huazhong University of Science and Technology discussed the controversial theoretical issue of professionalism and popularization of legislative language in their article “Professionalism and Popularization of Legislative Language” and proposed the applicable aspects and characteristics of these two kinds of language selection tendencies. Chinese scholars Lv Wentao and Yao Shuangyun (2018) wrote “Vocabulary Regulation and the Simplicity of Legal Language”, which analyzed the practical application of the rule of simplicity in China’s national legislative language from the aspect of vocabulary use and revealed the differences between legislative language and general language accordingly. Meanwhile, scholars with dual backgrounds in law and linguistics likewise paid much attention to the applied research of forensic linguistics. For example, in “A Study on the Language Norms of Statements of Defense”, Zhang Qing (2010) stressed the significance of studying the norms of language use and the art of rhetoric of defense statements. Structures and contents of statements of defense enjoyed their own characteristics in that there were differences in the defenders, facts of a case and personal styles. However, as a type of writing and rhetorical device, structures and contents of defense statements shared basic consistency. Li Li and Zhao Hongfang (2009) studied legal discourse in their book *An Empirical Study of Legal Language* from the characteristics of courtroom discourse, the right of courtroom speech and its realization, the language of the disadvantaged in court, courtroom discourse strategies, etc.

In addition, plenty of research achievements have been made in judgement documents, courtroom language and other areas of forensic linguistics. Yang Bin (2017) in his paper “An Analysis on Written Judgement in the view of Linguistic Eco-ethics” pointed out that there were many serious language problems in the implementation process of law. Many people in the field of law had a relatively weak consciousness of linguistic eco-ethics, and there were obvious problems in the appropriateness of the elements of style of a considerable number of written judgments. Under this situation, knowledge of legislation and the spirit of law could not be well spread to common people. To improve the ecological environment in the field of law, we should first improve the use of language. Zhan Wangzhen, Zhang He and Ding Yongcai

(2019), in “Research on the Standardization of Judges’ Court Discourse in the Context of Judicial Reform”, put forward some institutional measures to standardize the court discourse of judges in Gansu province in China according to the features of their court discourse.

It is worth mentioning that after Du Jinbang put forward the DIT, the doctoral dissertations on forensic linguistics from Guangdong University of Foreign Studies carried forward the applied research of DIT. For instance, Xu Youping’s *Realization of Persuasion in Chinese Court Conciliation: The Discourse Information Approach* (2011), Ge Yunfeng’s *Resolution of Conflict of Interest in Chinese Civil Court Hearings: A Perspective of Discourse Information Theory* (2013), Li Yuekai’s *The Study of Testimonial Verification Modes: Mappings and Integration of Courtroom Discourse Information* (2013), Zhang Shaomin’s *A Study on Authorship Attribution for Chinese Texts Based on Discourse Information Analysis* (2014), Guan Xin’s *A Study of Forensic Speaker Recognition Based on Discourse Information Analysis* (2015), Sun Bo’s *A Study on Automatic Inquiry of Chinese Judicial Discourse Information* (2016), Wang Hong’s *Research on the Mechanism of Automatic Representation of Legal Discourse Information* (2019), etc. The development of applied research in forensic linguistics is best shown by these dissertations.

2.3.3 Study on Legal Translation

The study on the translation of legal language is closely related to the application of legislative and judicial language. The translation of legal provisions and judicial documents and court interpreting are all important research topics.

With the establishment of the Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) program at universities and colleges, especially with legal translation as a distinctive direction, more and more scholars paid attention to legal translation. For example, in “Speech Acts and Court Interpreting”, starting from the theories of speech acts, Zhao Junfeng (2007) pointed out that there were different “felicity conditions” from which courtroom speech acts took shape, and accurately understanding these conditions and constitutive rules for the speech acts would assist interpreters in properly meeting with the challenges of court interpretation. Xiao Yunshu (2007) took the translation of “intellectual

property” as an example to study the translation norms of legal terms. It is the obligation and responsibility of legal workers and translators or interpreters to strive to standardize the translation of legal terms. In “A Comment on Similar Phrases of Chinese Legal Provisions”, Huang Yongping (2007) analyzed various problems in the translation of similar phrases in Chinese legislative documents, with examples of several main mistranslation and pointed out that translators must be familiar with the legal interpretation rules in English-speaking countries, so as to avoid making logical or semantic mistakes when translating similar phrases. Xiang Hong (2007) studied the linguistic features of structures and styles of judicial documents and emphasized the strong applicability of the purpose-oriented functional translation theory, which was conducive to achieving the communicative purpose of accuracy when translating judicial documents. Qu Wensheng (2012) discussed the problems of the translation of Chinese legal terms and their causes and proposed that the standardization of the translation of Chinese legal terms should be revised and updated. Zhang Qing (2018) also discovered that the English translation of the names of Chinese laws and regulations lacked a unified standard, which confused readers from other countries, and put forward some advice to address these problems. Cheng Le’s (2017) paper found that two intra-semiotic subjective links were identified within the process of formulation, interpretation, translation and reception of legal terms, and analyzed the five translation principles of legal terms within the semiotic interpretation from Semantic Triangle Model and Translation Triangle Model as well as its corresponding three elements—namely, Representation, Reference and Interpretation. Zhang Luping (2017) analyzes the problems encountered in court interpretation and the translation strategies from the aspects of contextual relationship, language structure, and dynamic adaptation from the perspective of adaptation theory and drug case interpretation records, and summarizes the principles that interpreters should follow. Zhang Falian (2020) summarizes the difficulties of machine translation technology in legal translation, and attempts to explore the combination of machine translation and human translation in legal translation.

Textbooks on legal translation have sprung up like mushrooms after a rain, for example, Zhang Falian’s *Legal English Translation* (2009), Xia Dengjun’s *Techniques of the Legal English Translation*

(2008), Teng Chao and Kong Feiyan's *English-Chinese Legal Translation: Theory and Practice* (2008), etc. Zhang Falian's book analyzed the translation of legal words, legal culture, legislative texts, foreign-related business contracts, charging documents and notarial deeds from the perspective of the characteristics of legal language and the principles of legal translation. In addition to legal translation, there are books on legal interpreting. For example, *Course of Legal Interpreting* (2006) edited by Du Biyu. Besides, there are some translations about legal translation, such as *Translating Law* by Deborah Cao (2008), one of the series of textbooks for MTI students.

2.3.4 Study on Legal Language Teaching

Du Jinbang believed that the study of the discourse information structure, especially the tree information structure of legal discourse, provided the supporting theories and tools for information analysis, and emphasized the importance of cultivating students' awareness of the macro-structure and information of discourse in legal English teaching, including the teaching of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation, etc. (Du Jinbang 2007). Based on the situation of English teaching in China, Zhang Luping (2007) explored China's legal English teaching model from a theoretical and practical perspective of English immersion by analyzing law and English, indicating that legal English teaching still had a long way to go to cultivating compound talents.

The development of the times has seen the increasing importance of legal foreign languages and more and more textbooks on legal languages. Zhang Falian⁷ can be regarded as a leading figure in the teaching field of legal English. He has not only published relevant papers but also compiled a series of legal English textbooks. He has been making great efforts in the development of legal English. In addition, there are other textbooks, such as Du Jinbang's (2004) *A Core Course of English for Law, Reference Book*, one of the series of textbooks on legal English, Sha Lijin's (2010) *Legal English*, one of the series of English textbooks for graduate students, Qi Jun's (2011) *Legal*

⁷ See <http://wgxy.cupl.edu.cn/info/1150/3140.htm> (Last access time: 2021-02-21).

English Textbook, Tong Luming’s *Course Book for Practical Legal English* (2006) and *Course Book for Legal English Texts* (2009), Liu Hanxia’s *Legal English* (2004), one of the series of textbooks for law major at universities in the 21st century, etc. There have been numerous textbooks on legal English published in recent years, for instance, *Legal English* (2010), a nationally planned textbook for the “Eleventh Five-year Plan,” and so forth⁸. Due to the increasing demand for legal English in society, more and more students majoring in law and English have participated in legal English tests. Therefore, the National Legal English Certificate Examination Advisory Committee compiled *A Coursebook on Legal Reading in English* (2010), one of the excellent series of textbooks on legal English for national colleges and universities and designated books for the national examination of Legal English Certificate (LEC), and other textbooks.

Besides publishing papers, works, translations and textbooks, domestic scholars have actively held and participated in academic seminars on forensic linguistics. The following table provides a review of national academic seminars on forensic linguistics since 2008:

Time	Name	Location
2008	The 5th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
2010	The 6th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics	Southwest University of Political Science and Law
2012	The 7th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics	Zhongyuan University of Technology
2014	The 8th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics	Northwest University of Political Science and Law

⁸ See the official website: <https://www.lectest.com> (Last access time: 2021-02-21).

2016	The 9th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
2018	The 10th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics and the Annual Conference of the Professional Committee of Forensic Linguistics of China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese	China University of Political Science and Law
2020	The 11th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics and the Annual Conference of the Professional Committee of Forensic Linguistics of China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese	East China University of Political Science and Law
2022	The 12th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics and the Annual Conference of the Professional Committee of Forensic Linguistics of China Association for Comparative Studies of English and Chinese	Guangdong University of Foreign Studies

Table 1 A review of national academic seminars on forensic linguistics since 2008

Due to the COVID-19, the 11th and 12th National Conference on Forensic Linguistics was held online respectively at East China University of Political Science and Law, and Guangdong University of Foreign Studies. And the 13th Conference will be held again in China University of Political Science and Law in Beijing.

Another phenomenon that is worth mentioning is that more and more young scholars have introduced Chinese forensic linguistics research to the international community and continuously made China's voice heard in the international academic arena, so as to let the world learn about the status of Chinese forensic linguistics research. In addition to senior scholars such as Du Jinbang, Liao Meizheng, Liu Weiming and other professors who have expressed their academic

views at international academic conferences and journals of forensic linguistics, a group of young and middle-aged scholars, such as Zhang Falian, Qu Wensheng, Yuan Chuanyou, Cheng Le, Wang Zhenhua, Ge Yunfeng, Dong Xiaobo and so forth, have gradually emerged in the field of international legal language research as up-and-coming figures. Take Cheng Le⁹, a well-known professor from Zhejiang University Guanghua Law School in the international legal language community, for example. He not only serves as the vice president and secretary general of many international academic organizations of legal and language research but also as the chief or deputy editor of multiple international academic journals on law and language, such as the chief editor of *Social Semiotics* and *International Journal of Legal Discourse* (Emerging Sources Citation Index), and the deputy editor of *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* (Emerging Sources Citation Index) and *International Journal of Semiotics and Visual Rhetorics* and *Language and Law*. In recent years, he has published more than 50 papers in SSCI, A&HCI, Legal Journal Index, and other authoritative international journals. Another example is Ge Yunfeng¹⁰, a professor at Shandong Normal University School of Foreign Languages and a rising star in the academic study of forensic linguistics in recent years. He has published papers in authoritative international academic journals or publications, for example, in *Pragmatics*, *Journal of Pragmatics*, etc., discussing China's civil trial discourse and the structure and rhetoric of judgement documents, which allowed the international academic community to learn more about Chinese forensic linguistics research.

2.4 Summary: A Brief Bibliometric Visual Analysis of Publications on Chinese Forensic Linguistics (2000-present)

To corroborate our previous analysis regarding Chinese forensic linguistics study, we have adopted bibliometric visual analysis of VOSviewer software based on literature in the China National

⁹ See: <https://person.zju.edu.cn/en/chengle> (Last access time: 2023-05-30).

¹⁰ See: <http://www.sfl.sdn.edu.cn/info/1225/1877.htm> (Last access time: 2021-02-20).

Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) from 2000-present.

The key topic for retrieval in this analysis was as follows: “TS = ((((((((((topic =‘法律语言’ or title =‘法律语言’) OR (topic =‘法律语言学’ or title =‘法律语言学’)) OR (topic =‘法律语言研究’ or title =‘法律语言研究’)) OR (topic =‘法律语言应用’ or title =‘法律语言应用’)) OR (topic =‘法律语言教学’ or title =‘法律语言教学’)) OR (topic =‘法律翻译’ or title =‘法律翻译’)) OR (topic =‘法律英语’ or title =‘法律英语’)) OR (topic =‘法律语言’ or title =‘法律语言’)) OR (topic =‘司法语言’ or title =‘司法语言’)) OR (topic =‘立法语言’ or title =‘立法语言’)) AND (time-span: Between (‘2000-01-01’,‘2023-05-29’)); document types (article or review). All the data were downloaded on May 29, 2023. After eliminating literature not relevant to the subject, 3,264 documents were obtained as the research data for this analysis.

2.4.1 Annual Publications Analysis

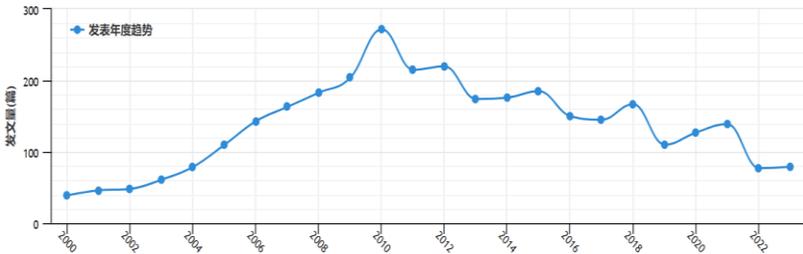


Fig. 1. Trends in the count of publications of Chinese forensic linguistics from 2000-present.

The annual publication for the 3,264 documents included in this analysis is shown in Fig. 1. The number of published papers had an overall fluctuating upward trend over the last 20 years, which reflects the development of this research field, and the number of publications rose after 2003 and peaked in 2010, supporting our previous analysis. In 2010, there was a publication volume of 272 articles. During this period, scholars’ research fields have become more extensive, and their research topics have become more diverse. The number of literature publications after 2010 declined and gradually stabilized. According to

the prediction of the bibliometric software, the number of published papers in 2023 will be 77, which shows that the research of Chinese forensic linguistics has fallen into a bottleneck period, and the future development needs to find new breakthrough points.

2.4.2 Discipline Analysis

The distribution of literature in Chinese forensic linguistics study is very diverse. Figure 2 shows the top 30 in numerical order of source disciplines. “Foreign Language and Literature”, “Jurisprudence and Legal History” rank in the top 2, and the amount of literature they contain accounts for more than 70% of the top 30 disciplines. It can be seen that the research of Chinese legal linguistics has attracted the common attention of social science circles such as linguistics, legal circles, translation circles and foreign language circles.

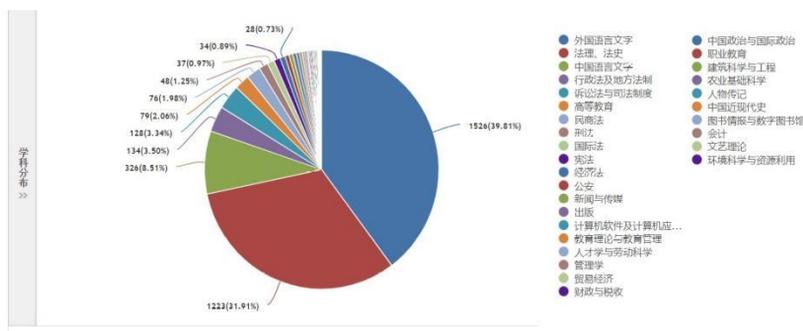


Fig. 2 Distribution of disciplines

2.4.3 Research Subject Analysis

Keywords are the core summary of a paper. Co-occurrence analysis of keywords may help the reader to understand the developmental history and research focus of a research field and predict future trends in this field. In this analysis, the co-occurrence map of 8,159 keywords was obtained (Fig. 3). A connection means that two keywords appear in the same paper. Keywords with high frequency were: 法律英语(legal

English) (738 times), 法律语言 (legal language or forensic linguistics) (393 times), 法律翻译 (legal translation) (343 times), 翻译 (translation) (213 times), and 立法语言 (legislative language) (178 times) (Fig. 4). The number of links indicates the degree of association between keywords, whereas the frequency indicates popular words in this domain. We also counted the first keyword listed in each literature as the main theme word for quantitative ranking. Figure 5 shows the top 20 main theme words, with the top 5 being: 法律英语 (legal English) (689 times), 法律语言 (legal language or forensic linguistics) (266 times), 法律翻译 (legal translation) (209 times), 法律英语教学 (legal English teaching) (156 times), and 立法语言 (legislative language) (149 times). The top words of the main theme words are roughly the same as the top words of the keywords co-occurrence, which means these keywords are the hot topics in Chinese forensic linguistics research over the past 20 years.

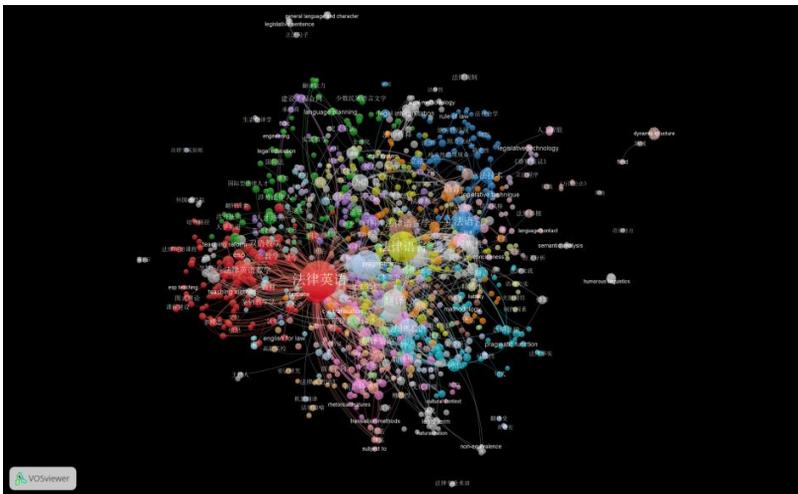


Fig. 3 The keyword co-occurrence network map.

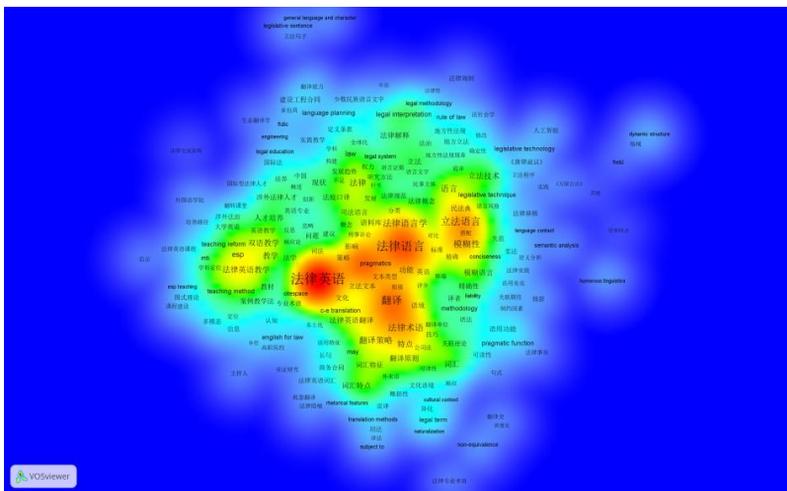


Fig. 4 Density visualization of keyword co-occurrence.

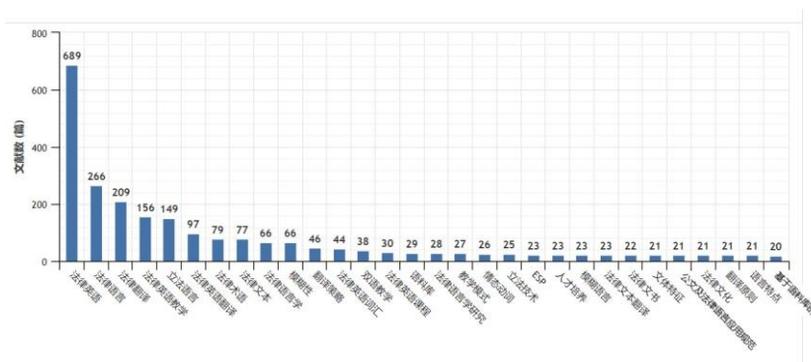


Fig. 5 Sub-distribution of major themes.

We also used VOSviewer software to perform cluster analysis on all keywords in this field, resulting in a total of 35 clusters. The circles of different colors in Figure 3 represent different clusters. Sorted by the number of keywords covered by the cluster, the top three clusters can be considered as the three main research interests in this field. Cluster 1 contains 95 keywords, mainly focusing on the topic of 法律英语教学 (legal English teaching). The high-frequency keywords within the cluster include: 法律英语教学 (legal English teaching), 法律英语课程 (legal English courses), 法律与英语 (law and English),

法律人才 (legal talents), 法律专业英语 (legal professional English), 教学改革 (teaching reform), etc. Cluster 2 contains 85 keywords, mainly focusing on the topic of legal English application. The high-frequency keywords within the cluster include: foreign-related law, foreign-related legal talents, language policy, international communication, international law, minority languages (少数民族语言), etc. Cluster 3 contains 64 keywords, mainly focusing on the topic of legislative language analysis, and the high-frequency keywords in the cluster include: legislative language, legislative intent, criminal law determination, criminal law norms, ambiguous legal language, local regulations, etc. Through the above analysis, it can be found that the focus of Chinese forensic linguistics research is more inclined to linguistic practice, and it has a high research interest in the reform and innovation of legal language teaching, and is also keen to analyze the basic role of legal language in foreign-related rule of law practice, and explore how to regulate legislative language or analyze judicial discourse.

2.5 The Future Development of Forensic Linguistics

In addition to putting more emphasis on the combination of theory and practice, the future development of Chinese forensic linguistics will present the characteristics of diversity, multidisciplinary integration and being more extensive and in-depth, which is the requirement of the times and the goal that forensic linguists need to strive for together. Specifically, the study of forensic linguistics will be more prominent in the following aspects.

2.5.1 Forensic Linguistics Will Make Technological Breakthroughs with the Help of Corpus Technology and Artificial Intelligence.

Legal language research has advanced significantly in recent years with the work of Gu Yueguo, Du Jinbang, Liao Meizhen, Song Beiping and others to build a legal language corpus. In January 2006, Dr. Song Beiping established the Institute for the Application of Legal Language at Beijing College of Politics and Law. And an expert consultation

meeting on the standardization of the Chinese legal language was held. At this meeting, experts from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Justice, China Law Society, Peking University, and China University of Political Science and Law had a discussion together, highlighting how a legal language corpus would form the basis for legal language research and serve as a tool for standardizing the legal language. Under the guidance of a steering committee composed of nine experts from the three disciplines of law, linguistics, and forensic linguistics, the construction of the Chinese legal corpus began. And the first forensic linguistics corpus was established in 2008, aiming to standardize the understanding and use of legal language. The development prospect of legal corpora is rather promising. As for the establishment and development of legal language corpora, nowadays, there are some authoritative, practical and effective corpora, such as Parallel Corpus of China's Law Document (PCCLD) and China Judgments Online. Many scholars are also studying the construction and application of corpora. Corpus technology can realize quantitative and empirical research, providing authentic, reliable, systematic and comprehensive original data for forensic linguistics research. Furthermore, as artificial intelligence develops, especially with ChatGPT emerging, groundbreaking results in forensic linguistics will certainly be achieved with the help of artificial intelligence technology.

2.5.2 Forensic Linguistics Will Integrate Legal Culture to Promote People-To-People Exchanges.

Legal culture is legal activities' wisdom crystallization in the development of human civilization, the cultural basis for the existence and development of legal phenomena in society, and the macro context for the formation and evolution of legal language. We believe that studies of Chinese and western legal language and culture and their contrastive study provide one of the future development directions for legal language. Zhang Falian's book *A Comparative Study of Chinese and Western Legal Language and Culture* (2017) comprehensively and systematically expounds the comparison of Chinese and western legal language and culture. Based on interdisciplinary research, and from a dynamic research perspective that combines linguistics and law, of

Chinese and western legal language and culture, a comparative framework and an analysis paradigm are systematically constructed, and vertical and horizontal research are innovatively integrated, and integration of point and sphere of comparison is strengthened, reflecting the changes of the times and the academic advancement.

Another textbook on legal culture is *Anglo-American Legal Culture Course* (2018), edited by Zhang Falian and Jiang Fang. It is a textbook for legal English majors in universities and colleges across the country and also a designated textbook for the national examination of LEC. The comparative study of Chinese and western legal language and culture enjoys great theoretical value and practical significance.

2.5.3 The Study Mode of Forensic Linguistics Will Tend to Become “Forensic Linguistics + Non-English Languages.”

With the expansion of the research field and scope of forensic linguistics, legal French, legal German, legal Russian and other “non-English” legal languages will continue to develop. With the promotion and development of the Belt and Road Initiative, the scope of cooperation between China and foreign countries has been expanding, and the fields of cooperation have become broader, which brings forward higher requirements for the development of legal foreign languages. Guided by theories of forensic linguistics and taking language as the bridge, the cooperation between China and countries along the Belt and Road will be better promoted, facilitating the signing of bilateral documents. Therefore, multilingual forensic linguistics is a direction for future development.

2.5.4 The Study Mode of Forensic Linguistics Will Tend to Become “Professional Field + Legal Foreign Languages.”

As the MTI program has gained in popularity in society in recent years, more and more attention has been paid to legal translation in foreign language teaching, and the teaching model and curriculum construction have constantly been improved. Theory and practice are more closely combined, and more and more applied research is based on systematic

linguistic theories. *Sea-related Legal English Translation* (2015), edited by Ren Dongsheng and Bai Jiayu, is a graduate textbook for MTI and JM (Juris Master) students. The book discusses professional knowledge related to the law of the sea, international maritime law, sea-related international commercial law and maritime law. China's Belt and Road Initiative mentioned above also involves many fields, such as banking and other financial projects, railways and other transportation projects, and hydropower and other infrastructure projects, all of which require protection of laws. Thus, it can be seen that one of the future development trends of forensic linguistics is to be guaranteed by professional legal knowledge in a certain field based on linguistic theories and the bridge of communication—language.

3. Conclusion

Since the brewing period beginning in the 1980s, the study of forensic linguistics has gone through the establishment and development period and the improvement period. More than thirty years of development have seen that the ranks of scholars studying forensic linguistics have gradually expanded and their academic level has become higher. From the initial focus on the theoretical system to later gradually paying attention to specific and in-depth monographic studies, the disciplinary system of forensic linguistics is becoming more and more complete. The fourth plenary session of the 18th CPC Central Committee stressed that “Law-based governance and law-based exercise of state power begin with compliance with the Constitution”, which marked the beginning of fully advancing the rule of law and ushered in a new era of developing law-based governance and modernizing governance in China. With the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, the development of foreign-related legal services can not be achieved without the study of legal language, which has put forward new challenges, expectations and requirements for theoretical thinking and practice of forensic linguistics.

Due to the endless emergence of forensic linguistic research results, limited by the author's ability, it is inevitable that for one thing cited, ten thousand may have been left out -- the list is far from being complete, but at least it has laid a preliminary foundation for sorting out

the research context of modern legal linguistics in China.

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