

Review

— R. Dian Dia-an Muniroh & E. Aminudin Aziz (2026).
Forensic Linguistics in Indonesia: Origins, Progress, and Prospects.
Cambridge University Press. 106 pp.

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Abstract

This review assesses *Forensic Linguistics in Indonesia: Origins, Progress, and Prospects* by R. Dian Dia-an Muniroh and E. Aminudin Aziz, a 2026 volume in Cambridge University Press's *Elements in Forensic Linguistics* series. The book builds a working definition of forensic linguistics for Indonesia from a survey of fifty-three academics and practitioners, traces the field from language-related prosecutions in the Old and New Order periods to its present institutional footing, and maps research and professional practice through a systematic review of 298 publications. The review argues that the book's main contribution is to document a Global South trajectory shaped by legal pluralism and extreme linguistic diversity, which unsettles the assumption that the discipline follows an Anglophone model. It also identifies four limitations: a thin critical historiography, limited attention to indigenous-language casework, little engagement with large language models and synthetic media, and an underdeveloped account of competency-based certification. The review concludes that the volume works as a roadmap for research infrastructure, professional standards, and interdisciplinary collaboration, and that its relevance extends to access to justice in multilingual societies.

Keywords

forensic linguistics, Indonesia, language as evidence, expert witnesses, book review

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The relationship between language and legal process has long been a subject of disciplinary debate, with scholars negotiating the boundaries of forensic linguistics between narrower definitions restricted to linguistic evidence in court (Gibbons, 1999) and broader conceptions of language-law intersections. Guillén-Nieto & Stein, (2022) have recently argued for a sharper distinction between the theoretical orientation of legal linguistics and the practically oriented, evidence-focused work of forensic linguistics proper, a distinction *Forensic Linguistics in Indonesia: Origins, Progress, and Prospects*, by R. Dian Dia-an Muniroh and E. Aminudin Aziz (2026), explicitly engages with in its opening chapter. Rather than importing a single definition wholesale, the authors draw on a survey of fifty-three Indonesian academics and practitioners to develop a working definition suited to the Indonesian context, foregrounding a justice-oriented dimension drawn from (Grant & MacLeod, 2020). Published in the *Elements in Forensic Linguistics* series, the book joins earlier *Origins* Elements on China and Southern Africa, extending the series' comparative ambition to a Global South, multilingual, multi-legal-system context: Indonesia's civil law, *Adat* (customary law), and Islamic law operate side by side, and its 718 languages, 778 dialects, and 43 subdialects (Zein, 2021) have no direct parallel elsewhere in the series. Read alongside its companion volumes, the book extends the series' comparative ambition beyond single-jurisdiction case studies toward a genuinely cross-legal-system account, in which linguistic diversity is treated not as background noise but as a defining feature of how forensic linguistic practice must be designed.

The book's five chapters move from conceptual foundations to historical development, research, practice, and future prospects. The authors trace forensic linguistics in Indonesia back to language-related prosecutions of the Old Order and New Order periods, when defamation provisions inherited from the Dutch-era *Herzien Inlandsch Reglement* were used against journalists such as Mochtar Lubis and public figures such as Sri Bintang Pamungkas, well before the term itself entered Indonesian usage. They identify the first academic testimony by a language expert in an Indonesian court in 1995, the first documented media use of the term in 2002, and the 2011 KIMLI conference in Bandung, where a keynote address on forensic linguistics subsequently became the first article on the subject published in an Indonesian journal. The chapter also documents the accelerating institutionalization of the field following the 2008 Electronic Information and Transactions Law, whose early and most-cited casualty was Prita Mulyasari, prosecuted for cyberdefamation after criticizing a private hospital by email, alongside the growing role of government bodies such as *Badan Bahasa*, which formalized forensic language analysis as a programme in 2015 and established a dedicated laboratory in 2018.

A systematic review of 298 publications from 2011 to 2023 shows that "language as evidence" research dominates the field (61 percent of the total), with hate speech, defamation, and insult as the most frequent case types, alongside a methodological shift

from qualitative discourse analysis toward corpus-based and computational approaches, including tools such as CQPWeb and AntConc and techniques such as stylistic authorship analysis. Most of this output appears in SINTA-accredited domestic journals and international conference proceedings rather than Scopus-indexed venues, a distribution the authors read as evidence of a maturing but still institutionally young research culture. On professional practice, the authors distinguish practitioner-linguists directly involved in cases from researchers who study legal language without such involvement, and show that while Indonesian criminal procedure recognizes expert testimony as valid evidence, it specifies no detailed qualifications for expert witnesses. A notable case study documents how a language expert's assessment of relational and cultural context led police toward restorative mediation rather than prosecution in a family defamation dispute, illustrating the interpretive and mediating roles the discipline can play beyond formal textual analysis. The authors also introduce the concept of "language war", a continuum of linguistic harm ranging from suggestion to slander, alongside five ethical principles for language experts: honesty, fairness, professionalism, proportionality, and credibility.

The book's central contribution is its documentation of forensic linguistics from a Global South perspective, in a field whose international literature has historically been dominated by research traditions from the United Kingdom, United States, and Australia (cf. Coulthard & Johnson, 2010). By showing how a legally pluralistic, multilingual society has developed the discipline through its own institutional, historical, and linguistic conditions, the authors challenge the assumption that forensic linguistics follows a universal, Anglophone-modelled trajectory. Many works on forensic linguistics focus either on theoretical foundations or on particular analytical techniques; this book instead moves fluidly between them, and its contribution is reinforced by the integration of history, research, and practice, connecting the discipline's institutional development to the growth of research and its translation into legal work, including the authors' own empirical studies on the gap between principle and practice in Indonesian police interviewing (Muniroh & Heydon, 2022a), which demonstrate that forensic linguistics can intervene before a case ever reaches court. Equally valuable is the book's treatment of Indonesia's linguistic diversity (Zein, 2021) as both a challenge and an opportunity: the authors show, through their own account of adapting cognitive interviewing techniques to Indonesian policing contexts, that standardizing forensic protocols cannot simply impose linguistic uniformity on a multilingual society, and argue instead for protocols capable of maintaining scientific and legal rigor while accommodating regional and sociocultural variation, which is especially important in cases involving hate speech, insults, threats, police interviews, and legal interpretation. This attentiveness to context

distinguishes the volume from accounts that treat forensic method as a fixed toolkit to be applied uniformly regardless of setting.

The book also has limitations. Because it attempts simultaneously to reconstruct history, survey research, describe practice, and propose future directions within a short volume, several areas receive more descriptive than analytical treatment; a stronger critical historiography, examining, for instance, whose linguistic knowledge has historically been recognized as authoritative within Indonesian legal institutions, would strengthen the historical narrative. There is also a tension between the book's recognition of Indonesia's linguistic diversity and the still-limited development of indigenous-language forensic linguistics: critical and ideologically grounded approaches to case analysis remain comparatively underdeveloped relative to the volume of cases reported, a gap the authors themselves acknowledge but do not fully resolve, and legal proceedings involving regional-language speakers may raise problems of interpretation, semantic equivalence, and culturally specific meaning that the book only briefly addresses. Similarly, the discussion of artificial intelligence and computational tools, while forward-looking, stops short of engaging with the forensic problems raised by large language models and synthetic media, issues of algorithmic bias, explainability, and evidential admissibility that will likely define the discipline's next decade. Finally, the relationship between academic linguistic expertise and forensic competence deserves fuller treatment. Possessing a degree in linguistics does not automatically qualify someone to provide forensic evidence; forensic practice requires specialized knowledge of evidential standards, legal procedures, expert-witness responsibilities, and documentation. The book correctly identifies accreditation as an unresolved issue, but a more detailed model of competency-based certification would make its recommendations more operational.

These limitations do not diminish the book's value; rather, they mark precisely where future scholarship can build. Following the theoretical-practical distinction that Guillén-Nieto & Stein (2022) draw between legal and forensic linguistics, the more pressing question for Indonesia is no longer whether linguistic expertise is relevant to legal process, but how it can be standardized, validated, and made accessible across a multilingual justice system. Three directions seem particularly important: stronger research infrastructure, including forensic corpora and datasets representing regional languages (Zein, 2021); a clearer professional framework of competency standards, accreditation, and ethical guidelines; and deeper interdisciplinary partnerships with law, criminology, psychology, and computer science, of the kind the authors' own collaborative work on police interviewing already models in practice (Muniroh & Heydon, 2022b). In this respect, the book's relevance extends beyond forensic linguistics: when language becomes

evidence, linguistic inequality can directly affect how a statement is interpreted, an accusation understood, or a witness represented, positioning the discipline within broader debates about access to justice in multilingual societies.

The book will be of particular interest to scholars and graduate students in forensic and legal linguistics, applied linguistics, and sociolinguistics, as well as legal practitioners and policymakers seeking to understand how linguistic expertise functions within a legally pluralistic, multilingual justice system; its accessible prose and clear disciplinary mapping also make it suitable as a starting reference for readers new to the field.

Forensic Linguistics in Indonesia: Origins, Progress, and Prospects is a timely and significant contribution to the international literature on forensic linguistics. Its central achievement is to insist that the discipline in Indonesia cannot simply reproduce models developed elsewhere (cf. Coulthard & Johnson, 2010): the country's linguistic diversity, sociocultural complexity, and legal pluralism demand locally grounded approaches that nonetheless meet internationally defensible scientific standards. The volume should be read not merely as a history of the field, but as a disciplinary roadmap, one that offers researchers working on forensic linguistics in Indonesia and other multilingual Global South contexts both a valuable account of disciplinary origins and a compelling invitation to rethink what forensic linguistic evidence should look like in diverse legal societies.

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