

Framing Anonymous Grievances as Letters of Complaint

ABSTRACT: This paper examined seven anonymous letters written to employees of a high-end grocery store in the Northeastern United States. Written and mailed over a span of five years, the initial letters complained about work issues while the latter ones escalated to include death threats. Under question was whether the letters were written by the same author. As no samples from any suspects were available, a framework for comparative analysis among the source documents was used. This study demonstrated how all seven letters shared similar features when analyzed as letters of complaint.

KEY WORDS: forensic linguistics, comparative analysis, anonymous letters, complaint letters, written discourse.

RESUMEN: El presente artículo examinó siete cartas anónimas escritas a empleados de una tienda de abarrotes exclusiva en el noreste de Estados Unidos. Las cartas iniciales, que fueron escritas y enviadas por correo durante un lapso de 5 años, consistían en quejas sobre asuntos laborales, en tanto que las últimas se volvieron más intimidatorias hasta incluir amenazas de muerte. Se cuestionaba si las cartas las había escrito el mismo autor. Como no existía ninguna muestra de ninguno de los sospechosos, se empleó un marco para el análisis comparado con los documentos fuente. El presente estudio demuestra cómo comparten las siete cartas características similares cuando se las analiza como cartas de reclamación.

PALABRAS CLAVE: lingüística forense, análisis comparado, cartas anónimas, cartas de reclamación, discurso escrito.

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Artículo recibido el
29/01/2015 y aceptado

el 28/04/2015

VERBUM ET LINGUA

NÚM. 5

ENERO / JUNIO 2015

ISSN 2007-7319

Forensic linguistics is the place where language meets crime. This field examines a vast array of aspects of language. The linguistic component of forensic linguistics looks at lexical selections, speech patterns, power relationships between or among speakers, errors, phraseology, spelling, grammar, syntax, and more.

The forensic piece is the contextual one. Once a linguistic inquiry is “placed” within the context where a crime may have or has occurred, the project becomes a forensic linguistic one.

Research studies conducted on linguistic issues related to law and crime are broad. Roger Shuy (1998, 2005, 2006), one of the pioneers in the field, jokes that such cases can be traced back to the book of Judges in the Old Testament, citing a post-battle pronunciation test of the word “shibboleth.” The Gileadites, the victors, pronounced the first syllable “shib.” If the losing Ephraimites used their customary pronunciation of “sib,” they were slaughtered. According to the book, 42,000 Ephraimites were killed as a result of “failing” the test (as cited in Hitt, 2102).

Forensic linguistics cases span Biblical to contemporary times. One of the most highlighted cases was that of Jon Benét Ramsey, the six-year child beauty pageant participant who was murdered in her home in 1996. Left at the scene was a ransom note. Much debate ensued as to who could have written the letter. Donald Foster, literary forensics expert, adamantly insisted that the victim’s mother, Patricia Ramsey, could *not* have been the author; however, he later changed his opinion and concluded that she *did* write it. In 2008, twelve years after the murder, the Boulder, Colorado District Attorney’s office officially removed all family members from the suspect list and issued an official apology to the Ramseys. It should be noted that Foster was also credited with revealing the identity of the author of *Primary Colors*, who had published the political novel as Anonymous and was later identified as

columnist Joe Klein. In another prominent case, Foster was also contracted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and confirmed that Ted Kaczynski was the Unabomber (Roberts, 2001).

J.K. Rowling, author of the hugely popular *Harry Potter* series, was at the center of an authorship case in 2013. Sparked by an anonymous tip that *The Cuckoo’s Calling*, a book that was supposedly written by “first time” author Robert Galbraith, was actually written by Rowling, an investigation began. Computer scientist Patrick Juola (2012) examined prepositions, articles, and other function words. He compared *The Cuckoo’s Calling* to Rowling’s known work and three other novels. Juola concluded that Rowling’s work consistently matched features of Galbraith’s. Juola cautions that forensic linguistic analyses are not a “magic bullet”, but contribute one more piece of evidence. Rowling later admitted that she published the new novel under a pseudonym in the hopes of receiving impartial feedback on her writing.

Authorship work continues in more cases, nearly all less public than those just mentioned. Kingston and Stalker’s (2006) work focuses on stylometry, also known as forensic stylistics, that examines grammar, style, syntax, spelling, etc. with the express purpose of resolving cases of disputed authorship. It’s no surprise that with so much communicating done online that the Internet is a vast place for study. Jiexun, Rong, and Hsinchun (2006) trace online authorship. They contend that a person’s writing is as unique as a fingerprint and coined the term “writeprint” to describe an online author’s distinct style. Rather

than identifying background characteristics of a writer or looking for similarities in samples, they limit their work to authorship identification, as it “is most relevant to cybercrime investigation” (p. 78).

Even with the seeming endless quantities of written language on the Web, Koppel, Schler, Argamon, and Winter (2012) are realistic when they identify a “fundamental problem” of authorship identification as the small samples that forensic linguists may work with. They observe that, “in the real world, we often encounter situations in which our lists of candidates might be very large and in which there is no guarantee that the true author of an anonymous text is even among the candidates” (p. 284). In addition to a large pool of possible suspects, two additional problems exist with regard to quantity of text. First, the samples from the candidates may be short and offer little data for comparison. Second, the document under investigation may itself be brief. Unfortunately, the amount of data with which forensic linguists work may be quite limited.

Given that there are constraints in the field of forensic linguistics, there are detractors to authorship identification in that there has not been as much systematicity as there should be. Rudman notes, for example, that no single author or work is “universally recognized as the definitive one” (2012: 264). The result is that each researcher acts independently to some degree even though their work contributes to the field as a whole. Rudman observes that the field is, in some ways, in its infancy and has not “had enough time to pass through any ‘shake-down’ phase and

enter one marked by a solid, scientific, and steadily progressing studies” (p. 263). Kotzé (2010) argues, however, that studies can indeed be done in a scientifically rigorous way. She proposes combining deductive quantitative analysis with an inductive stylistic analysis. In her study, she argues that the strength lies in the fact that “the stylometric calculations are based on principles of statistical significance which can be demonstrated in a transparent way in court and that clear-cut correspondence between the source text and those under investigation, linguistic and otherwise, can be identified and serve as complementary evidence to corroborate the findings of the analyst” (p. 195).

Another problem with forensic linguistics is that, unlike other academic fields where empirical studies can be designed, forensic linguists cannot control for data collection. Linguists work on cases years, even decades, after an event has taken place. Source documents, such as taped conversations, suicide notes, 911 calls, police interviews, etc. become the data and, therefore, data collection is beyond the control of the researcher (Olsson, 2004). In short, we work with what we are given (Gibbons, 2003).

Having said that, linguists look for theoretical frameworks within which data are analyzed and where there are sound foundations within which to work. In this case, which is described in greater detail in the following methodology section, I turn to Hartford and Mahboob’s (2004) research on complaint letters. Their study identified the structure of complaint letters in a systematic way that allows other written documents to be compared to the

structure of complaint letters identified in their work. This schemata works well for this case for two primary reasons. First, the source documents for this paper are seven anonymous letters received over the course of five years by a national grocery store chain located in the Northeastern United States. All seven are complaint letters in one form or another. Second, no primary suspect had been identified; therefore, no written samples were available for comparison.

Hartford and Mahboob's mirrors other such research endeavors in that it considers complaints to be a kind of "speech act" in that "the issuing of an utterance is the performing of an action." (Austin, 1962: 6). In this situation, the purpose of the letter is to lament or protest actions and behaviors. Franklin and Hardin (2012) similarly framed their analysis of a series of Kewa complaint letters as speech acts; however, they broadened their scope to include the sociocultural practices of expressing discontent. Coffin (2003) used the same sociocultural considerations in her work on using the complaint letter as an instructional tool in a second language class.

Methodology

Case Background

NutriStores (a pseudonym) is a grocery store chain that has over 400 locations across the United States. It is known for unique and top-quality merchandise at reasonable prices. Its customer base draws from upscale shoppers to young, college-age students on a budget.

The managers at NutriStores began receiving anonymous letters in 2008. Initially,

the letters contained complaints of working under poorly qualified supervisors, being underpaid, and allowing for unfair discrimination practices at the store level. More letters arrived between 2008 and 2013. It was unknown if the letters had been written by single individual, a group of people, or different people over time.

No action was taken other than notifying upper management, making general inquiries of the employees, and filing the letters away. When the nature of the letters escalated in 2013 to death threats, law enforcement was called in. The police tested for finger prints and DNA under the stamp and along the envelope seal. However, the letters had by then been handled by several people, making isolating fingerprints impossible. The DNA samples did not draw a match in any databases. The local police interviewed some, not all, of the employees at the store location where the letters had been received. Former managers who had received letters and had since left NutriStores for employment elsewhere were also interviewed. No leads were developed from the interviews.

At that point, I was contacted by management and asked to read over the letters to offer my insights. With no written samples from any suspects, a direct comparison was impossible. However, when analyzed as complaint letters, certain organizational and content patterns did emerge.

Source Documents

The source documents consisted of seven (7) letters sent between 2008 and 2013. The letters were sent by regular mail through the United States Postal Service

(USPS) and were postmarked locally. Only two of the envelopes were saved.

This case did not go to trial; therefore, it is not a matter of public record. The name of the store, employees' identities and the location will be kept confidential. For the purposes of this article, the store will be referred to as NutriStores and the store number as Store 123. Pseudonyms will be used for the recipients for their first and last, when given, names. The location will be listed as "City, State." Two sample letters in their entirety are included in the appendices, See Appendix A and B for letters 1 and 5, respectively. NutiStores

uses unique terms for different positions within the company that would be easily recognizable to anyone who frequents their stores; therefore, generic substitutes, such as [cashier], are used in place. The original letters also contain objectionable language, so only the first letter of the profanity is included. The letters are transcribed as they were in the original letters. Misspelled words, incorrect punctuation, and muddled phrasing are maintained for accuracy.

Below is a summary of the seven letters, L1 – L7, the recipients, date information, and brief comments. The documents are:

Table 1
Summary of Source Documents

Document	Recipient (pseudonym) and Position	Month (if known) & Year Received	Comments
Letter 1 (L1)	Margaret Chandler, Current Store Manager	September 2012	
Letter 2 (L2)	Jacklyn, former Store Manager	2010	
Letter 3 (L3)	Carolyn, Albert, Aaron, Martin, Donald G., Joan, Kyle, (two managers and employees at other stores) and Human Resources	June 2013	Duplicate copies were sent to managers at two other stores, employees and Human Resources. As these were the same version, this "unit" will be considered as one letter for analytical purposes.
Letter 4 (L4)	Carolyn, Employee	November 2013	
Letter 5 (L5)	Donald Gonzalez, Employee	November 2013	
Letter 6 (L6)	Paul Barker, former Manager	2008	
Letter 7 (L7)	Paul and Bruce, former Manager and Assistant Manager, respectively	2008	

Letters of Complaint

Letters come in many forms, such as loves letters, job offers, notices, of eviction, thank you notes, credit card offers, etc. Each of these genres has its own purposes, styles, and practices that are separate and distinct from other kinds of letters. Letters usually follow a general format based on the kind of letters they are. For example, thank you notes express appreciation for the item received, add a comment about its beauty, functionality, or some other positive feature, and close with an observation about the giver's generosity or other kind remark. Eviction letters typically open with a statement about non-payment and include specifics, such as the physical address, past due rent, late fees, etc. This is followed by a warning about the consequences if past due sums are not paid within a specified period. Some letters may actually cite the civil law or particular statutes.

Complaint letters, like the aforementioned examples, also share characteristics as a form of letter writing. In the most general terms, letters of complaint open with an overview of a problematic situation, talk about the complaint at hand, and then close with a request for a remedy of some sort. Other complaint letters include even more elements, such as complimenting the recipient of his/her talents at problem solving or offering possible remedies to the problem (Benet & Sykes, 2004; Cordray, 2013; Foster, 2007; Grant, 2011). Because the purpose of the letter is to express discontent, the author's tone in a complaint letter can range from disgruntled to livid (Aswell, 2007; Fitzgerald, 2007; Hancock, Woodworth, & Por-

ter, 2013; Mostyn, 2000; Smith & Shuy, 2002).

This study will be based on the components of complaint letters as posed by Hartford and Mahboob (2004). First, the study acknowledges complaints as a kind of speech act (Searle, 1969). A speech act is kind of performance in that a speaker says something with a clear intention behind the speech. In other words, speech is not just a cluster of words; there is meaning behind it. Searle explained that the speech act is:

the basic unit of communication, taken together with the principle of expressibility, suggests that there are a series of analytic connections between the notion of speech acts, what the speaker means, what the sentence (or other linguistic element) uttered means, what the speaker intends, what the hearer understands, and what the rules governing the linguistic elements are. (p. 21)

In the case of complaint letters, the "speaker," or in this case the author, intended to remonstrate about work conditions, employee performance, and management's leadership skills. The intention behind the letters appears to be to frighten, embarrass, and/or put blame on the recipients.

Second, complaint letters share common "moves". Using editorial letters of complaint as a basis, Hartford and Mahboob found that, "common moves included: introduction, praise, attention-getter, background, complaining, appeal to the editor, request for redress, suggestion, jus-

tification for request or suggestion” (2004: 585-586). Each of these moves is briefly defined below. The nine components are:

Introduction – A primer that gives an overview of the situation.

Praise – A strategic device to balance out forthcoming criticism. Also tempers the tone of the letter.

Alerters – Identifies the person(s) and/or organization(s) the complaint will be aimed at.

Background – Frames the complaint and adds additional information to understand the importance of the complaint and any other relevant details.

Complaint – The grievance under discussion.

Appeals to the editor – In the case of letters to the editor, the authors in Hartford and Mahboob’s study included text that explained why the editor(s) should select the letter to be published.

Request for redress – Ask for action, either general or specific, to be taken.

Suggestion – Identifies potential solutions or outcomes to the grievance.

Justification for request/suggestion – Explains the validity of the concerns and the usefulness of the proposed solution offered.

Analysis

Letters of Complaint – An Overview

In every one of the seven letters, the author complained either *to* or *about* other employees’ abilities and/or work practices. Topics of the letters centered on issues of fairness, accountability, and poor management. Fairness was an issue in all the letters, accountability in six, and management’s weaknesses in five.

Features of Complaint Letters

By its nature, a complaint letter is based on a concern raised by the letter writer. However, concerns are usually preceded and followed by the other components of a complaint letter, such as the introduction and recommendations. These seven letters are all focused nearly entirely on a litany of accusations and grievances.

Table 2
Summary of the Nature of the Complaints

Nature of Complaint	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7
Fairness	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Lack of follow up on management’s part	√	√	√			√	√
Accountability	√	√	√	√		√	√
Favoritism	√		√		√	√	√
Backstabbing/Gossip/Spying on One Another	√	√	√	√	√		√
Respect	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Dishonesty	√	√	√			√	√

Other aspects of the complaint letter are markedly absent. The absence of common features in a complaint letter can be as telling as if the parts were included.

As Hartford and Mahboob offer a logical framework by which to analyze letters, this will be used to compare and examine the letters sent to NurtiFoods' employees. The following analysis examines the (lack of) an introduction, (the deficiency of) praise, the use of shocking statements as a kind of attention-getter, the merge of background and complaint into a single category, and absence of useful suggestions and associated justification for a request.

Introduction.

The purpose of the introduction is to acquaint a reader with the general situation being written about. It may contain a kind of "hook" to get a reader's attention and entice the recipient to read on. Introductions also serve to provide an overview that may include the situation, location, dates, action, organization, interested parties, etc.

None of the letters under examination here contained a traditional introduction that oriented a reader to the nature of the complaint, the concerns, or any important background information. Problems, as perceived by the author, were never situated contextually. Rather, the letters opens with a "conversation" that appears to be well underway. The similarities in the way the letters opened right into complaint mode is unique in that not one follows the standard format of complaint letters. Also, the tone could be described as gruff. Instead of presenting oneself as

a level-headed individual hoping to work toward solving a problem, this author takes an aggressive, even insulting, stance from the onset.

By way of introduction, the opening paragraphs delve right into the author's grievances:

1. "Remember that you were the one who first threw out the word "Fair." (letter 1)
2. "Please stop asking us 'what can I do to help improve your work at Nurti-Stores [sic]? There is nothing you can do to improve our work at NutriStores [sic]. (letter 2)
3. "Hello, carolyn i want you to stop checking on me while working." (letter 4)
4. "Hello DONALD please stop checking on me while working,mind your own business." (letter 5)
5. "Stop lying to crew members." (letter 7)
6. "The situation is alarming at our 123 store in City, State. Margaret Chandler, our store manager seems to ignore it.She is standing against out traditional US American values which include freedom of speech and human rights.123 crew members are being treated as slaves, yes!!!yes!!!" (letter 3)
7. The cost of living for the year 2008 is equal to 90c and, in July employees--that are max out got only 65c from P-- --" (letter 6)

Some of the letters imply there is an existing problem, but no specifics are included. To begin a letter with "remember" suggests that the reader already knows which meeting or interaction is

being discussed. There may have been several meetings that centered on issues of fairness or it could have been used in passing. Helpful orienting information, such as the day or date of the meeting, is absent. Typical letters would open with a recap of, for example, what was covered at the monthly staff meeting held on a particular month, day, and year. It's also difficult to imagine a business meeting where talking about fairness was taboo or problematic. Further, if someone "threw out the word," that suggests the topic was open for discussion.

The "Hello" salutations found in examples 3 and 4 are anything but friendly. While the greeting is followed by the recipients' names, one is typed in all lower case letters (carolyn) and the other (DONALD) is spelled out in all capital letters. Neither sets a friendly tone for a correspondence or follows standard protocol for professional correspondence. Addressing someone correctly is one way in which we come across as polite. The author failed to do that in each case and appears to have devalued Carolyn and Donald by doing so.

Letters 2, 4, 5 and 7 begin with an order to *stop something*, e.g. "...stop asking us..." (letter 2), "...stop checking on me while working..." (letters 3 and 4) and "Stop lying to crewmembers. " (letter 7). Opening with a brusque command runs contrary to a typical introduction that, "is usually positive in nature" (Hartford & Mahboob, 2004: 587).

Praise.

Praise is included in letters to offer genuine compliments, recognize efforts, and

to "counterbalance the criticism that will follow" (p. 587). In complaint letters, acknowledging what was done well positions the writer as a balanced and reasoned thinker. However, in the samples, only two examples that might resemble praise were found. At best, these would be viewed as weak compliments. This category could have been eliminated from examination in this project, but it's the *absence* of praise, considered a standard inclusion in this genre of letters, that is equally telling. Therefore these are included here demonstrate the lack of anything resembling praise.

8. "During the store meeting you were criticizing Paul(he is better than you anyway)..." (letter 2)
9. "...T---(who has been working for the company for 11 years including 7 years of demo with excellent reviews)..." (letter 2)

Example 8's hierarchy positions Paul above Melody, the current manager, but it fails to actually compliment Paul's work or management skills. The function of this "praise" is to insult Melody rather than commend any aspect of Paul's work.

The next example shows promise in that the author notes T---'s exemplary work record. However, this also fails as an example of praise as what follows in the letter is, "I do not like Blacks and Spanish. etc." (letter 2). Shortly after offering a tidbit of praise, a racial insult followed.

It is also important to note that in neither of these instances of "praise" was the compliment directed at the person receiv-

ing the letter. Instead the recognition was for someone referenced in the letter.

Not only was praise absent as is customary in most complaint letters, but the letters also contained insults and threats:

10. “Go back to your [***** [sic] Puerto Rico” (letter 5)
11. “ I WILL TAKE YOUR LIFE” (letter 4)
12. “This is the first and last warning” (letter 4)
13. “If you do not stop that nasty job i will feed your brain with bullets” (letter 4)
14. “...you nasty creature” (letter 5)
15. “I will end your life soon” (letter 5)

These disturbing examples demonstrate the aggressive tone that lacked any decorum and failed to offer praise in any form.

Alerters.

Alerters “consist of the name, title, and/or description of the intended target of the complaint” (p. 587). The author of the NutriStores letters is absolutely clear about the intended target of the letters, whether they are addressed to management or employees. The letters contain a litany of all that is wrong with the company, management, and other employees.

Examples abound, so I will include some of the comments made about Margaret, the current manager and the most frequently referenced person in the letters. The author writes, “Margaret Chandler, our store manager, does not care about employees, does not respect anybody, she is overusing her power to do whatever comes to her mind.” (letter 3).

Jacklyn, the recipient of letter 2, fared no better. She was told that, “You don’t have enough knowledge to run a store I just mean that you have no management skills.” The author continued, “in your heart you only carry hate and lies what a malicious person...”

It is evidently clear in each of the letters who the targeted recipient is.

Background.

The background information is important because it explains the nature of the problem as well as the severity of the issue. In addition to identifying problems and the severity, it includes “the conditions that led to the complaint” (p. 588). Background information typically follows a cause and effect formula. In an unrelated example, one might argue that a rusty pipe led to a flood or faulty brakes on a car led to an automobile accident.

This distinction was more challenging to find as it was not always apparent if those the background and the complaint were differentiated. The question that arose was whether poor management, according to the author, led to problems at work and/or was the impetus to write the letters. Examples of background information include:

16. “Why isn’t there one standard that we’re all held to? Why, instead, is there a standard for each individual? This sets up a culture of favoritism and unfairness” (letter 1)
17. “You didn’t come up with new ideas and you did not create a better place to work” (letter 2)

18. “She is terrorizing employees, workers are overstressed, anxious and nobody wants to be there when she is in” (letter 3)

When looking at these samples, a pattern appears to emerge in which the author sees the manager’s inability to manage a situation leads to further problems at work. The question remains if the managers’ actions created the problem (the background) or resulted in problems (the complaint).

Complaint.

In a complaint letter, it is apparent that this will be the primary focus of the document. Complaining is, after all, the principal speech act. It is not surprising that anonymously written complaint letters are replete with examples of complaints. The following examples were chosen to capture the primary concerns of this author. See Table 2 for a summary of the major issues this author had.

19. “Deal with C--- M--- - She is a troubled young woman who is capable of wreaking havoc among the crew. Surprisingly, no male crew member has ever complained about her inappropriate behavior (discussions of a highly sexual nature; inappropriate touching)” (letter 1)
20. “You are the worst manager that I have had in my life” (letter 2)
21. “Melody does not meet the requirements to run a store. The bar is too high for her, she does not carry enough knowledge to handle that kind of tasks” (letter 3)

22. “Employees are not equally treated. Raises and any other advantage (bonus, training, promotion) are offered to those who are willing to spy for her. That is not fair at all” (letter 3)
23. “She has been here for 9 months she fired approximately 20 employees for nonsense which is an average of 2 employees a month” (letter 3)
24. “She hates lesbians and gays. Negroes are just animals for her ,she makes them do all the dirty work and the worst she is always keeping their profile low although they are the best and most dedicated workers in the store. We need to consider them as other employees” (letter 3)
25. “She is cutting hours, demoting employees (she demoted D---), blocking their raises just to gain a big bonus and to save couple hundreds for the corporate” (letter 3)
26. “...stop checking on me while working” (letters 4 and 5)
27. “stop treating employees based on their race, origin, color. This is against the law” (letter 6)
28. “Stop lying to crew members. Crew members are not stupid as you think. You are not supposed to read surveys” (letter 7)

These samples also show how the letters contained a litany of concerns and grievances. Accusations included being: anti-American, racist, homophobic, dictators, pompous, uncaring, disrespectful, having a master/slave mentality, nasty, terrorists, unfit, hateful, heartless, liars, uneducated, evil doers, peeping Toms.

Appeals to the editor.

Editors receive many letters for the OpEd section of the newspaper and must make choices about which letters get included and which don't. Letter writers frequently include a justification as to why their letter should be selected. As no editor received the seven letters being analyzed, nor were the letters intended for publication in a newspaper, appeals to the editor will not be considered in this study.

Request for Redress/Suggestion.

Second in importance to the complaint aspect of the complaint letter, the request for redress, "asks that action be taken to redress the problem(s) raised earlier. This request might be specific and contain certain directions and/or steps that should be taken or may be a general request that some suitable action should be taken to alleviate the problem described" (pp. 588-589). This is coupled with recommendations of ways to resolve an issue, the suggestion part of the letter.

There is a subtle, but important, distinction between the two. The former holds a view of what the final outcome might look like and the suggestion are the steps to get there. Further, the request for redress is a way to politely offer suggestions to decision makers.

In these letters, however, the suggestions resembled angry commentary. Some of the pieces of "advice" included:

29. "Do not allow the 'schmoozers' to fool you." (letter 1)
30. "Deal with X" (letter 1). Seven employees were included in a 'to do' kind of list that included reasons why

the employees were problems. Each of the seven employees warranted a separate paragraph. Some examples of the descriptors of these employees included, "...a crew member who is never held accountable for her near-zero productivity," "trouble all around," "the biggest gossipmonger in the store," "...relies on her age and lack of English skills to manipulate everyone around her," and "she literally cries when she doesn't get her way." Yet, in every case, the only piece of advice about how to address the perceived employee problems was to "deal with" them.

31. "You need to enroll for college and get at least an associate degree in business and finance because a degree in photography is nothing but a piece of crap." (letter 2)
32. "I would suggest that employees write the survey on paper, because most think that the online survey are being used to identify who is criticizing the management and later they could be fired." (letter 3).
33. "I am urging all [sic] regional, president, human resources To help her to run a store ,she need to learn from the beginning." (letter 3)

Conclusion

While this project will not result in an identity revealed, it does demonstrate that there are marked similarities among the letters. This analysis has shown that none of the letters began with a standard introduction and instead opened mid-conversation. There was a dearth of praise, even when it is customary to

at least include some kind of niceties in a complaint letter. Further, the background and complaints were melded in the letters. This lack of organizational structure meant that these two areas showed a marked overlap in content. Last, the request for redress and suggestions also coincided. Recommendations came across as mandatory rather than ideas for consideration.

We come back then to Joula's observation that analysis is not a "magic bullet," but can serve as a starting point and doesn't necessarily lead to a solid conclusion (2012: 281). This is one piece of an investigation into an anonymous identity. Forensic linguistic investigations are contributions to a larger database of evidence, investigation, and research. The contributions to linguistics as a broader field, through forensic linguistic investigations, can enhance and strengthen our understanding of language use and patterns in real-world contexts.

This project, then, has contributed to the database of forensic linguistic analyses. Other linguists can see how a collection of letters can be examined using more commonly established forms of written discourse, such as a complaint letter. Building off of this, other investigators may seek to explore other facets, such as using a different taxonomy for the organization and structure of letters.

With one of the challenges in forensic linguistics being the inability to create a research project from scratch, it is helpful to see how researchers organize a body of samples and, from them, frame linguistic inquiries. It is also useful to discuss the limitations forensic linguists face and, fur-

ther, to consider how these limitations can be addressed, if at all. With a growing database of studies that look at anonymous and/or threatening letters, the combined investigations are being developed and will provide a greater understanding of this genre of letters.

Appendix A

Letter 1, Sent to Margaret Chandler, Current Store Manager, September 2012

Remember that you were the one who first threw out the word 'Fair.' Are you *really* going to be fair or will you be fair only with those whom you like? Time will tell. Unfortunately, we've already seen what some of your "fair" is like. It isn't.

Not all your [coworkers] are respectful and courteous. I hope that you have been made aware that B- recently became angry with a female colleague and called her a [c----]. The former [manager] refused to address it. TWO MAJOR FAILS!

Do the [cashiers] not have the same level of accountability that you place on your part-time crew? Favoritism abounds within the [cashier] team. They treat [employees] rudely by taking it out with a bad mood, choosing not to listen, or just disliking someone and not trying to hide their dislike. Gossip abounds within the [employee] team (most specifically between A-, V-, and E-, aka "The Mean Girls"). Past concerns seem to have gone unaddressed. (Note: ["Cashiers"] refers to those who did not make the cut when choosing those who would be promoted to [Supervisor] and for very good reasons.)

Why isn't there one standard that we're all held to? Why, instead, is there

a standard for each individual? This sets up a culture of favoritism and unfairness. It's clear that two people can do the same thing and yet one gets punished for it and the other is allowed to continue with the same behavior.

Do not allow "schmoozers" to fool you. Those same people, who are flattering you and the [supervisors in training] and begging for attention, are treating their fellow crew mates like dirt. These are the same people who will make up stories about those they don't like (G-, S-, for instance) just to win points with management. Do you wish to be like J-? Beware your reputation.

- ~ Deal with L-. She is unpleasant to everyone around her and yet demands to be treated with kindness and consideration. She literally cries when she doesn't get her way and speaks nastily about [employees] who ask her for help.
- ~ Deal with P-. He actually believes he works harder than everyone else and you allow him to work whatever and wherever he wants every single shift. You don't require him to work on register while others are slammed with it; you allow him to sit outside smoking for a majority of every shift. Have you looked outside? It's not called "P-'s Wall" for nothing. Take a look outside!
- ~ Deal with A-. He is trouble all around. He is not a manager and is not qualified to act, as such. Please stop allowing him to treat his fellow [cashiers] as though he were their supervisor.
- ~ Deal with C-. She is a troubled young woman who is capable of wreaking

havoc among the crew. Surprisingly, no male crew member has ever complained about her inappropriate behaviors (discussions of a highly sexual nature; inappropriate touching)

- ~ Deal with K-. It's very frustrating to know that there is an [employee] who is never held accountable for her near-zero productivity, had been rewarded (given a raise) for wandering aimlessly her entire shift, gazing into space; walking away from assignments and hiding in the Demo station or in the bathroom. This is a person who has been here several years and is still asking other [employees] how to do her job.
- ~ Deal with H-. [t]he biggest gossip-monger in the store. She tells the crew that you are her friend and that you share information with her. Really? Be careful, should that be true.
- ~ Stop giving special privileges to the C- clan (including A-). They fawn all over you and your [coworkers]. They should not be excluded from being held accountable at the same level of those who just want to come in and do their jobs. (i.e. answering [service requests], treating customers and co-workers with respect)
- ~ Deal with T-. Rude to customers, harsh with colleagues, T- relies on her age and her lack of English skills to manipulate everyone around her. {Employees} seem to be afraid of her (for example, when she becomes angry and pretends to not understand why [employee] hours are cut during the summer resulted in T- being the only [employee] that we know of, whose

hours were never cut; she is allowed to gather her belongings and make purchases prior to clocking out). Again, a double standard.

Appendix B

Letter 5, Sent to Donald Gonzalez, Employee, November 2013

DONALD GONZALEZ,

Hello DON please stop checking on me while working,mind your business.I do my job as i can..i do my best. If you do not

stop I will end your life soon [f-----] [b-----], [n-----] evildoers. Go back to your [f-----] Puerto Rico country.Are you really happy when a fellow [employee] is in trouble. You are heartless. We are in the USA as i told C- both are doing the same nasty task. If you do not refrain from spying on me i will feed your monkey head with bullets [f-----] [a—] kisser. Kissing the manager's [a—] to get a raise:shame on you, nasty creature. I just started here and you are trying to make my life difficult. Stop it [N-----].

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