A formal theory of idiolect and its forensic applications

One of the applications of forensic linguistics is the determination of the authorship of a text that is evidence in an investigation or in a criminal case, such as an anonymous threatening letter or a disputed text message that is used as an alibi. Although the notion of *idiolect* is commonly adopted by forensic linguists, there is not enough knowledge on how much uniqueness and individuality exists in language. For this reason, forensic linguists address the question of authorship identification using *ad hoc* methodologies that vary depending on the case. In this talk I will firstly introduce the audience to forensic linguistics and authorship identification and then review the direct and indirect evidence in favour of a theory of language that should account for a large amount of individuality and uniqueness. I will then present a few elements of a novel formal theory of idiolect, at least for what concerns the lexicogrammar component of a language, and detail some of its predictions for future research.