Abstract

The objective of this thesis is to identify those specific aspects of written style which native speakers of English modify when attempting to anonymize their texts. The conclusions are based on the analysis of 20 texts by 10 authors, all of whom are native speakers of English. Two texts dealing with the same topic were produced by each participant; one was written as an official letter of complaint, and the other was written as an anonymous letter. The bulk of the results are grounded on a qualitative stylistic analysis of the individual texts, with merely a brief survey of quantitative methods. The purpose of the introductory chapter is to familiarize the reader with the subject of forensic authorship analysis, to provide a brief summary of the current state of research, and to introduce a series of empirical studies. The practical part of the thesis presents the qualitative stylistic analysis, provides a shorter summary of the quantitative analysis, and finally ventures to draw meaningful conclusions from the results. The results showed that the majority of authors manipulated with the style/register of the texts and with the specific lexical choices, whereas none of the 10 authors made alterations to spelling and only 2 authors chose to change the punctuation in the anonymous text. However, factors such as author variables and sample size must be taken into consideration before any definite conclusions can be drawn from the results.

Keywords
anonymization strategies, forensic linguistics, authorship attribution, idiolect