Laws are created, interpreted and administered through human language. Yet human language is notoriously subject to change and variation at every level. How can the resulting tension, between the need for precision and rigidity in law, and the natural imprecision and variability of human language, be effectively managed?

This unit analyses the pivotal roles played by language in the legal process, including:

- The nature, origins and functions of “legalese”
- How the structure of the adversarial process shapes speaking opportunities
- How courtroom discourse creates and sustains societal power relations
- Strategic uses of language by legal professionals
- Interpretation of language in copyright, trademark and contractual disputes
- Linguistic disadvantages experienced by second language speakers, deaf witnesses, Aboriginal and other multicultural witnesses, and children
- The relationship between gendered language and linguistic power in legal contexts
- The role of language in assessing asylum and native title claims
- The use of language as evidence in forensic speaker identification and authorship attribution

And we will ask: what roles can be played by linguists and linguistically-aware legal professionals in reducing disadvantage, improving legal processes, and ensuring the equitable administration of justice in Australia?

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