

## Not *KWIC* but Quick: KeyWords in Court

Dr Chris Heffer  
Department of English and Media Studies  
The Nottingham Trent University  
Burton Street  
Nottingham NG1 4BU  
[chris.heffer@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:chris.heffer@ntu.ac.uk)  
Tel. 0115 848 3399

As represented by the KeyWords tool in Mike Scott's *WordSmith* suite of corpus tools, a 'keyword' is a word which occurs in a text or corpus with a frequency which is unusually high in comparison with a norm indicated by a reference corpus such as the BNC. This paper argues that keyword analysis, which has been used for stylistic analysis, can also tell us a great deal about courtroom discourse. Drawing on a set of corpora of Crown Court transcripts compiled by the author, the paper shows how keyword analysis can reveal: differences in barrister strategy between examination-in-chief and cross-examination; the distribution of lexical judgement through jury trial; and modal preferences in the various parts of the trial. While keyword analysis is not a replacement for careful study of *KWIC* concordances, it can provide a clear and quick first impression of a particular genre or style, particularly in a genre complex such as trial by jury.