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FORENSIC LINGUISTICS

There is not a consensus on the meaning of this term. Some people in the field would include all the areas discussed in this review under this label; others would include only some of them. Here we are taking the term in the strict sense of "the field of the provision of linguistic evidence." As such, it may include language crimes, but the description and definition of language crimes need not involve expert testimony. Such evidence is typically given in court, but it may also involve aid to the police, to insurance companies, or, for example, to companies on copyright issues.

Important issues concerning linguistic evidence are its admissibility in court and its nature. Eades [2, c. 15-27] shows in considerable depth the problems of gaining acceptance in court of linguistic evidence on aborigines. There are other accounts of the difficulties and frustrations involved in the presentation and acceptance of linguistic evidence in court.

The types of information that linguistics can offer to the law fall into two main categories: 1) issues of authorship (i.e., whether a particular person said or wrote something) and 2) problems of meaning and communication. These issues can be addressed across all aspects of communication mentioned in the introduction, in both spoken and written form. Identification of authorship is often more reliable in the negative, since it is often possible to say with certainty that two language samples come from different people, even if it is not always possible to say with certainty that two samples come from the same person.

There are two principal means of voice identification, the ear or a machine. The ear may be untrained, as in the case of earwitnessing, which provides evidence of limited dependability, or

linguistically trained, which may offer greater reliability. The machine analysis of voices is a major sub-field with regular conferences. It fell into disrepute when the FBI made excessive claims concerning spectrographs, which were misleadingly renamed "voiceprints."

Found, Dick and Rogers [3, c. 183-196.] discuss the numerous features of handwriting that may permit identification. With the steady reduction in the use of handwritten material, emphasis has turned to the identification of typefaces, printers, and programs.

Words generally form part of broader examinations of style. A controversial area of forensic linguistics is "Stylometry." This technique involves word counts of various types, and the measurement of the cooccurrence of fairly common linguistic items such as "the + adjective + noun"; it is proposed that individuals vary considerably from each other on such features. It uses a statistical technique "cusum" to analyze the data. It has been widely attacked for the reliability of the statistics. Linguists have also doubted the validity of the technique, questioning whether there is any identificatory potential in parameters such as "the number of words beginning with a vowel"; "there is no generally accepted support for such a proposition".

In the area of communication, which was fundamentally a problem of "document design" or text construction. Concerning authorship, Coulthard [1, c. 287-302.] gave important evidence in the judicial appeal of the Birmingham Six, which showed on the basis of the nature of the discourse that the police records of interviews contained fabrications. For instance, they contained repeated reference to a "white plastic bag" in that full form, rather than beginning with the full form, and then using only "bag" thereafter, which would be normal in spoken discourse. Coulthard also examined a range of other features. The Birmingham Six were subsequently released and paid compensation.

Variations in all the areas mentioned above (speech sounds, words, syntax, etc.) are associated with different geographical regions, or Dialect (e.g., Queensland English); with socio-economic status, or Sociolect (e.g., working class English); and with different uses of language, or Register (e.g., the language of the courtroom). There are a number of examples of the forensic use of evidence on dialect differences reported in the journal, *American Speech*. As a

number of people speak any dialect, such evidence is typically not used to provide identification, unless the speaker is one of a small number of speakers (e.g., who said a particular sentence in a room containing four people). The most common use of such evidence is negative, (i.e., saying that particular speech is NOT the voice of a certain person on the basis of dialectal or sociolectal evidence). There are recent examples of film actors, with expert coaching, producing convincing versions of accents not their own. It seems to be very difficult, but perhaps not impossible, to simulate another accent to a degree where it is accepted as native by experts.

Reference list:

1. Coulthard M. A failed appeal. *Forensic Linguistics*. / M. Coulthard. - Harlow : Longman, 1997. - P. 287-302.
2. Eades D. Language in court: The acceptance of linguistic evidence about Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*. - 1997. - P. 15-27.
3. Found B., Dick D. and Rogers D. The structure of forensic handwriting and signature comparisons. *Forensic Linguistics*. / B. Found, D. Dick and D. Rogers. - 1994. - P. 183-196.