

Language analysis and forensic phonetics: relevant similarities and crucial differences

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Language analysis is a forensic application based on the analysis of a speech sample, and as such it has much ground in common with other forensic phonetic applications. On the other hand, it differs from other forensic phonetic applications in a number of ways: for example, it is not applied in criminal law, it is not focused on individualisation and it has a larger linguistic component.

Since 2006, language analysis is a recognised topic within the field of interest of the IAFPA, though not its core business. In 2007, a working group was installed to investigate standards and procedures in cases involving language and speech in asylum applications, and to advise on the adoption of a Resolution. In 2008 and 2009, this working group reported back to the membership at the Annual General Meetings. In 2009 a revised version of an interim position was put to vote and accepted by the membership. Having completed its task, the working group was dissolved (more information on the background of the Resolution can be found in Moosmüller, 2010).

In addition, problems with the ‘Guidelines for the use of language analysis’ (Language and National Origin Group, 2004) were presented at the annual conferences in individual presentations (Cambier-Langeveld, 2007, 2010a; Eriksson, 2008). Defense and criticism of the ‘Guidelines’ were published in IJSL (Fraser, 2009; Cambier-Langeveld, 2010b). The IAFPA has thus witnessed some of the discussions in this field, yet parts of these discussions may have been difficult to evaluate for some, due to lack of familiarity with the details of actual practice in language analysis.

In this presentation, I will describe how language analysis is performed by our office in some detail, and I will present an overview of the type of cases. I will highlight relevant similarities between the work done by forensic phoneticians and the work done by linguists in language analysis, and I will discuss some crucial differences between the two. This will lead us to topics of mutual interest, and possible topics for future research.

References

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