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LOID – Method and Limitations

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1. Background

Speaker identification is today, after decades of research and practice, a reasonably well established discipline. While the purpose of *speaker identification* is to identify a speaker, *speaker profiling* seeks to identify characteristics of a speaker, shared by some but not all, e.g. dialectal traits.

In immigration decisions, particularly in relation to asylum claims, speaker profiling through language analysis may offer an individual the opportunity to corroborate his or her claimed geographical origin by displaying a matching linguistic behaviour.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the linguistic analysis is to try the hypothesis that the subject of the linguistic analysis speaks a language or dialect which is consistent with the given place of origin. Verified AB adopts the LOID (Linguistic Origin Identification) methodology to test linguistic background. The linguistic behaviour of the subject displayed in the data is examined for consistency with the given speech community being tested. Where the given place of origin is refuted by objective analysis, another alternative hypothesis is generated for testing against the speech data.

3. Theory

Research, directly relevant to LOID, has concluded that ability to identify dialects is inherent in the individual, whether innate or acquired (Masthoff, Boubaker, & Köster, 2010). Therefore appropriate testing of prospective dialect identifiers is essential, while formal criteria are less so. Verified language analysis reports benefit from having both native speaker and linguist at one's disposal for the analysis.

An early attempt at rules of thumb for interpreting analysis reports was published 2004 as *Guidelines for the use of language analysis for the determination of the origin of asylum seekers* (henceforth Guidelines). The intention was to "assist governments in assessing the general validity of language analyses in the determination of national origin, nationality or citizenship." (Language and National Origin Group, 2004, p. 261). The document has been used as a manifesto and a diverse array of scholars endorsed it.

Criticism of the Guidelines has been launched both from the profession, practising in the specific field (Cambier-Langeveld, 2010) and from academic phoneticians, specialized in forensic work (Eriksson, 2008).

Following the criticism of the Guidelines, the International Association of Forensic Phonetics and Acoustics (IAFPA) wanted to make a position statement regarding the methodology of language analysis. A working group was set up in 2007 and two years later a resolution was adopted. It acknowledged two differing methods: the method whereby a linguist is carrying out the analysis by means of all tools at hand, including observations made by a native speaker, and the method whereby the same person is making the observations and carrying out the analysis (in a way being one's own informant), albeit then demanding that such person should have in-depth research experience of the linguistic variety at hand (IAFPA, 2009).

Verrips (2011) emphasizes the importance of the reasoning of the report to be transparent, thus allowing the evaluation of the report to be specific. De Graaf, Ten Thie och Verrips (2011) suggest that demands from a forensic perspective differs from those from a linguistic one and are sometimes contradictory.

4. Verified's method

The competence of the native speaker is unique. Several studies demonstrate a particular aspect of this, that one is better at identifying one's own dialect than other dialects (Markham, 1999; Clopper & Pisoni, 2006). Patrick (2008) remarks that "native competence in a language is respected by linguists as a legitimate type of knowledge, but on its own it is naïve and inexplicit knowledge […]". The methodology used by Verified is designed to optimise the contribution of this unique competence of the native speaker

LOID – Method and Limitations

with the theoretical foundation and professional experience of the linguist. Verified thus, like Dutch IND through its language analysis unit BLT (Cambier-Langeveld, 2010), adheres to one of the two methods sanctioned by IAFPA, while e.g. Swiss LINGUA (2010) has chosen to confine itself to the use of a linguist, albeit one with active competence in the language under analysis.

By native speaker is, for the present purpose, primarily meant someone who has been raised with the variety under analysis used in the home. There are certain varieties that are never used as a first language, but nevertheless, thanks to their stable markers, lend themselves to analysis, such as certain varieties of Pidgin English of West Africa (Simo Bobda, Wolf, & Lothar, 1999). Being a native speaker does not imply ability to acquire competence in dialect analysis. The experience at Verified is that extensive testing is needed for selection and to guide further education. The experience also shows that lay people tend to assign a higher degree of confidence in their judgments than do academics. The feedback between native speaker and linguist is a vital part of the analysis and it is hence valuable to adopt an initially sceptical attitude regarding individual statements concerning the speech sample.

The analyst selection tests are designed to gauge several distinct aspects of suitability in the candidate. In addition to being able to discriminate one's own dialect and instances of particular features of it, aptitude for abstract reasoning, integrity and phonetic awareness is sought.

By linguist is, for the present purpose, meant a person who after academic studies in linguistics has passed the internal task-specific training. This comprises theoretical aspects, including dialectology, as well as extensive practical training and completion of analyses under senior supervision. Verified has about a dozen linguists in its employ, including phoneticians and computer linguists. For details about the linguist responsible for the analysis at hand, refer to Enclosure I.

An unconditional requirement on the analysis report is transparency (Verrips, 2011). This requirement comprises all elements, such as the method, the observations and the reasoning as well as disclosure of details about native speaker and linguist. References concerning specific parts of the analysis are crucial to enable a proper evaluation of the analysis to the scientific literature, with narrow indication of pages where possible.

The linguists at Verified will carry out basic literature research, and where required and possible own experiments or surveys, regarding the relevant linguistic varieties. Traits discriminating adjacent dialects as well as sociolinguistic and language regime facts are covered. Based on these findings, instructions to the native speaker are formulated. The task of the native speaker is, in addition to provide a general over-all intuition, to identify instances of dialectal traits. As a rule, the report will annotate use of at least eight different traits at at least two distinct levels (phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical).

The data of analysis must meet certain quality standards reading e.g. sound quality and duration to enable a reliable analysis to be carried out. Also the nature of the speech is important and repetitions and non-spontaneous portions reduce the utility. Verified recommends digital formats and an environment which does not negatively affect the recording or the subject of the recording and for the recording to be at least fifteen minutes of speech as basis for a linguistic analysis. Length requirements may also vary with the hypothesis.

5. Limitations

It is important to keep in mind that LOID by itself does not determine nationality. Linguistic borders do not necessarily coincide with political ones and when doing so, rarely do so in a strict sense. Linguistic varieties straddling borders are common. The aim of the analysis is to determine in what linguistic environment a person has been socialized.

Analysis regarding subjects with a more complex history of residence and regarding those having been socialized in particularly heterogeneous environments (e.g. refugee camps or certain portions of transit countries) merits extra caution.

LOID – Method and Limitations

Even at the time of recording there are a number of factors which affect the person's speech. In cases in which a person speaks several varieties of a language, these varieties can be used in different contexts; for instance, one can speak in a certain way amongst family and in another way, usually more prestigious, to outsiders (Ferguson, 1959). Linguistic behaviour can also change in order to increase comprehension between two specific speakers, e.g. between the interviewer or interpreter and the interviewee. This is particularly the case if one wishes to accommodate the person one is speaking to (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, & Leap, 2000). The choice of interviewer should thus be made with consideration. Verified selects interviewer based on the specification of dialect in the hypothesis. Should such not be available, refraining from carrying out the interview should be considered.

It is important to look at the report in its context. The linguistic report evaluates how the person is speaking at the data of analysis at hand; the results do not mean that person cannot speak in other, different ways. The user of the report should critically evaluate the report in light of the information that the person in question has provided and other available facts that are accessible to the user of the report.

Linguistic behaviour and linguistic norms are constantly changing. It is important to stay in touch with the natural habitat, if you like, of the linguistic variety you are to discern. Some areas, such as the Gaza strip and Eritrea presents special difficulties to visitors. A related problem is the lack of up-to-date data in the scientific literature for certain dialects.

6. Hypothesis and scale for expression of conclusion

The point of departure for the analysis is a hypothesis about the linguistic background. Typically, this is formulated by the linguist and based on the subject's own accord of residential history.

In accordance with the IAFPA Code of Conduct (§ 5) (2004), the conclusion is accompanied by a gradation of the confidence with which it is given, as well as a comparison to available levels. The scale used corresponds to that of Statens Kriminaltekniska Laboratorium (2011). It should, however, be noted that Verified expresses how *consistent* the linguistic behaviour displayed is with the linguistic community of the hypothesis. No implications are to be construed as to how *specific* the speech sample is to the linguistic community which forms the basis for the hypothesis, nor about the likelihood to arrive at a corroboration or refutation of any alternative hypothesis. In the reasoning of the analysis, focus and distribution of the linguistic variety will be described as well as the specific relevant linguistic traits observed in the sample.

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LOID – Method and Limitations

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