THE TURNEY LETTERS:
LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE OF FRAUDULENT AUTHORSHIP

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Abstract: During the 23rd March - 4th April 2007 crisis over the detention of British military personnel by the Iranian authorities, press interest in the UK centred 1) on the "truth" of the Iranian assertion that the British boats had illegally entered Iranian waters and 2) on the authenticity of the statements the captives made on Iranian television and in the letters written by one of them: Faye Turney, the only woman in the group.

It is the purpose of this paper, admittedly after the event, to introduce some linguistic input into the debate on the authenticity of the texts by searching in the letters themselves for evidence of idiosyncratic usages which appear to be non-native and, from those, infer the existence of a *covert author*, distinct from the *overt writer*.

This paper is, therefore, a short forensic linguistic case study which demonstrates the hypothesis that the texts are corrupt, with a non-native, covert author - almost certainly a Farsi speaker – fraudulently claiming to be both the writer and the *originator* of the letters.

LISTY TURNEY: JĘZYKOZNAWCZE DOWODY FAŁSZERSTW

Abstrakt: W okresie kryzysu związanego z zatrzymaniem personelu brytyjskiego przez władze irańskie trwającego w dniach od 23 marca do 4 kwietnia 2007 roku, zainteresowanie brytyjskiej prasy skupiło się na tym czy rzeczywiście Irańczycy miali rację twierdząc, że brytyjskie statki nielegalnie wpłynęły na irańskie wody oraz na autentyczności oświadczeń emitowanych w irańskiej telewizji, a składanych przez osoby zatrzymane oraz w listach sporządzonych przez jedyną kobietę w grupie Faye Turney.

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie dowodów językoznawczych w tej sprawie, w celu wykazania cech idiosynkratycznych autora tekstu, który wydaje się być niemal na pewno osobą niebędącą rodzimym użytkownikiem języka, w którym sporządzono listy, co z kolei sugeruje, że listy napisane zostały przez tzw. jawnego autora, ale pod wpływem autora ukrytego.

Zatem, ten artykuł stanowi analizę przypadku z zakresu językoznawstwa sądowego, który wykazuje, że sporządzenie tekstów zostało wymuszone, przez nierodzimego użytkownika języka, autora ukrytego, niemal na pewno posługującego się językiem Farsi.

Introduction

One of the most dramatic features of the 23rd March - 4th April 2007 Shatt-al-Arab crisis was the appearance of the naval personnel involved on Iranian television and the publication of letters by one of them – Leading Seaman Faye Turney – to her parents, Members of Parliament, and the British People.

As far as the statements and letters were concerned, the debate in Britain during the crisis focused on whether the detainees had been coerced by threats and/or ill-treatment into speaking and writing as they did. It was quickly assumed that their behaviour could only be explained in terms of duress and the media rapidly adduced evidence in support of the assumption. This took the form of some analysis of NVC and occasional expressions of unease about the language of the letters but, otherwise, commentators make no use whatsoever of the readily available linguistic evidence before them.

That missing linguistic evidence is provided in this paper by forensic linguistic analysis which exposes a substantial number of words and phrases which appear to be non-native and therefore, an indication of joint production in which, in contrast to the normal process of writing, the *author* and *writer* are not the same person.
This study draws on ethnolinguistic and applied linguistic analytical techniques to distinguish the idiosyncratic from the "normal" and to provide a plausible explanation for their form and function.

The motivation for the study was to find linguistic evidence which would give substance to the air of "foreignness" that some journalists and commentators sensed in the texts and, by actually completing the investigation three days *before* 7th April, when information about the treatment of the captives became publicly available, to raise awareness of the significant role forensic linguistics can and should play in situations where the authenticity of texts is at issue.

1. Outline

The organisation of the paper is: §1 Outline, §2 Background (the setting in which the letters were produced), §3 Approach (ethnographic and applied linguistic ways of dealing with idiosyncratic textual data), §4 Data (the three letters, each presented with questionable stretches of the text in *italic* and followed by an individual commentary on each sample), §5 Plausible explanations (issues of duress: native and non-native production), §6 Conclusion (the essential role of the forensic linguist in breaking news concerning the authenticity of texts), §7 References, §8 Notes.

2. Background

On 23rd March 2007, 15 British naval personal (Royal Navy and Royal Marines) were arrested by Iranian Revolutionary Guards in the Shatt-al-Arab waterway on suspicion of illegally entering Iranian territorial waters. They were held by the Iranian authorities until their release on 4th April 2007.

While they were in custody, they participated in live appearances on Iranian television and, in the case of the only woman among them (Leading Seaman Faye Turney), wrote three letters which were put on display and subsequently published locally and internationally.

The British media quickly became focused on establishing the "authenticity" of the texts, a process which hinged on a set of ideological, axiomatic assumptions about the way service personnel are expected to behave in such circumstances. The reasoning can be stated in the form a simple syllogism:

Authentic messages, spoken or written, are plausible examples of expected behaviour.

The actions of this group are not plausible examples of the expected behaviour of service personnel.

Therefore, the messages are not authentic.

Since, as Abercrombie (1968.15) puts it, "we speak with our vocal organs … we converse with our entire bodies", professionals concerned with body language were called in who argued (on the UK media) that there were incontrovertible signs of stress and, indeed, coercion was confirmed (or reaffirmed) by the detainees themselves on their return to the UK after their subsequent debriefing on 7th April.

There was also a consistent undercurrent of discomfort and distrust of the texts in the whole of the media, signalled by the labelling of each of the letters with "scare quotes" (e.g. Faye Turney's first "letter"), and some sporadic questioning of the authenticity of the letters themselves based on extraordinarily naïve intuitive linguistic evidence e.g. "apologising" spelt "apologizing" (i.e. with a "z" rather than an "s") and "Abu Ghraib" misspelled as "Abu Ghrayb".

This is by no means surprising: journalists make a living using language and are, therefore, professionals with a heightened sensitivity to language. Faced by the texts, they felt uneasy; something was not quite right but just what it was they could not put their finger on. What they inevitably lacked (and still lack) is the metalanguage for discussing what they intuitively saw in the texts. Commentators can quickly - in the terms we shall be using in our analysis and discussion - *recognise* idiosyncrasy but are unable (and, no doubt are not motivated) to *describe* and *explain* what is wrong.

Incongruously, what has been missing, all along, is any kind of input from professional linguists, and it is the purpose of this paper to supply that.

By 5th April the captives had been released and flown back to the UK, where they were debriefed and, after more than 24 hours, information about the conditions under which they had been held became progressively available to the public.

However, no specifically linguistic evidence has ever been brought forward to contribute to this discussion and it is probably too late to expect any from the media: the story of what actually happened rapidly grew cold and within a few days was being edged off the stage by the question of the propriety of military personnel "selling" their stories to the press.

3. Approach

The default for the creation of written texts is that there will be an author who organises his or her thoughts into logical propositions which are re-organised as grammatically correct clauses (or sentences) and realised, by a writer, as socially appropriate texts (see Halliday 1978 for an expansion of this model).

The assumption is that the author and writer (or speaker) are the same person. Where they are not, we have instances of either the unmarked case of a typist "animating" the text (the term "animator" is from SKOPOS theory: Schäffner 1998), or the marked cases of "ghost writing" or plagiarism.

Translated texts, and other texts produced by non-native users of a language, are interesting in typically being marked by "non-ordinary" or "idiosyncratic" language which displays varying degrees of deviance ("faults", if we are feeling normative) in breaking linguistic rules or violating communicative conventions.

An ethnographic view of communication as the activation of communicative competence (Hymes 1972) would ask of any stretch of language, whether and to what extent it is 1) *possible* (in terms of the formal rules of the code), 2) *feasible* (in terms of ease of physiological or psychological processing), 3) *acceptable* (in terms of the communicative conventions of the society in which it occurs) and 4) *done* (in terms of its frequency of occurrence).

A more applied linguistic view, formalised as the technique of error analysis (Corder 1973), would label an idiosyncrasy as 1) an *error* (not "possible"), 2) a *mistake*, (either not "acceptable" or not "done"), or 3) a *lapse* (a slip of the pen or tongue)[9].

We would expect texts created by natives to contain the occasional unacceptable expression or rare turn of phrase or slip but not full-blown instances of the

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[9] Corder 1973 has a very helpful procedural algorithm (reproduced in Bell 1981. 173) for error analysis which, interestingly, includes back translation as a strategy for "making sense" of idiosyncratic input.

grammatically impossible (other than as a lapse). Non-native texts are likely to provide examples of all of these and a greater density of them.

In short, if we suspect a text of being the creation of a non-native speaker or writer, we are already armed with criteria for categorising what seems strange to us. What we need next is a procedure.

There are three essential steps to take in relation to any suspect stretch of language:

    1) *recognition,*
    2) *description* and
    3) *explanation*

We must, in other words, first *recognise* a stretch of language as an example of an *error*, *mistake* or *lapse,* next describe *what kind* of error, mistake or lapse it is, and, finally, attempt to explain *why* it has occurred.

Naturally, *recognition* is a relatively simple matter but *description* demands the metalinguistic terminology and skills of the professional linguist and *explanation* is, necessarily, a problematic enterprise fraught with uncertainty.

In the textual study which follows, we shall draw on both Hymes and Corder in the attempt to demonstrate the non-native nature of the Turney Letters and reconstruct the scenario in which they were realised.

      The issue, it should be remembered, is not who the *writer* was but who the *author* was. There is no dispute that Leading Seaman Turney *wrote* the letters. Copies of the original hand-written texts are readily available and have been published.

Linguistic analysis points very strongly 1) to the existence of a covert author - almost certainly a Farsi speaker - who, in some way, was able to control what went into the letters by providing the content and form of the letters Ms. Turney wrote and 2) to the fact that these were not the messages she wanted to send: they were the words of others put, as it were, into her mouth and falsely presented as her own.

4. Data and analysis

In the analysis that follows, the three letters are reproduced from the versions available from the *Daily Telegraph,* stretches of questionable usage marked in *italic*, each questionable usage provided with a commentary – in square brackets: [ ] - which consists of 1) an alternative formulation[10] which is (in the opinion of the analyst) more plausible as text produced willingly by an educated, adult native speaker of the language, and 2) short notes of a more general and cultural kind which offer some explanation of the formal characteristics of the data itself.

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[10] In Error Analysis terms, a "plausible interpretation"

When the full texts of the three letters are analysed for signs of idiosyncratic usage – specifically, non-native traits in the language – it can be demonstrated that there are in the region of 30 questionable occurrences (some 25% of the total number of words in the texts) which provide evidence in relation to disputed authorship.

Letter 1: released on Tuesday 27th March 2007

Dear Mum & Dad,
I am writing to you from Iran where I am being held. I will try to explain to you *the best* what has happened.
We were out in the boats when we were arrested by Iranian forces as we had apparently gone into Iranian waters. I wish we hadn't because then I would be home with you *all right now.*
I'm so sorry we *did* because I know we wouldn't be here now if we hadn't. I want you all to know that I am *well and safe.*
I am being well looked after, I *am fed* three meals a day and *I'm in constant supply of fluids*. The people are *friendly and hospitable, very compassionate and warm*.
I have written a letter to the Iranian people to apologise for us *entering into* their waters.
Please don't worry about me. I'm staying strong. Hopefully it won't be long till I'm home to get ready for Molly's birthday party and with a present from the Iranian people.
Look after everyone for me, especially Adam and Molly, I love you all more than you will ever know.
All my love Faye xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Commentary

1. *the best*: the best I can [not possible; ungrammatical but, perhaps, an intentional error; the first of the coded messages]
2. *all right now*: all right, now/all, right now [this is ambiguous but probably not significant]
3. *I'm so sorry we did*: I'm so sorry we did it [the verb needs an object and the lack of one makes the sentence ungrammatical]
4. *well and safe*: safe and well [the order "well and safe", while not ungrammatical, is certainly less common that the suggested alternative i.e. not "done"]
5. *am fed*: am being given/am getting food [perfectly grammatical etc but the use of the passive conceals the agent and focuses on the recipient, signalling the powerless situation she is in and maybe even hinting at force feeding. In addition, the simple present form of the verb, carries with it implications of mechanical regularity]

6.   *in constant supply of fluids*: getting plenty to drink ["in constant supply" is just not possible from a native speaker of English and "supply of fluids" has an eerily logistics/medical ring to it; inappropriate register]

7.   *...friendly, hospitable, very compassionate and warm* [not done: see comment 1 in §5 on plausible explanations]

8.   *entering into*: entering [ungrammatical: in English one "enters into" an agreement but only "enters" a location]

9.   *xxxxxxxxxxxxx*: 13 kisses [this again may be trivial but 13 kisses could be sending a coded message home: *choosing* to send such an unlucky number may well be highly significant]

Letter 2: released on Thursday evening 28th March 2007

Representative of the House of Commons,
I am writing to inform you of my situation. I am a British service person currently being held in Iran.

I would like *you all* to know of the treatment I have received here. The Iranian people are *kind, considerate, warm, compassionate and very hospitable.*
They have *brought* me no harm but have looked after me well. I have been fed, clothed and well cared for.
Unfortunately during the course of our mission we *entered into* Iranian waters.
Even through our wrongdoing, they have still treated us well and humanely, *which I am and always will be eternally grateful.*

I ask the representatives of the House of Commons, after the Government have promised that this type of incident would not happen again, why have they let this occur, and why has the Government not been questioned over this? "Isn't it time for us to start withdrawing our forces from Iraq and let them determine their own future?
Faye Turney 27/3/07.

Commentary

1.   *Representative of the House of Commons*: Representatives…/Members of Parliament. [Either "the Representatives" or "Representatives". What we have is ungrammatical (not possible): the noun is singular (yet "you all" is used later) and the expected definite article is missing. Further, the use of the term reveals considerable ignorance of the British Parliamentary system. Members of Parliament are not "representatives" of the House of Commons but of the people in their constituencies who elected them: not done]

2. *know of*: know about. [The MPs already know "of" her situation i.e. the fact that she has been arrested and is being held by the Iranians: what they don't know is the details: not acceptable]

3. *a British service person*: a member of Her Majesty's Armed Forces/a serving member of the Armed Forces/a member of the Armed Forces currently serving in Iraq or similar [a retired British soldier confirmed the implausibility of the original wording which can be confirmed by checking the phrase in Google. There is only one instance other than the many from these texts: not done]

4. *kind, considerate, warm, compassionate and very hospitable* [not done: see comment 1 in §5 on plausible explanations]

5. *brought*: caused/done. [Harm doesn't get brought to anyone: it gets done to them: ungrammatical]

6. *Even through*: In spite of [ungrammatical]

7. *our wrongdoing*: our having done wrong [not done: "wrongdoing" has a very judgemental ring to it]

8. *which I am and always will be eternally* grateful: which I am and always will be eternally grateful for. [Ungrammatical: a preposition may well be a bad thing to end a sentence with (sic) but we need one here. The alternative "for which I am and always will be eternally grateful" is far too formal]

9. *I ask the representatives of the House of Commons*: [see comment 2 in §5 on plausible explanations]

10. *"Isn't it time for us… future?"*: "Isn't it time for us … future?" [The single quotation mark is extraneous and its appearance (whether or not the omission of the closing final quotation mark is an insignificant slip of the pen) is unusual and inconsistent. If the "question" is to be signalled as a spoken question, the quotation would begin with the words *after the Government* and end with *their own future?* However, marking questions in this way may be seen as a further instance of Farsi rather than English rhetorical convention].

Letter 3: released on Friday afternoon 29th March 2007

To British People,
I am writing to you as a *British service person* who has been sent to Iraq, *sacrificed due to the intervening policies of the Bush and Blair governments*.
We were arrested after entering Iranian waters by the Iranian forces. For *this* I am deeply sorry. I understand that this has *caused even more distrust for the people of Iran, and the whole area of the British*.
        The Iranian people *treated* me well and have proved themselves to be *caring, compassionate, hospitable, and friendly*.

For this I am *thankful.* I believe that for our countries to move forward, we need to start withdrawing our forces from Iraq, and leave the people of Iraq to start rebuilding their lives.

I have written a letter to the people of Iran apologizing for our actions. *Whereas* we hear and see on the news the way prisoners were treated in Abu Ghrayb and other Iraqi jails by *the British and American personnel,* I have *received total respect and faced no harm.*

It is now *our time* to ask our government to make a change to its oppressive *behavior* towards other people.

Commentary

1. *To British People*: To the British People. [Ungrammatical: the lack of the article, as in comment 1 on Letter 2 above, signals non-native usage]

2. *sacrificed due to*: as a result of [leaving aside the bizarre spectacle of a Leading Seaman casting herself in the role of a "sacrifice" (though her status as a "victim" is hinted at in the first letter: comment 5 above), the "due to" is stylistically inappropriate]

3. *the intervening policies*: the interventionist policies [the term "interventionist" seems an unlikely one from the coxswain of a British naval vessel, especially in the incorrect form "intervening"].

4. *of the Bush and Blair governments*: of the British and American governments [not done: a member of the British armed forces would surely put "British" first and, unless making a UK party-political point, not single out the Prime Minister by name. The whole sentence is pure anti-western political rhetoric].

5. *For this I am deeply sorry*: I am very/extremely sorry for this [not done: not only is "this" ambiguous, referring either to being arrested or to entering Iranian territorial waters, but and more to the point, "deeply sorry" is a less common collocation that those suggested and the syntax, with the fronted prepositional phrase, is marked]

6. *caused even more distrust for the people of Iran, and the whole area of the British*: caused the people of Iran, and the whole area, to be even more distrustful of the British. [There seems to be a missing comma after "area", otherwise the sentence has to mean something like "…and everything to do with the British". The syntax, as it stands, even with the missing comma, is inordinately clumsy: possible but not done]

7. *The Iranian people treated me well*: The Iranian people have treated me well. [Inappropriate: there are two past forms of the verb available: "treated" and "have treated". The first refers to a past event or action with no necessary indication of continuation into the present i.e. "they treated me well so far but

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are not doing so now and are unlikely to do so in the future". The second refers to a past event or action but to one which continues into the present i.e. "they treated me well earlier, are still treating me well and I expect them to continue to do so". If the original formulation is taken literally, what is being signalled is that the situation of the captives is worsening].

8. *and have proved themselves to* be *caring, compassionate, hospitable, and friendly*: and have shown themselves to be…[not done: see comment 1 in §5 on plausible explanations]

9. *thankful*: grateful [not done: inappropriate lexical choice]

10. *apologizing*: apologizing/apologizing. [possibly not done: the "z" is an acceptable alternative in UK English but she uses "apologise" in letter 1]

11. *Whereas*: in contrast with [not done: inappropriate register]

12. *received total respect*: been treated with complete respect [not done: the collocations are inappropriate]

13. *It is now our time*: now is the time for us. [not done, perhaps and verging on the unfeasible: if the intention is as proposed in the alternative formulation, the structure is very clumsy and suggests that there was a time for other people to act and it is now the turn of the British People to do so]

14. *behavior*: behaviour [not done: unlike the "z" in 30 above, this is not a legitimate alternative to the American spelling; slip of the pen?]

5. Plausible explanations

Many of the linguistic and cultural clues revealed above strongly suggest that the author - someone with official authority to do so - either told Faye Turney what to write, dictated the words to her, or gave her a prepared text to write out in her own hand.
In addition, this original author is revealed as an individual whose command of English betrays a level of competence well below that of an educated, adult native speaker of the language (far inferior, that is, to Faye Turney's abilities), and shows many signs of an underlying Arabic or Farsi system. Back translation into Farsi (one of Corder's steps in dealing with an unintelligible sentence where the L1 is known) would be very likely to provide compelling support for this assertion.[11]

The rhetoric of Arabic (and Farsi) polemic is governed by a number of characteristics which are rare or even counter-productive in English i.e. not done (see

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[11] Perhaps hardly surprisingly, no native speaker of Farsi could be located, at such short notice, to provide more than a small amount of informal back translation of these texts. It is hoped that one will become available and it will then be possible to engage in back translation which ought to provide additional evidence of the fraud.

Hatim and Mason 1997. esp. chs. 9 and 10, and Darwish, A. 2006). Two of these are well represented in the texts:

1) parallelism in the form of the piling up of epithets. In the letters, the Iranian people are described with a minimum of four and a maximum of five adjectives (+ the intensifier "very") from a set of seven. In the conventions of this rhetoric, such repetition strengthens your argument but, in Western rhetoric, flouts Grice's maxim of quantity and is likely to have the reverse effect.

2) the frequent use of the rhetorical question: "after the Government..., why…and why…this? Isn't it time….own future?" In Arabic/Farsi rhetoric, asking the question and assuming that the answer you could give would be accepted by the receiver also strengthens your case.

Even if we only accept a small percentage of the suspect stretches of language and dismiss the majority as slips of the pen (which would need to be native-like slips), the letters demonstrate without doubt that their originator was not a native speaker of English. Many of the ungrammatical features in them can be traced back directly to Farsi and, as such, constitute interference from that language.

Further, there is the ignorance of British institutions and conventions which does not lead to ungrammatical sentences but to ones which are unacceptable in social terms (they just do not fit the British context) or in communicative terms (they are just not done). Either way, someone like Faye Turney could not display such lack of knowledge of the society in which she lives and, one may add, is pursuing a professional career defending.

The linguistic evidence is not and cannot be 100% conclusive but certainly appears to point to joint production involving the overt writer (or animator) and a covert, non-native, user of English acting as author.

Where there is joint production, the two producers must either have shared intentions for the rhetorical value of the text (both intending the same message to be transmitted) or different intentions (each intending a different message).

The evidence seems to point to the second scenario: an author and a writer intending to use the same text to send different messages. For the author, it was presumably important that the wording of the messages should be "normal" and not draw attention to itself. The last thing he would want would be for the language of the texts to raise suspicions about their authenticity. For the writer, who was not in sympathy with these intentions, it was equally important to word the letters in a way which was "non-normal", drew attention to its formal characteristics, and thereby alerted readers to the fact that the message was not genuine.

However, there is no overriding reason for assuming that each of the letters has the same genesis. We can imagine a continuum with extreme and opposed positions at either end (X and Y).

At one end of the scale (X), we would have the situation in which none of the letters were written under duress; all of them represented Faye Turney's genuine, honest thoughts; none were intentionally written in "non-normal" language but expressed in her own natural way; she is both writer and author; there is, therefore, no significance in any linguistic "evidence" of idiosyncrasy - the idiosyncrasies are chance phenomena – or fraud.

At the other end of the scale (Y), we would have the situation in which all the letters were written under duress; none of them represented Faye Turney's genuine, honest thoughts; all were intentionally expressed in "non-normal" language, in a coded way to show that she was writer but not author; linguistic "evidence" of idiosyncrasy is therefore significant - idiosyncrasies are motivated rather than chance phenomena – and points towards fraud.

If we accept this dichotomy, we see a striking difference in style between letters 2 and 3, which fit well at the Y end of the continuum, and letter 1, which stands out as fitting relatively well at the other (X).

Letter 1 contains no *errors,* unless we define *the best, entering into*, *in constant supply of fluids* as errors" rather than "lapses". It does contain several samples which fall under the "not done" category: *well and safe*, … *friendly and hospitable, very compassionate and warm.*

Letter 2 contains at least five *errors,* one of which, even if it had been grammatical, would not be "done". Equally, the whole of the final paragraph would certainly not be "done".

Letter 3 contains at least six *errors* and at least four "not done" utterances.

All texts have a referential function but it begins to look as if, paradoxically, these texts are also, in Jakobson's terms (1960), "poetic", since they (or, more correctly, parts of them) have a poetic function (in the sense of realising linguistic choices which lead to focussing on the "message") as well.

The words of Robert de Beaugrande (1978: 19) come to mind:

> When the writer's message is itself unconventional, [it] demands non-ordinary means of transmission. If ordinary means were used for such a message, the reader might well miss the point and force the message into a conventional framework...the non-ordinary use of language creates the proper circumstances for slower processing and heightened awareness.

In all three instances, Faye Turney was able to use her communicative competence as a educated, adult native speaker of English to 1) create text which was "unconventional" (what she was saying she knew to be untrue: intentionally flouting Grice's quality maxim) and 2) indicate this through "non-ordinary means of transmission" (marked language) in order to make sure that "the reader… [did not] … miss the point and force the message into a conventional framework" (i.e. believe her).

In this way, she provided her readers with "the proper circumstances for slower processing and heightened awareness." In short, by inserting words like "apparently" and the other "non-ordinary" words and phrases in the first letter and, in the second and third, faithfully transcribing the linguistically defective text dictated to her, she was able to signal clearly the incongruity between the words and message they appeared to carry. In this she was continuing an age old technique of secret writing: *steganography*; "hiding in plain sight" (Berloquin, P. 2008).

If I may be permitted a little irony at this point, the Leading Seaman stands out as a model amanuensis or translator in her fidelity to the original author. She scrupulously reproduces all his infelicities and, in that way, manages to totally subvert his intentions, converting texts which he intended to be read literally into texts which carried coded messages with a totally different ideological and communicative value! [12]

With the benefit of hindsight, we now know what actually happened. The contents of letter 1 were "suggested" to her, after which she was left to write in her own way and in her own words. In contrast, letters 2 and 3 were dictated for her to write out and send:

> …she was given pen and paper and told to write the first one herself, "admitting" her guilt and apologising. But she threw in a few of her own phrases to communicate to family and comrades [who] would know she didn't really believe any of it, e.g. ["] allegedly ["] and not referring to her ship by name. The next two however were completely dictated, as they'd realised that left to her own devices she'd not give them what they want[13].

However, as she herself says, she

> …decided to "take a chance" and write her letters in such a way that her family would realise that it was not the "real me". She did that by referring to her ship by its pennant number F99 - a method never used by sailors.
> Last night she told Sir Trevor [Mcdonald in an interview on ITV] that writing the letters made her feel like a traitor, but she had no choice.
>
> Peterkin, T. 2007

6. Conclusion

It is, surely, ludicrous that the media ran around in circles seeking circumstantial evidence of coercion, including that provided by experts in paralanguage, when there was hard, documentary, *prima facie*, linguistic evidence of fraud staring them in the

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[12] Copies of the hand-written versions of the letters are also available which contain a large number of underlinings and other seemingly extraneous marks. Further study of these texts might reveal even more instances of intentional coded messages.

[13] Personal communication from Tom Newton Dunn, Defence Editor, the *Sun*, received 12th April 2007 referring to Faye Turney's interview with the *Sun* on 7th April 2007.

face which could have been provided almost immediately each time a letter became available, and in a summative way once the crisis was over[14].

If forensic linguists wish to be taken seriously by the world outside academia, they must seize every opportunity to insist that, for example, good news reporting in circumstances such as these where the language evidence is crucial has to include a professional linguistic contribution. Had it been standard practice for the media to call upon forensic linguists as the letters were released[15], it would have been a relatively simple matter to provide professional insights which made sense of the breaking news as it came in and made a substantial and informed contribution to the debate.

It may well be argued that it takes time to produce an intellectually respectable forensic linguistic analysis and I am more than willing to accept that and engage in appropriate self flagellation. However, I would like to make a comparison between this study and market research. Not only do market researchers conduct vast, long-term surveys and studies and write voluminous reports on them, they also do what they call "quick and dirty" jobs[16].

The first version of this paper was just such a job. If we want to raise public awareness and appreciation of what forensic linguistics can do (and what linguistics, translation and interpreting are all about), we should be willing to undertake quick and dirty jobs like this, in addition to our more measured normal productions.

This paper is version 7. It represents what the writer feels, on reflection, should be written for other linguists, rather than for the press and the general public. It is, in short, still fundamentally version 1 but cleaner and more elegant with (to appropriate a suitably naval phrase), "bells, flags, and whistles" added.

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[14] The first draft of this paper was written on the three days between 27th March (the release of the first letter) and 29th March (the release of the third letter), when it formed the basis of part of the discussion on translation and ideology in a PhD class at GSIT. The first version of it written up on 4th April (as it became clear that the captives were to be released) and 5th April (when they were set free and repatriated), just before confirmation of coercion and, therefore, fraudulent attribution of authorship began to emerge from the official debriefing and the press conference which followed it.

[15] and, we might add, pay a very welcome fee.

[16] The technique has a long and honourable history in marketing and operations research dating back at least 35 years to Woolsey & Swanson 1975.

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