

Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO): Linguistics as Gate-keeping *or* Refuge by Shibboleth

Language Analysis for the Determination of Origin (LADO) is a blanket term for a series of different forensic linguistic methods which are employed by governmental asylum screening units in order to determine the origin of asylum seekers who are applying for refugee status. Applicants are interviewed by public or governmentally commissioned private agencies to ascertain whether they speak the (variation of a) language of a group they say they belong to, as part of testing their claim to come from a certain nation, region or group (LNOG 2004:261). However, none of these methods, which are based on eliciting spontaneous language samples, have ever been scientifically validated (Zwaan 2010:12). Moreover, being usually in the domain of interior ministries, LADO appears to be a rather clandestine practice, with very little information available publicly.

Although at least 100.000 individuals have undergone LADO since 1992 in several countries worldwide, we have heard almost nothing from the scientific community in this regard so far. The primary aim of this thesis is therefore to provide a contemporary, cutting-edge and comprehensive inquiry into the nature, implications and consequences of LADO.

This thesis aims at tracking LADO's origin (emergence/development and socio-political background), determining its international markets and players, and evaluating its methods and practices. The latter ones will be assessed by juxtaposition with established principles and parameters of rigorous scientific research, such as ethical framework, expert education and training, clarity of research question of expert's assignment, (up-to-date) scientific foundation (including test theory), transparency of data and argumentation, stringency and reproducibility of method(s), reflection of bias, open discussion of results, as well as application of quality control measures and third-party evaluation processes. The textual analysis of LADO-documents will be mixed: official LADO-related texts will be assessed by means of a critical discursive approach (e.g., Blommaert 2009, Fairclough 2003) whereas LADO reports (expert witness testimony) themselves will be evaluated against the backdrop of state-of-the-art – i.e., person-centred and lifeworld-oriented – linguistic theory (e.g., Busch 2010_{a+b}, Seidlhofer 2011).

Research will be both interrogative (personal or written communication and/or interviews with individuals who underwent LADO or their representatives, political decision makers, asylum officials, LADO practitioners and forensic-linguistic scholars) and investigative (freedom of information requests, parliamentary inquiry, screening of media archives, public registers and data bases – such as company registers or government spending reports, online access to asylum authority or practitioners' manuals and instructions, collection of a sample corpus of LADO reports) in character.

As such this doctoral thesis is planned to be a pioneering scientific contribution (likely the first monograph of its kind) to forensic-linguistic aspects of flight/displacement, refuge and rejection.

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