ASSTA AGM
Chairman’s Report on ASSTA Forensics Sub-committee ‘05

1.0 Meeting with Head of AFP Forensics
Earlier this year Phil Rose and Jennifer Elliott met with James Robertson, the head of AFP Forensics, to raise various forensically relevant issues. Topics discussed were:

*Joint workshops with the Police on Forensic Speaker Identification.* These would clarify the usual problematic issues (what can and can’t be done; how long it takes; necessity for documenting conversion history of recordings etc.) but also focus on what the Police could tell us – for example about the proper handling of evidence; how telephone intercepts are made etc.

*Accreditation* In conjunction with the question of forensic expertise, the question of accreditation was also raised. This is clearly a matter the committee, and ASSTA, need to address if we are going to be accepted in the wider forensic community. Some of the members of the committee have encountered this year some frighteningly poor forensic reports (commissioned by *Unisearch*). Accreditation might be a way of minimizing such dangerous work. It can be noted that the accreditation of forensic experts in the UK is now well under way.

*Web-site* The plan to have a forensics web-site as part of the ASSTA web-site was welcomed. We are at present looking for someone with expertise in web-site design (and hopefully some understanding of forensics) to get started. (Helen Fraser has said we can make use of her Forensics web-site.) ASSTA will be asked to fund this position.

Further developments have been overshadowed by Bali2. It is hoped to take them up again in the new year, along with the possibility of working with the AFP to collect data for trialing automatic forensic speaker identification methods.

2.0 Individual members’ activities
Committee members continue to be as active in both case-work and research as their ‘real’ jobs will allow. Apart from fielding inquiries from police and media about forensic matters, they report the following forensically-related activities for the period since SST 04 – present.

Jennifer Elliott has done a small amount of case-work - a number of preliminary assessments for AFP and NSW Police - and one full analysis of data for AFP/Commonwealth DPP on a drugs case which involved the analysis of TIs, a taped record of interview and a taped record of conversation. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau have recently asked her to undertake analysis of flight recordings from the Lockart River air disaster in May this year.

Helen Fraser has completed three small bits of casework. She also made a recent appearance at a *voir dire* discussing the admissibility of voice ID evidence in a case, and has given informal advice to the AFP on usability of some video footage for speaker ID.

John Ingram did three cases of forensic speaker identification, one involving a Philippines political scandal earlier this year.

Yuko Kinoshita finished a paper evaluating the strength of the popular forensic-phonetic parameter long term F0: *Does Lindley’s LR estimation formula work for speech data? Investigation using long-term F0.* It will appear in issue 12.2 of *Journal of Speech Language and the Law.*

Duncan Markham has completed one accent comparison job, a few transcript verifications, and a few transcriptions of surveillance recordings.

Phil Rose has completed several investigations related to forensic speaker identification, for both the police, in fraud, murder and child porn cases, and privately. His paper on *Technical Forensic Speaker Recognition: Evaluation, Types and Testing of Evidence* was published in a special edition of *Computer Speech and Language.* His paper on *Forensic Speaker Recognition at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century – An Overview and a Demonstration* will be published in the *Australian Journal of Forensic Science* early next year. He gave an invited talk to the ANZFSS on *Estimating Strength of*
Evidence in Forensic Speaker Identification. He has also started to look at combining traditional and automatic methods in Forensic Speaker Recognition, and to that end had a visit from a representative of the Spanish Company Agnito who markets a Bayesian automatic forensic speaker identification system.

There is obviously no let-up in the Forensic-Phonetic work solicited. It might be a good idea to look into the training by Committee members of more ASSTA people who could eventually take on such work.

3.0 Terrorist video
Responding to the recent various opinions reported in the media about the accent of the hooded terrorist in the video clip, the committee issued a joint cautionary press-release with members of the Language and National Origin Group: CAUTION REQUIRED IN DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM ACCENTS. It was hoped that the profile of the Committee, and ASSTA, might be raised thereby. The release was printed in the latest ASSTA newsletter.

As usual, the media frenzy spawned by the terrorist video meant that several committee members were interviewed on radio and TV concerning the matter, and forensic phonetics/linguistics in general. They were able to bring a degree of sanity to the matter by pointing out just what could and could not be deduced from someone’s accent.

4.0 Lawson Bayly’s Work
Earlier this year, Lawson Bayly was employed by ASSTA to undertake a ‘watchdog’ roll on various aspects of forensic speech science within the legal community, both in Australia and beyond. His more detailed brief was as follows:

- Keep watch for Australian legal cases which involve any aspect of forensic speech science, and maintain a register of such cases with relevant information easily accessible.
- Interpret general legal issues of relevance to forensic speech science, for example the implications of the recently introduced 'evidence act'.
- Interpret specific legal issues of interest in particular cases.
- Create and maintain links with members of the legal and law enforcement communities around the country in order to facilitate the flow of information between these communities and speech science professionals.
- Subject to availability of time, keep watch on developments in case law, legislation or investigative techniques of law enforcement agencies overseas that relate to forensic speech science matters (examining other common law jurisdictions as a priority, particularly US and Europe).
- Provide material to a third party who will maintain a webpage making agreed aspects of this information available to agreed parties (subject to professional and privacy considerations).
- Write up reports of agreed aspects of information gathered to be available to ASSTA.
- Make recommendations for activities or research projects that need to be conducted.
- Seek sources of external funding to continue this position.
- Seek sources of funding for projects on forensic speech science from legal and law enforcement agencies, and make these known within ASSTA.

Lawson has produced a valuable reference document, concerning Speaker Identification and Accent Identification, with summaries and online resources. We hope to be able to continue to employ him in this function.

Phil Rose, Chairman. November ’05