



In the beginning

I was asked by Rui if, as the First President of the Association, I would contribute to this, the first IAFL briefing. To quote Oprah Winfrey, I will speak my truth which others may correct in later issues. So I will begin by affirming that I was not actually the first President, even though I am listed as such on the IAFL website; I will explain below.

I thought that I could best contribute to the briefing with a mixture of history and commentary. It is strange to look back to the early 1990s, when almost everything seemed possible to those of us working in British universities, when administrators saw their role as helping academics achieve their goals, when there was no internet and international phone calls cost a fortune - £1 a minute for those of us in the UK. It was in this context that Forensic Linguistics began its growth into a well-established academic discipline, which now boasts a professional association, many of whose members act as expert witnesses; a biennial international conference; two international journals; three healthy masters degrees which have by now produced hundreds of graduates; and literally dozens of universities world-wide offering undergraduate courses entitled *Forensic Linguistics* or *Language and the Law*.

Looking back, it is amazing how optimistic, but also how inexperienced and ill-prepared we were.

The International Association of Forensic Linguists

In autumn 1992 following a Saturday meeting in an unheated building at the University of Birmingham a small group of self-designated forensic linguists decided it would be useful to create an Association. We nominated a small founding committee consisting of a Treasurer, a Secretary and myself as Chairman to explore the possibility. I wrote hard copy letters to people we thought were doing what we considered to be forensic linguistics work inviting them to become members and soon we had 25 signed up, although William Labov failed twice to reply to my invitation to become our Honorary President. Of course, I don't know that he even received my surface mail letters – how useful the WhatsApp indication of recipient having read is, provided of course the recipient has not disabled it!

We felt we should charge an annual subscription, but were at the same time worried that we were not offering members anything in return, so there arose the idea of a journal to be provided free to association members. As a start, we managed to keep the annual subscription

to the Association below the cost of subscribing independently to the journal, which seemed like a recruitment tool – provided of course the members thought the journal was worth reading. Shortly afterwards Sue Blackwell set up the invaluable FL-List, which would have been worth the subscription in itself, except that Sue rapidly opened it up to the whole international community!

Forensic Linguistics: The International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law

Pre-dating the founding of IAFL there was the International Association for Forensic Phonetics (IAFP) headed by Peter French, who also became a member of IAFL. The two of us thought it would be good for the two associations, which at the time had a joint membership of some 80, to share a journal. So, in 1993, a year after the founding of IAFL, we approached a contact in Routledge with the proposal. We had a meeting with a junior publisher in a pub in London and persuaded him the journal was viable, although we had not a detailed publishing plan nor even a single article ready to publish. He said hoped to be selling 500 copies a year after 3 years, we honestly told him that 150 was more likely, although we insisted the long-term future was bright. The journal was launched in 1994 intended by the editors as a biannual – but I have just noticed now, for the first time, that the first issue says on the copyright page “*Forensic Linguistics* is published three times a year by Routledge”. While the first three issues were of respectable size 6 articles, 5 articles plus 4 case reports and 8 articles plus 1 case report, possibly giving Routledge hope the journal could indeed become triannual, but we then had a crisis and the fourth issue had only two articles. Routledge probably thought they saw the writing on the wall and decided to cease publication after two more issues.

But, the journal was saved by the University of Birmingham Library, which had decided to set up a press and the journal became their first publication. However, in fact, all they did was to provide their imprint, all of the editorial duties that had been fulfilled by Routledge were passed on to the editors: contracting a proof reader and a company to type-set and print the journals. To handle this, as IAFL treasurer by now, I paid money into a Birmingham university account from which, as co-editor of the journal, I paid for a part-time secretary, the free-lance proof-reader, the external printer and the mailing to IAFL members. This cottage industry worked quite well for ten years and survived a change in title to *The International Journal of Speech Language and the Law*, until the university introduced a new financial regime. It was decided that a 40% overhead would be charged on all university accounts, irrespective of the source and purpose of the funds and this included the account for the journal, despite the fact that the journal would receive nothing in return from the university for the overhead, as secretarial and postage costs were paid in addition and the remaining 80% of the expenditure was outside the university. Overnight, the journal became unviable, from a position of having a 30% surplus after all costs had been met, with a 40% overhead charge it became loss-making.

Coincidentally, the journal was approached by Equinox and a trial period was negotiated during which Equinox would take over the journal for a period of two years. This arrangement became permanent, sadly, no compensatory payment was negotiated for the two

associations. And now members or their institutions may even have to pay to publish in IJSSL, if they wish their articles to be open-access. In the 1990's authors were courted and sometimes wined, dined and even paid by publishers; how the power-relations have changed - now publishers see themselves as doing academics a favour. It was in part in reaction to this monetisation of research publication that the Association's second journal, *Language and Law / Linguagem e Direito* was founded. However, all publication has a cost and *Language and Law* is sustained by the freely-given efforts of the special and general editors, the blind reviewers and of course the University of Porto which hosts the electronic copies and facilitates and effectively subsidises the open access.

It is a shame we will not meet up at Aston in September, but we do have the option of interacting instantaneously one-to-one or one-to-many with what is widely regarded as one of the most friendly and supportive academic communities in the world.

Malcolm Coulthard