



Questioned Documents - 2017

J14 Imitation Typewriter Digital Fonts — A Project to Establish a Reference Collection

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After attending this presentation, attendees will better understand the historical origins and development of imitation typewriter fonts, the various reasons for their creation and use, and the concepts for classification of contemporary examples.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by: (1) raising awareness of the potential for encountering imitation typewriter digital fonts in casework; and, (2) providing information about a research project to establish a reference collection.

Cases involving documents prepared on typewriters might be decreasing, but an increasing number of cases involve computer-generated documents being brought forward as typewritten documents, usually with some excuse for the absence of an “original” document.

The standard guidance for forensic document examiners confronted with copies of apparently typewritten documents is: “[w]hen examining nonoriginal text, determine whether the typestyle and other characteristics are consistent with a reproduction of original typed text or consistent with having been produced by another source (for example, computer generated typestyles that are based on or copied from typewriter typestyles).”¹

Because such cases often involve documents dated decades before they first surface in the context of a dispute, determination of the technology used in the production of the document or the introductory date of a typestyle can be dispositive. In such cases, the obvious pair of mutually-exclusive hypotheses may be stated as:

H_D – (the Digital Hypothesis): the document submitted for examination in copy form (or any underlying “original”) was created in the virtual reality of a computer screen using a digital font imitating the type design associated with typewriters and requiring one or more technological elements demonstrably not extant at the date of the document; or,

H_A – (the Analog Hypothesis): the underlying original of the document submitted for examination in copy form was prepared using the appropriate analogue impact technology of an actual typewriter potentially extant at the date of the document.

Depending on the context, observations that decisively support the likelihood of H_D relative to H_A can be of considerable probative value to the trier of fact.

Awareness of these issues has prompted a research project that aims to investigate the range of currently available typewriter look-a-like digital fonts and their background information to begin assembling a reference collection of these fonts. In addition to open-source images and digital font files, the project has objectives to gather relevant background information such as date of release, designer, distributor, and character set. When information regarding actual typewriter type designs that were the “inspiration” for the digital fonts is not included with the font files, standard typewriter reference collections will be searched. It is anticipated that this project will be ongoing, with updates as new fonts are released. Differentia for potential use in taxonomic classification of these fonts will be discussed.

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A concise overview of the germane historical context will be provided, ranging from imitation typewriter fonts of printers' foundry type in 19th Century print shops through the laser and ink-jet printers in the current century.

A casework example will be presented demonstrating how examination of a digital image revealed an anachronistic typewriter typeface design that was the basis for an even more anachronistic digital font.

Reference(s):

1. SWGDOC Standard for Examination of Typewritten Items §7.4.2; available from SWGDOC.com.

Typewriter, Digital Font, Forensic Document Examination