

'Lie Detecting' by a Voice, Is Center of Controversy

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WASHINGTON, June 4 — A new type of "lie detector" device that can detect psychological stress by analyzing a person's voice is gaining acceptance in some legal and investigative circles and its results have been used in a few court proceedings.

The device, called a "Psychological Stress Evaluator," has stirred a controversy among operators of the traditional polygraph-detector, because it is sometimes being used to test "truth" through voice recordings without the knowledge of the speakers.

This asserted capacity to test the truth of statements by people who were speaking for other purposes could touch off "an overwhelming furor before this is all done," concedes Allan D. Bell Jr., president of Dektor Counterintelligence and Security Inc., which developed the new device.

Mr. Bell and his associates in the industrial security company in Springfield, Va., outside Washington, say that the device has not been used to

their knowledge to test the truth of statements made at news conferences or other official events.

But the potential use of the machine to test the veracity of televised remarks is implicit in

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the company's promotional brochure, which says that the device was tested by monitoring 25 segments of the television program, "To Tell the Truth." It picked the persons who were telling the truth 94.7 per cent of the time, the brochure says.

The psychological stress evaluator was put to a more serious purpose Friday in Criminal Court in Ellicott City, Md., when Delores Jackson, a Baltimore woman accused of writing bad checks, was found not guilty on the basis of a "P.S.E." test and a handwriting analysis.

Before she took the test, the State Attorney's office and the public defender, Bernard Goldberg, agreed that the results could be used in evidence. Without an agreement, "lie detector" tests by traditional polygraphs, truth serum or any other technique are inadmissible as evidence.

Truth Indicated

The test indicated that Mrs. Jackson was telling the truth when she said her checkbook and identification had been stolen and the court acquitted her.

It was the fourth time that judges in Ellicott City have been told of the results of stress evaluator tests, by previous agreements between the public defender and state's attorney. In two of the cases—another bad check prosecution and a murder case—the charges were dropped. In the other, involving a shoplifting

ring, a defendant pleaded guilty to a reduced charge after the machine indicated he was involved.

The theory behind the new device is that the human voice normally operates in both audible frequencies and inaudible frequency modulations. The exception is said to be when a person is under stress. Then, according to inventors of the device, the inaudible FM vibrations disappear from the voice. To the ear there is no difference, but the machine traces the fluctuations on a chart.

Critics of the new device do not dispute that these fluctuations occur under stress and that the device charts them. Rather, they say that the stress could be due to other psychological pressures than lying. Because the polygraph monitors several bodily functions, they say that it offers the opportunity to cross-check various indicators without depending completely on one.

Ronald Decker, the chief of the Department of Defense's polygraph school at Fort Gordon, Ga., said that the new device was being tested by the department at Fort Holabird, Md., and that he had no plans to switch from the polygraph.

Intelligence agencies within the Government are said to have purchased three or four of the \$3,200 machines. But an intelligence source insisted Friday that they were not being used because "definitive testing is not complete." The source said that they were purchased as a possible alternative to the polygraph, and not with the thought of checking the truth of foreign officials' statements.

J. Kirk Barefoot, a New York security official who is a former president of the American Polygraph Association, said that many members of the association were dubious of the stress evaluator's reliability. He was most critical because the Dektor company advertises that it can be "used covertly."

Mr. Barefoot said he had doubts as to the reliability of such a test, and he added that "even if it could be done, it would be improper invasion of privacy."

Mr. Bell, a former military intelligence officer who formed Dektor two years ago with two other former intelligence officers, said the cost of the stress evaluator included a two or three-day course in its use. A person can be taught quickly to tell when a speaker is under stress, he said, but considerable experience is required to know when the stress is due to lying.

See also NYTimes 19 Feb 74,
Anthony Ripley, "An Expert Hints
at Tape Accident" - filed Watergate.