



A study on the Rarest case of Disguised Signatures in the form of Lateral expansion

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Abstract

Questioned documents have always been a challenge in forensic investigations. The disguising of signatures is the most common practice in white collar crime. In case of disguise, people deliberately change their usual pattern of writing including signatures with the intent to deny the authenticity of the same in future for some obvious benefits. There may be numerous methods to disguise the original handwriting and signatures depending upon the capability of the writer and intention behind disguising. In the present case study, the subject has disguised his own signatures by putting the alphabets in lateral expansion instead of usually used overlapped alphabets. A critical study was done to decipher the rare methodology of disguising using technique of lateral expansion.

Keywords: Disguised writing, Signatures, Forensic.

Introduction

It is well known fact that documents are not always what they are represented to be. The crime of alteration of documents, manipulations in the scripts and forgeries are quite in trend since antiquity. Whenever there is a transaction of vast properties or of large sums of money where the signature on a will or agreement is questioned, the importance of establishing authenticity of the document becomes utmost important. Forgery by disguising is a very common practice¹.

A deliberate departure from normal handwriting habits is generally referred to as disguise. Guise means external appearance². Disguise means modification of the external appearance so as to conceal the real original identity of the entity. In document examination, alteration of the handwriting appearance and other characteristics of writing is called disguise. The modifications known as disguise are intended to conceal the identity of the writer. The end concealed writing is called disguise writing and the one who disguises his handwriting is called disguiser³. The main purpose of the disguiser to disguise his handwriting is to conceal his linkage with the disguised text/signature as its author when he is questioned. Documents bearing disguised handwriting or signatures have increased tremendously in recent years. Therefore the methods used by the disguisers are also escalating significantly.

Methodology

The document bearing the questioned signature (denied by the subject) was provided by the investigative agency for expert

opinion. The standard signatures were obtained by the subject's personal identities such as his passport, and other authentic documents. Both scanned and photocopied documents were collected from the suspect. The tools for comparison included hand lens magnifier, a digital camera, scale, head fitted microscope, and a transmitted illuminating device.

Case history: The subject came to India to play for football club on a contract basis and took the payment for playing vide two payment receipts in the months and year August and October 2007 respectively. After few months he again demanded the contractual amount, denying the fact that he had already taken the payments. He also denied his two signatures on the money receipts dated August and October 2007 given to the club.

Observations: Experience has shown that certain features of handwriting are rarely changed; however they can be altered by the disguiser by using rarest techniques. The general appearance of handwriting may give a useful pointer to its probable author, no matter how carefully it has been disguised. The questioned sample Q1 and Q2 were examined for the presence of line quality defects and comparison of class and individual characteristics against standard samples S1 to S4 using instruments such as a magnifier, scale, transmitted light, etc. The signatures on the payment receipts were marked as Q-1 and Q-2. The signatures of the player on his passport and specimen sheet, marked as S-1 to S-4 were considered as the 'standard' signatures of player and these standard signatures were compared with the questioned signatures put by him on the two money receipts.

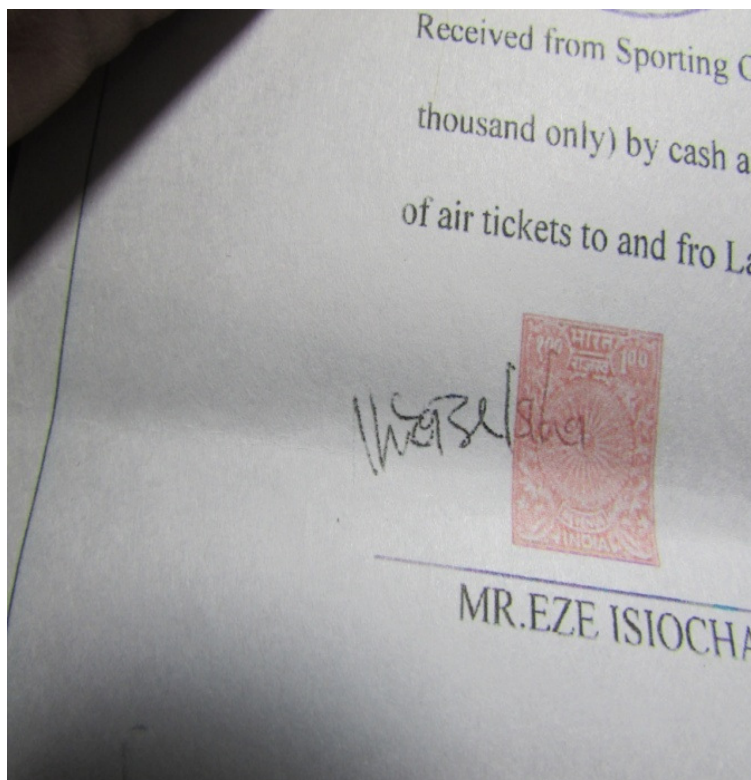


Figure-1
Questioned sample (Q1)

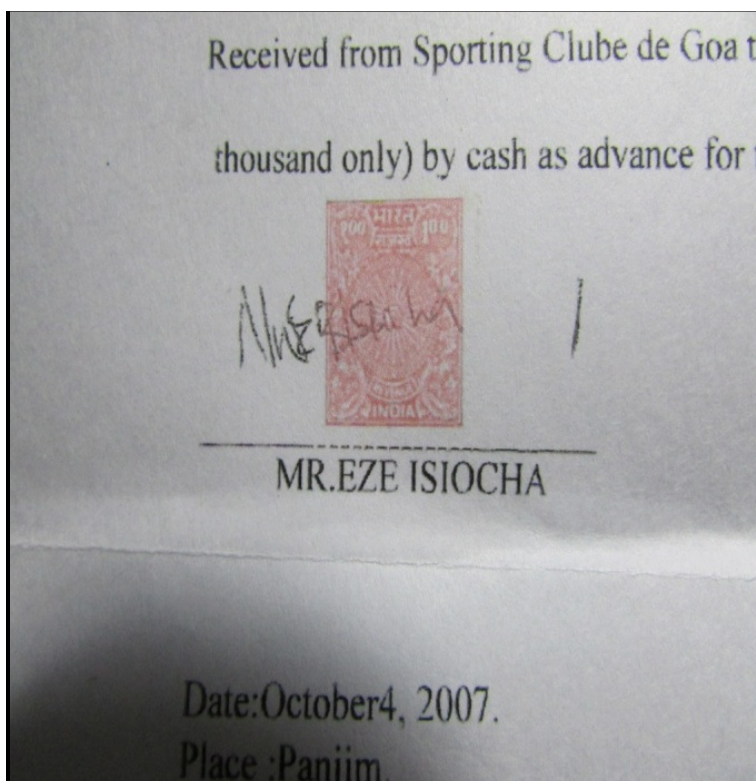


Figure-2
Questioned sample (Q2)

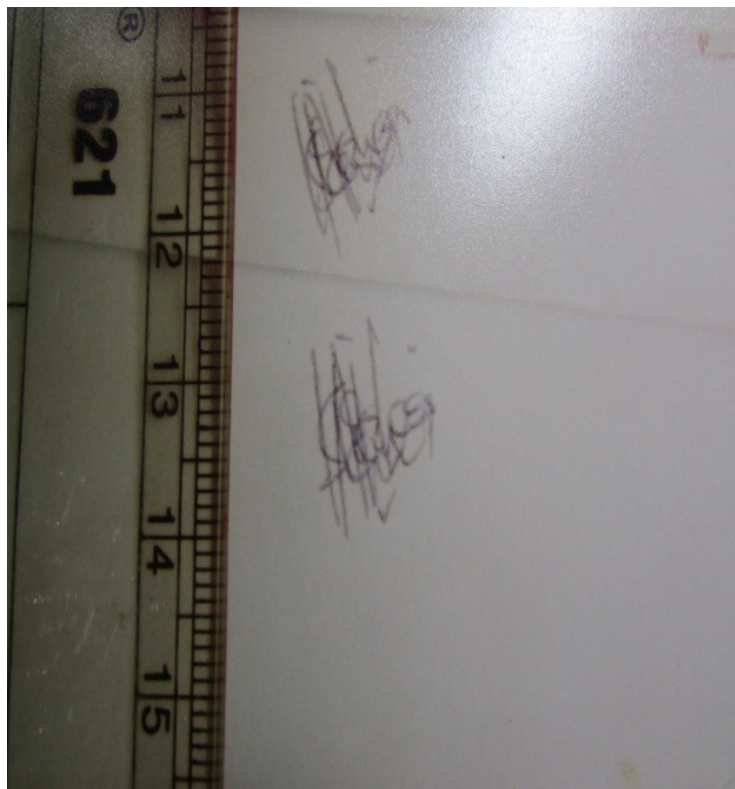


Figure-3
Specimen sample (S1)

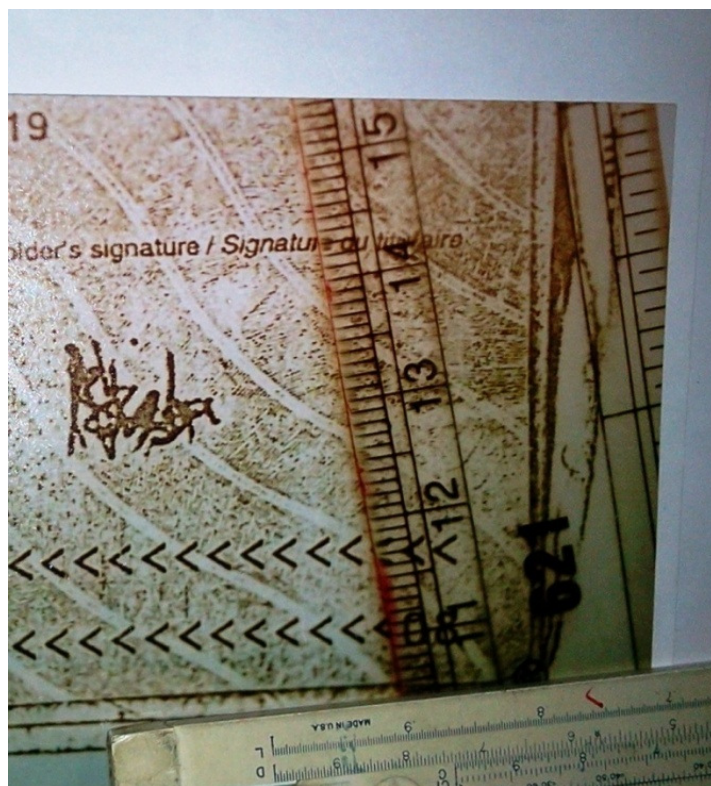


Figure-4
Specimen sample (S2)



Figure-5
Specimen sample (S3)

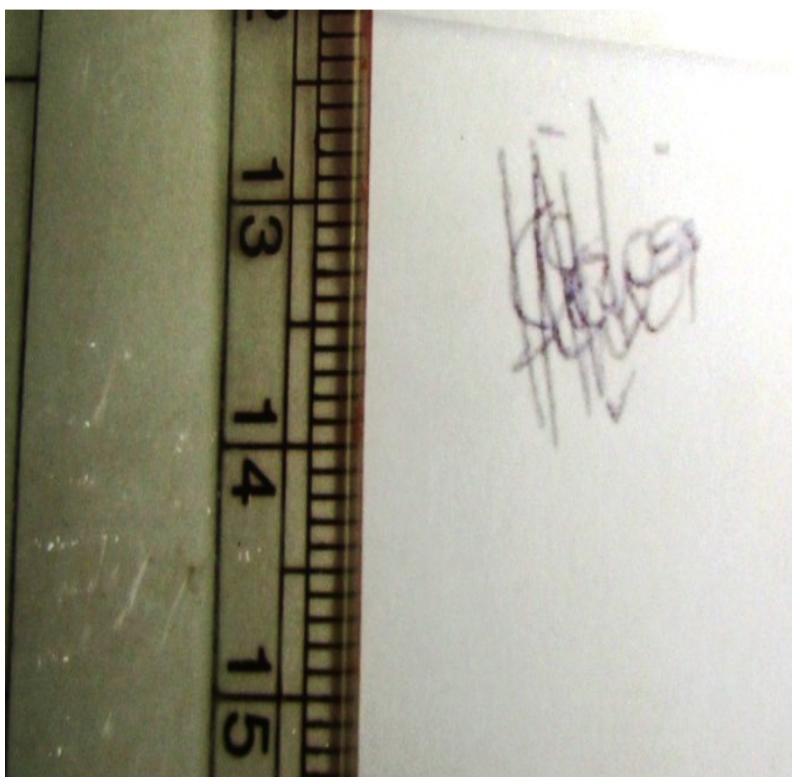


Figure-6
Specimen sample (S4)

Results and Discussion

On first visual examination, the two questioned signatures, Q-1 and Q-2 on the receipts were not found matching with the four standard signatures S-1 to S-4, however, the further observations and careful examination revealed that questioned signatures Q-1 and Q-2 were not having any suspicious evidence of forgery or copying act as line quality, speed, skill and movement etc were found similar with the standard signatures.

In the absence of line quality defects, the evidence of forgery was ruled out. Seeing the strong similarities of individual characteristics of letters in Q-1, Q-2, S-1, S-2, S-3 and S-4 it was found that the two questioned signatures were in fact disguised signatures, originally written by the same person with attempts of lateral expansion of alphabets separately. In fact, the writer was in the habit of putting all the alphabets of his signatures in overlapped manner in intermingled fashion and unconventional manner.

Much handwriting are characterized by abnormal spacing of the words; in some the words are separated by less than a width of a letter, whilst in other the spacing may be as much as the width of four or five letters. Close spacing is so common that its occurrence is of a little evidential value, but extremely wide spacing is comparatively rare. In the majority of disguise handwriting the word spacing is almost certain to be that of the normal script, a fact which may prove of some evidential value. For study of lateral expansion of the signature by the disguiser, various class and individual characteristics were studied, which are as under.

The class characteristics like line quality, speed, skill, movement, slant, alignments, spacing, size and proportion of letters and variations were studied. The line quality was smooth, the speed and skill was superior, the slant was backhand, and the alignment was ascending in two sets. The spacing between the letters of questioned signatures was wider because of attempted disguise. The size and proportions of letters cannot be compared because the standard signatures show overlapping of letters but questioned signatures do not show overlapping of letters but show 'deliberate' separate formations of letters because of deliberate disguise.

Further, the individual characteristics were studied for a detailed scrutiny of the signatures. It was noted that the questioned signatures were deliberately expanded signatures in respect of letters/ alphabets. This is a rare example of disguising effort when a person has not changed the shape, slant and size of letters but the person has changed the usual overlapped letters formations into separate letters formations. Such type of

disguising efforts pose great difficulty as similar form and formations of each alphabet cannot be demonstrated in the form of juxtaposed chart, by keeping each alphabet of Q-series and S-series in a side by side manner. Here it was deciphered that all the alphabets of standard signatures were in an overlapped and complicated bunch of strokes. The form and formations of 'E', 'Z', 'h' and last 'a' were found similar in respect of movement impulses and individual characteristics in Q and S-series.

In the absence of line quality defects in Q-1 and Q-2 and at the same time, considering the symptoms of disguise in Q-1 and Q-2, it was concluded that Q-1 and Q-2 are deliberately disguised signatures. Otherwise also, this is not at all a case of forgery because forger always follows a genuine model and no forger would copy differently from model. It is the original disguiser who deviates from his usual pattern to defy detection. In the absence of line quality defects in Q-1 and Q-2, it is doubly proved that Q-1 and Q-2 are genuine but disguised signatures. Since, there are disguising efforts in questioned signatures; there are variations due to disguise in two sets.

Conclusion

In the interesting and rare case study discussed here, it was observed that the person tried his level best to disguise his usual pattern of signature in an expanded manner, yet he was not able to change his 'individual characteristics' in some of the alphabets/letters. This finding has proved that even in rare and very uncommon method of disguise i.e. Lateral expansion of overlapped signature, the identification is possible. There could be innumerable methods of disguising efforts in time to come but it is a fact that, no person can be 100% successful in totally hiding his brain reflexes, stamping his individuality. It is because of the fact that certain individual characteristics are so deeply engraved into the sub-conscious mind that it becomes very difficult for the original writer to leave all such characteristics in the act of deliberate deviation/disguise.

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