

25-november 2025

LEXICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LEGAL ENGLISH

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Annotation. This research focuses on investigating distinctive lexical characteristics of Legal English, such as archaisms, technical terms, foreign words, synonymy through doublets and triplets, as well as repetition, which pose a challenge for non-native learners and laypersons. These lexical attributes are vital for developing future lawyers' professional communicative competence. Consequently, revisiting methods of teaching Legal English vocabulary is essential.

Keywords: Legal English, archaisms, technical terms, foreign words, synonymy, doublets, triplets, contextual learning.

Contemporary requirements for English language acquisition among Law professionals have increased over the past decades as a result of globalization and technological advances. English serves undisputedly as the lingua franca of law, the legal profession, and international legal education (Prinsloo, 2014).

In our research, we follow Northcott's (2009) suggestion that English language education aims to equip second-language law professionals to function effectively in academic and professional settings that demand English language proficiency.

Although the demand for legal professionals with a strong command of English is recognized worldwide, there are still questions about how to make Legal English

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education more efficient at the tertiary level. It should be noted that Legal English is even “incomprehensible to well-educated users of American English” (Prinsloo, 2014), not to mention the challenges it poses to students who learn English as a Foreign Language.

Legal language is difficult to master due to its qualities such as prolixity, nominalization, and terminology. Owing to the fact that legal language is distinctly different from other professional languages (Bhatia, Hafner, and Miller, 2010), it requires extra expertise from EFL instructors to design and conduct lessons in order to meet all stakeholders' expectations.

It is widely acknowledged that Legal language is the language that is used in formal legal discourse by legal practitioners, though the ultimate users are lay persons. The register of Legal English functions in both documentation and verbal discourse in legal settings. For instance, legislative legal writings such as constitutions, statutes, regulations, contracts, wills, treaties, as well as judicial decisions, legal textbooks and law reports are examples of written Legal English. (Bhatia, 2014). Courtroom interactions (judges giving instructions, lawyers questioning witnesses, and objections raised during trials), police interrogations, jury instructions, negotiations during mediation or settlement talks can serve as examples of verbal discourse in legal settings. As can be inferred from the aforementioned examples, the spoken language of lawyers exhibits creativity, whereas written legal English remains conservative and formal, adhering strictly to established conventions (Abdullayeva L. A., 2022).

Regardless of its form, proficiency in both legal skills and language abilities is essential in advanced legal education and professional development (Butler, 2013). This indicates that Legal English functions as a specialized sublanguage, differing from general English in aspects including vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Wydict and Sloan, 2005).

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Legal language, whether expressed in writing or speech, possesses distinct characteristics that set it apart from everyday English, such as, frequent use of common words, frequent use of Old English and Middle English, frequent use of Latin words and phrases, Use of Old French and Anglo-Norman words which have not been taken into the general vocabulary, use of terms of art, use of argot (specialized vocabulary or set of idioms used by a particular social class or group, especially one that functions outside the law), frequent use of words and expressions with flexible meanings (Mellinkoff, 1963).

The correct use of legal vocabulary poses a significant challenge for law students because the same word or term can have different meanings in a native language and English. In the following section of our article, relevant examples to illustrate each lexical category described above will be provided.

The first notable category consists of common words with distinct legal meanings. For example, words such as *attachment*, *consideration*, *execute*, *party*, and *find* bear specific definitions within legal contexts that differ from their general usage. An illustration is the term *consideration*, which in legal terms denotes a contractual concept involving an act or promise forming the price of an agreement.

Beyond common words, Legal English also uses archaic terms and expressions, such as adverbs like *hereof*, *thereof*, *hereinafter*, *hereunder*, and *heretofore*; nouns including *corporate veil* and *surrejoinder*; adjectives such as *aforesaid*; verbs like *arraign* and *bequest*; and phrases like *pursuant to*, *prior to*, and *vel non*.

Archaic lexical items are still used in Legal English to maintain precision and tradition in legal texts. Moreover, Legal English also features specialized technical terminology known as "terms of art," which include words like *tort*, *promissory*, *restrictive covenant*, *estoppel*, *bailment*, *libel*, *injunction*, *felony*, etc.

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The spoken form of Legal English incorporates informal jargon and abbreviated terms, such as *depo* for *deposition*, *hypo* for *hypothetical* example, and *punies* for *punitive damages*, which are generally absent from formal legal writing. Nonetheless, some Latin-derived expressions like *pro tem* (*pro tempore*) appear in both spoken and written forms.

Another distinctive lexical characteristic of Legal English is the use of doublets and triplets—pairs or triplets of synonymous or near-synonymous words, often derived from mixed linguistic origins such as French, Latin, and English. Examples include doublets like *null and void*, *fit and proper*, and triplets such as *give, devise and bequeath*, or *right, title and interest*. These combinations serve to enhance clarity and legal precision by covering subtle variations within legal concepts.

Legal English exhibits a set of distinctive lexical characteristics that collectively form a highly specialized sublanguage. These features contribute to legal language's precision and formality but also present considerable challenges for non-native speakers and law students learning English as a foreign language.

The complexity of Legal English vocabulary and its deviation from General English demand specialized teaching methods tailored to the needs of future legal professionals. Enhancing learners' proficiency requires emphasis on familiarizing them with the unique lexical features of Legal English.

Principles of contextual teaching and learning approach developed by Verbitsky can serve as an effective pedagogical model for overcoming difficulties relating to comprehension and retention of archaic and technical legal vocabulary in foreign language education. In the framework of this approach, legal vocabulary is embedded in authentic legal contexts, which enhances its retention and further application. Verbitsky's CTL theory integrates language learning with professional contexts, using real-world scenarios to make archaic terms like "*habeas corpus*" or "*wherefore*"

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meaningful through problem-solving tasks. For EFL students, this involves grouping vocabulary by legal genres and using them in group discussions, simulations and role-plays, which provide patterns for output practice. These activities bridge theory and practice by shifting from rote memorization to meaning-making activities, which are aligned with future lawyers' professional needs.

In conclusion, the distinctive lexical features of Legal English underpin its precision and formality, but at the same time create comprehension challenges for EFL law students. Verbitsky's CTL theory transforms Legal English pedagogy by immersing EFL law students in professional contexts through interactive tasks like discussions and role-plays.

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