POPULARIZATION STRATEGIES AS DISCURSIVE TOOLS TO MEDIATE LEGAL KNOWLEDGE IN ONLINE FORUMS

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ABSTRACT

Modern information technologies allow us to disseminate specialized knowledge through ask-an-expert forums that serve as a resource for transforming specialized concepts for a lay audience. This paper aims to add to the study of discourse production and is intended as a contribution to legal communication from a popularization-centered perspective. It considers the popularization of legal knowledge to a lay audience as a process of discursive accommodation to the reader's knowledge base and of alignment of the cognitive levels of participants in asymmetrical interactions intermediated by explanatory strategies. Through the analysis of online legal-lay communication, the article builds a classification model of discursive strategies that allow experts, including forum lawyers, to represent complex and abstract specialized content in an intelligible way to prevent communicative problems from emerging and communicate efficiently. The findings illustrate how various popularization strategies function to align the cognitive levels of participants and eliminate knowledge asymmetries. Two types of strategy (popularization by formulation and reformulation and popularization by illustration) are analyzed and assessed. Definition as a type of popularization by reformulation, comprising 42% of all strategies found in the corpus, is the most common explanatory strategy. Metaphors employed to popularize legal knowledge by relating specialized and everyday domains of experience are the least common explanatory tools used by forum lawyers. These explanatory strategies can be combined to jointly contribute to the purpose of accommodating legal information to the knowledge base of lay forum users. This study is a vector for investigating the problems of asymmetrical interactions in institutional settings. The methodology or aspects of asymmetrical exchanges can be expanded and become an avenue for further research.

Keywords: popularization discourse; explanatory strategy; discursive accommodation; laypeople; knowledge asymmetry; online discourse.

LES ESTRATÈGIES DE DIVULGACIÓ COM A EINES DISCURSIVES PER TRANSMETRE EL CONEIXEMENT JURÍDIC ALS FÒRUMS EN LÍNIA

Resum

Les tecnologies de la informació modernes permeten difondre coneixements especialitzats en fòrums en què es pot preguntar a persones expertes, un recurs útil per fer arribar conceptes especialitzats a audiències no especialitzades. Aquest article es proposa ampliar l'estudi de la producció del discurs i contribuir a la comunicació jurídica des d'una perspectiva centrada en la divulgació. S'hi analitza la divulgació dels coneixements jurídics a una audiència no especialitzada com un procés d'adaptació del discurs a la base cognitiva del lector i com un procés d'equiparació dels nivells cognitius de participants en interaccions asimètriques per mitjà d'estratègies explicatives. Amb l'anàlisi de la comunicació virtual entre experts i no experts en temes jurídics, en l'article es construeix un model de classificació d'estratègies discursives que permeten als experts –incloent-hi els juristes que participen en els fòrums– representar continguts especialitzats, complexos i abstractes d'una manera intel·ligible per evitar problemes comunicatius i per comunicar-se amb eficiència. En les conclusions s'il·lustra com funcionen les diverses estratègies de divulgació per equiparar els nivells cognitius dels participants i eliminar-ne les asimetries cognitives. S'hi analitzen i avaluen dos tipus d'estratègia: la divulgació per formulació i reformulació, i la divulgació per il·lustració. La definició com a tipus de divulgació per reformulació, que representa un 42% de totes les estratègies observades al corpus, és l'estratègia explicativa més habitual. En canvi, l'instrument menys utilitzat pels juristes de fòrums és el recurs a metàfores per difondre el coneixement jurídic, tot relacionant dominis d'experiència especialitzats i quotidians. Aquestes estratègies explicatives es poden combinar per contribuir conjuntament a l'objectiu d'adaptar la informació jurídica a la base cognitiva dels usuaris no especialistes del fòrum. Aquest estudi és un vector per investigar els problemes de les interaccions asimètriques en contextos institucionals. La metodologia o els aspectes relacionats amb intercanvis asimètrics es poden ampliar, i poden obrir una via per a recerques futures.

Paraules clau: discurs de divulgació; estratègia explicativa; adaptació discursiva; públic no especialitzat; asimetria cognitiva; discurs en línia.

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Sumari

1 Introduction

This article analyzes popularization strategies within the discourse found in law forum posting. Assuming that strategies used in discourse production constitute an identifiable field of study within discourse studies, this article presents linguistic research on expert knowledge popularization.

Knowledge asymmetry (the knowledge difference that exists between experts and a lay audience) has been analyzed within many different fields since knowledge differences are found in a great number of domains, ranging from business communication to media, education, law, and medicine. Legal discourse, like any other professional discourse, has traditionally been considered incomprehensible to laypeople (Anesa, 2009; Anesa, 2016; Boginskaya, 2020; Ciapuscio, 2003; Gotti, 2008; Krapivkina, 2017; Krapivkina, 2018; Tiersma & Curtis et al., 2008), "who are presumably looking for easily accessible information on issues that have affected their lives only for a limited period of time, thus entering and exiting the realm of the legal community of discourse in a short time-span" (Salerno, 2019: 34). The knowledge asymmetry characteristic of legal-lay interactions forces lawyers to use popularization strategies in order to accommodate legal information to the knowledge base of laypeople. Knowledge asymmetry is considered to be a hindrance to the optimal transfer of legal knowledge, including in online law forums, since the use of unfamiliar technical terms impedes the comprehensibility of what is said. Even if the meaning is known to the lay person, understanding an utterance containing technical concepts will require a greater effort. Therefore, knowledge asymmetry should be considered from the speaker-addressee perspective, taking into account the special knowledge transfer.

The issue of expert-lay exchanges is investigated by a number of researchers, who deal with discursive structures, lexical and syntactic features, strategies used to make specialized content intelligible to a lay audience, etc. (see Anesa, 2016; Anesa & Fage-Butler, 2015; Anesa & Kastberg, 2012; Boginskaya, 2020; Ciapuscio, 2003; Felstiner & Sarat, 1992; Kastberg, 2011; Krapivkina, 2018; Tiersma & Curtis, 2008). For example, Calsamiglia (2003), Ciapuscio (2003) and Gotti (2008, 2014) have dealt with the popularization of scientific discourse, while Cacchiani (2018), Anesa (2016), and Turnbull (2018) have analyzed the issues surrounding the popularization of legal knowledge. Traditionally, research on texts communicating legal knowledge has concentrated on written samples (Boginskaya, 2020; Ciapuscio, 2003; Krapivkina, 2018; Tiersma & Curtis, 2008). However, surprising little (see Anesa, 2016),[1] however, has been written about online expert-lay interactions that occur in the process of giving legal advice to lay forum users. In the last decade, it has become commonplace for laypeople to look for information about legal issues online to get an idea of the steps they should take in a given law-related situation. The process of information seeking that forces lay citizens to pose questions in law forums entails them establishing a direct relationship with legal professionals. Making legal information available to a lay audience through law forums plays a crucial role in making citizens aware of their legal rights and the possible consequences of their legal actions. The online posts offer a rich overview of the communicative problems occurring in this discursive scenario and of the strategies legal professionals resort to in order to resolve them.

The present study has adopted a cognitive discursive approach in an attempt to describe the popularization process in online law forums, which combine the characteristics of both written and oral types of discourse. The article aims to classify the popularization strategies employed to align the cognitive levels of participants in online asymmetrical exchanges – a special field of communication, which offers some interesting ground for the study of discourse production. Knowledge asymmetry in law forums has the potential to generate the kind of communicative conflict that tends to materialize in the use of specialized vocabulary (Ciapuscio, 2003). In such online encounters, legal professionals must present legal knowledge in a way that laypeople can understand. In so doing, they resort to different discursive strategies for knowledge representation. Hence, definitions, reformulations, denominations, scenarios, examples and metaphors used by forum lawyers are frequent in online interactions where knowledge asymmetry is evident.

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1 Anesa (2016) analyzes legal popularization discourse in terms of the dynamics, communicative objectives, and legal constraints within which participants must act.

2 Current study

The current study is based on the assumption that explanatory strategies align the cognitive levels of participants in online encounters, improve the comprehensibility of legal texts, including those found in legal forums, accommodate legal information to the knowledge base of laypeople, and prevent communicative problems from emerging.

The study intends to answer the following questions:

1) What is popularization?

2) What discursive function strategies used by lawyers help to popularize legal knowledge in online law forums?

3) What types of popularization strategy predominate in legal-lay interactions?

4) What markers signal the popularization strategies, and do forum lawyers resort to semantic variations or rather limit a set of linguistic means of popularization?

The cognitive discursive approach adopted in the article is based on the analysis of discursive tools employed to eliminate knowledge asymmetries and accommodate specialized discourse to the reader's cognitive base. Popularization involves both discursive and cognitive dimensions, and is a linear process of knowledge transfer intermediated by discursive strategies employed to fill the knowledge gap and eliminate the knowledge asymmetry between experts and lay readers. If popularization has traditionally been seen as an intralinguistic translation, distortion of scientific information or recontextualization of specialized knowledge, the present article defines it as the process of discursive accommodation to the knowledge base of lay users and an alignment of the cognitive levels of participants in asymmetrical online interactions, bringing its cognitive dimension to the forefront. The other contribution of this study is to provide an integrated classification of discursive strategies employed by forum experts in the popularization of legal knowledge. Although it is self-evident that discursive choices are determined by the cognitive level of the target audience, few authors have attempted to specify what those choices are in online popularization discourse.

The paper is structured in the following way. In sub-sections 2.1 and 2.2, the methods employed to analyze the popularization strategies will be shown and the corpus, including the corpus selection criteria, will be described. The outline of previous research into legal-lay interactions will be developed in Section 3. Section 4 will demonstrate the main popularization strategies found in the corpus. Finally, in Section 5, conclusions will be drawn and avenues for further research will be outlined.

2.1 Corpus design

A linguistic corpus was designed for the purpose of the study following the principles of Corpus Linguistics. Since the replies collected were used as a data repository, the approach employed in the present research to answer the research questions is corpus based. The data was drawn from the law forum on the expertlaw.com website, which exists as a source of free, publicly available information.

Forum users can contact legal professionals to pose their questions. Such ask-a-lawyer forums allow laypeople to get free answers from legal professionals in their areas to basic legal questions on a variety of legal issues. Since law forums are a common tool for acquiring legal information, they perform a popularizing function. The expertlaw.com forum includes lawyers; employment, insurance, tax and real estate professionals; law enforcement officers, and many other people with specialized knowledge, in addition to laypeople. The forum includes different sections with a specific focus on different legal issues, such as accidents and injuries, civil rights violations, business law and intellectual property, insurance law, criminal charges, etc.

To compile the corpus for this study, the lawyers' replies were selected based on the following criteria:

1) presence of popularization strategies: the replies were required to contain reformulations, definitions, denominations, examples, and metaphors.

2) time: all posts date back to the period between January and December 2020, as the aim is to focus on synchronically comparable texts.

The texts that met these criteria were shortlisted and selected to build the corpus. The main focus was on the popularization strategies and their frequency. The corpus built provides authentic examples to explore how explanatory strategies may be used to popularize legal knowledge in law online forums. The corpus comprises 468 lawyers' replies, totaling 83,820 words. The replies were drawn from different parts of the forum: injury law, business and corporate law, criminal law, labor law, family law, and property law. This compilation can be called a small-scale corpus. However, according to Flowerdew (2004), small-sized corpora provide relevant contextual information, which makes them useful for a context-based analysis.

2.2 Research methodology

This corpus-based study aims to classify and describe the popularization strategies lawyers employ to accommodate legal knowledge to the cognitive level of a lay audience. To comply with this aim, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative analyses. In order to go beyond a mere list of explanatory strategies typically employed in law forums, the present study applied the interpretative method. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a good way to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and where you need to explore the issue. It does not use statistical data due to concerns over the quality of data. In the present study, qualitative research is used to analyze and describe the types of explanatory strategies.

However, a combination of the qualitative and quantitative methods can contribute to far richer and more explanatory findings. For the purpose of a quantitative analysis, the flexible and easy-to-use statistical data analysis tool – QDA Miner – was used. It can quickly extract and analyze information from large amounts of documents. The quantitative analysis identified the frequency of popularization strategies used in the corpus. The next step in the quantitative analysis was to identify verbs employed to define legal concepts and linguistic markers used in denominations. This analysis was aimed at checking the hypothesis on semantic variations in the discourse used by forum lawyers. The average frequency of occurrence of the verbs used in definitions was determined (in this paper, an *average frequency* is defined as "the number of times a linguistic unit occurs in the texts included in the corpus") as well as that of the denomination markers. Definition verbs and denomination markers and the frequency of their occurrences were summarized in a table format. The frequency of occurrences of expressions signaling the explanatory strategies as well as reformulation and exemplification markers was identified to check the hypothesis on semantic variations. The results were also summarized in a table format. The analysis of popularization discourse in law forums was undertaken by taking into account the explanatory strategies described in the works by Anesa (2016), Boginskaya (2020), Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004), Ciapuscio (2003), Gotti (2008, 2014), Hyland (2007), Krapivina (2017), and Turnbull (2018). Using these strategies, an attempt was made to describe the process of legal knowledge popularization in online law forums and identify the most commonly used explanatory strategies.

3 Theoretical background

3.1 Macrolinguistic analysis: popularization as dissemination, distortion, transformation, recontextualization, rediscoursification, translation or accommodation

The theoretical framework for the analysis conducted on the macrolinguistic level is based on studies of knowledge popularization and popularization discourse that treat popularization as a process involving experts and a lay audience. Considering that this study contributes to popularization theories by defining *popularization* as the process of discursive accommodation, it is important to examine the definitions provided by other researchers.

The concept of popularization is often associated with the *dissemination* or communication of scientific knowledge defined "as an intended and interactive construction and exchange of knowledge resp. experiences and skills on a verbal and nonverbal level" (Reinhardt & Stattkus, 2002: 537). Reinhardt & Stattkus define

knowledge communication from a constructivist perspective, emphasizing its creative function, while also focusing on its interactive aspect.

Traditionally, within constructivist approaches, popularized knowledge is considered to be modified or distorted, which might be due to the distance, in terms of forms, between the specialized knowledge and its popularized version. Hilgartner (1990: 519) argues that popularization can be considered both as a positive and negative process: at best, it is an appropriate simplification of science for non-experts; at worst, it is a pollution or distortion of science. The researcher believes that the ambiguity and flexibility of the boundary between *appropriate simplification* and *distortion* gives experts leeway when constructing simplified representations of scientific knowledge. Similar to Hilgartner, Gregory & Miller (1998: 85) argue that "popularization is essentially an act of persuasion."

The same methodological approach was adopted by Bagiyan (2019), who argues that discursive tools employed for the popularization of specialized knowledge deconstruct salient features of scientific discourse, contributing to its functional pragmatic deregulation and destabilizing the functional space.

Bucchi (1996), who criticizes this canonical approach, argues that terms like *distortion* and *inaccurate translation* only make sense in reference to the most outdated models of communication. Bucchi (2008) holds that knowledge is transferable without significant alterations from one context to another, so that it is possible to take an idea or result from the scientific community and bring it to the lay audience.

One more study on the phenomenon of popularization that does not assume it to be a process of distortion was conducted by Whitley (1985). He holds that the form in which knowledge is transferred from experts to a lay audience is different since specialized knowledge has to be explained to a lay audience, so the linguistic features of expert discourse are different from those of popularized discourse. However when adapting the form to a lay audience, knowledge is assumed to remain unchanged throughout the *discursive transformation* process.

Other approaches to popularization have also been suggested. Calsamiglia (2003) argues that the concept of popularization, which has been interpreted as vulgarization, debasement, translation, transposition, or reformulation, should be rethought to include the process of *recontextualization*. The author holds that it is important to be aware of the different dimensions of this process and changes in the cognitive and situational dimensions.

One of the most comprehensive definitions of popularization was provided by Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004: 370) in their research on properties of the interface between meaning and knowledge in popularization discourse in the Spanish press regarding the sequencing of the human genome: "popularization is a vast class of various types of communicative events or genres that involve the *transformation* of specialized knowledge into 'everyday' or 'lay' knowledge, as well as a *recontextualization* of scientific discourse." The authors believe that popularization involves both the reformulation and recontextualization of scientific knowledge produced in specialized contexts. They identified that the recontextualization of scientific knowledge and its transformation into everyday knowledge combines precise knowledge with approximate knowledge.

Similar to Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004), Ciapuscio (2003: 210) uses the concept of recontextualization to describe the popularization discourse and provides a definition of recontextualization from Hall et al. (1999), according to which recontextualization refers to various ways of appropriating, using, and reusing talk or text drawn from one context to make formulations available in another. The researcher assumes that recontextualization presupposes putting something in a different context and creating a new context for it.

The central role of recontextualization in the process of popularizing specialized knowledge is also highlighted by Sarangi (1998: 307), who sees it as a transfer and transformation of discourse into texts divorced from the social interaction that created them. The researcher argues that recontextualization is reproduction rather than representation, which implies creativity. Similarly, Raffa (2016) claims that popularization is a task of "recontextualization" where the communicator presents specialized knowledge in a way that is relevant to the intended audience, thus giving it new meaning.

According to Silletti (2015), popularization implies a process of *simplifying* and making specialized information more explicit by using other semiotic information related to the specialized content. Simplification is defined here in line with a definition provided by Bhatia (1983: 42), who described this process "as a special form of intra-lingual translation, the purpose of which is to make a given text simpler in terms of its content and/ or form." It is interesting that Bhatia was one of the first to claim that this process "necessarily involves a kind of tampering with the original linguistic input" (Bhatia, 1983: 42). According to the researcher, in simplifying legal content, it is not always possible to do much about legal terminology, since most "legal terms are associated with particular legal concepts and any attempt to replace them will result in a distortion of the intended meaning" (Bhatia, 1983: 43).

Attempts to define the concept of popularization in a different manner were made by Gotti (2016: 16) in his study on the translation of legal texts. He claims that "the popularization process is a kind of *redrafting* that does not alter the disciplinary content – object of the transaction – as much as its language, which needs to be remodeled to suit a new target audience. In the process, information is transferred linguistically in a way similar to periphrasis or to *intralingual translation.*" The researcher claims that "the communication of knowledge implies important changes in the cognitive dimension, deriving from the interaction between specialized knowledge and its popularization" (Gotti, 2016: 19).

A different methodological approach has been adopted in the study by Anesa (2016: 73), who argues that "the notion of popularization goes beyond that of a form of intra-linguistic translation where specialized language is transposed into a simplified one." She sees popularization "as a form of *rediscoursification* [*my emphasis*], intended as the creation of a new type of discourse, where specialized language is exploited differently according to a new set of participants, setting, objectives, and rules, thus producing new culturally and historically located meanings."

In this article, which has adopted the cognitive discursive approach, the *expert knowledge* popularization is considered to be a process of *discursive accommodation* of specialized content to the knowledge base of a lay audience, thus implying the alignment of the cognitive levels of participants through a set of explanatory strategies. Accommodation is defined as the process by which linguistic (lexical and grammatical) structures are modified to adapt to a target audience. The experts have to accommodate specialized information to suit a lay audience by evaluating their knowledge base and explaining specialized terms with the aim of eliminating the asymmetries in knowledge. Experts and non-experts can be very distant in terms of the amount of shared knowledge or epistemic cultures and practices, but this knowledge asymmetry is a constitutive factor in knowledge dissemination, since "if communicatively relevant inequalities of knowledge were non-existing, there would be little or no need for most kinds of communication" (Linell & Luckmann, 1991: 4).

In this sub-section, I have tried to shed light on the concept of popularization and to provide my own definition of the process of popularizing specialized knowledge. The next sub-section will deal with studies conducted on the discursive strategies employed to align the cognitive levels of participants in asymmetrical exchanges.

3.2 Microlinguistic analysis: popularization strategies as discursive tools intended to accommodate specialized information to the knowledge base of a lay audience

On the microlinguistic level, the theoretical framework of the research is based on major studies conducted on the discursive strategies identified in the corpora of specialized texts intended for the popularizing purpose. These include Anesa (2016), Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004), Ciapuscio (2003), Garzone (2006), Gotti (2014), Gülich (2003), Heffer (2005), Imwinkeiried & Schwed (1987), and Turnbull (2018).

One of the first studies on specialized knowledge popularization strategies is Imwinkeiried & Schwed's (1987) analysis of a corpus of old and new jury instructions. The researchers identified several linguistic strategies that can make legal texts comprehensible to a lay audience: common words instead of legalistic ones; simple and short sentences, and proper organization of paragraphs. The results demonstrated that laypeople (jurors) comprehended the new instructions compiled with the help of popularization strategies significantly better than they understood the old instructions. Wiener et al. (1995) analyzed legal texts and concluded that the rewritten ones were more comprehensible to laypeople. In the study of a corpus of texts about the sequencing of the human genome, Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004) identified a group of strategies that are used by specialized

journalists for the management of knowledge. Besides the metaphors conceptualizing abstract categories, and sequencing as decodification, they found that descriptions of new objects tend to be organized using a limited number of fundamental categories. Gotti (2014) described such popularization strategies as thematization and denomination. Ciapuscio (2003) explored the oral interaction between scientists, and he specialized journalists that precedes the writing of science popularization texts targeted at the lay reader and assessed two types of recurrent formulation procedures deployed by experts: illustration and reformulation. Turnbull (2018) distinguished between illustrations, or explanations, and reformulations, which entail the clarification of earlier statements. Salerno (2019) described knowledge recontextualization strategies and processes of intra-lingual translation in pages devised for the mediation of copyright-related legislation on the gov.uk institutional platform. The researcher defined intra-lingual translation as the process "whereby exclusive expertise translates into intelligible knowledge, suitable to the background and experiential knowledge of the addressee" (Salerno, 2019: 8).

The previous studies on popularization discourse allowed me to build up an integrated classification of discursive strategies employed to popularize expert knowledge and align the cognitive levels of participants in asymmetrical online interactions.
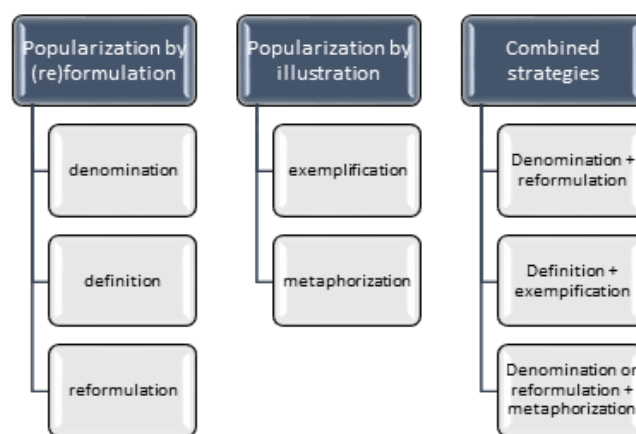

Figure 1: Popularization strategies

Taking into account the great number of classifications of explanatory structures used in popularization discourses, I suggest that these two types of strategy fully cover the explanation process in law forums. All of these structures have referred to instances of accommodation applied to the conceptual level of discourse, as they try to draw from experiences familiar to the lay audience (Ciapuscio, 2003: 212). Popularization through illustration differs from popularization through formulation/reformulation since it is of a conceptual nature and is not confined to the representation of an idea with different words or the introduction of new objects or terms. It can be seen as a paraphrasing strategy, in which specialized information is replaced by other information that refers to the legal content.

3.2.1 Popularization by (re)formulation

Denomination

In order to be able to explain legal phenomena, first they need to be described. It is not surprising, therefore, that descriptions play such a crucial role in the denomination of legal phenomena. Denomination is defined by Garzone (2006: 91-92) as a tool "introducing new objects, events or terms." According to the researcher, this strategy is often integrated into a sentence dealing with something else, often resorting to expressions such as *called*, *known as*, *meaning*…, etc. or also *so called*, *technically called*, *in other words*, etc. (Garzone, 2006: 92). The new concept is always introduced after being explained.

All constructions aimed at introducing new objects or events, as in the following example, can be referred to as denominations:

*More information is needed to explore your situation, but this certainly **sounds like** it could be an **unlawful practice.***

This example contains a denomination introduced by the linguistic marker *sounds like,* which acts as a connector.

Definition

The crucial role of definition as "a conceptual delimitation of a term by a brief description of some general and specific properties of the thing the term is referring to" (Garzone, 2006: 92) has been emphasized by many researchers. For example, Anesa (2012) argues that definitions are crucial for several reasons: they make specialized discourse familiar and understandable and may be strategically used to attack or confirm an expert's credibility.

According to the researcher, popularization texts frequently employ definitions that are composed of hypernyms and superordinate nouns followed by a specification in relative clauses (Anesa, 2015: 119). In contrast to specialized discourse, where definitions are employed when a new term is coined, or new meanings are attached to existing words within the discipline (Gotti, 2014), in legal-lay exchanges definitions are frequent, involving a far more limited use of specialized vocabulary.

Definitions are used to explain unknown words or things in a paradigmatic mode. This popularization strategy entails an explanation of legal terms through various categories: composition, quantity, size, localization, time, properties, process, functions, etc. (Calsamiglia & Van Dijk, 2004: 379).

The legal term is often followed by a linguistic marker such as "*is …"*, "*means …"*, "*includes"*, "*indicates"* or "*is defined as …"*. Definitions have simple structures and contain information that does not require expert knowledge to be understood. Unlike denominations, when definitions are provided, the method used is juxtaposition. The term is followed by its periphrasis.

Reformulation

Hyland (2007: 269) defines *reformulation* as "a discourse function whereby the second unit is a restatement or elaboration of the first in different words, to present it from a different point of view and to reinforce the message." This strategy is often preceded by requests to explain the meaning of a specialized concept (*What's that mean? In simpler terms? Could you explain that in lay?)* and signaled by reformulation markers (*or, put another way, that is, in other words*).

Ciapuscio (2003: 10-11) claims that the term *reformulation* includes all the possible forms of expansion or reduction of the equivalent formulation. Hyland (2007: 277) claims that "the process of repackaging information rarely results in a statement which has an exact equivalent meaning. Rephrasing invariably alters the pragmatic and rhetorical connotations of the original by moving the reader towards the writer's preferred interpretation." This observation indicates a pragmatic rather than logical equivalence of reformulations.

Reformulations can be introduced a) by means of appositions, preceding or following the term they clarify; b) in parentheses, dashes, quotes, and c) by means of linguistic markers such as *that is, i.e., in other words* (Garzone, 2006: 94). According to Calsamiglia & Van Dijk (2004: 383), "such explanatory moves establish a link between old and new knowledge, where usually a new notion is introduced first, followed by an explanatory reformulation or paraphrase."

3.2.2 Popularization by illustration

Exemplification

According to Hyland (2007: 270), exemplification is "a communication process through which meaning is clarified or supported by a second unit which illustrates the first by citing an example." Exemplification

includes resources used by experts to explain specialized terms through objects of everyday experience. These mental models are easier to remember than general knowledge and are useful as an explanatory tool for eliminating confrontations between different epistemic cultures and creating coherent, user-friendly texts.

Examples used by experts can refer to one word or even large discourse units (case studies) and be signaled by punctuation marks (e.g., parentheses) or linking adverbials (*for example, for instance, such as, like*).

Metaphorization

The legal setting might not seem to be an appropriate area for metaphors, as legal discourse is allegedly precise and objective. However, metaphors are an integral part of legal thinking as well as of legal-lay interaction, contributing to explaining or illustrating a legal phenomenon in an intelligible way. For laypeople, metaphors employed to communicate legal knowledge may allow them to conceptualize abstract legal phenomena and concepts by associating them with familiar objects and notions.

In the present study based on the cognitive approach, metaphor is considered as a cognitive mechanism rather than a linguistic trope. It determines how thought is structured by relating specialized and everyday domains of experience and reframing complex terms through familiar concepts. "In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor" (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003: 10). Among the advantages of metaphorization are terminological transparency and conciseness. The use of metaphors in popularizing specialized knowledge is well recognized (Anesa, 2015; Boginskaya, 2020; Calsamiglia & Van Dijk, 2004; Ciapuscio, 2003; Gotti, 2014).

3.2.3 Popularization strategies combined

Some popularization strategies can be combined in order to accommodate the expert knowledge to the lay audience's knowledge base. Among these combinations are *denomination + reformulation; definition + exemplification; denomination and definition; denomination + metaphorization; reformulation + metaphorization*. Metaphors and examples are often used as supporting rather than main strategies of popularization, and are preceded or followed by denominations, reformulations or definitions.

4 Findings

Filling the cognitive gap between legal professionals and laymen and aligning their cognitive levels is a process that takes into account both linguistic expressions and knowledge accommodation strategies. In this part of the article, I will focus on the following popularization strategies: denominations, definitions, and reformulations as types of popularization by (re)formulation and examples and metaphors as types of popularization by illustration used to discursively represent legal concepts to a lay forum audience.

4.1. Denomination

*(1) If they didn't want to interview you because of age, disability, genetic information, national origin, pregnancy, race/color, religion, or sex then those classes are **discrimination** under the law.*

The explanation including causes of discrimination mentioned in the law is followed by the denomination. The semantic structure of this explanation is based on the semantic features classification.

*(2) The attorneys' questions are not **evidence**. Only the witnesses' answers are **evidence**. You should not think that something is true just because an attorney's question suggests that it is true. However, the attorneys for both sides can agree that certain facts are true.*

The legal term is used after the explanation, which is followed by concrete examples of *evidence*. This is a combination of two popularization strategies: *denomination + exemplification*.

One more interesting example found in the corpus is a negative denomination:

*(3) A Labor Commissioner claim is **not a Lawsuit**.*

I found seven occurrences of this type of denomination in the corpus.

Table 1 shows the most frequent denomination markers as a percentage of all such markers in the corpus. The preponderance of the first two markers over the others implies that forum lawyers use a limited set of reformulation means.

MARKER	TOTALS
is called	39
is known as	27
meaning	19
so called	15

Table 1: Most frequent denomination markers (% of total)

4.2 Definition

Definitions are also frequently used by experts to suit a lay audience and improve the comprehensibility of specialized concepts. In law forums, definitions, as a unique logical and discursive strategy involving the interaction of language and thinking, play a significant role in explaining abstract legal concepts to lay users. Here is an extract from the corpus that contains a definition of the legal term *confidential communication:*

*(4) The only bit that bears further discussion is the term **"confidential communication."** It means any communication carried on in circumstances as may reasonably indicate that any party to the communication desires it to be confined to the parties thereto, but excludes a communication made in a public gathering or in any legislative, judicial, executive, or administrative proceeding open to the public, or in any other circumstance in which the parties to the communication may reasonably expect that the communication may be overheard or recorded. There may be many circumstances in which someone being "verbally abusive" might not constitute a **confidential communication.***

The legal term is explained by offering a definition that fills the knowledge gap and eliminates the knowledge asymmetry between the lawyer and lay forum users. The text responds to the need to accommodate legal information to the knowledge base of a lay audience. The verb *to mean* is used to link the term to its explanation. Here is a definition of the legal concept *discrimination*:

*(5) **Discrimination simply means** using some criteria or basis for choosing one over another.*

The verb *mean* and the adverb *simply* are used to define the legal concept. An analysis of the corpus has shown that the main structure of definitions is as follows: Legal term + definition introduced by verbs such as *be, mean, include, define*. A quantitative analysis of the verbs introducing definitions, intended to identify the semantic choices of legal professionals, is shown in Table 2.

VERB	TOTALS
To be	33
To mean	25
To indicate	17
To include	15
To be defined	10

Table 2: Most frequent verbs introducing definitions in the corpus (% of total)

It is evident that the verbs most commonly used to introduce definitions are *to be* (33%) and *to mean* (25%), implying that legal professionals rarely resort to semantic variations but rather tend to limit a set of linguistic means.

4.3 Reformulation

Reformulation occurs when a lawyer reformulates an utterance by expressing abstract legal concepts in a different way. Reformulations comprised about 13% of the total popularization strategies in the corpus.

*(6) The prosecution must prove **every element, that is, every part** of the crimes charged "beyond a reasonable doubt."*

*(7) The elements of the crimes are the **essential ingredients, or important parts**, of the proof.*

As the examples above illustrate, the function of reformulations is to restate an idea in different words to make it comprehensible to a lay audience.

Equivalence between the original statement and the reformulation is signaled by reformulation markers, and the most common of these are *that is* (27% of cases) and *in particular/particularly* (24%). Table 3 shows the most frequent reformulation markers as a percentage of all such markers in the corpus. The preponderance of two markers over the others implies that forum lawyers use a limited set of reformulation means.

MARKER	TOTALS
that is	27
in particular / particularly	24
in other words	17
or	13
namely	10
specifically	6
put another way	3

Table 3: Most frequent reformulation markers (% of total)

4.4 Exemplification

Exemplification includes the resources used by legal professionals to explain complex legal concepts in terms of everyday experience. It is the fifth type of popularization in the corpus, representing an appeal to a more familiar experience. Examples as well as definitions, reformulations and denominations are signaled in a limited number of ways (see Table 4).

MARKER	TOTALS
for example	35
such as	31
e.g.	17
like	13
when	3
for instance	1

Table 5: Most frequent exemplification markers (% of total)

The most frequent exemplification markers are *for example* (35% of all cases) and *such as* (31% of all cases). The synonymous expression *for instance* is rarely used in the corpus, which suggests the unwillingness of legal professionals to use semantic variants.

Here is an extract with the least used exemplification marker *when*, followed by a specific example of general phenomena:

*(8) A **tip credit** is **when** an employer pays you less than the minimum wage ($4.25 per hour for instance) and gets a credit from the tips you receive to count toward its obligation to pay minimum wage ($9.00 per hour for example).*

What follows is an example from the corpus where the legal concept *discrimination* is explained by means of a reference to everyday experience. The exemplification marker employed in the extract is *for example*:

*(9) So, **for example**, choosing an applicant with a college degree over someone without a college degree is **discrimination** in favor of people with college degrees. But that discrimination is perfectly legal. Indeed, every act of hiring an employee requires some act of discrimination in that the hiring person is deciding who gets hired based on certain criteria.*

The lawyer explains the meaning of the legal concept by providing an example from everyday experience. By selecting the exemplification strategy, the legal professional tries to avoid comprehension difficulties and formulates the complex legal concept in a simplified manner that is closer to a lay audience, thereby facilitating understanding.

*(10) (…) there must be another term because **"legally unavailable"** doesn't cut it. You WERE available if you testified.*

The forum lawyer explains the meaning of the term *legally unavailable* through the example of one of the ways of being *legally available*: if a person testifies, he or she is considered to be legally available. The exemplification serves to advance intelligibility of the legal content.

In the sentence below, the lawyer makes an attempt to improve clarity by continuing the explanation of the term *legally unavailable* through exemplification. The exemplification strategy is signaled by the marker *example.*

*(11) **Unavailable** is simply the opposite of **Available**. The word is used I imagine in many legal citations/decisions. **Example**, if a person is out of the Country, they are UNavailable if their in-person testimony is needed.*

As can be seen from the reply, the legal professional succeeds in offering a highly comprehensible explanation. The terms are epitomized in an everyday situation, and the phrasing also helps to make the term easily understood.

*(12) **Blackmail** is threat to do harm or reveal harmful or embarrassing information if the person being threatened does not do or refrain from doing something. A common example of blackmail would be if John and Susan both live in homes that are governed by a homeowners' association, and Susan is on the HOA board. The board is looking to hire a contractor to do some work on the common areas, and John owns a contracting company that wants to do the work for a price that is substantially more than another contractor. John tells Susan that she needs to ensure that John's company gets the job or he will reveal to Susan's husband that he and Susan had an affair. That's your stereotypical **example** of **blackmail**.*

The legal term *blackmail* is explained by offering a definition, which is followed by an example where exemplification is instrumental to the definition. The exemplification refers to everyday events and allows the lay forum user to focus on a more familiar concept that is closer to the non-expert public and facilitates understanding. Thus, examples refer to the act of presenting knowledge in a simpler mode by referring to everyday experience. However, they provide incomplete information about legal issues. If the information needs to be complete, more precise definitions are required.

*(13) Some **evidence** proves a fact directly, such as the testimony of a witness who saw a jet plane flying across the sky. Some evidence proves a fact indirectly, such as the testimony of a witness who saw only the white trail that jet planes often leave. This **indirect evidence is** sometimes **referred** to as **"circumstantial evidence."** In either instance, the witness's testimony is evidence that a jet plane flew across the sky.*

The lawyer defines the concept *circumstantial evidence*. The definition is followed by concrete examples relating the concept to a specific situation. This case is a combination of two popularization strategies: *definition + exemplification*.

4.5 Metaphorization

As the result of a convention, metaphors relate legal and everyday domains of experience and reframe legal terms through familiar concepts. The following example illustrates the case:

*(14) Under California law it is illegal to discriminate based on marital status, but if the problem was that you were a **party animal** and the hiring manager didn't like the partying lifestyle, discriminating against you because of that would be legal because a party lifestyle is not on the list of characteristics protected by federal or California law. Look at the lists of criteria in my prior post. If the reason is something other than the things listed there the discrimination is legal.*

The lawyer explains the meaning of the term *legal discrimination* through the metaphor *party animal*. The comparison helps the forum lawyer avoid comprehension difficulties on the part of the lay forum user and contributes to the effectiveness of the popularization of the legal issue.

A quantitative evaluation of the occurrences of explanatory strategies employed by legal professionals in online forums identified the most frequent popularization tools. The results are presented in Table 5.

EXPLANATORY STRATEGY	TOTALS
Definition	42
Denomination	20
Reformulation	17
Exemplification	11
Metaphorization	6
Combination of strategies	4

Table 5: Distribution of the explanatory strategies in the corpus (% of the totals)

An analysis of the corpus has shown that definition, comprising 42% of all strategies found in the corpus, is the most common strategy employed by legal professionals to communicate legal knowledge to lay forum users. Metaphorization, comprising 6% of all strategies found in the corpus, is the least common tool employed by lawyers. Combined strategies are also used by forum lawyers, but their share is insignificant.

5 Conclusion

The article aimed to add to the study of discourse production and was intended as a contribution to legal communication from a popularization-centered perspective, considering the transfer of legal knowledge to a lay audience as an indirect process intermediated by popularization strategies. In this article, popularization was studied from a cognitive discursive perspective as the process of discursive accommodation to the knowledge base of a lay audience with the aim of aligning the cognitive levels of participants in asymmetrical online interactions. Thus, the main contribution of the present article was to improve current understandings of popularization and build an integrated classification model of popularization strategies, taking into account the many classifications developed by other researchers.

The main purpose of this research was to show that law forums contribute to the dissemination of legal knowledge to a lay audience, and legal experts interact with laypeople to fill a 'gap' in knowledge (or eliminate knowledge asymmetries). Online law forums were analyzed as a legal knowledge popularization tool.

Online legal-lay discourse was analyzed as it serves as ground for legal knowledge popularization. Legal-lay communication involves various communicative situations, including law forums. The transfer from legal to legal-lay language, which aims to reduce the cognitive gap between communicants and improve the efficiency of communication, is a challenge for lawyers. Successful communication with laypeople depends on lawyers' ability to explain complex legal concepts in a comprehensible way. The epistemic asymmetry that characterizes legal-lay interactions in online forums forces lawyers to resort to explanatory strategies in order to avoid communicative difficulties.

In this article, I have described the process of legal knowledge popularization through the use of explanatory strategies aimed at accommodating legal information to the knowledge base of lay forum users. Each of these strategies has specific features that allowed me to distinguish between them. The following popularization strategies were revealed in the corpus:

- popularization by (re)formulation:

1) denominations used to introduce legal concepts after explaining their meaning;

2) definitions used to clarify the meaning of legal concepts to facilitate comprehension by forum users;

3) reformulations used to restate or elaborate utterances conveying specialized knowledge in different simpler words.

- popularization by illustration:

1) examples used to relate complex legal concepts to everyday experience;

2) metaphors that encompass comparisons and analogies, and relate legal and everyday domains of experience.

Each of these strategies is aimed at solving the dominant popularization task – accommodation to the knowledge base of lay readers or an alignment of the cognitive levels of participants in the asymmetrical interaction. These strategies can thus serve a popularization function and are used in the negotiation of meaning of specialized terms to facilitate the lay audience's understanding. The corpus-based analysis revealed that these explanatory strategies can be combined, as they both contribute to the purpose of facilitating the communication of legal knowledge to lay forum users.

The study has shown that definition, comprising 42% of all strategies found in the corpus, is the most common tool employed by forum lawyers to communicate legal knowledge to a lay audience. Metaphors and combined strategies, comprising 6% and 4% of all the strategies, are the least common tools employed by forum lawyers.

Drawing on previous research, I have tried to contribute to the study of popularization discourse in general, and explanatory strategies in the discourse of legal forum posting in particular. Avenues for further studies may be research into the explanatory strategies employed by legal professionals in other legal cultures and using material in other languages, then comparing the results with those obtained in the present study. More multidisciplinary research is required to understand how explanatory strategies are involved in the acquisition of specialized knowledge. In addition, it could be interesting to propose a further distinction within the two types of popularization and identify additional subtypes of these strategies.

Acknowledgments

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