**The Impact of Digitalization on Legal Communication: Introduction**

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Digitalization is one of the most dynamic global trends in the 21st century. The penetration of digitalization into modern society has contributed to the generation of new discourse practices, which, in turn can affect (specialized) communication profoundly. The impact of digital technologies is visible in all areas of human activity and across interactional processes, with the creation of new communicative spaces. Law as a discipline and practice represents no exception to these mechanisms and both the operationalization and the communication of law are inevitably affected by it. Interest in the digitalization of legal activity is not new and continues to grow, encompassing a vast range of areas, from the impact of technologies on law-making to the creation of new legal relations, from the popularization of legal language to the analysis of everyday legal practice.

This special issue takes into consideration some specific instances of how the adoption of digital approaches and tools affect legal language and its investigation. Clearly, it is not intended to fully assess the possibilities of digital technologies in all areas of legal activity. Rather, the selection of studies presented here can offer some reflections on how the evolution of legal discourse can be observed in terms of communicative interactional dynamics, textual investigation, and translation processes.

The first paper, by Giuliana Diani, focuses on communication management on law blogs (blawgs). These tools are constantly gaining popularity and thus deserve scholarly attention. Indeed, they represent key tools for the communication and popularization of specialized legal knowledge. Legal blogs have an important dialogic function (Bondi 2018) and could also serve as a democratizing tool (Anesa 2018). They are accessible by a vast range of participants displaying heterogenous backgrounds and thus the exchanges can involve participants with various levels of expertise. Thus, blawgs represent specific blogs that a vast range of subjects (with different levels of expertise) can refer to in order to acquire specialized legal information

or discuss legal issues. The paper acknowledges the importance of post comment threads as a way to create interaction and which can also constitute a site for antagonistic discussions.

The theme of the popularizion of legal language is tackled also by Patrizia Giampieri, who focuses on the European and UNESCO Cultural Conventions and their readability. The study compares the two texts in terms of language and contents. It contributes to shedding light on the accessibility and intelligibility of these documents to the layperson in terms of clarity, content, sentence structure and syntax and explores how their style is influenced by media or digital language. The paper highlights that the European Convention and the more recent UNESCO Convention, are typified by a formal, detached and rather archaic style, being addressed to its member states. Conversely, the Operational Guidelines are to some extent more in line with the Plain English principles and result in being more accessible to the layperson.

The third paper, by Tímea Kovács, investigates the use of machine translation in legal contexts by offering a comparative analysis of neural machine- and human-translated legal texts. This approach clearly shows the impact of machine translation on the production of legal translations. This study discusses the role of legal translators and reviewers of legal texts in light of the development of neural machine translation and its capability of modelling how natural languages work (Castilho, Gaspari, Moorkens 2019). More specifically, this study offers a qualitative and quantitative comparison of acts which have been translated relying on neural machine translation applications in relation to human-translated ones. With the objective of aiming to produce texts which are more aligned to human-translated ones, processes of pre- and post-editing also require the development of specific skills (Robert et al. 2017), which can be enhanced by the awareness of the specific opportunities and limitations offered by machine translation according to the language pairs considered (Lample et al. 2018).

The last contribution is by Helga María Lell and offers a reflection on the use of digital tools for the analysis of legal texts. In particular, the analysis makes use of a distant reading tool (Voyant Tools) as well as a database which facilitates the graphical visualization and the systematization of literal formulas. This approach is applied to the investigation of a given term (in this case, dignity) and its usage in the jurisprudence of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in order to detect it and show its different meanings. This study focuses on how technological resources facilitate the visualization of a large number of texts before detailed

reading. The aim is to show how distant reading and informatics resources can offer a quick image of a large number of texts and pages before deciding on a deep read.

These papers present insights into the impact of digitalization on law and language and offer food for thought in the form of questions for further research. While blawgs are increasingly used as an accessible, fast, and interactive means to exchange legal information and are even considered authoritative sources by judges, how are they impacting the evolution of the law? Written laws and legal documents appear to be becoming more accessible in terms of the language adopted, and yet they continue to cling on to more formal and archaic formulations. As law is renowned as a conservative area, slow to adapt, could it be that even formal laws will follow suit in using plain English in the future to be more accessible to laypersons? Or are blawgs on a trajectory to dominate as the popularized method to access legal information, explanations, and debate to a range of stakeholders? However, the impact of digitalization on the legal sphere is not restricted to access to information but also affects the production and interpretation of it. Digital tools provide assistance in carrying out preliminary tasks regarding these matters, such as by identifying relevant points from a vast number of texts, which consequently merit further reading (Voyant Tools) and by providing translations which correspond to source language use (machine translations), which may then follow with post-editing by a human translator. Such tools continue to *assist* humans, but do not yet *exceed* human intervention on tasks. There is no doubt that digitalization is capable of both resolving challenges and creating new ones and elements of digitalization in the form of the internet as well as digital tools will play a role not only in the production of such challenges but also in settling them.

**References**

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