Managing Discussions in Law Blogs: from Post to Comments

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Abstract

The paper explores "the dialogic action game", which takes place in law blogs through sequences of posts by law professor blogger and comments by readers, who may be either academics or an interested, non-academic public. The corpus used for this study is taken from a legal blog website: the United Kingdom Constitutional Law Association (UKCLA). The aim is to look at how law professor bloggers interact with readers in their blogs and at how participants manage the debate. By combining corpus methodology with a discourse analytic approach, the overall findings show that the law blog post encourages participants to contribute with different kinds of comments, ranging from agreement to disagreement either with the post or with other comments. The analysis has also highlighted distinctive linguistic features of posts and comments. By addressing the interests of different types of audiences who participate in discussions, law blogs testify the important role they play in the practice of law, as they build a kind of bridge between legal academics and legal practitioners.

Keywords: law blogs, UKCLA blog, post−comment threads, dialogicity, language resources

1. Introduction

It is widely recognised that the Internet provides us with digital resources for knowledge dissemination addressing the lay public, and platforms such as blogs have become increasingly important as leading tools for the public communication of specialised knowledge. Academic blogs, for example, are considered as sites where research is developed as well as disseminated, i.e., real "research blogs" (Kuteeva 2016: 432), where "unknown, heterogeneous, and varied audiences may participate in co-constructing research debates" (Mauranen 2013: 30−31).

Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to domain-specific blogs. Luzón (2013a), for example, investigated the discursive strategies used by science bloggers to communicate and recontextualise scientific discourse, and to engage the diverse readership of science blogs. Freddi (2020) examined interaction and audience engagement in science blogs written by individual scientist-writers. Dialogicity in institutional and individual scientific blogs was also explored by Bondi (2022). Moreover, research interest has been devoted to blogs in the field of economics. Bondi (2018a) analysed blogs created by American economists who write for the academia as well as for the media. Furthermore, Puschmann (2010) and Ruiz-Garrido and Ruiz-Madrid (2011) looked at corporate and executive blogs respectively. Zou and Hyland (2020a), on the other hand, explored bloggers' use of engagement resources across hard and soft disciplines (physical science, life science, education, applied linguistics).

Growing interest has also been shown in the study of scholarly blogs in the field of law in English. Garzone (2014) explored the personal individualistic dimension of law blogs or "blawgs", and likewise, Tessuto (2015: 85) investigated legal blogs as a "site for stance and engagement". Parallel to legal knowledge dissemination among experts, attention has also been devoted to the importance assumed by law blogs as a tool for communicating legal issues with "the wider audience" of non-experts. Solly (2012: 52) examined a legal blog, *BabyBarista*, published first by *The Times* and then by *The Guardian* as "a fictional account of a junior barrister practising at the English Bar". Anesa (2018) discussed the "democratization of knowledge" by focusing on blawgs concerning environmental issues.

As research has shown, legal blogging plays an important role in popularising legal knowledge. The present paper contributes to this research strand by exploring "the dialogic action game" (Bondi 2018b: 60), which takes place in law blogs through sequences of posts by the law blogger and comments by readers, who may be either academics or an interested, non-academic public. Post−comment threads[1] have attracted considerable research interest over the last decade. Academic bloggers have been shown to interact with their readers in different ways. In her study of economics blogs, Bondi (2018a: 41) found that interaction among commenters often only takes the form of "interwoven polylogues that engage participants in parallel conversations, some of which are more clearly oriented to just sharing views, while others aim at knowledge dissemination and knowledge construction proper". Interaction in the form of participant mentions has also been shown to be more observable in the comments when compared to the posts, as highlighted by Freddi (2020) in her work on science blogs. Luzón (2011) observed that in their interaction bloggers and weblog readers use more markers of social behaviour such as affectivity (i.e., slang or informal expressions, emoticons) and interactivity (i.e., expressions of interest or congratulations, of agreement and disagreement) than indicators of anti-social behaviour (i.e., verbal expression of negative emotion, humor-sarcasm, irony). Zou and Hyland (2020a), on the other hand, noted that blogs in soft disciplines (education and applied linguistics) use more reader mentions, directives and questions, while hard science blogs rely on resources which claim more author authority and require more shared understanding.

However, comments are also a site for antagonist discourse. As emerges from Luzón's (2013b: 111) study on academic blog discussions, there is a high incidence of conflict in the comments sections, "ranging from mild criticism and disagreement to more severe expressions of conflict, like bold criticism, challenging questions or insults". Zou and Hyland (2020b) also analysed form and focus of criticism in academic blog comments and found that they both reflect the directness and informality of online communication while respecting some of the conventions of academic engagement.

Due to the paucity of attention to interaction in academic blogs in the field of law, this study looks at how law professor bloggers interact with readers in their blogs and at how participants manage the debate. To this end, the paper aims to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the language resources that characterise the post−comment threads?
2) Does the blogger trigger a debate?
3) How is the debate managed by the participants through their comments?

The next section provides a description of the corpus used for the study as well as the methodology adopted. The results will be reported in sections 3 to 5, followed by some concluding remarks in section 6.

2. Corpus and Methodology

The corpus used for this study is taken from a legal blog website: the United Kingdom Constitutional Law Association (UKCLA). Only single-authored blogs commenting on legal cases written by law professors and lecturers affiliated to UK universities were selected over a ten-year period between 2012 and 2021. The choice of single-authored blogs was made in order to avoid potential differences with respect to the strength and focus of the positions expressed, and to create a more clearly identifiable category of blog. Since the purpose of the study is to analyse the dialogic structure of blog threads originating from the post, only blogs dealing with legal cases where the posts had comments sections with at least three comments were selected. The corpus consists of 144,600 words in total and includes 39 posts and 440 comments (an average of 11 comments per post). The website was chosen for its relevance within the academic legal community. UKCLA "is the UK's national

[1] A thread is intended as a series of replies to a single post in online discussions.

body of constitutional law scholars affiliated to the International Association of Constitutional Law". As stated in the 'About us' homepage, "its object is to encourage and promote the advancement of knowledge relating to United Kingdom constitutional law and the study of constitutions generally". Its blog, launched in 2010 (https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/blog/), is "a repository of expert comment and analysis on matters of constitutional law in the UK and further afield".

From a methodological point of view, the analysis develops in two directions: one focusing on the language resources of the two main phases of a blog thread: posts and comments, the other focusing on its dialogic structure. Using *WordSmith Tools* 6 (Scott 2012), a quantitative exploration of the keywords of posts and comments was carried out. Contrasting the wordlists obtained from the posts and comments, the distinctive language resources of each phase were identified, i.e., those that vary in statistically significant ways across posts and comments. The analysis centred on the top twenty keywords of posts and comments respectively, on the assumption that they can qualify the communicative function of posts and comments. Concordances were studied to identify the effective role played by selected items. The second part of the analysis involved an exploratory, qualitative study of "the dialogic action game". As Bondi (2018b: 49) observes, this means "looking at blog posts and comments in terms of their speech acts and their initiative and reactive function".

3. Post−Comment threads: a quantitative overview of language resources

This section presents the results of the corpus-driven observation of the language resources that characterise the post−comment thread components of the law blog corpus. The analysis starts with an overview of the most frequent lemmas of posts and comments respectively.

Table 1. Wordlists of posts and comments (top 20 lemmas)

POSTS wordlist			COMMENTS wordlist		
Rank	Freq.		Rank	Freq.	
1	6693	the	1	4676	the
2	3351	of	2	2042	of
3	2744	to	3	2010	to
4	1708	in	4	1303	a
5	1637	a	5	1228	is
6	1562	that	6	1184	that
7	1463	and	7	1165	in
8	1219	is	8	1128	and
9	915	it	9	899	on
10	753	be	10	808	it
11	676	as	11	637	be
12	653	not	12	620	at
13	635	on	13	603	not
14	622	for	14	509	for
15	610	Court	15	494	as
16	609	law	16	447	Parliament
17	591	this	17	435	this
18	536	was	18	409	was
19	515	by	19	407	I
20	455	Parliament	20	392	reply

As Table 1 shows, what is immediately noticeable is that both lists have seventeen items in common, namely *the, of, to, that, for, this, was* with identical ranking, whereas *in, a, and, is, it, be, as, not, on,*

Parliament with a slight difference in the ranking. Interestingly, however, the first-person pronoun *I* appears only in the top twenty wordlist of the comments, and not in the posts where instead it ranks 80th (133 occurrences). This is a surprising result as the prominence of the first person singular pronoun is quite common in blogs because of their subjective nature, as observed in the literature (e.g., Bondi and Seidenari 2012; Zou and Hyland 2019, 2022). This difference can be further explored by examining the keywords that are typical of posts and comments, thus complementing the more general picture that emerges from the two wordlists in Table 1.

Table 2. Keywords of posts and comments (top 20 lemmas)

POSTS Keywords			COMMENTS Keywords		
Rank	Freq.		Rank	Freq.	
1	263	Lord	1	392	reply
2	3351	of	2	294	p.m.
3	112	Strasbourg	3	225	a.m.
4	610	Court	4	407	I
5	6693	the	5	620	at
6	146	principle	6	188	you
7	144	said	7	143	September
8	98	Convention	8	228	Assange
9	65	Secretary	9	899	on
10	34	University	10	75	your
11	219	prerogative	11	73	prosecutor
12	62	suggested	12	66	February
13	33	citation	13	39	yours
14	136	European	14	64	July
15	53	Tribunal	15	69	Sweden
16	156	under	16	135	Brexit
17	75	union	17	80	my
18	108	between	18	43	add
19	24	Commissioner	19	176	prorogation
20	265	power	20	26	lawyer

As shown in Table 2, the top twenty keywords in the posts, i.e., words whose frequency is statistically significant when compared to that of the comments, are characterised by a majority of lexical words and mainly nouns referring to legal cases such as *Lord*, *Strasbourg*, *Court*, *European Convention/Union*, *Tribunal*, *Commissioner*. Indeed, only two items *of* and *the* are grammatical words. The word *University*, on the other hand, is related to the bloggers' academic affiliation and *citation* occurs at the end of each post and collocates with the word *suggested* to indicate the source of the post to be cited, i.e., *Suggested citation: S. Lee, 'The Supremes' Seventh: Dominant or Diminished?, U.K. Const. L. Blog (26th Sept. 2019) (available at https://ukconstitutionallaw.org/))*. The seventh most significant keyword is *said*, often used as a reporting verb to introduce a judge's claim. The use of this reporting verb manifests the primary characteristic of the law blogs under investigation. As I have shown elsewhere (Diani 2021), reporting a judge's view is a preliminary condition necessary for the blogger to show how the legal case stands. This provides a context within which the blogger presents his or her position that becomes a fundamental element in prompting discussion with her/his audience. As example (1) shows, the attributed statement introduced by *said*

is commented on by the blogger. Through the choice of the wording *I agree*, the blogger's alignment with Lord Sumption's position is evident.[2]

(1) In a striking passage, **Sumption says** that "an important object of modern democratic constitutions is to treat the people as a source of legitimacy, while placing barriers between them and the direct operation of the levers of power." This is necessary, he says, "to contain the fissiparious tendencies of democracy; to counter the inherent tendency of democracy to destroy itself when majorities become a source of instability and oppression." **I agree** that the people are not well-placed to govern themselves directly and should instead be governed by way of representative institutions capable of reasoned choice. (Richard Ekins: Representative Politics and the Limits of Law, May 29, 2019)[3]

Moving on to consider the top twenty keywords of the comments, we find that, unlike the posts, they are characterised by frequent references to the participants in the form of first and second person markers: *I* ranks 4th, followed by *you* in 7th position, *your* in 10th, *yours* 13th, and *my* 17th. These results recall Freddi's finding in her study on science blogs that the prominence of first- and second-person pronouns reflects the communicative nature of comments "having an interpersonal function of responding utterance" (2020: 19). Their very personal stance is well exemplified by the verbal word-forms co-occurring with *I*. The list of top ten collocates of *I* displays the verbs *think* (46 occurrences), *find* (in the sense of believe 13 occ.) as verbs of cognition expressing an opinion but also *agree* (19 occurrences) "pointing to the inherent link between post and comment and the function of rebuttal to a claim" (Freddi 2020: 22). The following are some filtered concordance lines.

ry 9, 2016 at 10:55 am Reply Sorry, but I think it's genuinely shocking to suggest
explanation have been given as to why. So I think it's fair to say that it's the Swedish
on September 28, 2019 at 8:02 pm Reply I think that you are absolutely right to refer
ng used for an improper purpose. However, I do not think that any of these matters are
, 2019 at 4:21 am Reply Michael Vickers I find your statement '(2) a parliament was
on August 30, 2019 at 9:36 pm — Reply I find the arguments here to be weak. 1.
is Young on June 7, 2018 at 8:04 pm Reply I agree — I would only add that (as I under
ember 26, 2019 at 1:25 pm Reply Basically I agree that there is a current problem with the

Similarly, the collocates of *my* are nouns such as *view* (11 occurrences), *opinion* (4 occ.), *claim* (3 occ.), *point* (2 occ.), *argument* (2 occ.) that clearly indicate the adoption of the highly opinionated involvement of participants in discussing the posts, as the following concordance lines show:

denitire) on July 14, 2019 at 4:41 pm Reply In my view this argument misses the central point
Court in Webster answered to the contrary. In my view this is wrong and that high-policy was
ld the individual transgress against society. In my opinion voting rights are 'Civic Rights
ed with the FtPA. I therefore disagree that my claim is "wrong" as you suggest. Your point
coercive factors are present. But to repeat my point: "to argue that Assange's conditions are
verbiage a bit longer, there are elements of my argument you seem to have misunderstood.

While *I* and *my* almost invariably refer to the participants replying to the bloggers' posts, the reference to *you* and *your* varies and includes both the impersonal/generic form as in example (2), and more specific reference to the blogger who is directly addressed, as in examples (3) and (4).

[2] Excerpts have been reported in their original form as found in the data regardless of syntactical errors or linguistic inaccuracies.
[3] In all examples bold is added for emphasis.

(2) *Mikey* on May 13, 2014 at 6:50 pm Reply
[…] it is much clearer and simpler to say that the "opposite" of a liberty is a duty. If **you** have a liberty (not) to perform an action then **you** are under no duty, positive or negative and someone does not have a claim-right to legally compel **you** to do it or refrain from it. A 'duty not to' is the contrapositive of a duty. (Grégoire Webber: On the 'lawful' premise and prostitution, May 13, 2014)

(3) *Baron Ash* on September 30, 2019 at 2:46 pm
[…] Anyway, **you** have a good blog and make **your** points clearly, for which I thank **you**, even though (obviously) disagreeing. (Alex Green: Our Constitution, Accountability and the Limits of the Power to Prorogue, September 26, 2019)

(4) *C D Vanderweele* on October 7, 2019 at 2:41 pm Reply
While I disagree with **your** analysis, the Supreme Court in Miller 1 ruled the referendum as only advisory. The constitution does not recognise referenda. The court has not prevented Brexit since the prorogation could never have allowed Brexit. The government never argued prorogation was designed to permit Brexit to happen. Indeed, it argued that it had no effect. **You** cannot have it both ways. (Danny Nicol: Supreme Court Against the People, September 25, 2019).

These preliminary frequency-driven observations call for a more extensive analysis of blog posts and comments in terms of "their initiative and reactive function" (Bondi 2018b: 49). Following Bondi's approach to the analysis of economics blogs, the following section focuses on the blog thread investigating whether and to what extent legal posts build a debate and how the debate itself is managed in terms of communicative action realised by participants through their comments.

4. Does the legal post trigger a debate?

As Bondi (2018a: 39) observes, "posts act as first turns of a blog thread, by involving the reader in the argument and often explicitly inviting the reader to react". The legal posts under investigation are extremely interesting in this respect because only occasionally is the readership's involvement called for: only 15 instances of second person pronoun *you* and 6 occurrences of the expression *reader* were found, some of which are in the following concordance lines:

entary supremacy in such a situation. But,	you will be thinking, surely this hypothetical is funci
arantee of non-refoulment. Whether or not	you believe Mr. Assange is guilty of a sexual offence
guilty of a sexual offence, whether or not	you think he is a self-publicist deliberately resisting ar
e is the battle" in front of the weary troops.	Readers will remember that the original legal battle ov
ing, Barber and Hickman on this very blog.	Many readers may be unaware, however, that a handf
that are built into those draconian powers.	Readers may also be interested in a timely speech
For this reason Jackson is Revolutionary.	The reader will recall that the Blair this reason Jackson

The scarcity of reader engagement markers may find an explanation in the academic writing style that law professor bloggers follow in the publication of their posts. They provide their postings with "an essay-like writing form" (Tessuto 2015), often similar to a research article, including the Introduction, Discussion and/or Conclusion sections in which they develop their argument. As Tessuto (2015: 101) suggests, by adopting academic writing standards, bloggers miss the opportunity to make full use of reader-oriented markers that could create a highly interactional nature of the blog genre. Reader engagement, however, turns out to be more frequent through a more formal reader-inclusive *we* pronoun (130 occurrences) and object pronoun *us* (23 occurrences).

(5) It was "common ground" that the Crown is subordinated to law and "common ground" that the King cannot change the law of the land by prerogative (at [26],[29]). The "basic picture about how the EU operates" is also "common ground" (at [37]). At this level of generality, none of this is controversial, but the fact that each point was expressed as common ground meant the court did not need to give a precise explanation of the rule. If **we** wish to be precise, there is a great deal to be said about the Case of Prohibitions or about the application of EU law […] (Ewan Smith: Treaty Rights in Miller and Dos Santos v. Secretary of State for Leaving the European Union, November 16, 2016).

Interestingly, we found that five instances of *we* occur in questions that seem to trigger a response from readers and "change the monologue to a dialogue" (Zou and Hyland 2020a: 7), as the following example illustrates:

(6) According to M v Home Office, a court might, having made an order which a minister disobeyed, just declare the minister to be in contempt. A mere declaration would not do the court's authority any good at all in this hypothetical situation. It is unlikely that the press or the members of the House of Commons would take the court's side and press the government to respond positively to the declaration. If the declaration were ignored, the lesson that the executive learned would be that it can get away with such responses to the courts. **Would we want that?** (Dawn Oliver: Parliamentary Sovereignty: A Pragmatic or Principled Doctrine?, May 3, 2012)

As Zou and Hyland (2020: 8) point out, evoking a response from readers through questions – in this case combined with reader-inclusive *we* – clearly helps bloggers construct a more dialogic and interactive discourse.

Although the legal posts under investigation only occasionally trigger a debate by explicitly bringing readers into their argumentation, they subtly encourage participants to contribute with different kinds of comments, ranging from agreement to disagreement either with the post or with other comments. The following section analyses the dialogue that follows posts created by participants contributing with their comments.

5. From post to comments

An overall analysis of comments confirms the dialogic nature of blogs based on the "participant-oriented dimension" (Bondi 2018a: 41). This is realised through an interplay of comments both addressed to the blogger and other participants. They may range from a single sentence of positive or negative evaluation to several sentences of sustained argument. The following comments are directed at the blogger: (7) and (8) express outright positive evaluation as a single sentence, while (9) exemplifies a negative comment extended over several sentences to justify the criticism. In our corpus of 440 comments, 23 show agreement with the blogger, often consisting of a single sentence, while 27 express disagreement, usually made up of several sentences. As the examples show, the use of positive or negative evaluative adjectives such as *interesting*, *brilliant*, *flawed* intensifies the force of agreement or disagreement.

(7) *Professor Carwyn Jones* on January 21, 2021 at 5:03 pm Reply
An **interesting** contribution to a topical debate! (Rivka Weill: We the British People Rule: From 1832 to the Present, January 21, 2021)

(8) *Christoph Smets* on September 30, 2013 at 5:17 pm Reply
Thank you very much for this **brilliant** combination of opinion piece and legal article! (Roger Masterman: A Tale of Competing Supremacies, September 30, 2013)

(9) *Jim W* on September 17, 2019 at 2:01 pm Reply
Paragraph 7 seems to me fundamentally **flawed**. There is no judicial review of the 'legal act of prorogation'; only of the Government's*advice to prorogue*, which you correctly distinguish in places but conflate in others. There is therefore no threat to the fabled 'sovereign authority'. There is, indeed, no mechanism by which the legal act of prorogation can itself be reviewed by the Courts. (Stephen Tierney: Prorogation and the Courts: A Question of Sovereignty, September 17, 2019)

Interestingly, the bloggers whose positions are being disputed often move immediately to rebut the commenters' criticism and upgrade their own initial positions (13 cases of rebuttal out of 27 instances of disagreement). They express their rebuttal directly, by means of exact repetition of the commenters' words. This is illustrated in the following comments taken from the same blog:

(10) *Roger* on September 26, 2019 at 9:15 am Reply
Unaccountable unelected judges have no business interfering with those who are.
Very simple. […]

Alex Green on September 26, 2019 at 3:08 pm Reply
Thank you for your comment Roger. **With respect, it cannot be true that judges have no business at all 'interfering'** with elected officials, if that means that they should not hold them to legal account. […] If you truly believe in the importance of elected and accountable officials you should be very much in favour of the UKSC decision.

Paul McH on September 26, 2019 at 12:19 pm Reply
This is very pedantic but **it makes my teeth itch** when I see it written as 'judgement'. The author seems to suggest in the Conclusion that **Johnson was wrong** in his (apparent) affinity to direct democracy as opposed to the pure representative democracy espoused in the judgment. […]

Alex Green on September 26, 2019 at 3:05 pm Reply
Thanks for your comment Paul. I do indeed argue that **the PM was wrong** to do what he did and that his understanding of democracy is impoverished. However, it does not follow that representative democracy needs to forestall direct popular engagement – far from it. […] Also, **I hope your teeth accept my apology**. (Alex Green: Our Constitution, Accountability and the Limits of the Power to Prorogue, September 26, 2019)

By taking up the commenters' precise words in his response (*judges have no business at all 'interfering' with elected officials*; *the PM was wrong*), the blogger makes his rebuttal more effective, in that it proves to be an efficient strategy for emphasising his initial position and allowing him to stress the differences of the commenters' opposed opinions.

The blogger's rebuttal often produces an articulate counter-argument by the commenter who intervenes again and reinforces criticism (*With respect, that is a specious argument*), before trying to placate or defuse the tension (*Anyway, you have a good blog and make your points clearly, for which I thank you, even though (obviously) disagreeing*), as the following example shows.

(11) *Baron Ash* on September 27, 2019 at 4:53 am Reply
Nicely constructed article, but verbiage nonetheless. All this elegant nattering on about 'accountability' ignores – just like the Justices assiduously (and disgracefully) did – that the prime accountability of the Executive is to the Parliament, who are the elected representatives of the people. If the Parliament felt that prorogation was unreasonable, they could have called

a vote of No Confidence. They were warmly invited to do so, but even though they can command a majority (Exhibit1 the ridiculous Benn's Surrender Bill), they chose not to do so. […]

Alex Green on September 28, 2019 at 8:31 pm Reply
Thank you for your comments Ash. **If you will tolerate my nattering verbiage a bit longer, there are elements of my argument you seem to have misunderstood**. I agree that Parliament could (and should) have exercised its power to hold a vote of no confidence, however it has not as yet. […] Furthermore, the relevant harm was not done to Parliament but to the populace, who have a moral and legal right to be appropriately represented on an ongoing basis. […]

Baron Ash on September 30, 2019 at 2:46 pm Reply
[…] "Furthermore, the relevant harm was not done to Parliament but to the populace, who have a moral and legal right to be appropriately represented on an ongoing basis." **With respect, that is a specious argument.** Parliament IS the people, essentially. And also it's a weak argument against the fact that if Parliament didn't like prorogation they could have forestalled it. They chose not to exercise that option and did a run around to a clearly pro-Establishment Court. […] **Anyway, you have a good blog and make your points clearly, for which I thank you, even though (obviously) disagreeing.** (Alex Green: Our Constitution, Accountability and the Limits of the Power to Prorogue, September 26, 2019)

The examples show that either the blogger or the commenters follow principles of politeness (see the expression *with respect* that mitigates the force of their disagreement) and only occasionally use informal language while criticising (*it makes my teeth itch*; *I hope your teeth accept my apology*), typical of more personal interaction.

Participants do not only respond to the post, but also to contiguous comments, as shown in the following example. Addressing the commenter by name points to a more direct involvement.

(12) *Cassandra* on February 13, 2016 at 10:42 am Reply
I just wanted to append this chronology over what the Swedish prosecutor have (not) done, for those who might be unaware (I'm not sure how much this has been covered in the UK press):
20/08/10: The women contact the police in order to force Assange to be tested for STDs. […]
21/08/10: The day after chief prosecutor Eva Finné cancel the arrest order saying she can see no reason to suspect rape has been committed.[…]
Several things strike me as odd here:
1. The story is leaked to a Swedish tabloid the same night the complaint is made, this is not common in Sweden. Headlines are made around the world.
2. The fact that the first prosecutor dismissed the case indicate it is at best a very weak case. Eva Finné is a well-renowned and experienced prosecutor so there is no reason to believe her decision was unreasonable.
3. That another prosecutor picks up a case again is unusual but not unheard of. […]

Sebastian H on February 15, 2016 at 9:33 pm Reply
Cassandra,
In order to understand the case it is important with a chronology. **In yours there are many important events left out.** To understand the prosecutor's actions you have to be aware of what Assange have done. This chronology includes most of Assange's and the prosecutor's actions. The dates are in most cases correct. When I am unsure of a date I will mark it with a *: […]

> Final comment. I could have made some errors on the dates above. It was a some time ago that I was interested in the case. If someone questions the dates I will be happy to check my notes in order to confirm exactly when something actually took place.
>
> *Cassandra* on February 19, 2016 at 10:57 am
> Yes you are right, naturally one can add more facts, **I am sure you have not mentioned all relevant facts either.** I tried to limit myself to easily verifiable facts I am familiar with and that might be relevant to the question whether the Swedish Prosecutor have done enough to try to hear Assange in Sweden and the UK. I only hope to encourage those who are quick to dismiss the UN opinion to take a look at the evidence themselves before jumping to conclusions.
>
> *Sebastian H* on February 15, 2016 at 9:21 pm Reply
> Several things strike me as odd here: **I am not of the same opinion**. My comments are in your text and it is my hope it is easy to read.
> 1. The story is leaked to a Swedish tabloid the same night the complaint is made, this is not common in Sweden. Headlines are made around the world.
> My comment:
> It is not yet confirmed it is a leak. Someone (nobody knows yet) got hold of the story and tipped a number of newspapers and news agencies in Sweden. Expressen was the only newspaper that somehow got the prosecutor in charge to confirm that Assange was arrested. It is also very common that important people parade in the press. Assange is no exception. […]
> It is obvious that the UNWGAD got their facts wrong on many points. If you get your facts wrong it normally means that your opinion is wrong too. I find it extremely remarkable that a UN "expert group" is unable to verify if what one party claims is true. If the opinion of the UNWGAD is "ridiculous" or not I have no opinion. I am more concerned that they didn't get their facts right and therefore their opinion is wrong too. […]
>
> *AFB65* on February 24, 2016 at 12:42 pm
> **Sebastian H** You are ignoring human rights. Was/Is it possible to question Assange as a free man? Answer is yes. So, UK and Sweden were not allowed to start extradiction, it is so easy, when some does understand human rights. You state UK would ignore human rights again? I'm not surprised. (Liora Lazarus: Is the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention Decision on Assange 'So Wrong'?, February 9, 2016)

What we see here is a sequence of comments by participants engaging each other in disagreement exchanges. The first comment (Cassandra) is directed at the blogger's post addressing the case in question. What follows is a direct personal criticism by a participant, Sebastian H, who addresses Cassandra by name, questioning the chronology she has provided (*In yours there are many important events left out*). Then Cassandra responds to his comment showing disagreement *(I am sure you have not mentioned all relevant facts either*). Again, Sebastian H intervenes by contrasting Cassandra's position (*I am not of the same opinion*): he quotes from her comments and presents his critical interpretation. His long comment stimulates further discussion. Another participant, AFB65, in fact, intervenes by addressing Sebastian H. The extract exemplifies the complex "polylogic structure of comments" (Bondi 2018a: 41). Comments can address the post, as the first comment by Cassandra shows, but they can also respond to other contiguous comments as shown in the example.

An overview of the comments highlights conflictual discourse. This reminds us of Luzón's (2013b: 118) finding that "in blog discussions interlocutors explicitly engage in the adversarial method of argument, where one's claims are defended by showing that the other party is wrong". However, our data show that participants keep a civilised tone towards each other, and do not use rudeness. Their

writing is formal. This may be associated with the institutional nature of the law blogs under investigation, in which bloggers and commenters are legal professionals – in only three posts participants are 'lay observers', as they refer to themselves.

6. Conclusions

This study examined posts and comments from law blogs commenting on legal cases relating to UK court decisions in an attempt to answer the question of whether law professor bloggers trigger a "dialogic action game" with readers as part of an ongoing conversation and at the same time open up a debate. As the data show, law blogs address the interests of many legal professionals (academics, solicitors, barristers, judges) and it is in their comments that dialogicity appears to be more observable. Although the posts analysed are accompanied by a small number of comments (an average of 11 comments per post), they highlight interactive discussions and reflect the characteristic features as observed in the literature: they are "polylogues, where each comment is a response either to the post or to one or various previous comments and where interlocutors can answer back as soon as they see the other's post" (Luzón 2013b: 118). The comments in the corpus show agreement and disagreement in different forms, ranging from a single sentence of positive or negative evaluation to several sentences of sustained argument. The argument consists of different interpretations of the post or of any contiguous comment, thus creating complex exchanges. Commenters choose the issues of the debate they want to address, in light of their own positions.

The analysis has also highlighted distinctive linguistic features of posts and comments. The wordlists and keywords comparisons have revealed that first- and second-person pronouns (*I* and *you*) are a prominent feature of comments when compared to posts. This reflects "the double conversational and rhetorical role of comments, both as essential parts of the post-comment adjacency pair and rebuttals in the discussion prompted by blog posts" (Freddi 2020: 32). Posts, on the other hand, are characterised by reporting frameworks: the seventh most significant keyword is *said*, used as a reporting verb to introduce a judge's or a court's decision on legal cases. This provides a context within which the blogger presents his or her argument and elicits responses from the audiences.

The overall results seem to bear out Fit's (2013: online) remark that legal blog posts provide a great value to a broad spectrum of readers by addressing many existing and widely acknowledged issues with legal writing and access to legal information. Additionally, they can serve as an excellent platform for dissemination of legal scholarship, a place for debates or just testing of ideas. This may explain the expanding practice of academic legal blogging that has affected the way law scholars communicate, as it is considered "a better vehicle to spread ideas in the digital era than traditional academic journals", whose advantages are "access, speed, interactivity, and transparency" (Duval 2018: 97).

By addressing the interests of different types of audiences who participate in discussions, law blogs testify the important role they play in the practice of law, as they build a kind of bridge between legal academics and legal practitioners. This may find an explanation in the impact that they have had in judicial opinions over the years. As Peoples (2010) shows in his study on the citation of blogs in judicial opinions, courts rely on the discussion of legal issues found in blogs to support judicial reasoning and analysis. This seems to suggest that law professor bloggers represent authority, credibility and disciplinary appeals (Hyland 1999). The legal blog posts under investigation clearly demonstrate this.

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