

# **ORIGINAL PAPER**

# Structures of Linguistic Harmonisation and Adaptation(s) in Teaching Legal English

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#### **Abstract:**

Many learners see legal language as an opaque code only intelligible to a small elite. The truth is more prosaic yet more intricate. Legal English is a specialized variety that draws on long legal traditions, strict institutional routines, and a dense technical lexicon. Teaching it at the Faculty of Law, University of Craiova, becomes a complex practice not only because of the linguistic hurdles of terminology and phraseology but because the classroom is a meeting point of distinct legal cultures. In Romania, a Latin legal heritage refined through French influence and continually reshaped by European Union norms must be re-expressed in English for international mobility, academic success and professional communication. The task is to harmonize what students already know in Romanian civil law with the discourse conventions of English used across different common law and EU contexts. This paper argues that the core of effective teaching lies in designing a shared linguistic platform, then guiding students through successive adaptations: mapping concepts across legal systems, aligning registers, negotiating genres, and practising translation-sensitive moves. The goal is functional intelligibility without loss of legal precision, communicative fluency without erosion of doctrinal nuance, and pragmatic readiness for the hybridized linguistic ecology of contemporary European law. The following pages develop a compact narrative in five movements: an introduction to the problem, a theoretical frame for harmonisation and adaptation, a view of harmonisation as classroom architecture, a view of adaptation as classroom practice, and a conclusion that outlines a workable synthesis for the Romanian context.

**Keywords**: ESP, teaching legal English, adaptation, context, terminology

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#### 1. Introduction

Every cohort of first-year law students brings into the Legal English classroom an implicit map of law. That map is largely civil-law oriented, rooted in codified reasoning, and coloured by Romanian doctrinal vocabulary. When the class opens, the first linguistic reality they encounter is not just unfamiliar English words but a new pattern of speaking and writing the law. They must learn how English legal discourse sets out authority, how it frames issues, and how it expects arguments to travel from rule to application. They must also learn that legal English is not a single uniform code. There is a family resemblance among the Englishes of the UK, the EU's multilingual legislative workflow, and the United States, but each differs in sources, style, and institutional expectations.

A practical problem follows. Students know Romanian legal concepts articulated through Latin and French traditions. They must now operate in English, which is tied to common law genres and to EU drafting practices that cultivate plainness, consistency, and multilingual concordance. The demand on teaching is therefore dual: to build a common linguistic ground where everyone can stand and to design successive adaptations that allow learners to move between systems without losing balance. In this sense, teaching Legal English is both a harmonising project and a set of micro-adaptations calibrated to students' prior knowledge, their legal aspirations, and the constraints of the genres in which they will have to speak and write.

This harmonising stance is not optional in a European setting. As Martina Bajčić notes, "many scholars speak of a hybridization of legal languages in the EU," a point that places English at the centre of a new communicative space where legal cultures negotiate meaning every day (Bajčić 2018, 8). The classroom at Craiova is one locus of that negotiation. Our local task is to prepare students to navigate multidirectional flows: from Romanian into English, from civil law into common law discourse, from national practice into EU multilingual drafting, and from the academy into professional practice. The rest of this paper sets out a practical way to do so.

### 2. A theoretical frame for harmonisation and adaptation

Legal English has often been discussed as a special register or sublanguage. One concise formulation, addressed to the general issue of specialized varieties, states that "we study legal language as a kind of second language, a specialized use of vocabulary, phrases, and syntax that helps us to communicate more easily with each other" (Ramsfield 2005, 145; Bain Butler 2013). This characterization matters pedagogically. Treating Legal English as a second language inside English legitimizes a full didactic toolkit: needs analysis, genre awareness, scaffolded input, controlled production, feedback cycles, and corpus-aided noticing. It also provides a theoretical bridge to ESP, English for Specific Purposes, where the goal is functional adequacy in real tasks rather than abstract mastery of the whole language. In the ESP tradition, an oft-cited lesson is that "ESP courses help students become more proficient in their field of study," precisely because instruction is aligned with disciplinary communication (Xhaferi and Xhaferi 2011, 434).

Harmonisation is a legal and linguistic idea. In European private law, the harmonisation of contract rules and the translational discipline that accompanies that enterprise have been widely discussed. Comparative lawyers are vital intermediaries in that conversation because they see both the doctrinal shapes and the linguistic surfaces that must align across languages (Onufrio 2007). Linguistically, harmonisation means that

textual artefacts in different languages must convey equivalent effect and similar pragmatic force within institutional workflows. EU legal English is particularly instructive because it becomes a pivot language for multilingual concordance while retaining fidelity to national law concepts. As Bajčić argues, the outcome is a hybridized linguistic ecosystem where English is central, yet its legal meanings remain conditioned by translation into and out of twenty-plus languages (Bajčić 2018).

Adaptation, by contrast, is the teacher's craft in action. It concerns the calibration of input to learners' previous knowledge, the adjustment of tasks to their legal aims, and the modulation of register to fit genre. The adaptation task is partly linguistic and partly sociocultural. Students at the University of Craiova are schooled in a civil law approach to reasoning and in Romanian institutional writing practices. They must acquire habits of English legal clarity, typical sentence economies in drafting, and the discursive moves by which argument is framed. The teacher must adapt exercises so that students recognize the continuity of legal ideas beneath different linguistic packages.

A useful mini-model is to see harmonisation as the architecture and adaptation as the furniture. The architecture is the shared platform: core vocabulary, a small set of canonical genres, the most frequent syntactic and phraseological patterns, and the pragmatic norms for address, citation, and hedging. The furniture is movable: tasks that can be rearranged for case-note writing, memo drafting, clause editing, and oral advocacy. The two build on research across translation studies and legal linguistics. For example, Maria Magdalena Lăpădat, in work on mobile-assisted learning, underscores that technology-supported environments can systematize noticing and practice, while reminding us that learners' success depends on clear communicative aims. In her words, "MALL has revolutionized the traditional paradigms of language learning," offering flexible routes to vocabulary acquisition (Lăpădat 2023, 266).

The lexical distinctiveness of legal English can be identified as a central teaching challenge. We must look closely at the lexical characteristics of Standard English versus legal English used in written documents, so that students learn to recognize register cues and collocational routines. Denisa Bărbuceanu's work on terminology and language industries also points to the competence building translators and legal communicators need, a reminder that our students will operate in a labour market where terminology management is a professional asset. Hence the observation that "translators need to develop specific competences by examining the linguistic nature of legal texts" (Bărbuceanu 2020, 39).

### 3. Harmonisation as classroom architecture

The first semester is given to building common ground. The platform has four beams: conceptual mapping, core lexicon, textual genres, and discourse moves. Each beam consolidates what students already know in Romanian and aligns it with English forms they will actually use.

The conceptual mapping beam starts with legal families. Students work through condensed contrasts between civil law and common law, not to claim one as superior but to sensitize learners to genre and authority differences. A short set of anchor concepts proves very useful: sources of law, role of precedent, structure of a claim, and institutional forms of decision. We treat this not as pure legal theory but as discourse templates. A Romanian civil code article is a concise rule expression; a common law case report is a layered narrative of facts, issues, holdings, and rationales. EU legislation, finally, models an intentionally plain and terminologically controlled English. Presenting these side by

side allows learners to see the pragmatic distribution of English stylistic choices across institutions. It also prepares them for Bajčić's hybridization thesis at a micro-level: when students later draft clauses or summarize judgments, they are primed to choose the appropriate English voice for the task (Bajčić 2018, 8).

The core lexicon beam is a curated vocabulary of about 500 high-value items grouped by function rather than topic. Function groups include authority verbs (hold, rule, find, dismiss), analytical linkers (therefore, however, in so far as), procedural terms (appeal, jurisdiction, standing), and contract staples (consideration, breach, remedy, damages). The initial aim is not rare terminology but high-frequency words that drive legal reasoning. Students meet each item in model sentences drawn from open legal corpora and EU materials. They also map Romanian equivalents and annotate any conceptual mismatch. This step builds the "platform" because it creates a bilingual web of meanings. Some terms are stable across varieties, while others signal registration into a specific field of discourse, reinforcing the need to make register shifts visible.

The genre beam selects a few canonical forms and explores them deeply rather than sampling many superficially. Three genres anchor the course: the case brief, the objective memo, and the contract clause set. Each genre is introduced with a short rhetorical profile: communicative purpose, audience expectations, organisational moves, and stylistic cues. Texts are short, authentic, and chosen for discursive clarity rather than doctrinal difficulty. This is where harmonisation overtly encounters adaptation: Romanian-trained students must learn to reconstruct a case into a common law-like brief, even when the case is civil-law in origin, and they must write an objective memo in a neutral, graded English style without importing civil-law citation habits. An EU regulation excerpt then illustrates how English is used as a shared drafting language among nonnative professionals and how terminological discipline secures multilingual coherence. On that point, comparative legal translation scholarship argues that harmonisation is partly a translational craft deployed to ensure European internal consistency, which in turn conditions how we should train students to write in English (Baaij 2012, 1–3; Onufrio 2007).

The discourse moves beam is the pragmatic toolkit. Students learn to present issues, state rules, apply facts, and conclude with warranted claims. They practice hedging and signalling certainty; they learn how to phrase limited conclusions, and how to cite authority unobtrusively. This beam operationalizes the idea, again from ESP practice, that proficiency is task-bound and purpose-sensitive. The literature on ESP for law courses shows that when course design truly reflects learners' field, performance improves because the language is immediately useful. Hence the simple but powerful observation quoted earlier that ESP training "helps students become more proficient in their field of study" (Xhaferi and Xhaferi 2011, 434).

Creating the platform also involves a careful stance on difficulty. We prioritize clarity over technicality, then extend to precision. This is aligned with plain language practices in EU drafting and converges with Romanian scholarship that foregrounds the need to make the lexical and syntactic features of legal English explicit. Such clarity does not dilute legal rigor. It unlocks it. Students who can reliably produce basic issue statements and orderly argument paragraphs can later insert technical content without destabilizing the sentence frame.

If EU legal English is central to multilingual concordance in law making, then the classroom should make room for its style. Bajčić's sentence about hybridisation becomes a boundary stone. It tells students to expect variety and to cultivate agility in a

space where English meets Romanian doctrine and EU drafting discipline (Bajčić 2018). It also protects them from an unnecessary anxiety: they are not required to sound like a nineteenth century English barrister to be competent in twenty first century European legal communication. At the same time, a broader linguistic insight from our local scholarship underscores that language is inseparable from culture. As Laviniu Costinel Lăpădat puts it, "Culture is not simply a backdrop to language, it is its pulse, its rhythm, its atmosphere" (Lăpădat 2025, 70). Placing this insight beside EU drafting discipline reminds learners that harmonisation is both institutional and cultural.

# 4. Adaptation as classroom practice

If harmonisation is the building, adaptation is the furniture. It moves daily to fit learners' prior knowledge, their evolving aims and the genres they must perform soon. Adaptation begins with a simple premise that: "Motivation is one of the most important factors in foreign language teaching and learning" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat 2023). Keeping motivation high is not a matter of theatricality but of visible relevance. Students need to see that today's task solves tomorrow's problem.

Adaptation is where teaching becomes a craft. It answers three situated questions. Who are these learners and what do they already know? What communicative tasks will they face in the near future? How can we design practice that bridges the two? The following adaptive routines aim to do exactly that.

The first routine is needs analysis in action. Rather than a one-off questionnaire, we run a rolling check of learners' aims through micro-prompts embedded in weekly tasks. Students annotate what they found hard and what they still need to say in English in their other law classes. The ESP literature insists on this alignment between course content and real needs; the research shows that when learners see connection between tasks and their disciplinary future, motivation stays high. The simple truth, as the ESP for Law study summarizes, is that carefully targeted courses promote field-relevant proficiency (Xhaferi and Xhaferi 2011, 434).

The second routine is contrastive micro-translation. Students translate a single sentence or short paragraph from Romanian sources into English and back. We choose clauses and fragments that foreground one specific problem, such as subject placement, prepositional attachment, or a term that has close English near-equivalents with different doctrinal reach. We treat success not as literal mimicry but as functional equivalence measured against the communicative goal. The approach resonates with comparative legal translation perspectives, where translation is the site of harmonisation work rather than a mere conduit from one language to another (Onufrio 2007; Baaij 2012, 5–9). A supporting observation from Romanian pedagogy in a different domain captures a recurrent micro-difficulty: "Some confusion among foreign students also occurs when two or more prepositions express the same relationship" (Burtea Cioroianu 2024, 52–53). Legal English drafting is full of prepositional choices with doctrinal consequences, so early, explicit practice prevents ambiguity from accumulating in clauses.

The third routine is register drilling. Students are shown pairs of sentences, one in everyday English and one in a legal register, and asked to diagnose and reproduce the differences. This explicitly implements the observation from Craiova scholarship that we must train students to recognize and produce the "lexical characteristics of Standard English versus legal English used in written documents." The drill is not just about vocabulary but about phrase shape and length. Learners often realise that legal writing prefers explicit reference anaphora, reduced ambiguity, and a stable rhythm of clause

linking. The routine is supported by local reflections on the media-saturated learning environment. "Nobody can deny that today, our students ... live in a media world, in which most of the data is delivered by visual input, through diverse high-tech devices" (Bărbuceanu 2020, 39). Short, high contrast slides help learners notice what matters in register.

The fourth routine is genre rehearsal. For case briefs, we teach the discipline of the Issue Rule Application Conclusion arc, but we adapt its use in civil law contexts by letting students write an IRAC style analysis of an article from the Romanian Civil Code combined with a short appellate summary from an ECJ judgment. The alternation de centres common law habits and presents the arc as a general reasoning aid rather than a foreign template. The rehearsal continues with memos that constrain sentence length and clause structure to reduce cognitive load, then gradually relax these constraints as fluency grows. Contract clause drafting closes the sequence. Here, harmonisation is visible in the tension between English common law style and EU plain drafting. We ask students to express obligations and conditions in crisp, testable English but also to track Romanian conceptual origins, annotating where equivalence is structural rather than lexical. This helps them discover that the same functional frame can host different doctrinal contents (Bajčić 2018; Baaij 2012).

The fifth routine is mobile-assisted spaced practice for terminology and phraseology. Vocabulary items and typical collocations are scheduled for recall over weeks, backed by short contextual prompts. Lăpădat's account of mobile-assisted learning supports this practice by identifying the way flexible digital repetition reshapes acquisition. The effect in our classroom is practical: students arrive with the right words ready for use because the platform has served them at the right time and at the right level of difficulty (Lăpădat 2023, 266).

The sixth routine is metalinguistic reflection supported by reading in Romanian scholarship on legal language and on the social-technological frame of education. Andreea Stoian's discussion of the "role of education and the systemic changes determined by the evolution of technology" helps students see why communicative clarity and source awareness are now professional obligations, not ornamental style (Stoian 2019, 126). We bring these reflections into the classroom so that students see their training not as isolated drills but as a response to the wider ecology of legal communication.

Many students treat reading as a vocabulary delivery system rather than as a training ground for inference and judgment. Here Lăpădat and Lăpădat's formulation is a compass: "Reading has long been treated as a multiplier skill in language education" (Lăpădat and Lăpădat 2025, 260). If a single text can deliver hundreds of lexical items and many grammar patterns, then cultivating inferential reading is efficient and necessary. In practice, the course uses short opinions, regulation excerpts and professional guidance documents as reading laboratories. Learners track hedges, boosters, reporting verbs and the placement of authority. They underline concessive pivots and test how those pivots alter the warrant for a conclusion. They rehearse the act of reading like a lawyer without aping an alien tone.

Adaptation also faces the grammatical layer head on. Romanian learners of English sometimes struggle with article usage, prepositional governance, and the syntax of complex noun phrases typical of legal drafting. Here we profit from research on Romanian learners' grammatical hurdles. Burtea Cioroianu's work on "Grammatical Structures Difficult for Foreign Students to Integrate" does not target Legal English directly, yet it maps structural pain points that we see mirrored when law students write

in English. We therefore build explicit microsessions on determiners in definitions, noun preposition patterns in jurisdictional phrases, and participial modifiers in conditions and warranties. The attention to structure is not separate from harmonisation; it is the micro level at which harmonisation either holds or fails (Burtea Cioroianu 2024, 52–53).

A natural question is how to handle the variety within English legal registers themselves. Students notice that a US Supreme Court opinion has a different tone from a UK Supreme Court judgment and both differ from EU Commission guidance. We choose to treat this as an adaptive lens rather than a source of confusion. Learners are invited to extract the core moves that recur across jurisdictions, then to adjust tone and citation conventions. The class learns, for example, that English legal writing often favours shorter sentences in professional practice than in older judicial prose, and that EU drafting promotes sentence transparency as a means of multilingual concordance. This creates a pragmatic harmony in students' minds: the common structure of analysis is stable, while tone and detail adjust to venue.

Technology is present but humbler than the rhetoric that sometimes surrounds it. The mobile tool schedules vocabulary and brings quick examples to hand. Classroom time is reserved for the human interaction that builds confidence: collaborative drafting, peer revision, and oral rehearsal. Here again, translation aware scholarship helps re centre attention on meaning, not gadgetry. Lăpădat's theoretical and practical MALL work supports a classroom culture in which the decisive question is always communicative adequacy rather than technical display (Lăpădat 2023).

Students need to grasp how English is used as a medium for multilingual legal coherence. A short reading unit based on Bajčić addresses this. We frame the unit around a concluding quotation that continues to guide the course: "many scholars speak of a hybridization of legal languages in the EU." The sentence is both a diagnosis and a reassurance. It tells students that variation is normal and that their task is not to become monolingual in an imagined pure Legal English, but to become agile in a hybrid space where English meets Romanian legal thought and EU multilingual discipline (Bajčić 2018, 8).

Adaptation, then, is not improvisation. It is a planned set of small moves that respond to actual learners while preserving the integrity of the harmonised platform.

#### 5. Conclusions

Teaching Legal English at the Faculty of Law, University of Craiova, is a sustained act of harmonisation and adaptation. It is harmonisation because we are building, with each cohort, a shared platform where Romanian civil law reasoning and English legal discourse can coexist fruitfully. It is adaptation because each group of learners arrives with different strengths, aims, and uncertainties that must be negotiated through tasks, feedback, and pacing. The aim is modest but vital: functional competence that respects legal precision and cultural nuance, ready to serve study and practice in a hybrid European environment.

The paper has adopted a narrative that begins with the problem and pursues a sequence of solutions that remain within the reach of an instructor's weekly schedule. The recommended platform is small but sturdy: a mapped conceptual core, a functional lexicon, a canon of three genres, and a set of pragmatic moves. The recommended adaptations are routine rather than spectacular: continuous needs analysis, contrastive micro translation, register drilling, genre rehearsal, mobile assisted spaced practice, and

reflective reading that situates the learner inside a Romanian and European conversation about legal language.

The quotations seeded throughout the discussion were chosen to be brief and pointed, not as ornaments but as hinges. They secure the argument at key joints. From ESP we borrowed the plain assertion that courses aligned to field tasks improve performance. From translation theory and EU legal linguistics we borrowed the anchoring idea of hybridization and the necessity of cross lingual equivalence as a craft rather than a miracle. From Craiova scholarship we borrowed reminders about lexical distinctiveness and the need to cultivate terminology competence, as well as an awareness that the technological shaping of education is not a distant generality but a daily fact in our classrooms. Together these sources give our local practice a wider legitimacy and a clearer sense of purpose.

The stakes are more than academic. Romanian law graduates increasingly operate in arenas where English serves as a connecting medium. Contracts, case commentaries, and regulatory submissions travel through English even when addressed to non-Anglophone institutions. The precise management of meaning in that medium is a professional responsibility. Teaching must therefore make students comfortable with the practical uses of Legal English, alert to its cultural and institutional cues, and confident in their ability to adapt their civil law knowledge into English frames without deforming doctrine. When they can do that, the classroom has done more than improve vocabulary; it has trained a bilingual legal intelligence attuned to the pragmatic realities of European legal communication.

The greatest pedagogical challenge is to uphold clarity without flattening complexity. Every teacher of Legal English knows the temptation to oversimplify. Yet the very complexity of our teaching environment is our opportunity. It invites students to see that law is not a set of isolated systems but a conversation among traditions, and that language is the medium by which those traditions meet. When students learn to move across registers, to respect the weight of a term while choosing a plain phrasing, and to hear the difference between a civil law article and a common law holding without resorting to stereotypes, they become translators of legal culture in a non metaphorical sense. They carry understanding across.

This synthesis is achievable. It does not require vast new resources, only consistent attention to harmonisation and adaptation as complementary principles. It asks us to design a shared platform that is lean and useful, then to move furniture as learners require. It asks us to make room for both Romanian doctrine and European multilingual practice. It asks us to treat mobile technology as a tool for memory rather than a substitute for thinking. It asks us to keep sentences clean and arguments orderly, to choose our examples with care, and to let students rehearse the moves until they can perform them under pressure.

If there is a single conviction that emerges from the Craiova experience, it is that Legal English is learnable in this harmonised, adapted way. Students who begin by seeing legal English as opaque can end by recognising it as a disciplined yet flexible medium. They will still respect its technical density, but they will no longer fear its unfamiliar surface. They will have learned to harmonise and to adapt, and in doing so they will have acquired a transferable craft. The classroom's modest rituals of vocabulary practice, genre rehearsal, and translation reflection become habits of mind that accompany them into internships, moot courts, and, later, into practice.

To close, I return to a set of compact formulations that have guided our work and that may serve as a brief credo. First, legal English is a specialized variety, best taught as a practical second language inside English, with tasks anchored in law. Second, harmonisation is the architecture of shared understanding in a multilingual legal order. Third, adaptation is the furniture of daily teaching, arranged around learners' needs and legal futures. Fourth, clarity is not the enemy of rigor but its condition. Fifth, technology helps when it serves memory and exposure, not when it distracts from thinking. These convictions are not new, but their deliberate combination classroom has proven steady and productive. They are, I submit, a usable structure for linguistic harmonisation and adaptation in teaching Legal English.

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