

Jumanca, Romanița, *Characteristics of the English and Romanian Legal Discourse. A Comparative Approach*. Szeged: JATE Press, ISBN: 9789633153734, pp.401

Book review

Alexandru ORAVIȚAN*

Legal discourse has long been perceived as impacting the many, but discernible for the few. To analyse legal discourse, one is effectively embarking on an odyssey of what lies both on and beyond the page; the wordiness of legalese evokes not only competence in a discourse ridden with specificities, but more so a cultural component stemming to traditions as old as the practice of law itself.

Romanița Jumanca's book, *Characteristics of English and Romanian Legal Discourse. A Comparative Approach*, based on her doctoral thesis, posits a wider intentionality than the one contained in its title – a bridging of the interlinguistic gap and the coming-together of shared tropes, conceptual frameworks, and formulaic idiosyncrasies of English and Romanian legalese. The value of this research effort lies, in my view, in the uncovering of a shared tradition of English and Romanian legal discourse, which, despite numerous and significant differences, stems back to the very roots of Western legal culture. From this point of view, this research venture is propelled not solely by keen linguistic awareness, but also by a refined cultural competence at the textual and extratextual level. In spite of its narrowing through the choice of languages contrasted, Jumanca's effort comes as a reply to some pivotal questions: how can one define the discursivity of legalese? How can one frame the language of the law as discourse? What are the implications of the discursive

*Postdoctoral Researcher, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Letters, History and Theology, West University of Timișoara, Romania. E-mail: alex.oravitan@yahoo.com

specificities both for practitioners of the law and for the laymen directly affected by the law?

Romanița Jumanca thus embarks on a twofold approach, equally contextual and linguistic, both macro and micro-textual. This necessarily demands both quantitative and qualitative research mechanisms, which the author manages to place in a carefully construed sequence. Clarity and logic are paramount for the author, in the vein of the legal discourses that she is analyzing. The blend between sample texts and authentic documents belonging to Civil, Commercial and Criminal Law (bylaws, contracts/agreements, wills, and indictments) is seamless, as the analysis manifests coherence and cohesion both at the analytical and methodological level.

From the onset, the difficulty of building two sets of relevant texts is raised by the author, faced with the challenge of overcoming variation in terms of length, amount of information, and even structure. Linguistic, sociopolitical and cultural differences present added layers to be overcome and addressed in the rumination through English and Romanian legal texts. Nevertheless, Jumanca manages to overcome these difficulties through a conjunction of analytical and methodological actions. First comes the pertinent selection of the same types of texts for both languages: one bylaw, two agreements, three indictments and three wills. Her corpus thus offers firm ground as far as the validity of the research venture is concerned; moreover, it makes her endeavor generalizable to the types of texts under consideration. Secondly, and most significantly, the employment of both contextual and linguistic mechanisms of analysis manages to offer a panoramic view of both English and Romanian legal discourse and, consequently, the intersection of the two becomes comprehensible even for a reader uninitiated in legalese.

Through a thorough literature review and a methodical structuring of the corpus into genres and subgenres, the firm footing that Romanița Jumanca gains in the chosen subject matter allows her to deconstruct the similarities and dissimilarities of English and Romanian legal discourse in a manner that denotes competence in synthesis, comparison and sociocultural mapping. For the specialized reader, the soft areas of the texts under consideration, namely the means of construing meaning within the confines of an apparently rigid form and necessary jargon, present equally new challenges and opportunities for development. For the layman, the academic pleasure of Jumanca's analysis comes from minute details, which not only enrich general knowledge with regard to legal discourse but also appeal to a cultural background familiar to most language users.

As far as the latter is concerned, one may take note of the analysis of Latinisms in legal discourse, with their assorted baggage of power, prestige, and axiological backbone. By filling a necessary gap in knowledge concerning the presence of Latin elements in English discourse in particular, the author offers a fascinating incursion into the very formation of English legal discourse and establishes the coordinates through which English and Romanian legalese may be mapped on the common ground

of Western law. Furthermore, Jumanca's analysis of conceptual metaphors in English and Romanian legal discourse casts a necessary light on the cultural mentalities at play when it comes to the wielders of legal discourse. Legal discourse is thus presented as a dynamic field, prone to ceaseless shifts, echoing the cultural developments at the societal level.

Lastly, there are key moments throughout the analysis in which the author formulates overarching statements concerning the most criticized aspects of legal discourse. While "legal documents are criticized because they are frequently inaccessible and incomprehensible to people that are not specialized in this type of language" (Jumanca 2018: 32) and "communication fails to take place when complex, ambiguous, arbitrary or lengthy sentences are employed in legal discourse" (Jumanca 2018: 34), Romanița Jumanca methodically works against such claims in order to permanently reveal that, as any type of discourse, legal language is inherently discernible once the reader grows accustomed to its specificities and intentionality. Thus, to the former claims regarding the trappings of legal discourse Jumanca (2018: 125) sturdily replies: "Legal documents are very carefully written, they are simple from the point of view of grammar, and no difficult constructions are used. Yet they are lexically dense. The documents are drafted involving features that are easily recognized by both a professional and a layman."

A companion through the lexical density of legal discourse and a proof of the academic maturity of the author, *Characteristics of English and Romanian Legal Discourse. A Comparative Approach* is a necessary tool for linguists, translators and practitioners, directly contributing to a better comprehension of English and Romanian legalese.

References

Jumanca, R., *Characteristics of English and Romanian Legal Discourse. A Comparative Approach*. JATE Press: Szeged, 2018.