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Legal Concepts and Multilingual Contexts in Digital Information

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ABSTRACT

Analysis of legal documents cannot be reduced to their linguistic expression. When dealing with legal texts a distinction should be made between the linguistic form (normative statement) and the content (norm). Norms are conceived as the interpreted meaning of linguistic contexts (partitions in a legal text, fragments of judicial decisions, etc). In the interpretative process, legal practitioners make reference to an external system of concepts that can be assumed, even if not universal, at least shared by a large social and cultural community. As a consequence, legal interpretation and legal conceptualization are strongly influenced by cultural, social and political factors and changes in meaning of legal concepts occur within a synchronic localization in different cultures and within a diachronic evolution process of the environment in which they are created. This dynamic nature of legal knowledge poses serious problems in communicating legal information, and even more in the realm of digital communication, where, in order to manage knowledge across national borders, there is a strong demand of shared vocabularies embedding a shared understanding of legal concept. This paper aims at showing how lexical/terminological resources and conceptual structures, such as ontologies, can be constructed by means of the innovative tools provided by ICT, like the Semantic Web languages, the computational linguistic and the ontology engineering techniques. Such semantic resources may have a strategic role in representing meaning evolution and in investigating social and cultural influences in linguistic uses and, as a further goal, solutions offered by ICT for bridging the gap between form and content can also provide innovative visions of theoretical issues.

KEYWORDS

Legal Translation; Legal Concepts; Cross-Lingua Retrieval; Multilingual Semantic Web

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