EVALUATION & ASSESSMENT BY *PROJECT WORK* WITH ENGLISH FOR LEGAL PURPOSES

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ABSTRACT. *Evaluation & assessment by project work with English for Legal Purposes*. Breaking with conventions, I have included in the category of *projects* such works as: *Long Essay/Mini-research paper*, *Poster,* proper *Project* on legal subjects, all accompanied by *Oral Presentations* using or not *PowerPoint*. This paper points out that evaluation/assessment by project proves to be complex, relevant, agreeable, creative and competitive. While preparing their projects, the students had the opportunity to read a large amount of authentic legal texts, thus acquiring legal vocabulary in English. They practised and developed their oral communication skills by delivering presentations. Project evaluation integrated successfully language skills and specialized legal knowledge. Timing and methods of evaluation proved to be significant for both students and the professor.

Keywords: evaluation-assessment, project work, oral presentation, legal English language, creativity, teaching/learning efficiency.

REZUMAT. *Evaluarea prin Proiect în cazul Englezei pentru scopuri juridice*. Depășind orice convenționalitate, am inclus în categoria *proiecte* lucrări precum: *eseul, mini-lucrarea de cercetare, posterul, proiectul propriu-zis* având la bază problematică juridică, toate însoțite de prezentare orală, cu sau fără PowerPoint. Această lucrare scoate în evidență faptul că evaluarea prin *proiect* se dovedește a fi complexă, relevantă, agreabilă, creativă și competitivă. În timpul pregătirii proiectelor, studenții au posibilitatea să citească un volum mare de texte juridice autentice, acumulând în felul acesta vocabular juridic în limba engleză. Ei și-au exersat și dezvoltat abilitățile de comunicare prin prezentările făcute. Evaluarea prin proiect a făcut posibilă integrarea cu succes a abilităților lingvistice și a cunoștințelor juridice specifice. Momentul și felul cum s-a făcut evaluare s-au dovedit semnificative atât pentru profesor cât și pentru student.

Cuvinte cheie: evaluare-verificare, proiect, prezentare orală, limbaj de specialitate juridic, creativitate, eficiență didactică.

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Introduction

I would like to present in this study the partial results of an experiment I have been carrying out with the 1st year students at the Faculty of Law, "Babes-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca. Our students are expected to study Legal English for 4 semesters during the first two years of their four-year BA programme at the Faculty of Law. Their level of English is intermediate, upper-intermediate and advanced. Obviously we cannot accept beginners at the English for Legal Purposes classes.

Legal English courses focus on building legal vocabulary, approaching authentic legal texts, enhancing students' ability to use legal language, learning and using language structures typical for Legal English, building receptive and productive skills, introducing students to basic legal information in English, thus helping them to function adequately in an international Legal English context.

I initiated my experiment in the academic year 2010-2011 with the 1st year students, by requesting them to produce a *project,* which was assessed at the end of the 1st semester and a Legal English vocabulary test assessed at the end of the 2nd semester. I chose the assessment by *Project Work* during the 1st semester because law students are extremely enthusiastic at the very beginning of their studies and this enthusiasm tends to fade out when they discover how difficult the study of law proves to be.

So I wanted to use their initial energy, their creativity and willingness to work and produce some interesting *projects*. After my first year experiment, I found out that in spite of the fact that the students produced imaginative projects, they were not sufficiently prepared for doing such projects, especially on legal topics and at the same time they had to develop specific skills for this purpose. Of course, they also needed to acquire more legal vocabulary in English and so I decided to reverse the order and ask them, in the academic year 2011-2012, to make their *project* during the 2nd semester and use the first one to develop some skills and enrich their legal vocabulary – thus taking the risk of having, maybe, less elaborate projects. I was aware of the fact that students work less for their English classes during the 2nd semester and concentrate more on law subjects proper.

During my teaching I was concerned with the following issues:
a) to apply different evaluation methods and techniques suitable to teach English for specific purposes, in my case Legal English;
b) to understand when and how the evaluation and assessment should take place, a process that is very important for both students and professor.

1. Evaluation and assessment – a dynamic concept

Evaluation and assessment represent a complex procedure based on certain methods and criteria that should result in changes to be made in order to improve the whole teaching-learning process. As Dudley-Evans and St. John

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pointed out, this process should be "dynamic and adaptable". "Evaluation is a very constructive and powerful activity and a very stimulating one" (Dudley-Evans, St. John, 2006: 129). In the methodology literature one may discover different methods and techniques used for evaluation-assessment. Not all of them are applicable to foreign languages and only some of them are suitable to evaluate Legal English.

2. Evaluation of the Legal English Practical Course

During this complex process questions arose that had to be answered.
What am I going to evaluate?
➢ the anticipated progress in language – the level of knowledge and the oral and written communication skills:
➢ the discourse and style of the specific language, in this case Legal English;
➢ the two parties involved in the process: *professor* and *student* (feedback and self-evaluation);
➢ the results that will give me solutions to my future work;
➢ the teaching-learning strategies applied to academic studies;
➢ the exigency and responsibility of the parties involved in the academic study process.

Obviously all these items are worth being evaluated, but only some of them could prevail in my experiment.

3. Assessment by *Project Work.* Theoretical considerations

By definition, *Project Work* means research work ended with a "tangible object as outcome" especially with undergraduate students, or a "dissertation" with postgraduate ones (Dudley-Evans and St. John, 2006: 195). Dudley-Evans and St. John specify the stages students have to go through when working on projects. They have to:
⇨ generate a hypothesis
⇨ carry out a literature review
⇨ test the hypothesis
⇨ write a report
⇨ give an oral presentation

(Dudley-Evans and St. John, 2006: 195, 196). I advised my students to choose *library projects*, which the above named authors described in *Developments in English for Specific Purposes*: "Library projects [...] involve stages 2, 4 and 5 [and] do not require setting and testing of a hypothesis" (Dudley – Evans and St. John, 2006:196).

The projects based on library research require "extensive purposeful reading followed by a written report and oral presentation" (Bloor and St. John, 1988, in Dudley-E, St. John, 2006: 195). As the above mentioned authors state, project work involves "a good deal of out-of-class activity. The project

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begins in the classroom, moves into the outside world and then back into the classroom, and provides an opportunity for real world and classroom experience to overlap" (Dudley-E, St. John, 2006: 195). Making a project also entails creativity, capacity of selection, analytical and critical skills and other abilities.

4. Why have I chosen *Project Work* as the method of evaluation-assessment for the law students?

Prerequisites:
☞ foreign languages are taught at the Faculty of Law for 4 semesters: each semester is followed by some type of assessment;
☞ the process of evaluation is described as being formative and summative;
☞ evaluation should be relevant, comprehensive and stimulating for the objectives of the *Legal English Practical Course;*
☞ legal professions require a lot of legal writing and speech delivering/ pleading;
☞ evaluation methods and techniques are not static, but adaptable to ESP as well (*"Learners do not only learn language through law, but also law through language"*, L. Perez-Gonzales, 1999).

Choosing projects as a method of evaluation/assessment has certain important benefits for students, as they are required:
☞ to organize and schedule their activity;
☞ to concentrate on a certain topic;
☞ to do research in the library and on the Internet;
☞ to identify a large quantity of information;
☞ to discover a wide variety of sources;
☞ to select the essential information;
☞ to adapt the information selected to their own projects.

5. Aim and objectives of my experiment. Stages

Starting this experiment I had in mind to determine my law students:
◆ to read English legal texts of general character;
◆ to accumulate specific legal vocabulary in English;
◆ to acquire individual working techniques such as to collect and collate information;
◆ to select and organize legal information;
◆ to develop presentation abilities;
◆ to develop an authentic English legal discourse;
◆ to do certain activities following a logical structure and last but not least…
◆ to lay the foundation of a collection of teaching materials for the Legal English Course.

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The table below presents the stages of my experiment:

English for Legal Purposes 1st year students		
Academic year	1st semester	2nd semester
2010 / 2011	**Project Work** (topic at choice)	**Legal English test** (testing vocabulary and other legal issues)
2011 / 2012	**Legal English test** (testing vocabulary and other legal issues)	**Project Work** (topic at choice)

The favorable context for carrying out this experiment

Law students prefer projects because:
➢ they have the chance to use their imagination to find interesting legal subjects and famous cases;
➢ they have the opportunity to exercise their legal reasoning and develop argumentative skills;
➢ English language is indispensable for documentation and practicing legal professions in an international context;
➢ writing and presenting their final project works will reveal both their level of legal knowledge as well as their English language abilities.

6. Types of projects. Topics

I suggested to my law students to opt for and produce one of the following types of *project works*:
▫ *Long Essay*/Mini-research paper (a derivative of PW and Essay)
▫ *Poster*
▫ *Oral presentation with Power Point.*

I suggested legal topics of general nature so that my students could choose their topics according to their interests, needs and imagination. I wanted my students to choose interesting and original subjects that might give them a lot of joy and pleasure in producing their projects. Most of them were produced individually but we had quite a number of projects made in pairs or even small groups (3-4 students). There was only one condition for the project work: documentation, writing, presentation should be in English exclusively.

In the following lines there are some examples of topics (of general nature) that I have suggested to my students:

⬧ Legal Science (in general)
⬧ Legal Systems,
⬧ Hierarchy of Courts in UK and US
⬧ Legal professions a.s.o.
⬧ Aspects of British Culture and Civilization (related to the legal field).

⬧ Specific aspects of law – famous cases
⬧ University education (in general)
⬧ Legal education (in particular)

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And here is a list of project titles produced by my students:

Legal education	History of law
The Study of Law	The Symbol of Justice
Why Going to Law School	The Roman Legal System
Law School in Europe & USA	The Code of Hammurabi
UBB - Law Faculty	The Progress of Law in Time
The National Institute of Magistracy	
Law & Fame	

Legal systems	Legal profession
Legal Systems of the World	How to Become a Lawyer in the UK
UK Legal System	How to Become a Lawyer in USA
Civil vs Common Law	How to Become a Judges in the UK
Separation of Power	Barristers in Different Countries
The British Parliament	Law Firms
Jury Trials	Law Carriers

Examples of oral presentations using Power Point produced by students:

Title of presentation :	Student's name:

Major Legal Systems of the World:
    Common Law – England and Wales
    Civil Law – Romania
    Religions Law – India
	Deak Hella, 1st year, group 106, Faculty of Law, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

How to Become a Smart Lawyer	Marincas Oana Diana, 1st year, group 111
The European Law Students' Association	Ciucan Alexandra, 1st year, group 105

7. Assessment criteria:

In the process of assessing the projects, I took into consideration the following criteria:
➲ suitable subject related to the content of the English for Legal Purposes course;
➲ originality and creativity invested in the paper/poster/ PowerPoint;
➲ student's analysis and synthesis capacity (personal and critical opinions being highly appreciated);
➲ correct use of English legal vocabulary in relation with the context and topic;
➲ quality of presentation (structure, style, slide layout);
➲ compliance with the legal style in writing and presenting the projects.

8. Statistics. Quantification of projects

1st year students, 1st semester, academic year 2010/2011:
➢ total number of students: 474
➢ total no. of projects presented: 455

Type of projects	No. of projects
Model + 2 posters	1
Mini-research papers	16
Posters	59
Oral presentation + Power Point	379

Remarks:

‣ Very few students have chosen the traditional mini-research paper / long essay.

‣ Students have produced more original posters than papers. The posters incorporated a lot of handwork, proved to be highly imaginative, some of them presented interesting drawings and pictures and they really looked like teaching materials.

‣ Oral presentation using PowerPoint (PP) was chosen by the majority of students: 83, 3%.

‣ Other projects were combinations such as:

❶ paper +PP

❷ paper + DVD

❸ paper + poster

❹ PP + DVD

❺ poster + DVD e.g. the Socratic Method

❻ model + 2 posters e.g. the model of Nigara Falls + 2 posters about Canada (one refering to political and legislative data about Canada and one being on the main touristic attractions of Canada).

9. Why have so many students chosen oral presentation using PowerPoint?

Below there is a list of such reasons:

☞ modernity and attractiveness of this type of project work;

☞ passion for work on computer;

☞ pleasure to navigate on the Internet, search and choose a subject;

☞ preference to communicate essential things freely and quickly;

☞ the strong impact of oral and visual communication;

☞ PP better reveals their level of mastering legal English;

☞ PP proves the amount of individual / pair / group work invested by the students who produced them.

10. Preliminary conclusions to my experiment:

▲ all types of projects suggested have been chosen by the law students;

▲ their presentations indicated the following aspects:

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➤ a huge amount of information from different legal sources has been used;

➤ students managed to acquire a large amount of legal vocabulary;

➤ it was a joyful activity that brought along a fierce competition between the students to produce interesting and competitive projects;

➤ students learned and applied the traditional structure of papers or the layout of slides;

➤ they practised the oral presentation skills suitable to the type of project chosen;

➤ students learned how to use their ideas to produce coherent work (paper, slides, etc.);

➤ they exercised explanation and especially argumentation with their presentations;

➤ the assessment of the projects proved to be complex, relevant and at the same time agreeable for the students forming 'the audience';

➤ assessment of projects in the classroom was beneficial for all students because they had the oportunity to learn about a wide variety of legal subjects, acquire legal terminology and watch different presentation styles;

➤ students have a good opportunity to exercise integrated skills.

Evaluation & assessment by projects proved to be both formative and summative.

The final stage consisting in making the inventory of the projects, classifying them according to types and subjects in order to be used later as teaching materials in the legal English classes, provided great satisfaction for students and the professor.

11. Difficulties and challenges encountered:

◆ lack of legal vocabulary not only in English but in Romanian as well, since I have been working with 1st year students;

◆ difficulties in approaching and studying legal subjects in English;

◆ academic study skills insufficiently developed;

◆ lack of vision about the academic learning style in general;

◆ poor capacity of synthesizing materials and giving suitable and concise titles to papers, chapters, slides, posters;

◆ difficulties in structuring the content of the slides (slides overcrowded with information);

◆ shortcomings related to slide design (style of letters, too many images or no images at all);

◆ superficiality and lack of interest when approaching the theme of the project;

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◆ excessive use of copy-paste from the Internet without any acknowledgement or selection.

12. Experiment 2011-2012 (2nd stage)

This experiment has been going on this academic year as well. I intend to assess my students' Legal English projects in the 2nd term for the following reasons:

☛ students should have enough time to enrich their English legal vocabulary during the 1st and 2nd terms;

☛ they have the possibility to acquire basic knowledge of law in English if they study two terms and have their project assessment at the end of the year;

☛ students have more chances to discuss with their professor about the Project Work as a method of evaluation / assessment.

13. Current measures taken to prepare students for evaluation/assessment by Project Work:

☛ enrich the theoretical background by teaching them how to produce slides and deliver oral presentations;

☛ practice these skills;

☛ present examples of projects from the previous year;

☛ initiate discussions about possible improvement, errors related to theme, content, spelling mistakes, slide design;

☛ learn from previous projects, analyzing them during classes (1-2 projects will be presented towards the end of each class).

14. Final conclusions

Why should professors opt to evaluate law students by projects?

• both students and professors become more familiar with legal texts and specialised vocabulary from different branches of law;

• such activities develop excellent academic study skills to be used by students not only in the Legal English classes but with other Romanian legal subjects as well;

• projects develop the capacity of structuring information;

• projects stimulate imagination and competition;

• projects manage to immerse students in the English Legal language for an extensive period of time;

• students may learn law via English legal classes and English via law (adaptation of a quotation from L. Perez – Gonzales, 1999);

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• projects encourage comprehension, language acquisition, and develop oral and written communication skills;

• evaluation becomes part of the formative process;

• self-evaluation becomes part of the whole teaching-learning process.

As a final conclusion, the experiment which I have been carrying out with the 1st year students at the Faculty of Law, "Babes-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, has indicated that the project work method reveals the unity between linguistic competence and performance in specific instances of Legal English use. While preparing their projects, the students had the opportunity to read a large amount of authentic legal texts, thus acquiring legal vocabulary in English. They practised and developed their oral communication skills by delivering presentations. Project evaluation integrated successfully language skills and specialized legal knowledge, and proved both enjoyable and beneficial to all involved.

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