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The Transformative Power of Language in Shifting Concepts in Legal Education

The legal landscape is changing fast according to supranational sources of legal rules, multiple jurisdictions, and transnational litigation. Communication in global, multilingual, or multicultural settings requires future lawyers to upgrade their knowledge of legal language and the terminology of law. Nowadays the subject of foreign language teaching faces similar changes, particularly by developing new approaches to languages for special purposes (LSP), e.g., law. A rising number of legal (terminology) database projects in Europe, provided by translation studies, attempt to cater to the needs of more effective transnational communication.

Despite this shared situation, an interdisciplinary cooperation between these subjects is rarely seen. The potential of a mutual enriching collaboration between law and humanities has yet to be taken up on both sides. One reason is that foreign language teaching still has to struggle with being accepted as a full academic discipline. Additionally, the image of multilingualism often mirrors negative associations with multiculturalism and migration issues and is irrationally perceived as danger for national identity and a loss of social and legally determined values.

Teaching a foreign legal language makes it possible to pay attention to this shortcoming. Firstly, it supports the capacity to manage the difficulties of the language and terminology of law. Secondly, it helps us understand the various perspectives of other cultures and legal systems. A "cross-cultural" approach shifts the focus in the classroom to the students in order to assist them in becoming aware of the cultural contexts they bring to the study of law and enable them to compare their cultural perspective with the shifting cultural context of the law. By practicing language and cultural awareness in such a discourse, students should be better able to interpret human behavior. Basing this research on constitutional law as a pool for legal and therefore social and moral values, I combined methods from law, translation studies and foreign language didactics. I ask how students can be enabled to deal with different legal concepts while studying a

foreign language, and how their legal practice can benefit from a more flexible culture-based comparative approach where they have to negotiate values, discuss their assumed universal validity of morality, and interrogate their beliefs of right and wrong in judging and professional decision making.

The configuration of LSP teaching is adaptive and includes the interpersonal component, relevant to the practice of law undergoing a “paradigm shift” towards a self-reflective, competency-based, experientially taught approach. Based on empirical findings, my research aims at suggesting normative reforms. I hope to generate a sustainable approach for culture-based acquisition of foreign legal language, revealing the influence language has on the development of law and legal ideas.