LEXICON AND GRAMMAR IN LEGAL-LAY LANGUAGE: A QUANTITATIVE CORPUS STUDY ON ITALIAN

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Abstract

The study presents a corpus-based analysis of lexico-grammatical features of Italian legal lay-language – i.e. language with legal content but aimed at non-specialist audiences. The study is conducted on a self-compiled electronic corpus of legal-lay lan-guage, CorIELLS. First, a collostructional analysis of four grammatical constructions is performed, and results are contrasted with the 'Nuovo Vocabolario di Base' (De Mauro & Chiari, 2016). Legal-lay language is found to have 'blended' characteristics between specialistic and non-specialistic registers. Secondly, the subcategorization preferences obtained with the first analysis are compared to the same structures in the legal and nar-rative subcorpora of the CORIS corpus (Rossini-Favretti, 2000). Findings from statistical modelling on frequency data corroborate the prediction that legal-lay language presents idiosyncratic lexico-grammatical features. The contribution represents the first quanti-tative corpus study of legal-lay language in Italian and proposes that this textual type is characterised by idiosyncratic features, which are probably the result of simplification projects in legal drafting.