

ABSTRACT FOR “BILINGUALISM IN THE WORKPLACE: A CASE STUDY. TEACHING LAWYERS TO WRITE IN PLAIN ENGLISH.”

This is a case study of bilingualism in the workplace. I work at Marval, O'Farrell and Mairal, the largest law firm in Argentina. I teach lawyers whose first language is not English to write in 'Plain English', this transforms their writing skills and they can communicate much more effectively with their clients.

English is the international language of business today. Leading companies must therefore be able to communicate effectively in English. But how? This is a case study of bilingualism in the workplace. I work at Marval, O'Farrell and Mairal, the largest law firm in Argentina, and one of the largest in Latin America. There are approximately 300 lawyers and a third of their clients are foreign or foreign derived, so at least a third of their business is conducted in English. All of the lawyers have a high level of English; however, it is one thing to speak a language and quite another to write it. For lawyers accuracy is paramount, and as most of their communication with clients is written it is vital for the lawyers to be able to write in English effectively.

Many of the lawyers have learnt to write in so-called 'Legal English' and write long winded sentences like this one full of legalisms and unnecessary words. *Pursuant to the terms of such contract hereinafter, in the event of a*

continuation of this breach, my client will hereby effect an immediate termination of said contract.

However, in law firms around the English speaking world today there is an increasing tendency to move away from legalese. This tendency is called Plain English.

What is Plain English? It is a way of writing based on the principle that any educated lay person should be able to read a legal document and understand it. Therefore the legalese sentence above could change to: *If the breach continues, my client will terminate the contract.*

While Plain English is not obligatory for lawyers, as clients prefer it many modern law firms are following this tendency. My case study shows how I implement the principles of Plain English: precision, conciseness, simplicity and clarity, in the following three stages.

1) Plain English Writing Course I: theory

This course shows them how to:

- Make their sentences shorter.
- Keep subject, verb and object close together.
- Use the active voice.
- Avoid hidden verbs.
- Avoid legalisms.

2) An individual class.

I then invite the lawyers who have taken the course to send me some of their written work. I analyze the work and look for any patterns. In an individual class I suggest how they can change their work. At the end of the class I give them a couple of pages of their own work and ask them to

change it using the same techniques. This is particularly helpful as they can continue to change their writing alone.

3) Plain English Writing Course II: practice. This course puts the theory into practice. How to change working legal documents:

- Make a letter more forceful by using techniques of emphasis and word order.
- Analyze a contract and the justification for 'shall', hereinafter' and other legalisms.
- Write a memo using different techniques, like planning and summarizing.
- Recognize an appropriate register for informal and formal writing.
- Work on translation techniques: false friends, free translation and interpretation of a statute.
- The writing process. Write a piece of prose in class and present all stages of the work: brainstorm, plan and a composition.

This case study of bilingualism in the workplace shows how Plain English can transform lawyers' writing skills and enable them to communicate more effectively in the business world today.