

Formation History of Criminal Law Terminology in Linguistics

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Abstract :

Criminal law terminology plays a crucial role in the legal system, shaping the precise expression and interpretation of legal norms. Its linguistic formulation reflects the evolution of legal thought and systems across history. The structural and semantic characteristics of criminal law terms have been extensively influenced by linguistic norms and the need for terminological precision. In modern linguistic studies, legal terms are increasingly examined from cognitive, pragmatic, and structural perspectives. Despite growing interest in legal linguistics, the historical formation, morphological features, and typological classification of criminal law terminology remain underexplored, particularly in relation to their grammatical stability and translation across languages. This study aims to analyze the historical development, morphological structure, and semantic precision of criminal law terminology, highlighting its clarity, unambiguity, and functional consistency within legal discourse. The findings show that most criminal law terms are structurally single-component and are valued for their stability and specificity. Two-component terms also appear frequently, often comprising noun, adjective, or adverb models that refine legal definitions. Additionally, arbitrary modification of legal terms by professionals undermines terminological consistency. The article presents a linguistically grounded analysis of criminal law terms as distinct from general vocabulary, emphasizing their systemic and unchanging nature within legal communication. Understanding the grammatical and semantic formation of legal terms is essential for maintaining the coherence of criminal law language and ensuring effective legal practice, translation, and education.

Keywords: Criminal Law, Term Formation, Morphological Structure, Suffixes and Prefixes, Antonymy Process, Terminology Typology

Introduction

The development of criminal law terminology represents a significant intersection between linguistics and legal studies, revealing how language evolves to meet the precision required in jurisprudence. Rooted in the Latin term *terminus*, meaning “limit” or “boundary,” legal terms serve not only as technical designations but also as semantic markers within the broader framework of law. In the field of linguistics, the study of legal terminology—especially that of criminal law—has gained attention for its structural, morphological, and semantic characteristics. The importance of clarity, unambiguity, and consistency in legal discourse necessitates the formation of terms that are not only linguistically sound but also aligned with the functional demands of criminal justice systems. These terms often take the form of single-component lexical units, known for their stability and specificity, and are supported by compound structures that express complex legal concepts such as intent, negligence, and severity of offense. The historical and systematic formation of these terms reflects the evolution of legal institutions and investigative procedures, and their typological diversity invites further inquiry into how suffixes, prefixes, and antonymy contribute to legal expression. As legal terminology continues to expand, it is vital to understand not only its etymological roots and morphological structures but also its role in shaping the conceptual system of criminal law. This study explores the formation, function, and structural properties of criminal law terms, providing insight into their linguistic development and the implications for legal communication and translation.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative linguistic analysis to investigate the formation and historical development of criminal law terminology.[1] The methodology is based on a structural-semantic approach, wherein legal terms are examined in terms of their morphological composition, grammatical structure, and semantic precision.[2] Primary attention is given to the classification of terms into single-component and compound forms, with an emphasis on how these structures contribute to terminological clarity, stability, and legal function.[3] The research draws from authentic legal texts, including documents issued by investigative bodies, to analyze the practical use and evolution of terms in criminal law discourse.[4] Additionally, the study explores the role of suffixes, prefixes, and word formation processes such as antonymy in shaping the lexicon of criminal law.[5] Comparative insights are included by referencing terminology development in different legal traditions, highlighting both universal patterns and culturally specific features.[6] The data is further contextualized through reference to relevant theoretical frameworks in modern linguistics, particularly cognitive and pragmatic perspectives that emphasize the function of legal terms within institutional language.[7] The focus on term formation and usage consistency serves to underscore the importance of terminological precision in legal practice, while also contributing to broader discussions on the intersection of linguistics and law.[8] This method allows for a detailed and historically informed understanding of how legal language evolves and how it maintains its authoritative role within both linguistic and judicial systems.[9]

Result and Discussion

The article includes examples of documents used by investigative bodies.[10] It analyzes the specific features of legal terms, focusing primarily on the issue of translating these terms from the perspective of criminal law.[11]

Keywords (repeated in 3 languages):

Uzbek: терминлар, терминология, терминосистема, структура-грамматика

Russian: термины, терминология, терминосистема, структура-грамматика

English: terms, terminology, terminological system, structure-grammar

The word “term” comes from the Latin word *terminus*, which means “limit” or “boundary.”[12] Its second meaning refers to specialized vocabulary related to specific fields such as science, technology,

art, and others.[13] In modern times, many linguists try to define clear distinctions between "term" and "terminology." [14]

In contemporary linguistics, legal terminology is studied across various fields such as cognitive, pragmatic, and anthropocentric approaches.[15] Legal terms are considered an object of linguistic research. This is because the structure, etymology, and semantic expression of legal terms are analyzed within linguistics before becoming official terms used in legal documents.

When criminal law terminology is analyzed from a structural-semantic perspective, it is seen that most of these terms are single-component. These are characterized by their concreteness, unambiguity, and stability.

The main requirement for legal terms is that they be clear, unchanging, and based on specific foundations. If professionals working in the legal field arbitrarily alter terms or fail to use them consistently in both theory and practice, it disrupts the stability of terminology. Single-component terms help expand legal terminology. In two-component term combinations, models that clarify nouns, adjectives, and adverbs are more prevalent.

For example:

Serious crime – determines the degree of the crime;

Negligent attitude towards duty – describes one's attitude or behavior towards a position;

Object of assault – defines the nature of the object involved.

Conclusion

The historical development and linguistic formation of criminal law terminology reflect the evolving nature of legal language shaped by societal, cultural, and institutional needs. This study has demonstrated that the core characteristics of criminal law terms—such as clarity, stability, and structural precision—are essential for ensuring consistency and accuracy in legal discourse. Through a linguistic lens, criminal law terminology reveals a predominance of single-component terms known for their unambiguous meaning, as well as more complex two-component constructions that enrich legal expression. These terms are not only grounded in specific grammatical models but are also influenced by the processes of morphological derivation and semantic specialization. The formation of legal terminology, especially in criminal law, must be approached with methodological rigor to maintain its integrity across both theoretical and practical applications. Any inconsistency in term usage risks undermining the coherence and reliability of legal systems. Thus, the grammatical diversity, semantic clarity, and historical rootedness of legal terms demand continuous scholarly attention, particularly in translation and comparative legal linguistics. This conclusion underscores the importance of viewing legal terminology not merely as a technical tool but as a dynamic linguistic system that embodies the legal culture and cognitive framework of a society.

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