



16th International AELFE Conference  
LSP in Multi-disciplinary Contexts of Teaching and  
Research

# The Flexible Language Acquisition platform (FLAX): measuring its efficacy in the legal English classroom

*María José Marín Pérez and María Ángeles Orts Llopis*

*Universidad de Murcia*



UNIVERSIDAD DE  
MURCIA



## **1. Introduction and literature review**

1.1. The lexicological level

1.2. The pragmatic level

## **2. The FLAX: a corpus-based language learning platform**

## **3. Methodology**

## **4. Results and discussion**

4.1. Specialised terms and the general lexicon

4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers

## **5. Conclusion**

## **References**



## 1. Introduction and literature review

- This research presents the **analysis** of two learner **corpora** within the field of **legal English**.
- Both **corpora** comprised the essays written by **105 informants** divided into an experimental and a control group (section 3).
- **Only** the **experimental** group could employ the FLAX, a **corpus-based** language learning **platform**, as an information/learning source.
- **Motivation:** there is a **gap** in the area where **legal English DDL** (*data-driven learning*) experiments have very **rarely** been implemented (Boulton, 2012).



## 1. Introduction and literature review

- DDL instruction has received **support** by a plethora of authors (Johns, 1997; Sinclair, 2003; Hunston, 2007; Boulton, 2012), although there exist some **problem areas**.

- **Ädel** (2010) detects seven **challenges** which corpus-based language instruction has to overcome, amongst them: the '**language maze**' or the challenge of **interpretation** and **evaluation**.

The **FLAX platform**, which is corpus-based, manages to, at least, **address** some of these questions.



## 1. Introduction and literature review

### 1.1. The lexical level

The **relevance** of terms in specialised communication:

- They **crystallise** specialised concepts (Kit and Liu, 2008).
- They are used as **vehicles** to transmit specialised **knowledge** (Cabr e, 1993).
- **Understanding** such concepts facilitates **comprehension** in specialised discourse (Mar n, 2014).
- From a **quantitative** perspective, they can be automatically **mined** implementing various algorithms (Drouin, 2003; Scott, 2008; Sinclair & Rockwell, 2012).



# 1. Introduction and literature review

## 1.2. The pragmatic level: MD markers

Metadiscourse markers (Hyland and Tse, 2005) are markers of interpersonality:

☞ **Textual:** they **organise** information **in an orderly manner** within the text.

- Transition/logical markers (*and, furthermore*); frame markers (*firstly, as regards*); code glosses (*hence, moreover*); endophoric markers (*see above*); evidentials (*according to*).

☞ **Interactional:** they show the **speaker's/writer's attitude** to the propositional content of the text.

- Hedges (*may, might, probably*); boosters (*certainly, clearly*); attitude markers (*I think, unfortunately*); engagement markers (*consider that*); self references (*I, our, mine*).



## 2. The FLAX

The FLAX is an **open-access** online **language learning** platform which offers, amongst other, corpus-based materials to learn legal English (designed by the FLAX team at the University of Waikato, NZ).

- It is **corpus-based** insofar as it contains **full transcriptions** of complete lectures and allows for their automatic processing.

Let us **take a look**: <http://flax.nzdl.org/greenstone3/flax>





## 2. The FLAX

Apart from the texts and the videos, the FLAX offers language activities to exploit the resources in each lecture. For instance:

☞ **Term lists** (which can be stored in our “cherry basket”)

**English Common Law MOOC (University of London with Coursera)**

About Collection Search Lectures Quizzes Extras Activities Collocations **Wordlist** LexicalBundles My Cherry Basket

academic Words sort by frequency

legal	153	civil	115	convention	95	principle	84	issue	82
fundamental	75	interpretation	73	obviously	71	area	57	previous	55
link	52	theme	52	process	51	community	51	precedent	51
legislation	49	interpret	48	institution	46	constitutional	41	hierarchy	39
role	38	involve	38	create	35	context	34	economic	33
individual	33	source	32	stress	32	lecture	32	domestic	32
authority	29	structure	29	tradition	29	constitution	29	require	28
define	27	period	27	contemporary	27	major	26	distinction	26
couple	25	method	25	concept	25	impact	24	section	24
paragraph	24	debate	23	integrity	23	inconsistent	23	consistent	22
similar	21	function	21	justify	20	focus	19	approach	19
primarily	19	evidence	18	circumstance	18	prior	17	presumption	16
quote	15	policy	15	chapter	15	instance	15	relevant	15
somewhat	15	legislative	15	grant	14	labour	14	ultimately	14
conventional	14	access	13	achieve	13	accurate	13	coherent	13
final	12	ensure	12	resolve	12	creation	12	ambiguity	12
quotation	12	so-called	12	definition	12	precedence	12	commentator	12
image	11	element	11	tension	11	prohibit	11	specific	11
commission	11	enable	10	complex	10	feature	10	category	10
restriction	10	affect	9	enforce	9	precise	9	abstract	9



## 2. The FLAX

### 👉 Collocations

#### English Common Law MOOC (University of London with Coursera)

About Collection

Search

Lectures

Quizzes

Extras

Activities

Collocations

Wordlist

LexicalBundles

🍒 My Cherry Basket

#### 📖 Browse Collocations in Collection

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w y Top 100

#### 📖 9 collocation(s) associated with the word *appellate*

Adjective (6) | Verb (2) | Noun + of (1)

- [appellate jurisdiction](#) (8)
- [appellate courts](#) (5)
- [appellate capacity](#) (2)
- [appellate level](#) (2)
- [appellate structure](#) (1)
- [appellate committee](#) (1)





## 2. The FLAX

### 👉 Lexical bundles

#### *English Common Law MOOC (University of London with Coursera)*

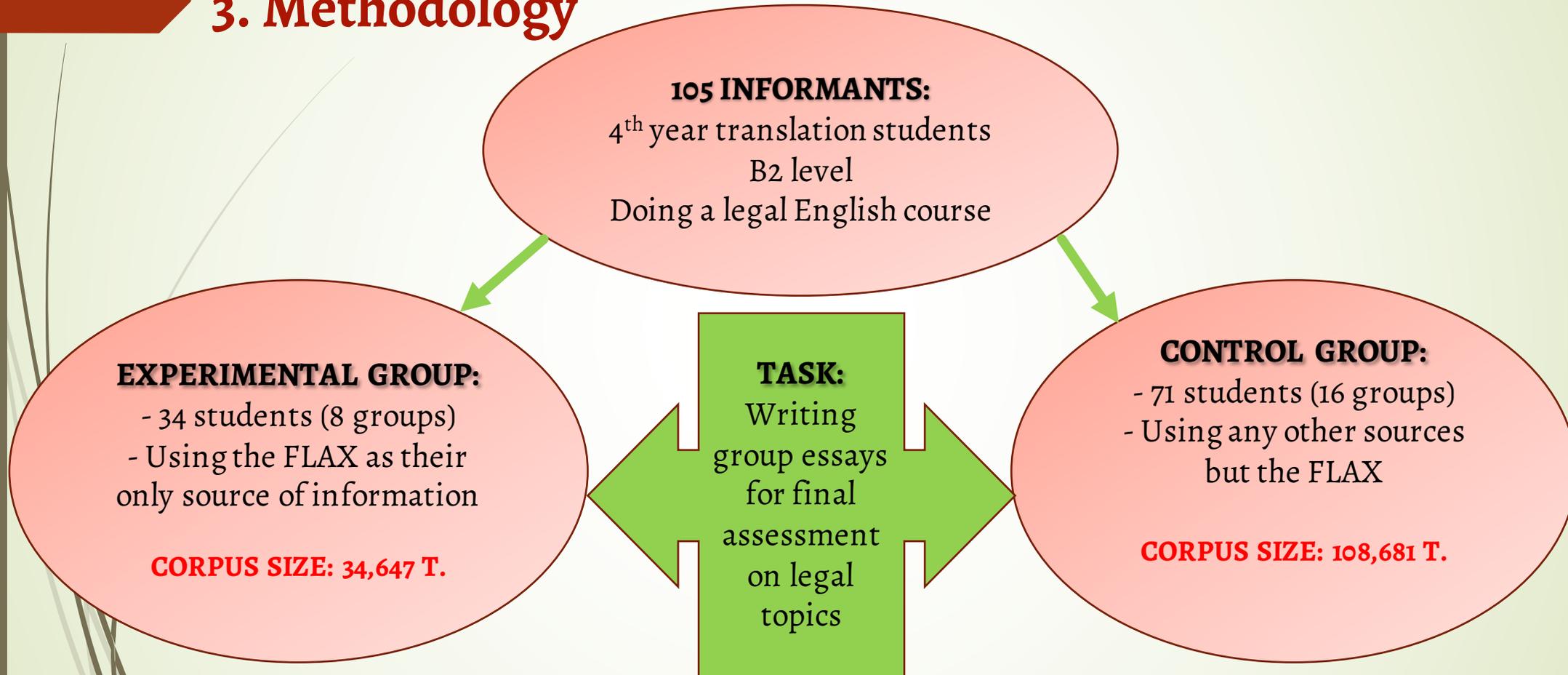
[About Collection](#) [Search](#) [Lectures](#) [Quizzes](#) [Extras](#) [Activities](#) [Collocations](#) [Wordlist](#) [LexicalBundles](#) 🍒 [My Cherry Basket](#)

[At the beginning](#) [In the middle](#)

- [In other words, the](#) (22)
- [In other words, what](#) (8)
- [In other words, it](#) (7)
- [This takes us to](#) (6)
- [In other words, we're](#) (5)
- [In other words, we](#) (5)
- [We've been thinking about](#) (4)
- [I suppose the other](#) (4)
- [In other words, it's](#) (4)
- [I just want to](#) (4)
- [Now this is a](#) (4)
- [He went on to](#) (3)
- [I want to just](#) (3)
- [Which of the following](#) (3)
- [This article shall not](#) (3)



### 3. Methodology





## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.1. Specialised terms and the general lexicon

#### 1- Term Usage:

FLAX corpus: 10.32% of  
the type list were terms.  
Non-FLAX c: 3.82%  
terms

#### 2- Terms and text range:

FLAX corpus: 48.49% of  
the texts  
Non-FLAX corpus:  
29.54% of the texts

#### 3- Lexical diversity:

Non-FLAX corpus:  
37.63 STTR  
FLAX corpus:  
35.3 STTR

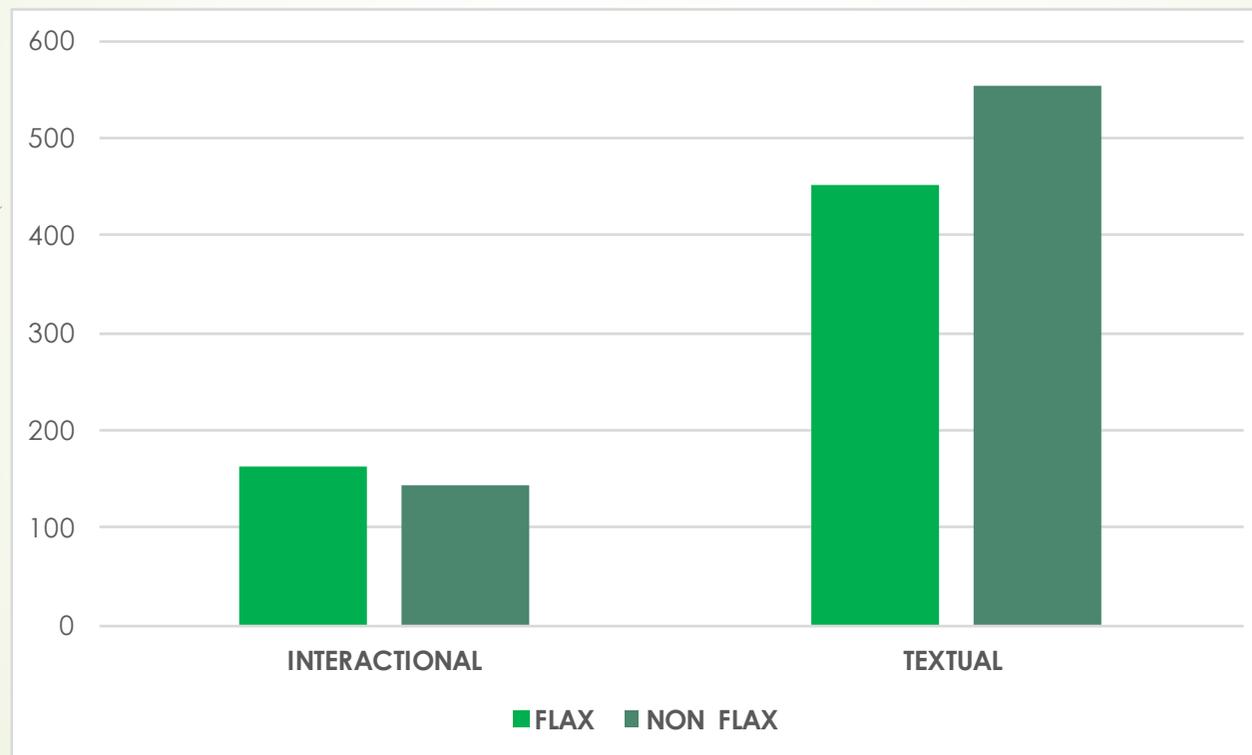
#### 4- Lexical fundamentality:

FLAX corpus: 79.39%  
general vocabulary  
Non-FLAX corpus:  
66.73%



## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers





## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers (interactional set)

INTERACTIONAL MARKERS		
TYPES	NON-FLAX (norm. freq.)	FLAX (norm. freq.)
<b>HEDGES</b>		
May	16.47	16.16
Might	1.75	3.17
Must	17.21	11.55
Can	35.06	43.29
Could	3.50	16.45
Would	5.89	27.42
Probably	0.28	0.87
Perhaps	0.09	0.87
Maybe	0.09	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>80.34</b>	<b>119.78</b>
<b>BOOSTERS</b>		
clearly	1.10	1.15
certainly	0	1.15
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>1.10</b>	<b>2.3</b>

ATTITUDE MARKERS		
need to	3.12	3.46
we think	0	0.57
I think	0	0.28
have to	4.50	10.39
Unfortunately	0	0.86
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>7.62</b>	<b>15.56</b>
<b>ENGAGEMENT MARKERS</b>		
consider that	0	0.86
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.86</b>
<b>REFERENCES TO SELF</b>		
I	9.01	4.61
Me	2.02	0.57
us	4.60	5.48
our	2.76	4.90
mine	0.36	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>18.75</b>	<b>15.56</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>143.24</b>	<b>154.06</b>

## 5. Conclusion

-This research has presented the **analysis** of two learner **corpora** within the field of **legal English**.

-The two corpora have been analysed on a lexical and pragmatic level showing that:

1- The **experimental group** displayed a **better command** in the use of legal **terms** whereas the vocabulary in their essays was more basic and less varied than the control group's.

2- The **use of MD markers** by both the experimental and control groups is **scarce**, finding a **striking** difference between textual and interactional ones. This evidences their lack of confidence as regards their willingness to express **stance** through interactional markers. The **experimental groups excels** the control group in the use of the latter, appearing to be more **willing** to build an **interaction** between the writer and the reader.



## REFERENCES

- Ädel, A. (2010). "Using corpora to teach academic writing". In Campoy Cubillo, M.C., Bellés Fortuño, B. and M.L. Gea-Valor (eds.) *Corpus-based approaches in English language teaching*. London: Continuum.
- Boulton, A. (2012). "Corpus consultation for ESP. A review of empirical research". In Boulton, A., S. Carter-Thomas and E. Rowley-Jolive (eds.). *Corpus-Informed Research and Learning in ESP. Issues and applications*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company: 261-292.
- Cabré, M.T. (1993). *La terminología. Teoría, metodología, aplicaciones*. Barcelona, Ed. Antártida.
- Dafouz, E. (2008). "The pragmatic role of textual and interpersonal metadiscourse markers in the construction and attainment of persuasion: A cross-linguistic study of newspaper discourse". *Journal of Pragmatics*, 40: 95-113.
- Hunston, S. (2007). *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hyland, K. and Tse, P. (2004). "Metadiscourse in academic writing: A reappraisal". *Applied Linguistics*, 25 (2): 156-177.
- Johns, T. (1997). "Contexts: The background, development and trialling of a concordance-based CALL program". In Wichmann, A., S. Figelston, T. McEnery and G. Knowles (eds.). *Teaching and Language Corpora*. London: Longman: 100-115.
- Marín, M.J. (2014). "Evaluation of five single-word term recognition methods on a legal corpus". *Corpora*, 9 (1) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 83-107.
- Sinclair, J. (2003). *Reading Concordances: An Introduction*. London: Longman.
- Scott, M. (2008). *WordSmith Tools version 5* [computer software]. Liverpool: Lexical Analysis Software.
- Sinclair, S. and Rockwell, G. (2012). *Voyant Tools* [web application].

## 4. Results (top 20 specialised terms)

<b>NON FLAX-BASED TEXTS (control group)</b>		<b>FLAX-BASED TEXTS (experimental group)</b>	
<b>TERMS</b>	<b>KEY-NESS</b>	<b>TERMS</b>	<b>KEY-NESS</b>
Law	7833.93	Law	3584.82
Contract	3050.50	Rights	1586.21
Legal	2839.63	Court	1378.70
Civil	2493.52	Precedent	1187.08
Attorney	1904.97	Case	702.25
Court	1577.73	Sovereignty	641.44
Criminal	1361.42	Statutes	468.01
Offence	1316.28	Act	467.83

Party	1266.3	Decisions	429.75
Custody	796.83	Convention	372.03
Testator	649.71	Appeal	337.26
Property	600.88	Legislation	227.05
Probate	581.39	Rule	219.71
Contractual	531.89	Civil	210.75
Power	523.25	Constitution	210.63
Legislation	509.75	Power	201.92
Arbitration	485.55	Interpretation	197.23
Act	432.32	Binding	184.37
Notary	426.29	Judicial	179.32
Agreement	422.80	Jurisdiction	158.02

## 4. Results (Term usage samples)

- 1- In a will, the testator or testatrix appoints another person (called the executor) as responsible of the administration and distribution of his/her possessions among his/her inheritors or beneficiaries (Non- FLAX).
- 2- A.D.R consists of choosing a judge called arbitrator that, after examining the different positions of the parties, issues a binding decision called arbitration (Non-FLAX).
- 3- The term binding precedent is the opposite idea to persuasive precedent, which is not binding (FLAX).
- 4- The parliament (...) creates supreme law (statutes), which will override inconsistent case law and reflect the sovereignty and legitimacy of parliament (FLAX).



## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers (textual set)

TEXTUAL MARKERS		
TYPES	NON-FLAX CORPUS (norm. freq.)	FLAX CORPUS (norm. freq.)
<b>TRANSITION/LOGICAL MARKERS</b>		
And	249.17	246.77
furthermore	1.29	1.15
additionally	0.55	0
Or	104.43	53.11
But	16.47	27.71
however	7.45	10.68
nevertheless	2.85	6.64
so	8.83	19.92
therefore	3.40	7.22
finally	2.85	2.60

moreover	1.20	1.73
hence	0.28	1.44
thus	2.48	4.04
in addition	1.29	0.87
in summary	0.00	0.29
in conclusion	0.09	0.29
what is more	0.09	0.00
concluding	0.37	0
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>403.09</b>	<b>384.46</b>
<b>ENDOPHORIC MARKERS</b>		
noted/see above/below	1.74	0.86
see Fig	0.09	0
in section X	0.18	2.3
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>2.01</b>	<b>3.16</b>



## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers (textual set)

FRAME MARKERS		
In the first place	0.09	0.29
firstly	0.64	1.15
as stated in	0.28	0.00
as for	0.74	0.00
as regards	0.00	0.29
thirdly	0.18	0.29
secondly	0.74	0.87
regarding	4.05	2.31
concerning	1.38	1.15
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8.1</b>	<b>6.35</b>
CODE GLOSSES		
that is	2.58	3,17

in other words	0.18	0.00
explicitly	0.18	0
specifically	0.83	0.29
—	0.92	0.00
()	119.52	25.40
colon	8.37	18.76
namely	0.28	0.29
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>132.86</b>	<b>47.91</b>
EVIDENTIALS		
According to	8	6.63
X states/says	0.55	4.32
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>8.55</b>	<b>10.95</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>554.61</b>	<b>452.83</b>



## 4. Results and discussion

### 4.2. The pragmatic level: analysis of meta-discourse markers (usage samples)

1. It comprises the rule by which a court hears and determines what happens in civil lawsuits (Non FLAX).
2. Defamation: it occurs when the defendant communicates untruthful information about the plaintiff and it hurts the plaintiff's reputation (FLAX).
3. (...) which are not considered as crimes nor breaches of contract, that is, torts. (Non FLAX)
4. In other words, they tried to make a case that would not be a precedent (sic). (FLAX)
5. Henceforth, we will focus on civil law from Common law and its division (Non FLAX).
6. However, we must not forget that history is fuel to the future and that our current idea of due process is ( ) (FLAX)