

Legal Frames: Applying Frame Semantics to specialized languages

Anderson Bertoldi, Rove Chishman, Thaís Domênica Minghelli, Carolina Müller, & Carla Krieger de Valle
Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos

FrameNet (Fillmore, Johnson and Petruck, 2003) frames have been used for developing lexical databases and annotated corpora for different languages. Spanish FrameNet, Japanese FrameNet, and FrameNet Brasil (Salomão, 2009) are just some examples. Kicktionary is an example of a specialized multilingual frame-based lexicon for the soccer language. SALSA project applies the FrameNet semantic tags to annotating German corpora. Other works have applied FrameNet frames to automatic development of lexicons, for legal ontology improvement and legal text annotation. It is possible to find an extensive collection of works describing FrameNet and Frame Semantics applications in Boas (2009). In this work we discuss the development of legal frames and the use of FrameNet frames for legal applications.

Law is social-oriented science; therefore legal concepts of one legal system may not be shared by other societies. Considering that Law is a social-oriented creation, some legal events described by FrameNet could not be equivalent in different legal systems. In the case of legal frames, it is not only an issue of linguistic equivalence, but an equivalence of systems. When we compare FrameNet `Criminal_process` frame to Brazilian `Criminal_process` frame, we perceive different levels of equivalence between frames. Frame equivalence involves, primarily, conceptual correspondence (similarity of the legal events described by the frame), frame element correspondence (similarity of the roles of the participants in a legal event) and lexical correspondence (possibility of translation for the legal concepts in both languages).

The FrameNet `Try_defendant` frame and the Brazilian `Try_defendant` frame may be considered equivalents because they describe legal events that are similar. We can find correspondence for frame elements of the FrameNet frame in Brazilian frame. Even the English frame-evoking lexical units present translation equivalents in Portuguese. The `Notification_of_charges` frame does not present a perfect correspondent in the Brazilian legal system. Contrasting English frame-evoking lexical units and Portuguese equivalents, we perceive that Portuguese lexical units evoke two different frames in the Brazilian legal system: `Charging` and `Indictment`. As the `Notification_of_charges` frame is a subframe of `Arraignment`, and the Brazilian legal system does not present any legal event that is comparable to the arraignment session, the consequence is Portuguese lexical units evoking more than one frame and a subtle difference in frame elements. While `Notification_of_charges` presents the frame elements `ACCUSED`, `ARRAIGN_AUTHORITY`, and `CHARGES`, `Charging` presents `ACCUSED`, `PROSECUTION_AUTHORITY`, and `CHARGES`. While `Notification_of_charges` frame is not completely correspondent to the Brazilian legal frames, the English frame-evoking lexical units, on the other hand, find perfect translation equivalents in Portuguese (*charge.n: acusação.n*).

This work enables us to draw some conclusions. Firstly, the more complex the event described by a frame is, the more difficult it is to reuse FrameNet frames. Secondly, non-complex frames, like `Law` and `Legality`, are more reusable. Our aim is to develop a lexical database of the Brazilian legal language and to use these semantic tags for legal information retrieval. Frame Semantics allows us to describe the roles of the participants of the predication and to make the mapping between syntax and semantics. A frame-based lexicon database also could be connected to other frame-based linguistic resources, such as the Brazilian FrameNet.

References

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