



Online Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms

By Silvana Carr

The first Canadian online

Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms, launched in November 2006 by Vancouver Community College (VCC) in British Columbia, provides free public access to 5,000 criminal law terms and their definitions in Plain Language (English), along with equivalents in Chinese (Traditional and Simplified characters), Farsi/Persian, Punjabi, Russian, Spanish, and Vietnamese. Based on Canadian law and initially developed to provide Canadians with an easy-to-understand reference to legal terminology, the glossary has received international recognition for its usefulness in countries with English-based common law legal systems.¹

Filling a Void

In 1999, members of the local legal community in British Columbia—among them the Law Courts Education Society of British Columbia and VCC's Certificate Program in Court Interpreting—voiced concern over a lack of consistency in the comprehension and use of legal terminology among unaccredited court interpreters working in the provincial courts. This problem was seen as being particularly significant in areas outside metropolitan

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Vancouver, where there were (and still are) very few accredited interpreters working in the provincial courts.

At the time this issue was being raised, VCC had already expressed an interest in creating for its interpreting students a consistent terminology tool in the form of a multilingual glossary based specifically on the Canadian legal system. After discussing how best to go about meeting the needs of VCC students while assisting unaccredited and untrained interpreters to comprehend Canadian legal terminology better, VCC and the Law Courts Education Society of British Columbia resolved to develop a multilingual glossary that would include definitions in Plain English. To facilitate access, it was also decided to present the glossary in a web-based format and open it to the public at no charge.

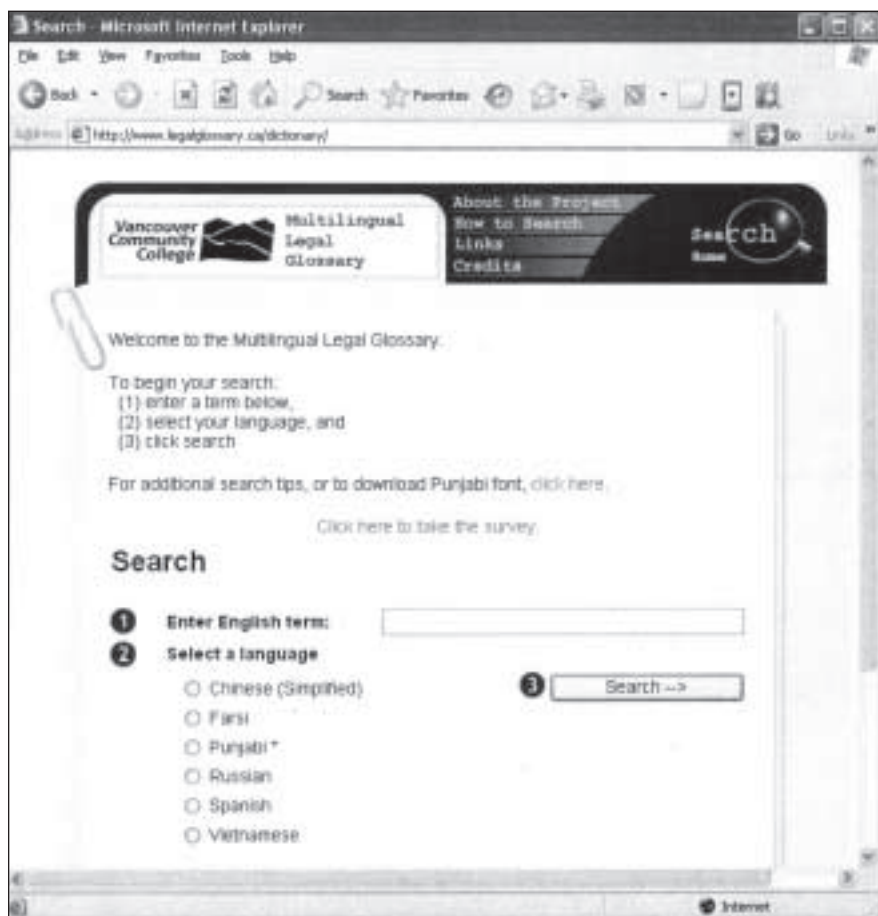
After initial needs assessments in

the community, it was obvious to those involved that this combined initiative would fulfill needs beyond court interpreting. The glossary would also benefit:

- Translators;
- Workers at social service agencies;
- Legal personnel working with limited-English-proficient clients;
- Immigrants going to court who need assistance in understanding the criminal court process; and
- Members of the general public who are untrained in legal matters.

VCC took on the project and obtained funding from the Law Foundation of British Columbia. VCC is grateful to the Foundation for its generous support and its understanding of the complexity and challenges of the project, which ultimately took six years to

Figure 1—The homepage of the *Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms*



complete. The results can be seen at www.legalglossary.ca (see Figure 1).

Content

A team of interpreters, legal terminologists, and judges have selected the terms they consider to be the most pertinent and frequently used in criminal court. The selection team has noted that not all the 5,000 terms can be classified as legal terms, but has determined that they are court-related and therefore relevant to the project. The court-related terms fall into the following categories:

- Police jargon;
- Scientific terms;

- Technical terms;
- Narcotics; and
- Street slang.

Since all terms are used in court and legal proceedings, their inclusion benefits not only interpreters and translators, but all those participating in court or legal processes (e.g., laypersons unfamiliar with legal terms, non-English speakers).

How to Search

The glossary is user-friendly and simple to navigate. Each entry appears on its own page and is easy to read. Every entry includes the following elements:

Part I: English Entry

- The term in English;
- Its part of speech;
- Its definition in Plain English;
- An example of how the term is used in context; and
- Related terms (synonyms and antonyms), if any.

Part II: Entry in the Other Language

- The equivalent term in another language;
- Its definition in the other language; and
- Related terms, if any.

Users may search by:

- Full phrase; or
- Individual words from the phrase; or
- Base word (e.g., “revoke” versus “revoked”; “appeal court” versus “appeal courts”).

If searching for just the English term, the entry page will show only Part I of the entry. If searching for the equivalent of the English term in one of the six other languages covered in the glossary, the entry page will show both Parts I and II for each term (see Figure 2 on page 38).

So far, the response from users has highlighted the feature that differentiates this glossary from other free online glossaries that give translations of legal terms. Many other glossaries do not supply context or explain the meaning of the translations they provide. The online *Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms* generates a Plain English definition for each term and provides an example of how it is used, thus making it possible for the lay reader to understand its meaning. ➡

Glossary Development

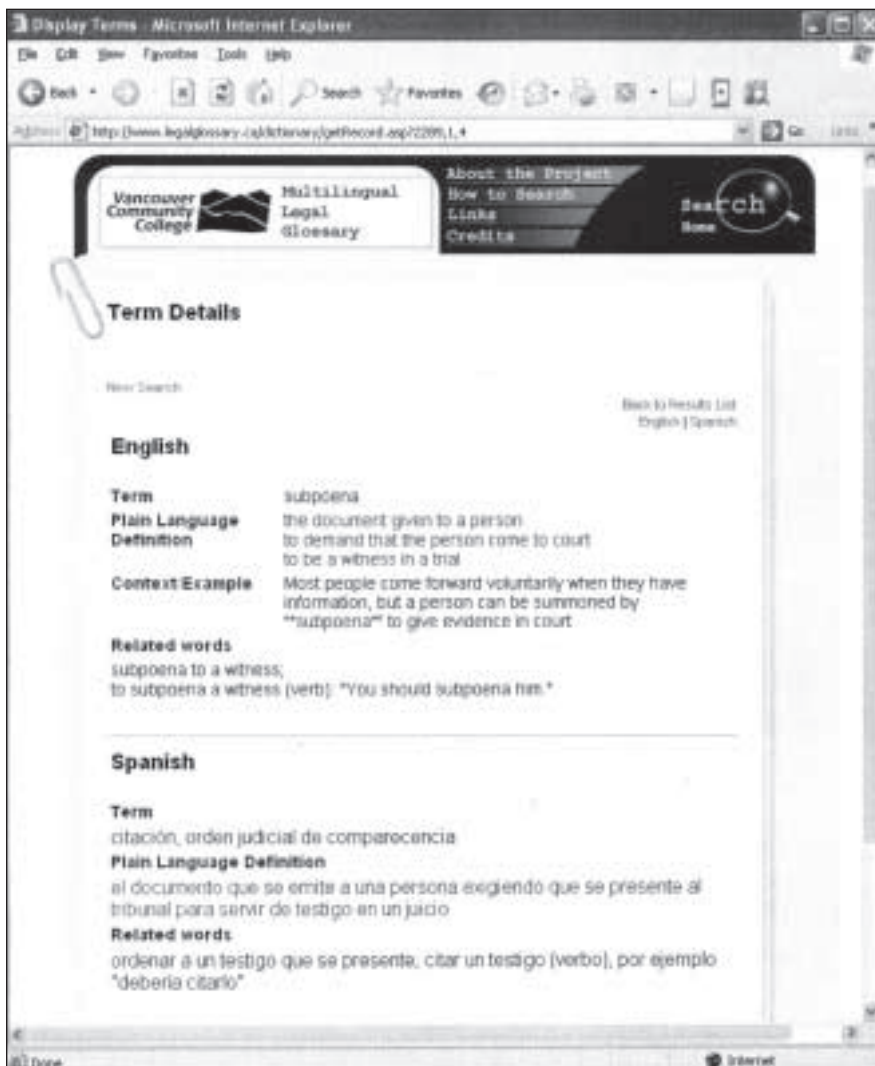
The glossary project was designed by lexicographer Roda Roberts, the director of the Canadian Bilingual Dictionary Project, and is based on the collaborative efforts of over 30 professionals with expertise in the Canadian legal system, legal terminology, translation, and web design. The project has required the ongoing multi-directional participation of all involved in order to move the glossary through the different stages of development.

From the beginning, a comprehensive quality assurance path was established and rigorously followed in the creation of the terminological entries. Following the selection of the 5,000 terms, lawyers and Plain Language specialists created the definitions in Plain English. The definitions were reviewed for legal accuracy and to ensure that they could be understood by laypersons. Once approved, the terminological entries were sent to qualified terminologists and translators who created equiv-

alents in each of the six foreign languages. Peer bilingual terminologists reviewed each entry for accuracy and ease of comprehension in each language. The entries were finally reviewed for legal accuracy by bilingual lawyers and certified legal translators with experience in both the Canadian legal system and the legal systems of the countries where the six languages are spoken. There were, in total, 10 stages of completion necessary for final term approval (see Figure 3 on page 39).

The entire project, which was overseen by a steering committee of representatives from the legal and multicultural community, has drawn upon an amazing body of knowledge and expertise, and has received unwavering support and assistance from all stakeholders.

Figure 2—Typical search results on the entry page



Limitations

The field of law is vast, and the online *Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms* was never intended to be all-inclusive. This glossary is limited in scope, both in the number of terms (5,000) and in the area of law (criminal) it covers.

It is important to clarify that the glossary does not cover the laws of the countries in which the six languages are spoken. Its purpose is to explain Canadian legal terminology and to provide foreign language equivalents for concepts related to Canadian law. As mentioned above, however, the glossary is useful in any country that bases its legal system on English common law.

Due to copyright issues, the glossary does not include formal definitions from legal dictionaries or contexts from legal documents. The only definitions included are Plain Language definitions created specifically for this glossary. The Plain English definitions cover only the

For more information on Canadian Law and Legal Interpreting

Association des Juristes d'Expression Française
<http://ajefo.ca>

Canadian Bilingual Dictionary Project
www.dico.uottawa.ca

Canadian Association of Law Libraries
www.callacbd.ca

Law Courts Education Society of British Columbia
www.lces.ca

Law Foundation of British Columbia
www.lawfoundationbc.org

Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms
www.legalglossary.ca

Vancouver Community College Certificate Program
 in Court Interpreting
<http://continuinged.vcc.ca/interpreting>

legal meaning of the terms in criminal law. A term may have other meanings that are not covered in this specialized glossary, but these can be found in a regular legal dictionary.

At the time of this writing, improvements are under development. For example, all pages of the glossary will soon be made accessible to Google so that it can index the entire site for browsing.

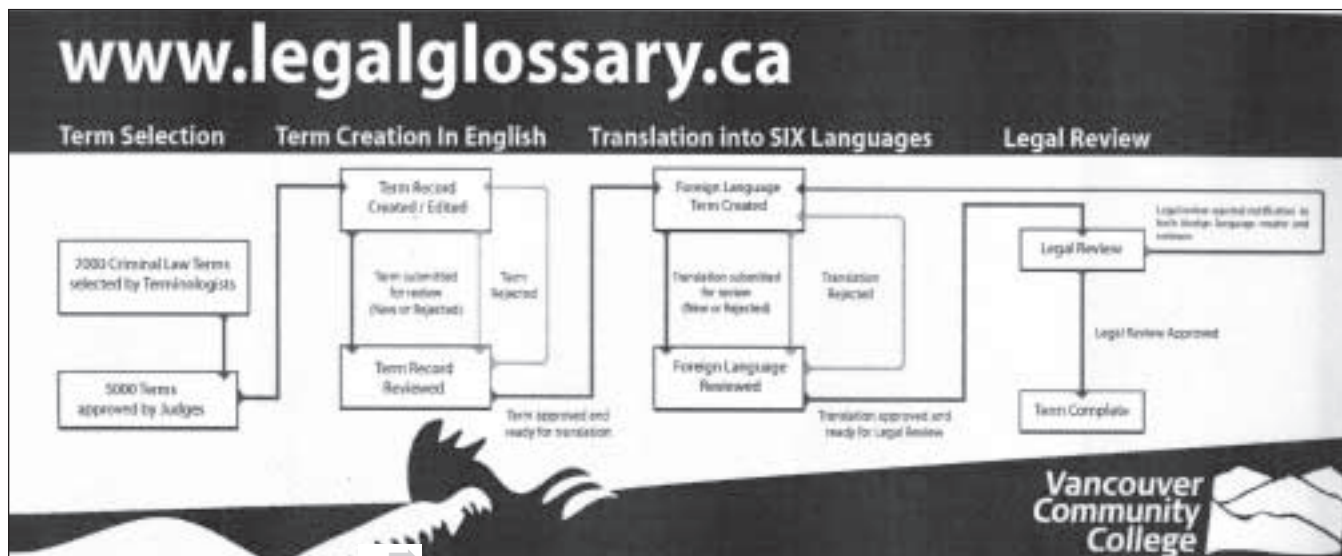
Future Developments

The response to the online *Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms* has been overwhelming, and has come not only from North America, but from other countries, including India and Iran. Feedback from an online survey includes requests to add other languages and to expand the scope to other areas of the law. The Law

Foundation of British Columbia recently awarded VCC two generous grants to permit it to expand the glossary with terminology from family and immigration law, as well as to develop the entries into another language. A needs assessment will determine the choice of language.

One of the most frequent comments from the survey has been to point out that the glossary ➡

Figure 3—Stages of final glossary term approval



Online Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms Continued

does not contain the other official language of Canada. The decision not to include French is based on two facts. In Canada, court documents are printed in French and English. To help address the issue, the Association des Juristes d'Expression Française has come forward to offer their collaboration, and the addition of French to the glossary is now in the planning stages.

Where to Go from Here

The online *Multilingual Glossary of Legal and Court-Related Terms* is a work in progress. Please visit www.legalglossary.ca and take a minute to fill out the online survey on the homepage. Input and feedback from working interpreters and translators will be very much appreciated.

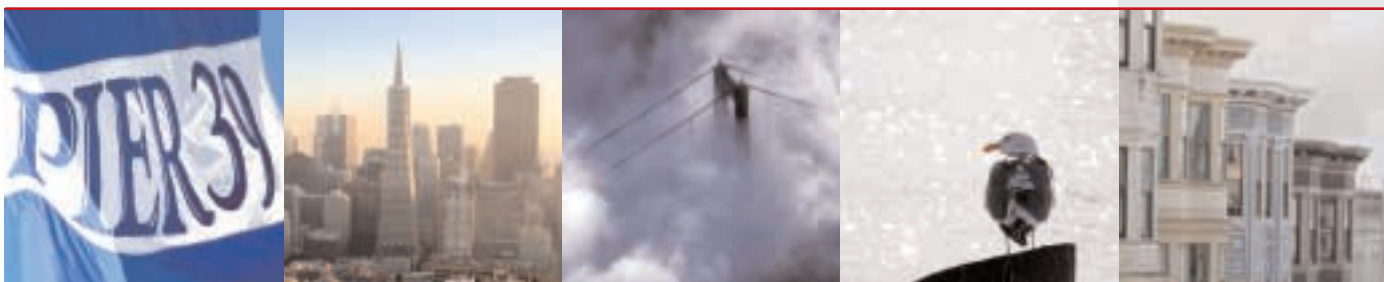
Note

1. See *The Self-Help Law ExPress* (Harvard Law School), Blogs.law.harvard.edu/shlep/2007/01/08/law-glossaries-a-to-z.

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