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The Applicability of Movies in Legal Language Teaching: Evidence from Multi-Dimensional Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to examine courtroom discourse by comparing naturally-occurring trials to movie trials in order to determine whether such movies can be used in the teaching of Legal English. For the purpose, data are retrieved from the *American Movie-Trial Corpus* and the *American Real-Trial Corpus* (built for the present analysis), and are compared via corpus-driven criteria and Biber's Multi-Dimensional Analysis. The findings show very little linguistic and textual variability in the two investigated domains and thus confirm that the linguistic similarity of movie and naturally-occurring conversation is also present at a more specialized level. Hence, the claim that it is beyond dispute that the cinematic portrayal of the American legal system is far removed from legal reality is confuted and it is, consequently, suggested that movie language could be used as a remarkable source for learning not only the general usage of face-to-face conversation, as recently documented, but also the more specialized features of courtroom discourse. The findings also add value both to the role of corpora in teaching, which is often emphasized by numerous authoritative linguists, and to their methodological value in legal language research.

Keywords: Movie language, Legal English, Movie trials, Real trials, Multi-dimensional analysis, Corpus linguistics, Language teaching

1. Introduction

Both courtroom discourse and movie language have inspired the studies of many scholars from the most heterogeneous disciplines. Within the legal field, there is a long tradition of works, among which the following provide a backdrop to the present study: Conley, O'Barr, and Lind (1979), on the role of the presentational style in the courtroom; Greenfield (2001) and Silbey (2001) on the role of lawyers and justice; Loftus (1975), Beach (1985), Luchjenbroers (1991), Garzone, Miglioli, and Salvi (1995), Pridalová (1999) and Innes (2010) about the language used in the courtroom. As regards movies, instead, investigations have generally taken into account either dubbing and subtitling (cf. Menarini, 1955; Pavesi, 1994, 2005; Bollettieri Bosinelli, 1998; Taylor, 2000; Gottlieb & Gambier 2001; Bruti & Perego 2005), or the language of movie scripts (cf. Taylor, 1999; Taylor & Baldry, 2004); although more recent studies have explored the features of movie conversation (Pavesi, 2005), also comparing it to natural language (Forchini, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012a). There is also a tradition of studies which has focused on the type of technical terms involved in movie making (May, 1962) or on the interaction between the movie text and the audience (Goffman, 1976, 1979; Bettettini, 2004; Bubel, 2008), rather than on the language spoken in the movies. Countless works have also considered the connection between law and the movies (cf. Machura & Ulbrich, 2001) by investigating the linguistic concept of courtroom justice as a genre (Silbey, 2001), the historical development of American criminal trial films (Rafter, 2001), the expression of American popular culture (Kuzina, 2001), and the influence of Hollywood courtroom movies on the rest of the world (Machura & Ulbrich, 2001).

Despite the interest shown in the areas mentioned, however, scholars do not seem to have identified the dimensions of courtroom discourse and movie drama, their textuality and their characteristic linguistic features. This is what the present study intends to explore: by applying Biber's (1988) Multi-Dimensional Analysis to real trials and trials in movies, the aim of the paper is to verify to what extent Machura & Ulbrich's claim (2001, p. 118) about the cinematic portrayal of the American legal system being "far removed from legal reality" is correct. The main claim is that if no significant linguistic difference is found between real and movie trials, then it will become reasonable to assume that movies can be used as a source for teaching the specialized features of legal language.

2. Background and Methodology

The idea behind the present research is based on the results of previous investigations (cf. Forchini, 2012a) which, by applying Biber's (1988) Multi-Dimensional Analysis, has reassessed the traditional perspective on the language spoken in the movies and the role it can have in language teaching. As already discussed in Forchini (2012a), movie conversation has traditionally been described as artificial and non-spontaneous, especially for three reasons: 1) it is prefabricated; 2) it is written to be spoken as if it were not written; 3) it is recited. Although there cannot be any doubt about the artificiality of movie conversation, given that movies are artifacts by nature, the precise calculations made through Multi-Dimensional Analysis (henceforth MDA) have revealed that this type of language mirrors the spoken features of face-to-face conversation, the functions that such features serve, and its textual

dimensions (cf. also Biber, 1988). More specifically, movie conversation has been classified as a textual type which is spoken, and not written (although it originates as a written to be spoken form), and which is marked by *involved production*, *non-narrative concerns*, *situation-dependent reference*, a relatively *low level of persuasion*, and by the same mean scores characterizing face-to-face conversation. Furthermore, via MDA it has been demonstrated that in spite of the artificiality of movies and of the fact that their dialogues may originate from a written form, movie conversation is not only extremely similar to face-to-face conversation, but it actually differs from written language and from prepared (i.e. non-spontaneous) speeches (Forchini, 2013a). This divergence especially emerges in Dimension 1, which is, indeed, the most prominent dimension of both movie and face-to-face conversation. This similarity to face-to-face conversation (LSAC in Chart 1[1]) and divergence from written documents and prepared speech is illustrated in Chart 1:

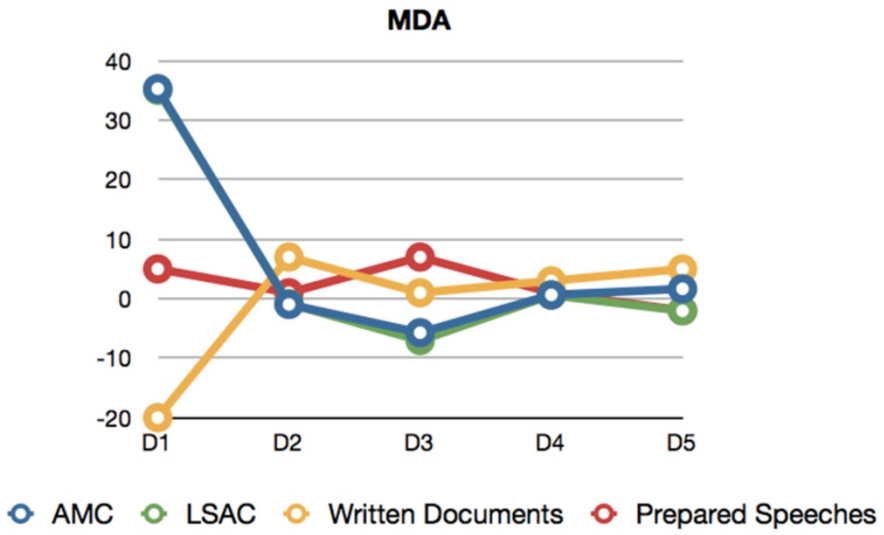

Chart 1. MDA of 4 Genres: Movie Conversation (AMC), Face-To-Face Conversation (LSAC), Written Documents and Prepared Speeches (i.e. Dimensions 1-5) from Forchini (2013b: 100).

The major implication which has derived from the MDA results is that movie language can now be considered representative of spoken language, which consequently means that when teachers need to illustrate the features characterizing spoken language, they can now legitimately use movies as a tool for teaching them (cf. also Forchini, 2013b).

The reason for giving such importance to movies in language teaching stemmed from the following considerations: the similarity with face-to-face conversation, the ease with which they can be retrieved, the motivation they inspire. The importance of acquiring spoken traits in the achievement of language competence and the difficulty of collecting spoken material (cf. Biber et al., 1999; McCarthy, 1999; Mauranen, 2004; Halliday, 2005) have been pointed

[1] LSAC stands for *The **L**ongman **S**poken **A**merican **C**orpus*, which is taken from the *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* and, together with the *Longman Written American Corpus*, belongs to the *Longman Corpus Network*. Whereas AMC stands for **A**merican **M**ovie **C**orpus (see Forchini, 2012a for further details).

out by many authoritative linguists: given its similarity to face-to-face conversation, movies can offer easy access to the characteristics of speech. The power that movies have to evoke student interest and motivation has also been pointed out for almost a hundred years: during the 1920s, Cunningham's (1923, p. 489) results showed "that the interest created by the prospect of the moving picture caused the class to work hard during the entire month". Similarly, during the 1940s, Mallery (1948, p. 149) described movies "as an appetizing device for achieving other ends in school" and reported that students found studying novels "much more interesting" by using movies in the classroom. And more recently, Forchini (2012b, 2013b) has shown that learners, not only appreciate using movies, but they increase their linguistic competence by gaining increased awareness about the existence of discourse markers, interjections, elisions, blends, false starts, reformulations, and repetitions.

The present research has been conceived as a further step in using movies in language teaching: if no, or very little, variability is also found between real and movie trials, then it will be reasonable to assume that movies can also be used as a source for teaching the specialized features of spoken legal language. A similarity with previous results would also confirm the shape of the core language of movie conversation which, according to previous studies (cf. Forchini, 2012a), does not seem to be influenced by movie genre. Hence, the decision to explore the nature of trials in movies. This was partly due to the fact that the interaction of courtroom discourse is considered, in Williams' words (2005, p. 24) "the closest approximation to everyday speech of all public legal discourses", which is a quality which favors comparisons with previous research (cf. Forchini, 2012a). From another viewpoint, in terms of motivation, courtroom movies appear to be a perfect choice, since this type of drama is one of the most popular American movie genres. Indeed, it is so popular (Kuzina, 2001) that "viewers in countries with very different legal traditions think their trials follow the United States movie pattern" (Rafter 2001, p. 24).

The methodological choice of using MDA to investigate movie language was determined by two practical reasons: the necessity to compare current results with previous research which adopted MDA to explore the nature of movie language, and the need to provide a strong and extremely reliable statistical analysis to clear possible doubts about the status of movie language. MDA, indeed, has become a milestone in language research thanks to its strength, which derives from its reliability (see Biber, 1988, 1995, 2006; Biber & Finegan, 2001a, 2001b; Atkinson, 2001; Reppen, 2001; Conrad, 2001; Helt, 2001; Rey, 2001; Quaglio, 2009; Forchini, 2012a), from its useful applications (cf. Biber, 1988), and from the fact that MDA also works on small portions of corpora (cf. Biber, 2004), which is the case of the present study.

Given the aims of the present paper, it is possible only to give an outline of MDA here. In a nutshell, this type of statistical analysis identifies groups of linguistic features that co-occur frequently in texts in order to determine register variation. In particular, via factor analysis a large number of linguistic features characterizing, in this case, trials, are reduced to a small set of derived variables called *Factors*. Then, through a calculation of the communicative functions most widely shared by the linguistic features in question, each *Factor* is interpreted functionally as a *Dimension* of variation which underlines each set of co-occurring linguistic

features[2]. It is worth emphasizing that all the factors are considered *Dimensions* in that they define "continuums of variation rather than discrete poles" (Biber, 1988, p. 9): this means that texts cannot be interpreted as *either totally* formal *or* non-formal, narrative or non-narrative, explicit or situation-dependent, etc., but rather as *more or less* formal, narrative, explicit, etc.

The following Biberian *Dimensions* are considered here: Dimension 1, Dimension 2, Dimension 3, Dimension 4 and Dimension 5, which are represented by Factor 1, Factor 2, Factor 3, Factor 4 and Factor 5, respectively. *Dimension 1* represents the *informational (negative) vs. involved (positive) production* dimension and thus identifies whether a text is marked by high informational density and exact informational content or, on the contrary, by affective, interactional, and generalized content (Biber, 1988, p. 107). *Dimension 2* represents the *narrative (positive) vs. non-narrative concerns (negative)* dimension and, thus, distinguishes narrative discourse from other types of discourse (Biber, 1988, p. 109). *Dimension 3* represents the *explicit (positive) vs. situation-dependent (negative) reference* dimension and, thus, distinguishes between highly explicit, context-independent reference and non-specific, situation-dependent reference (Biber, 1988, p. 110). *Dimension 4* represents the *overt expression of persuasion (positive)* dimension and, thus, marks the degree to which persuasion is marked overtly (Biber, 1988, p. 111). *Dimension 5* represents the *abstract (positive) vs. non-abstract (negative) information* dimension and, thus, "seems to mark informational discourse that is abstract, technical, and formal versus other types of discourse" (Biber, 1988, p. 113). Readers wishing to go further into MDA should consult Biber (1988).

In order to be able to identify the linguistic features of movie and real trials and thus determine their textuality, movie data were retrieved from the *American Movie-Trial Corpus* (which currently consists of 38 270 words), whereas real trial data were retrieved from the *American Real-Trial Corpus* (which consists of 695 863 words). More specifically, the *American Movie-Trial Corpus* (henceforth AMTC), which is now part of the *American Movie Corpus* (cf. AMC in Forchini, 2012a), is made up of the manual transcriptions (i.e. not web scripts) of the trials present in the following movies: *JFK* (by Oliver Stone, 1991), *A Few Good Men* (by Rob Reiner, 1992), *Philadelphia* (by Jonathan Demme, 1993), *A Time to Kill* (by Joel Schumacher, 1996), *The Rainmaker* (by Francis Ford Coppola, 1997), *Erin Brockovich* (by Steven Soderbergh, 2000), *Runaway Jury* (by Gary Fieder, 2003), *Find Me Guilty* (by Sidney Lumet, 2006), *Fracture* (by Gregory Hobit, 2007), and *The Lincoln Lawyer* (by Brad Furman, 2011). The *American Real-Trial Corpus* (henceforth ARTC), on the other hand, a corpus built for the present analysis, is made up of extracts from the following trials[3]: *The Los Angeles Police Officers' Rodney King Beating Trials* (1992 /1993), *The Ruby Ridge Trial* (1993), *The West Memphis Three Trials* (1994), *The O. J. Simpson Trial* (1995), *The Okla City Bombing Trial* (1997), *Testimony and Statements of President*

[2] This interpretation is based on the assumption that frequently co-occurring linguistic features in texts share at least one communicative function, and that it is possible to identify a unified *Dimension* underlying each set of co-occurring linguistic features (cf. Biber, 1988).

[3] These extracts were chosen according to the period of time in which the trials occurred so that the span of time characterizing them and that of movies were rather close (the real trials took place between 1992 and 2006, whereas the movies were produced between 1991 and 2011).

William Clinton Relating to his Impeachment Trial (1999), and *The Zacarias Moussaoui Trial* (2006). These trials were downloaded from the Douglas O. Linder's *Famous Trials* website[4] and then manually cleaned before being processed. Both the corpora were extracted and tagged with the *Biber grammatical tagger* in order to be processed by means of the *SAS software package*[5] and, given the different size of the corpora, the findings were normalized to 1000 to allow reliable comparisons. The software *Antconc*, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordancing and text analysis developed by Lawrence Anthony[6], was also used to analyze word lists and lexical bundles. All data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively by corpus-driven criteria (Francis, 1993; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Biber, 2009).

3. Multi-Dimensional Analysis, Word Lists and Lexical Bundles

The comparison of movie language (AMC), movie trials (AMTC), and real trials (ARTC) yields two significant results, which are illustrated in Table 1 (cf. Forchini, 2012, 2017):

Table 1. MDA of the AMC, of Movie and Real Trials

DIMENSIONS	MOVIE LANGUAGE		TRIALS
	AMC	AMTC	ARTC
D1	**35.31**	**12.5**	19.15
D2	**-0.97**	**-0.13**	1.21
D3	**-5.72**	**-0.33**	-1.48
D4	0.64	-1.32	-0.16
D5	**1.66**	**0.34**	1.17

As far as the first result is concerned, which regards the comparison between the AMC and the AMTC, the MDA of movies indicates that, although there is a difference concerning Dimension 4, the textual dimension of movie trials is similar to the one of the AMC: although the *overt expression of persuasion* is negative in the AMTC and positive in the AMC, the two mean scores of this dimension are rather close in number, the one characterizing the AMC being close to zero (0.64), and the one of the AMTC equal to -1.32. This means that the degree to which persuasion is marked overtly is rather low in both corpora. This subtle difference, however, may be ascribed to the fact that the AMCT is made up of trials only, and not of the transcriptions of the whole movies like the AMC. It can, then, be assumed that the low mean score of the *overt expression of persuasion* is even lower in the AMTC presumably due to the need to make persuasion covert in trials: this can be held to be true by considering that questions, for example, should not lead answers in trials, which means that persuasion, although it is a fundamental part of the rhetoric of trials, needs to be concealed. The data, in other words, prove that movie trials display the same textual dimensions of other movie genres, thus, they largely confirm the findings of previous research which describes movie language as being marked by *involved production*, *non-narrative concerns*, *situation-dependent reference*, *non-overt expression of persuasion*, and *abstract information*, whatever the genre. The findings also emphasize the role of Dimension 1, which continues to

[4] Cf. http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/ftrials.htm.

[5] Both the tagging and the processing of the data were made possible especially thanks to the collaboration and support of Douglas Biber, to whom I would like to express my deep gratitude.

[6] Cf. http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/

emerge as the most significant Dimension, also in more specialized movies and, as illustrated below, also in real trials.

The second important result is about the comparison between the AMTC and the ARTC, namely, two more specific types of conversation. As shown in Table 1, both movie and real trials bear the highest mean score in Dimension 1. Besides, the two mean scores of Dimension 1 are both positive and rather close in number (i.e. 12.5 and 19.15, respectively), and none of the other dimensions has a high mean score in the two corpora. Another significant aspect which is visible from Table 1 is that movie and real trials have four out of five dimensions in common: the only dimension which is different in terms of polarity is Dimension 2, however, it is worth pointing out that despite this polar difference, the mean scores of the two corpora are not particularly divergent. These features are to be interpreted as follows: given that it is Dimension 1 which highly characterizes both the corpora, their most important textual feature is the one which defines them as being marked by *involved (positive) production*. Besides, given that the mean scores of this dimension are qualitatively and quantitatively similar (i.e. the mean scores of both Dimensions 1 are positive and rather close in number: 12.5 and 19.15, respectively), it means that both the corpora share a similar number of linguistic features and that such features trigger the same textual function. In other words, both movie and real trials are characterized by those linguistic items which favor an affective, interactional, and generalized content (Biber, 1988: 107). The fact of having four out of five dimensions in common, instead, demonstrates that the two corpora are closely related textual types, although the subtle difference which has emerged concerning Dimension 2 marks movie trials for *non-narrative concerns*, and real trials by *narrative* ones. These textual types are specifically marked by *involved production* (cf. D1), *situation-dependent reference* (cf. D3) *non-overt expression of persuasion* (cf. D4), and *abstract information* (cf. D5). Given the importance of Dimension 1 in these conversational domains, Section 3.1. will concentrate on the interpersonal dimension that has emerged from the two corpora.

3.1 The Interpersonal Dimension of Trials and Movie Language

Table 2 sums up the linguistic items, retrieved through the MDA of movie and real trials, which are frequent in both corpora and thus determine their interpersonal dimension. It is the high frequency of uninflected presents, imperatives, verbs in the third person forms, second person pronouns and possessives, first person pronouns and possessives, contractions, private verbs (e.g. *believe, feel, think*), *it* pronouns, coordinating conjunctions and clausal connectors, demonstrative pronouns, etc. (e.g. Table 2), which favors an interactive discourse. Indeed, by having a positive weight on Dimension 1, the high frequency of such features contributes to an interpersonal dialogic character, which expresses private attitudes, emotions and thoughts (cf. Biber, 1988).

Table 2. Linguistic Features characterizing movie and real trials which have positive weight on Dimension 1 (cf. Forchini, 2018, p. 141)

LINGUISTIC FEATURES	MOVIE TRIALS Mean Scores	REAL TRIALS Mean Scores
Verb (uninflected present, imperative & third person)	96.74	93.94
First Person Pronoun / Possessive	47.39	34.95
Second Person Pronoun / Possessive	48.25	39.25
Private Verb (e.g. believe, feel, think)	16.75	19.75
Pronoun 'it'	12.57	14.30
Discourse Particle (e.g. now)	2.90	6.00
Demonstrative Pronoun	5.62	11.13
Adverb / Qualifier – Emphatic (e.g. just, really, so)	4.55	3.78
'That' Deletion	5.38	6.03
Coordinating Conjunction – Clausal Connector	9.96	16.02
Modals of Possibility (can, may, might, could)	7.83	6.07
Nominal Pronoun (e.g. someone, everything)	6.10	6.00
Stranded Preposition	1.24	1.88
Verb 'Do'	1.94	1.96
Verb 'Be' (uninflected present tense, verb and auxiliary)	2.11	2.18
Wh- Question	2.78	3.33
Wh- Clause	0.95	1.61
Adverbial – Hedge (e.g. almost, maybe)	0.93	0.89
Contraction	17.30	23.02
Adverb / Qualifier – Amplifier (e.g. absolutely, entirely)	2.49	1.70
Subordinating Conjunction – Causative (e.g. because)	1.58	1.69

Not surprisingly, such interactive discourse marking in both movie and real trials also emerges from the word list and lexical bundles present in the two corpora, which are illustrated in Tables 3 and 4, respectively: not only have the two corpora common interpersonal dialogic features, but these features are also present in the same linguistic form. This implies that they serve the same linguistic function (cf. also Biber, 1988): verbs in the third person forms (*is, was* cf. Table 3), second person pronouns and possessives (*you, your*), first person pronouns and possessives (*I, we, my, me*), contractions (*'s*), private verbs (*know*), *it* pronouns, coordinating conjunctions and clausal connectors (*and, but*), demonstrative pronouns (*this, that*), the discourse particle (*now*), for example, are used in a context which is interactional and needs an explicit reference. This also reflects the non-specific, situation-dependent reference which Dimension 3 shows.

Table 3. Word lists from movie and real trials

Rank	Raw Frequency	**Movie Trials**	Rank	Raw Frequency	**Real Trials**
1	1699	the	1	36 009	the
2	1323	you	2	24 042	that
3	1075	i	3	22 313	you
4	889	to	4	19 132	and
5	809	a	5	18 206	to
6	774	and	6	14 261	of
7	720	that	7	14 040	i
8	693	of	8	11 841	a
9	564	your	9	11 285	in
10	494	in	10	10 346	was
11	488	it	11	10 142	it
12	432	s	12	9219	he
13	392	is	13	7650	is
14	388	was	14	7616	s
15	368	mr	15	6406	did
16	346	this	16	5974	this
17	335	t	17	5878	yes
18	320	he	18	5838	on
19	293	for	19	5619	what
20	289	honor	20	5071	t
21	276	no	21	4723	there
22	254	have	22	4490	at
23	249	on	23	4452	have
24	242	we	24	4305	we
25	222	not	25	4246	your
26	221	what	26	4088	they
27	190	they	27	3865	were
28	190	with	28	3853	not
29	188	be	29	3852	with
30	186	at	30	3560	or
31	185	did	31	3503	no
32	180	my	32	3410	had
33	179	do	33	3265	for
34	179	his	34	3257	do
35	176	me	35	3099	would
36	168	are	36	3023	about
37	165	yes	37	3008	be
38	160	all	38	3005	as
39	147	now	39	2933	if

40	145	but	40	2761	sir
41	145	m	41	2760	when
42	144	were	42	2663	all
43	137	as	43	2592	his
44	133	about	44	2586	him
45	130	there	45	2442	mr
46	128	from	46	2440	right
47	127	would	47	2336	any
48	124	so	48	2320	time
49	123	him	49	2319	from
50	123	know	50	2317	are

The same can be said for the lexical bundles (i.e. 2-grams) illustrated in Table 4: 14 out of 20 (see the lexical bundles in bold; those which are underlined are the lexical bundles found in both corpora) are those commonly used in spoken conversation (cf. Biber et al., 1999; Forchini, 2012a) and thus favor an interactional context. These interactional 2-grams are present in both corpora (the other six are present too, but with a difference in rank, so they are not included in the table) and thus contribute to the same dialogic function.

Table 4. 2-grams from movie and real trials

RANK	Rank in the Corpus	Raw Frequency	Movie Trials	Rank in the Corpus	Raw Frequency	Real Trials
1	1	283	**your honor**	2	2976	**did you**
2	3	133	**i m**	7	1734	**that you**
3	6	103	thank you	8	1728	**yes sir**
4	7	94	**do you**	11	1498	**your honor**
5	11	68	**did you**	12	1477	**do you**
6	12	67	**i don**	19	1309	**i m**
7	13	64	**you re**	20	1110	**and i**
8	16	61	**and i**	23	1022	when you
9	18	58	**i was**	24	997	**i don**
10	19	55	**that you**	27	923	**you have**
11	22	49	i have	29	907	if you
12	27	41	**yes sir**	31	833	and you
13	28	40	**you are**	33	811	**you were**
14	29	39	are you	34	772	that i
15	32	38	honor i	37	755	**i was**
16	35	38	objection your	44	713	i think
17	37	38	**you know**	45	701	**you re**
18	38	37	would you	47	685	you can
19	42	36	**you were**	50	673	yes i
20	46	35	**you have**	54	660	**you know**

In Table 5, which illustrates the most frequent lexical bundles (i.e. 3-grams) in the corpora, it can be seen that a similar situation transpires: although only seven 3-grams out of thirty are present in the top 30 words of the two corpora (i.e. *I don't, your honor I, ladies and gentlemen, I didn't, I'm not you, don't, is that correct*), the other non-common 3-grams can be grouped into similar categories which serve the same functions. There are lexical bundles which have a word or tag (such as *is that correct, is that right*), for instance, which functionally double-check the correctness of what the witness is saying or has just said. Others (such as *your honor*, or *sir*) are honorific forms for addressing the hearer. The vast majority of the lexical bundles contain an interactive personal or possessive pronoun.

Table 5. 3-grams from movie and real trials

Rank	Raw Frequency	Movie Trials	Raw Frequency	Real Trials
1	67	**i don t**	997	**i don t**
2	38	**objection your honor**	480	**don t know**
3	37	**your honor i**	398	**i didn t**
4	28	**don t know**	391	**do you recall**
5	28	**thank you your**	340	**i m not**
6	27	**ladies and gentlemen**	336	in this case
7	26	**you your honor**	335	**what did you**
8	24	**i didn t**	332	at that time
9	22	**i have no**	332	that s correct
10	22	**i m not**	328	is that correct
11	21	**your honor mr**	292	is that right
12	19	**your honor we**	292	the crime scene
13	18	no further questions	275	state s exhibit
14	17	**i d like**	274	one of the
15	17	**you don t**	273	**yes sir and**
16	16	isn t it	269	**yes i did**
17	16	**thank you mr**	257	**did you have**
18	15	a code red	255	out of the
19	15	**i m sorry**	255	that he was
20	15	**questions your honor**	253	**and did you**
21	14	d like to	246	that s the
22	14	is that correct	238	**did you do**
23	14	**your honor the**	238	that he had
24	13	**i can t**	231	**your honor i**
25	13	isn t that	228	**you tell us**
26	13	**yes your honor**	220	and that s
27	13	**your honor you**	219	**you don t**
28	12	at this time	217	that s what
29	12	**do you think**	216	**ladies and gentlemen**
30	12	**have no further**	210	**did you see**

Similarly, also the lexical bundles (i.e. 4-grams) illustrated in Table 6, although present in a different lexical form in the two corpora, perform what Cortes (2004) calls an interpersonal function: both the corpora display a majority of interactional bundles, namely, conversational word combinations which are used to express politeness or to report (e.g. *thank you your honor, your honor you may, witness your honor you, your honor i m, i want you to* and *did he*

tell you, is that correct yes, is that right yes, can you tell us, could you tell us, did you have any in movie and real trials, respectively) and fewer stance bundles which express attitudes that frame some other proposition and expressions (such as *i don t know, i don t think, i don t understand* and *i don t know, i don t think, i don t remember, i don t recall* in movie and real trials, respectively).

Table 6. 4-grams from movie and real trials

Rank	Raw Frequency	Movie Trials	Raw Frequency	Real Trials
1	25	**i don t know**	381	**i don t know**
2	25	**thank you your honor**	180	**i m going to**
3	13	**i d like to**	165	**what did you do**
4	11	**i have no further**	164	**did he tell you**
5	11	**your honor you may**	157	**is that correct yes**
6	9	**further questions your honor**	148	**is that right yes**
7	9	**no further questions your**	135	**i m not sure**
8	8	a bone marrow transplant	131	at the crime scene
9	8	**gentlemen of the jury**	123	**i don t think**
10	8	**i don t think**	109	**can you tell us**
11	8	**so help you god**	108	**could you tell us**
12	7	**approach the witness your**	94	**did you have any**
13	7	**but the truth so**	93	on may the th
14	7	**have no further questions**	93	west memphis police department
15	7	**isn t it true**	89	the west memphis police
16	7	**nothing but the truth**	89	**you tell us what**
17	7	**the truth so help**	87	correct that s correct
18	7	**the witness your honor**	83	**i don t have**
19	7	**truth so help you**	83	**i don t remember**
20	7	**witness your honor you**	80	**don t have any**
21	7	**your honor i m**	77	he was going to

22	6	and gentlemen of the	77	**that s correct and**
23	6	**and nothing but the**	77	**your honor we would**
24	6	at the time of	74	**i don t recall**
25	6	damages in the amount	69	**and what did you**
26	6	**do you have any**	68	**don t know what**
27	6	**help you god i**	68	the back of the
28	6	**i don t understand**	67	**ladies and gentlemen of**
29	6	**i want you to**	67	**that right yes sir**

4. Discussion, Concluding Remarks, and Implications

What has emerged from the Multi-Dimensional Analysis of movie and real trials and the investigation of their word lists and lexical bundles is a significant similarity between them. In particular, the data have shown the following traits:

a. the two corpora have the same polarity as regards D1, D3, D4 and D5 and the mean scores of these four dimensions are numerically similar (D1 equals to 12.50 and 19.15, D3 equals to -0.33 and -1.48, D4 equals to -1.32 and -0.16 and D5 equals to 0.34 and 1.17, respectively in the AMTC and ARTC);

b. although D2 is different in the two corpora in terms of polarity, their mean scores are not particularly divergent;

c. D1 bears the highest mean score in both corpora and none of the other dimensions has a numerically significant mean score in both corpora;

d. the spoken features which have emerged favor a discourse which is interactive and contribute to an interpersonal dialogic character which expresses private attitudes, emotions and thoughts (cf. Biber, 1988);

e. this interactive discourse and interpersonal dialogic character have also been confirmed by exploring the word lists and lexical bundles (i.e. 2-, 3- and 4-grams) present in the two corpora: these items are commonly used in spoken conversation (cf. Biber et al, 1991; Forchini, 2012a) and favor an interactional context; also when they appear in different lexical forms, they perform similar interactive functions.

These traits have led us to two major conclusions: first (cf. traits *a* and *b*), both movie and real trials are very similar textual types which are marked by *involved production* (cf. D1), *situation-dependent reference* (cf. D3) *non-overt expression of persuasion* (cf. D4), and *abstract information* (cf. D5). Second (cf. traits *c*, *d*, and *b*), the most salient dimension characterizing these textual types is the interpersonal one. Thus, the data have, on the one hand, confuted the claim that the cinematic portrayal of the American legal system is “far removed from legal reality” (Machura & Ulbrich, 2001, p. 118); on the other hand, they have

supported (and explained) the claim about courtroom discourse being "the closest approximation to everyday speech of all public legal discourses" (Williams, 2005, p. 24). The high relevance of Dimension 1 is, indeed, due to the high presence of interactive items which contribute to a dialogic character and express private attitudes, emotions and thoughts. The only difference which has been observed regarding Dimension 2 (i.e. movie trials are marked by *non-narrative concerns*, whereas real trials by *narrative* ones), although a subtle one, can be explained in two ways: the *non-narrative concerns* of movies could simply be in line with the general traits of movie language (which is *non-narrative*), whereas the *narrative concerns* of real trials reflect the existence of two parallel moments which naturally coexist in trials. Such moments are the interaction between the participants in the trial (i.e. the present) and the narration of the past events (i.e. the past). This is also evident by looking at the slightly higher occurrence of the present tense in movie than in real trials (cf. verb - uninflected present, imperative & third person in Table 2: 96.74 vs. 93.94, respectively), although it is worth noting that both the texts are marked by a verbal style and a narrative style and that for both of them the most significant dimension is D1.

By comparing these results with previous research, two main conclusions can be drawn: first, the present data have supported the previous findings about the nature of movie language, which has appeared once again to be marked by *involved production*, *non-narrative concerns*, *situation-dependent reference*, *non-overt expression of persuasion*, and *abstract information* and to bear the higher mean score in Dimension 1, regardless of the genre. Second, the data have demonstrated a similarity with real language also in a specialized context, such as the one investigated here.

The main implication which derives from this study is that, given the linguistic and textual similarity found between real and movie trials, it becomes reasonable to assume that movies can be used as a source for teaching not only the features of face-to-face conversation, but also the specialized features of legal language. Through the interpersonal traits found both in movie and real trials, movies could be used, for example, to illustrate the rationale for law, to foster critical thinking and analytical skills. There are, indeed, a number of attributes of critical thinking which are directly related to legal reasoning, and which Ennis (1989) usefully mentions. These include, for example, such as being capable of taking a position or changing a position as evidence dictates, remaining relevant to the point or issue in question, seeking information as well as precision in information, being open-minded, taking into account the entire situation, keeping the original problem in mind, searching for reasons, dealing with the components of a complex problem in an orderly manner, seeking a clear statement of the problem, looking for options, exhibiting sensitivity to others' feelings and depth of knowledge, and using credible sources.

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