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FEATURES OF THE USE OF LEGAL TERMINOLOGY IN ENGLISH DETECTIVE FICTION

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT:
ARTICLE HISTORY:	

This article examines the features of the use and functioning of legal terminology in English detective fiction as a specific form of artistic discourse where institutional legal language interacts with literary narration. Detective fiction occupies a special place in English literature due to its close connection with crime, investigation, and judicial processes. As a result, legal terminology becomes one of the central linguistic components of the genre. The research focuses on semantic, stylistic, pragmatic, and narrative characteristics of legal terms, their transformation in fictional contexts, and their role in constructing realism, suspense, and ideological meaning. The study is based on examples from classical and modern English detective writers and demonstrates that legal terminology functions not only as an informative tool but also as an important aesthetic and expressive means

English detective fiction has long been recognized as one of the most influential and widely read literary genres. Its popularity is largely explained by the combination of intellectual intrigue, psychological tension, and social realism. Crimes, investigations, and legal consequences form the narrative foundation of detective stories, which inevitably leads

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to the active use of juridical vocabulary. Legal terminology in such texts does not merely serve a technical purpose but becomes an essential stylistic and semantic element of artistic narration.

Legal terminology traditionally represents a specialized lexical system designed to ensure accuracy, clarity, and stability of meaning. Terms such as arrest, warrant, suspect, evidence, testimony, trial, verdict, sentence, and jurisdiction are normally associated with institutional legal discourse. In professional legal communication, these units function within strict normative frameworks and are characterized by unambiguity and formalization. However, when incorporated into literary texts, especially detective fiction, legal terms undergo functional and stylistic transformation.

The specificity of detective fiction lies in its hybrid discourse nature. It combines elements of narrative discourse, everyday conversational speech, police procedural language, and courtroom rhetoric. This interaction creates a unique linguistic environment in which legal terminology adapts to artistic aims. Writers are required to preserve authenticity while ensuring accessibility for a non-professional readership. Consequently, legal terms in detective fiction often appear in simplified forms or are supported by contextual explanations that allow readers to understand their meaning without specialized legal knowledge.

Historically, the emergence of detective fiction coincided with the institutional development of modern law enforcement systems in nineteenth-century England. The works of Edgar Allan Poe introduced analytical investigation as a literary method, while Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories established a stable model of detective narration enriched with police and legal terminology. In early detective fiction, juridical vocabulary primarily fulfilled an explanatory function, introducing readers to investigative procedures and reinforcing realism. During the Golden Age of detective fiction in the early twentieth century, legal terminology acquired more complex narrative functions. Writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers used legal vocabulary not only to describe investigation processes but also to mislead the reader, construct false assumptions, and organize logical puzzles. Terms related to evidence, alibi, motive, and confession became key narrative instruments guiding the reader's interpretation of events.

In modern crime fiction, the scope of legal terminology has significantly expanded. Contemporary novels actively incorporate courtroom discourse, forensic language, and procedural expressions reflecting advances in criminal investigation. Concepts such as DNA

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evidence, cross-examination, prosecution, defense attorney, and forensic report have become integral elements of modern detective narratives, emphasizing the growing influence of legal realism.

From a semantic perspective, legal terminology in detective fiction often demonstrates expansion and reinterpretation. While preserving their core denotative meanings, legal terms may acquire metaphorical or symbolic connotations. For example, the word verdict may represent moral judgment rather than an official court decision, while sentence may symbolize fate or destiny. Such semantic shifts enhance the expressive potential of juridical vocabulary and allow authors to convey philosophical and ethical implications. Stylistically, legal terminology performs several important functions. One of its primary roles is the creation of authenticity. The presence of juridical vocabulary strengthens the illusion of reality and convinces readers that the fictional world corresponds to actual social institutions. This realism is particularly important for detective fiction, which relies heavily on logical plausibility and procedural accuracy.

Legal terminology also contributes to characterization. Different social roles are reflected through lexical choice. Detectives, lawyers, judges, and police officers tend to employ formal and procedural vocabulary, whereas suspects and witnesses often use emotionally colored or evasive language. Such contrasts help construct psychological depth and social differentiation among characters. Another significant stylistic function of legal terminology is the creation of atmosphere and suspense. The emotionally neutral and formal tone of juridical language often contrasts sharply with scenes of violence, fear, or moral conflict. This contrast intensifies dramatic tension and highlights the opposition between institutional order and human chaos.

From a pragmatic standpoint, legal terminology in detective fiction fulfills informative, manipulative, and evaluative functions. It informs the reader about investigative stages and legal consequences, manipulates expectations by concealing or revealing crucial details, and expresses value judgments concerning justice, guilt, and responsibility. Authors frequently exploit the ambiguity between legality and morality, demonstrating that lawful actions are not always ethically just. In narrative construction, legal terminology functions as a structural marker. Detective plots typically follow a sequence of crime, investigation, confrontation, and resolution. Legal terms often signal transitions between these stages. The announcement of an arrest may indicate narrative climax, while a verdict or confession

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provides closure. In this sense, juridical vocabulary organizes the internal logic of the narrative.

Dialogue plays a particularly important role in demonstrating the functional variability of legal language. Interrogations, courtroom scenes, and police briefings are characterized by formal syntax and specialized terminology, whereas everyday dialogues tend to paraphrase legal concepts in simplified language. This stylistic variation reflects real communicative practices and increases narrative credibility. The use of legal terminology significantly influences reader perception. Adequate incorporation of juridical vocabulary enhances engagement and intellectual satisfaction, while excessive terminological density may impede comprehension. Successful detective fiction maintains a balance between specialization and narrative clarity, ensuring both realism and readability. In addition, detective fiction contributes to the popularization of legal knowledge. Through repeated exposure to juridical terms, readers develop a basic understanding of legal procedures and concepts, which shapes public perceptions of law and justice. Thus, detective literature functions as an intermediary between professional legal discourse and everyday linguistic consciousness.

In conclusion, legal terminology in English detective fiction represents a dynamic linguistic system that extends beyond its traditional institutional function. Within literary discourse, juridical vocabulary undergoes semantic adaptation, stylistic transformation, and pragmatic reinterpretation. It plays a crucial role in plot development, character construction, genre authenticity, and ideological meaning. Legal terminology serves as a bridge between factual reality and artistic imagination, enabling writers to create intellectually engaging and socially grounded narratives. The study of its functioning contributes to a deeper understanding of discourse interaction and highlights the close relationship between language, law, and literature.

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