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WEBPAGE USABILITY AND UTILITY CONTENT: CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND THE LAW ON GOV.UK

1. Introduction

The mission of the *UK Ministry of Justice* is “to protect the public and reduce reoffending, and to provide a more effective, transparent and responsive criminal justice system for victims and the public.”¹ In the digital age, this involves online representation (Kastberg 2010; Ditlevsen 2011), communication and mediation of legal knowledge via online content, especially intended to assist citizens with “making sense of justice,” the law and one’s rights.² Hence, the *Your rights and the law* pages of the UK Ministry of Justice,³ maintained by the Government Digital Service (GDS) on the *Gov.uk* platform⁴ as part of the Government Digital Strategy 2010-2015 and 2016-present: their mission is to create and deliver standardized user-friendly content that addresses the specific socially-grounded knowledge construction needs of specific lay users (UK citizens, permanent residents, tourists, etc.) (Cabinet Office 2012; GDS-a; GDS-b).⁵

It goes without saying that the ability to deliver relies on successful mediation (Engberg and Luttermann 2014) of legal knowledge via a type of sense-making intertextual recontextualization (Linell 1998; Calsamiglia and van Dijk 2004; Gotti 2014) that takes place across different cultures, discourse communities and communities of practice. Textual changes such as simplification, condensation, elaboration and refocusing (Linell 1998, 155) enable provision of accessible knowledge in effective asymmetric, intercultural and inter-discourse communication between experts and lay people (Scollon and Scollon 1995). Linguistically, the process is readily understood as ‘*intra-linguistic*’ translation (Jacobi 1987; Mortureux 1982, ed.), whereby exclusive expertise translates into intelligible knowledge, suitable to the background and experiential knowledge of the addressee. In this respect, research in the dialogic tradition has long identified strategies such as intertextual paraphrasing, intratextual reformulation (Adam and Herman 2000) and reconceptualization of terms. But, if the user cannot find the information or cannot find it easily due to poor interface and/or content design (Nielsen 1995; 1997; 1999; 2002; 2011; 2012), the information is not there (Tognazzini 2014).

If interface design, layout arrangements, content design and linguistic strategies run together, then the obvious question is, how do visual and written mode play out in the *Your rights and the law* (YRL) pages of the UK Ministry of Justice? Set against the backdrop of reflection on context-dependent trust (Section 2), the paper therefore provides a qualitative investigation into selected YRL articles and subdirectories. As hyper(multi-)modal texts (Lemke 2003, 301; Engberg and Maier 2015), the pages conflate multimodality and hypertextuality. This justifies integrating notions from multimodal analysis (Martinec and Salway 2005; Bateman 2014) with insights from research on web design and web user interfaces (Nielsen 1995 ff. and associates at NN/g) in order to discuss layout arrangements and the visual representation of mediated knowledge in the YRL pages (Section 3).

Moving on to the written representation of mediated knowledge, we postulate that factual language is used to address topics of concern to the end-user, and specialist terms come with (shortcuts to) expository definitions within dictionary-like microstructures (or articles) to address the knowledge and cognitive-oriented

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¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-justice>. Last Visited January 30, 2018.

² <http://open.justice.gov.uk/>. Last Visited January 30, 2018.

³ <http://gov.uk/browse/justice/rights>. First Visited June 1, 2016. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

⁴ <http://www.gov.uk>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

⁵ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.



needs of lay users. Thus, a counterpart of mature sitemaps for legal mediation would be dialogic reference to other texts (Bres 1985; Bres and Nowakowska 2005: *interdiscursive dialogism*) via intertextual paraphrasis and intratextual reformulation in several types of expository definitions (Loffler-Laurian 1983; Jacobi 1987; Adam and Herman 2000). Another way to attend to the asymmetric relation between competent institution and end-users with varied experiential backgrounds is recourse to *interlocutive dialogic devices* (Bres 1985; Bres and Nowakowska 2005), also in headings and keyword lists. Section 4 takes a brief look at these issues. Section 5 summarizes the main findings of the paper.

2. Mediated legal knowledge and trust in institutions

The Gov.uk platform and its YRL pages can be handled as social transmitters of useful information from principals – the government and the UK Ministry of Justice (sensu Goffman 1982) – to citizens. If, in the best of circumstances, they mediate legal knowledge by transmitting the system of laws and regulations, practices and services that regulate interactions between individuals, they give more predictability to uncertain situations and help guarantee justice and order. In this context, the intent of popularization (making knowledge accessible in various ways) justifies systematic efforts by service and content designers to accommodate the characteristics of non-expert communicative partners and build some kind of mutual understanding and common ground (Engberg, Cacchiani, Luttermann and Preite 2018). The other way round, though, the platform might fail to “help people get the information they need, in the way they need it.”⁶ It might fail to deliver due to ineffective knowledge building and communication strategies, or scarce usability (NN/g; Section 3). Yet, with delayed and difficult access to basic self-help information and documentation, citizens’ orientation is more likely to move users towards distrust in the institution – which does them harm or, at best, no good (Petitat 1998; 2004; Marková, Linell and Gillespie 2008).

The purpose of this paper is to assess the presence in the subdirectories of our concern of visual features and linguistic strategies that can help communicate and mediate effective answers to potential questions posed by lay users – including not only information and documentation for guidance on the law, but also the provision of digital services⁷ along guidelines set forth by the Gov.uk’s *Service Manual* (GDS-b) and *Digital Service Standard* (GDS-a).⁸ If this is the case, then it seems reasonable to suggest that knowledge representation on the Gov.uk platform can assist users with behaving pro-socially and responsibly. Also, we assume that a concurrent merit of useful and easy to use pages would be that, as an “early [and fast] response system to [urgent] problems” (Farrell 2014, adapted) of specific citizens, they can contribute to reinforcing trust in the institution and encourage the willingness of citizens to legitimize and give credibility to the government (Petitat 1998; 2004; Marková, Linell and Gillespie 2008).⁹

3. Online visual representation of mediated legal knowledge

The purpose of the Gov.uk platform and the YRL subdirectories is to communicate easily, exactly and precisely the knowledge of relevance in the situation and for the information needs of the lay interlocutor – which involves extensive reflection on both the visual and written dimensions of knowledge representation. Working on the assumption that effective user interfaces are in fact responsible for much that is important for communicating on the YRL pages (NN/g), this section concentrates on webpage layout. To this purpose, we

⁶ <https://gds.blog.gov.uk/2018/07/11/the-importance-of-content-designers-in-government/>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

⁷ For instance, the page *Guidance. Firearms licensing covers Licensing guidance, good practice on firearms law, and forms for applying for approvals under the law*: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/firearms-licensing-police-guidance#apply-for-a-licence>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

⁸ The guidelines are partly available for external communication on <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual> and <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/service-standard>. Last Visited January 30, 2018.

⁹ Notice that ‘problems’ also cover dissatisfaction with the service received. In that regard, the Gov.uk platform provides content about starting a complaints procedure by phone, email or in writing (e.g., *Complaints procedures*: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-passport-office/about/complaints-procedure>. Last Visited September 15, 2018) or making online inquiries (e.g., *Passport inquiries*: https://eforms.homeoffice.gov.uk/outreach/Passport_Enquiries.ofml. Last Visited September 15, 2018). Giving citizens a say means interacting with them as equal before the law, and ultimately ensure that their voices are heard. This is another way to reinforce trust towards the institution.



bring together notions from research on multimodality (Martinec and Salway 2005; Bateman 2014) on the one hand and from work on webpage usability (Nielsen 1995 and associates at NN/g, a computer user interface and user experience consulting firm) on the other. Framing our argument within a webpage usability perspective (NN/g), websites that deliver good value to both end-user and principal organization are understood as *mature information formats* (Farrell 2014), which adopt easy to use (*usable*) user interfaces to effectively transmit accessible *utility content*, or *useful* mediated knowledge (which meets the information needs of lay users and is adequate to their varied background and search skills) (Cacchiani 2018).

3.1 Useful heuristics for mature information formats

In the words of the Government Digital Service and the Service Manual Team (GDS-a; GDS-b), the key to creating positive user experiences and making the Gov.uk platform work is to identify users' needs via extensive user research and.¹⁰ This informs user-centered service and content design.¹¹ To that effect, requests for feedback on beta versions of new services (e.g., *Apply online for a new passport*)¹² are part of 'as-you-go' user research. Also used to that effect are questions about user negative experiences at the bottom of all pages (*Is this page helpful? Yes, No; Is there anything wrong with this page?*), which jump link to feedback forms or dialogue boxes (*What were you doing?; What went wrong?*).

This is in full accord with research on webpage usability (Nielsen 1995 ff. and associates at NN/g). Over time NN/g has produced a set of recommendations for improved user interface design based on extensive quantitative and qualitative user experience research, training and consulting on topics such as research methods and user testing, eye tracking, human-computer interaction and persuasive design, as well as web usability, web accessibility and content strategy. Particularly, NN/g has singled out a set of actions that can help develop positive user experiences on particular websites (e.g., corporate websites in Loranger 2015, and higher education websites in Sherwin 2016), and make up better website experiences in general (Nielsen 1995; 1997; 2011; 2012, inter alios). In what follows we pursue the idea that usability heuristics (Nielsen 1995) can be used as criteria for descriptive analysis (cf., e.g., Cacchiani 2018).

First, in mature information formats knowledge is not only accessible but also expandable. Directories are visually consistent within and across panes and pages. Information is structured hierarchically in relatively flat and wide hierarchies (e.g., with items organized on three layers) and items that do not overlap conceptually within each (sub-)category. Users have access to sitemaps that can guide their navigation (Whitenton 2013). Additionally, when information is written for the web, it does not clutter the page.¹³ Information framing and information fixing devices comprise dots, keywords, itemized lists of hyperlinks or FAQs (Farrell 2014; 2015), different backgrounds for banners, vertical and horizontal panes, etc. Information is framed and fixed in clusters of meaningful (rather than clever) headlines and bylines, and, for headings of subheadings, traditional itemized lists of hyperlinks or FAQs with jump links to separate questions and answers (ibid.). Third, the layout is scannable (Nielsen 1995; 1997), allowing for a combination of paragraph styling and chunking by topic with listing and highlighting of keywords (via hyperlinking, variation in typeface and color) or other visual representation tools that move away from cumbersome linear reading. Color and high contrast for text are used for readability (Tognazzini 2014). In general, specific typefaces and sizes, color palette, spacing and positions are systematically used not only for selected functions (e.g., navigation) but also for dominant and secondary texts and images in particular (Nielsen 1997; 2011; Tognazzini 2014). The question about dominant and secondary texts and images invites reflection on a number of related issues: how do meanings cohere (sensu Bateman 2014)? Or, how do written text, static and dynamic images combine in the interest of creating positive user experiences? How are meanings fixed and framed (Kress 2010), mediated and foregrounded? How do specific actions interact within and across pages, and down potential search routes via direct or diagonal quick links, jump links and hyperlinks to documents and pages?

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/user-research>; <https://userresearch.blog.gov.uk/2015/03/18/so-youre-going-to-be-a-user-researcher-top-tips-to-get-you-going/>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport>; <https://www.passport.service.gov.uk/help/feedback>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/apply-renew-passport>; <https://www.passport.service.gov.uk/help/feedback>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

¹³ Indeed, Nielsen (1997) argues, the text should use half the word-count (or less) than conventional pages.



To capture the nature of coherence in *hypermultimodal* (Lemke 2003; Engberg and Maier 2015) layouts (i.e. webpages) that constitute joint compositions of visually instantiated and intentionally co-present texts and images (Barthes 1977 [1964]), we borrow notions from research on the status of and types of logico-semantic relations in text-image pairs. Thus, *status* relations encode the distinction between:

- i. *text-image pairs on equal footing*: in *relays* which provide *independent* or *complementary* contributions to the understanding and memory of meaning;
- ii. *pairs with unequal status of text and image*: *illustration*, where the text is *subordinate* and specified by the image; *anchorage*, where the text *amplifies* and specifies the image (ibid.; see also Martinec and Salway 2005).

Within the economy of this paper, we must also consider the type of *logico-semantic relation* at hand:

- i. *close relation to the text*: one-way *expansion* (from text to image or the other way round); *elaboration* in the form of *exposition* (image and text with the same generality) or *exemplification* (text or image more general); *extension*, for intrinsically unrelated information; *extension*; *enhancement*, with circumstantial information;
- ii. *little relation to the text*: *decoration*, which makes the text more attractive but does not produce real effects on the reader's understanding or memory (Bateman 2014, 131; cf. also Kong 2006); *control*, including schemes like *engage* and *motivate*, which encourages some kind of (non-emotional) response from the reader (Bateman 2014, 130-131);
- iii. *relations beyond the text*: *interpret*, which comprises *document*, for factual and substantial support to the text, and *emphasize* (ibid.).

At this point, we have the apparatus we need to look into the online visual (re)presentation of mediated legal knowledge. Textual chunks within the page will be analyzed as separate units.

3.2 Layout consistency across multiple routes to utility content

One basic postulate of webpage usability is that layout arrangements are consistent across panes and pages. As a matter of fact, a quick search in YRL shows that the pages come closer to realizing a mature information format (sensu Tognazzini 2014), by means of usable webpage layout and user interfaces for accessible utility content.

In terms of interface design, any two screenshots from (sub-)directories of departments and services show common solutions (i.e. a single design) for layout arrangements and templates for exemplar transactions in digital by default services.¹⁴ This means that users move through similar layout arrangements and down similar routes when applying online to renew their driving licence¹⁵ or registering to manage their personal tax account with Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs,¹⁶ gathering information about applying to adopt a child through their local council¹⁷ or inquiring about getting help during a flood,¹⁸ and turning to local council and services.¹⁹

Figures 1 to 5 provide screenshots down multiple routes from *Your rights and the law* (1) through content for *Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO)* in 2016 (2a) (later replaced by 2b, *Punishments for antisocial behavior*, due to changes to legislation) and *Report a crime or antisocial behavior* (3), to *Report vandalism* (4) and *Statistics. Nature of vandalism* (5). Here, subdirectories on multiple levels show that feature selection on the visual representation side, layout arrangement, high text contrast, meaning and function of variation in color and font size, are all consistent with the conventions set by the Government Digital Service in their Service Manual (GDS-b). By clearly connecting and unifying panes and pages within the Gov.uk platform, consistency plays a robust role in asserting and maintaining the individual identity of the UK Ministry of Justice.²⁰

¹⁴ See Cacchiani (2018) for discussion of consistent (though not uniform) layout arrangements, user interfaces and the visual representation of knowledge on Gov.uk subdirectories.

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/renew-driving-licence>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/apply-to-adopt-child-through-council>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/help-during-flood>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

¹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>. Last Visited March 1, 2018.

²⁰ For a more thorough analysis of the visual representation of knowledge in Figures 1a, 2a and 3-5, see Cacchiani (2018: Figures 5-9).



There is yet another point to be made: knowledge about *Your rights and the law* – a subdirectory or *Crime, justice and the law* at Gov.uk – is expandable and communicated progressively, diluted across panes and pages. It is constructed in easy user interfaces following the navigation choices made by the specific end-user based on her specific needs (Tognazzini 2014; adapted). This is in line with directions in the Service Manual (GDS-b) and the Digital Service Standard (GDS-a) in particular, and involves recourse to the standard usability tricks – roughly, meaningful (as against clever) subheads and itemized lists of shortcuts to subdirectories in skyscrapers and columns, highlighting for visited links and blue buttons with inverted contrast relation that foregrounds the subject of concern. They help trace the path the user is following and the parallel mental maps and semantic relations that are progressively construed when jumping from keywords through the A-Z list to further subdirectories, organized into different levels. The resulting network of itemized lists and hyperlinks also provides a visual representation of the immediate subdirectories in the sitemap (Figures 1a, 1b).²¹

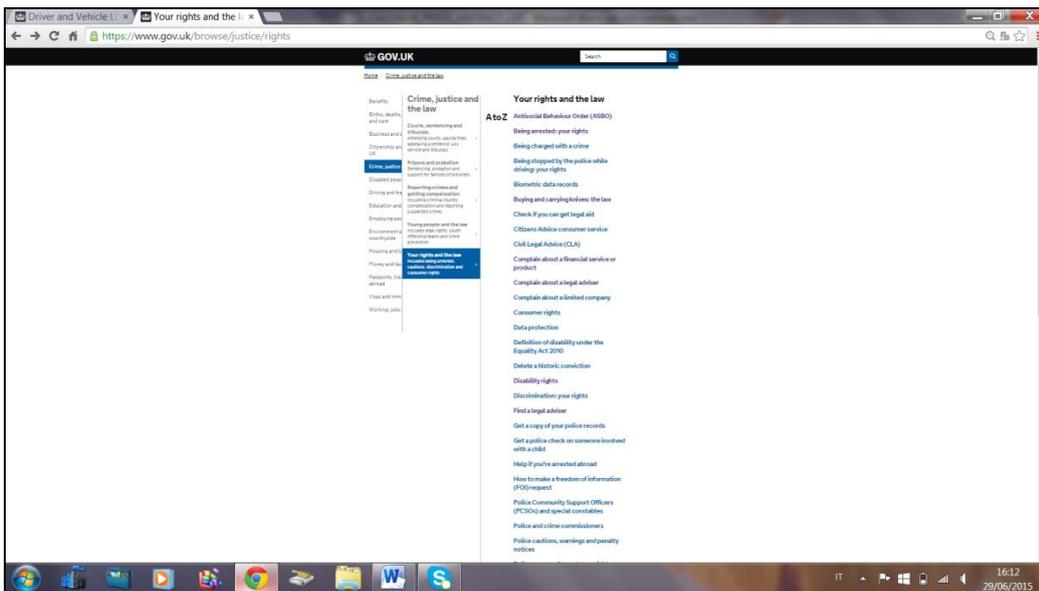


Fig. 1a: *Your rights and the law* (2016)

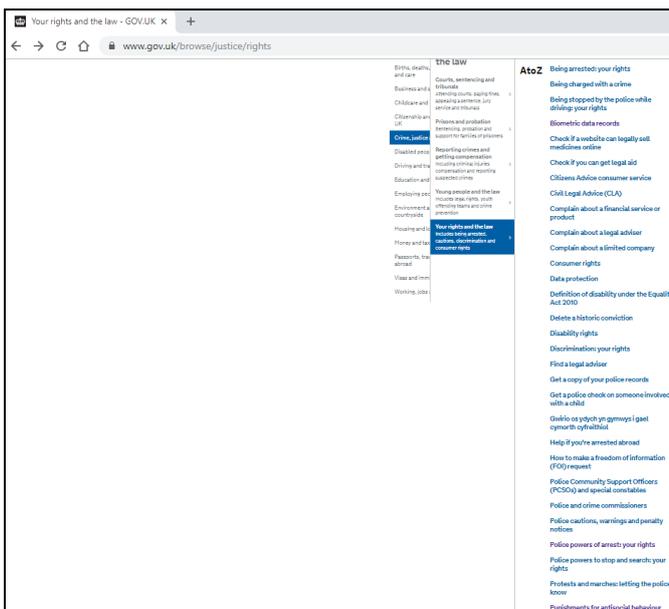


Fig. 1b: *Punishments for antisocial behaviour* (2018)

²¹ Respectively, <http://www.gov.uk/browse/justice/rights>. Last Visited June 1, 2016; <https://www.gov.uk/browse/justice/rights>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.



Clicking on *Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO)* in the pop-up skyscraper of Figure 1a or *Punishments for antisocial behaviour* in Figure 1b, we jump link to at-a-glance viewing of mediated information on the landing page (Figures 2a, 2b).²²

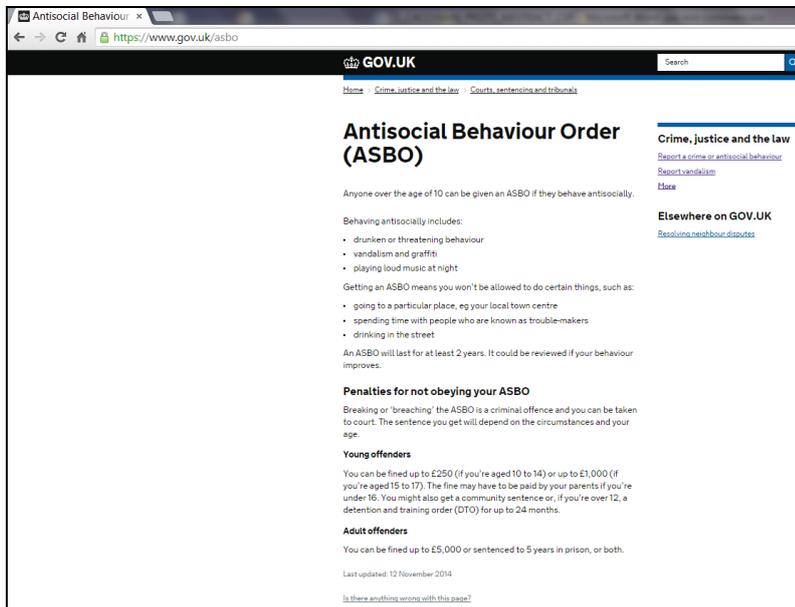


Fig. 2a: *Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO)* (2016)

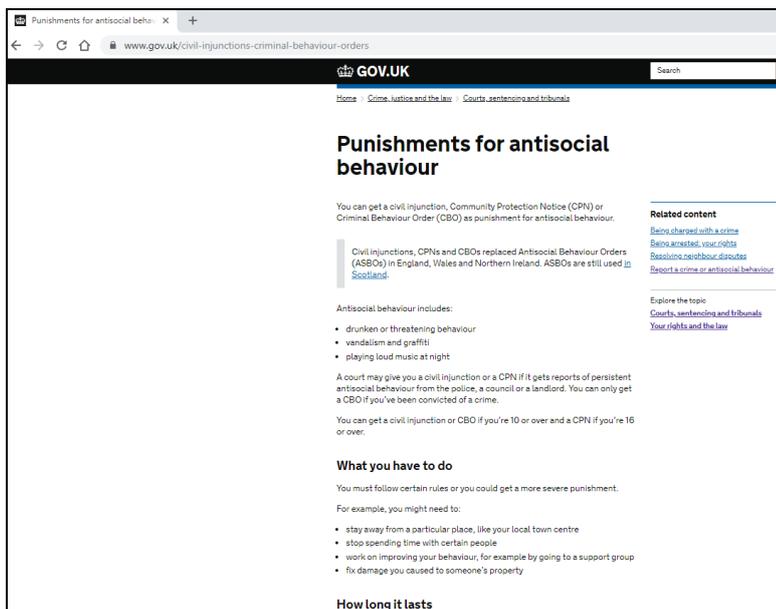


Fig. 2b: *Punishments for antisocial behaviour* (2018)

However, if well aware of the whys and wherefores of antisocial behaviour orders or punishments for antisocial behaviour – behaviours, offenders, notification, consequences, violation and penalties – one may want to skip the article and rather access expansions such as *Report a crime or antisocial behaviour* (Figure 3).²³

²² Respectively, <https://www.gov.uk/asbo>. Last Visited June 1, 2016; <https://www.gov.uk/civil-injunctions-criminal-behaviour-orders>. Last Visited September 15, 2018.

²³ <http://www.gov.uk/report-crime-anti-social-behaviour>. Last Visited June 1, 2016.



Also, the same content can be accessed via multiple roads. Hence, clickable buttons (with inverted contrast relation to foreground the subject of concern) in Figures 2a and 2b further extend *Crime, justice and the law* (foregrounded in Figures 1a, 1b) and allow the user to land onto Figure 3.

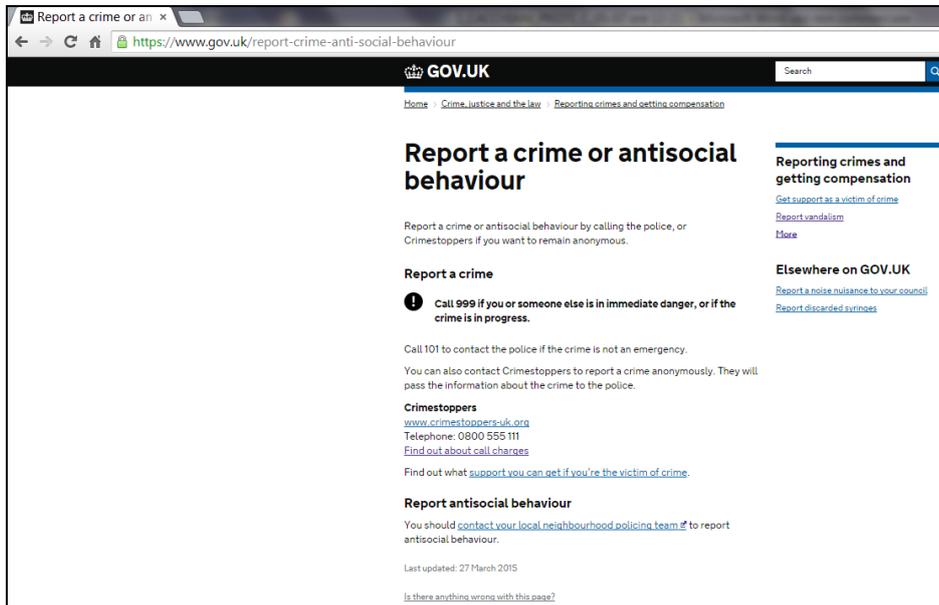


Fig. 3: Report a crime or antisocial behaviour

The end-user can also access content about reporting vandalism (Figure 4)²⁴ via links (*Report vandalism*) on the pages on *Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO)* (Figure 2a), *Punishments for antisocial behavior* (2b) and *Report a crime or antisocial behaviour* (Figure 3).

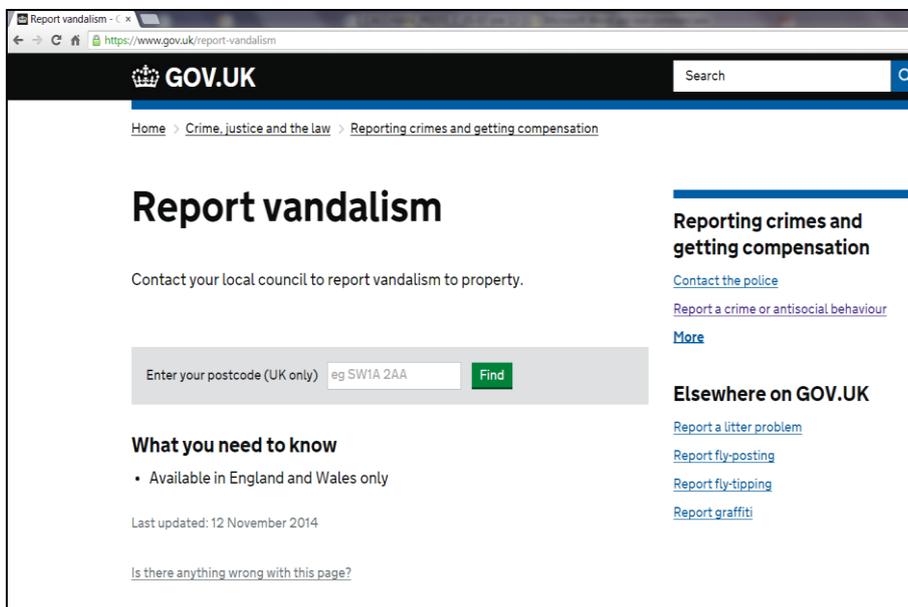


Fig. 4: Report vandalism

Interestingly, *vandalism* is used as an undefinable in the article about ASBOs and punishments for antisocial behavior (Figures 2a, 2b). If the end-user is not familiar with the specialized meaning of vandalism, however,

²⁴ <http://www.gov.uk/report-crime-vandalism>. Last Visited June 1, 2016.



mediated knowledge can be accessed via the search box in the black leaderboard at the top. Thus, typing in *vandalism* will return one page about *Statistics. Nature of vandalism* (Figure 5).²⁵

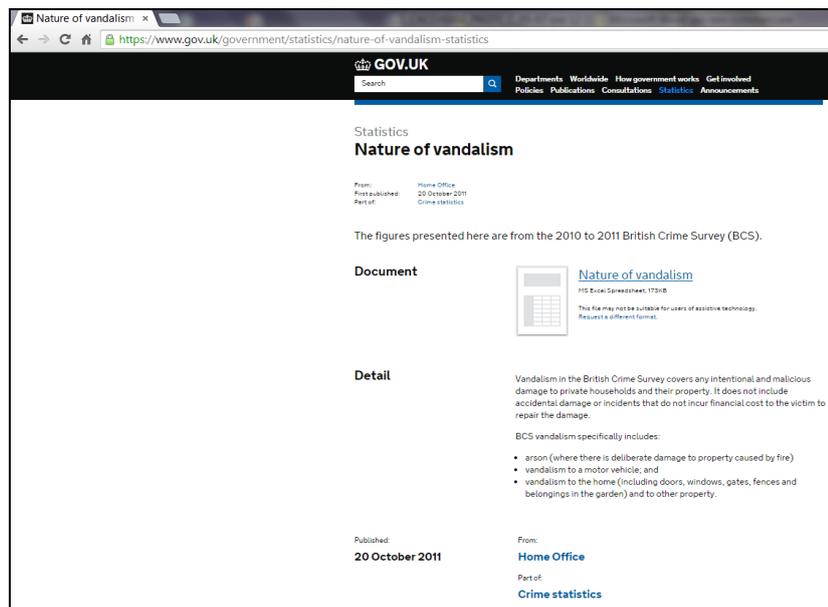


Fig. 5: *Statistics. Nature of vandalism*

Like other headings (Figures 2-4), *Statistics. Nature of vandalism* is further amplified by subsequent chunks. Documentary information in the form of a clickable document presenting figures and statistics is followed by a dictionary-like microstructure (Jacobi 1987; Adam and Herman 2000: intratextual reformulation; Section 4) with circumstantial information about the source text (e.g. *in the British Crime Survey*) and exemplifying specification (Barthes 1977 [1964]) in a bulleted list from the *Detail* rectangle on the white pane [1]:

- [1] Vandalism in the British Crime Survey covers any intentional and malicious damage to private household and their property. [...]
BCS vandalism specifically includes:
- arson (where there is deliberate damage to property caused by fire)
 - vandalism to a motor vehicle; and
 - vandalism to the home (including doors, windows, gates, fences and belongings in the garden) and to other property. (Nature of vandalism)

Overall, there is nothing fancy. There is no interest in presenting decorative-promotional images that might help engage with the reader and motivate searches by making the text more attractive and any usability mistake less noticeable (Kurosu and Kashimura 1995; Meyer 2017). If we understand bars, boxes and skyscrapers in panes and pages as visually related, then the *A-Z* list in the pop-up skyscraper of Figures 1a and 1b expands on the closely related, higher level clickable item (*Your right and the law*, in the column *Crime, justice and the law*) – which is an obvious choice with legal knowledge mediation.

Subordinate enhancing information is not important content. Since it does not satisfy user queries, it does not need to attract attention. Therefore, it is visually backgrounded in diverse ways. For example, circumstantial information like “The figures presented here are from the 2010 and 2111 British Crime Survey (BCS); or Published 20 October 2011, From Home Office, Part of Crime Statistics” (Figure 5), is not framed in the middle of the page (contrary to the *Document* and *Detail* boxes), is presented in small font and/or at the bottom of the page, and lacks contrast.

Another important point concerns relations beyond the text (from regular webpages to documentary pdfs). Landing on pdfs is postponed (Figure 5). From the point of view of usability, pdfs are problematic in that they

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/nature-of-vandalism-statistics>. Last Visited June 1, 2016.



are not easy to browse, read or navigate on screen. However, they are a source of factual and substantial information, which supports the text in the webpages and might indeed be required to answer less common or less basic questions.

4. Online written representation of mediated legal knowledge

We saw in Section 3 that layout consistency across multiple search routes is a prerequisite of useful visual representation of mediated legal knowledge on subdirectories of the Gov.uk platform. Another precondition is that the intended user can land on the information s/he needs via multiple routes while receiving assistance with his/her searches. Taking a usability perspective, it is easy to claim that information design works around users' inability to form effective queries and issues such as poor search results (Farrell 2014; 2015, adapted). However, there are other important ways to assist with transmitting accessible and expandable utility content in the written mode. We will explore the issue in this section.

4.1 Dialogism: working definitions

If we have to look at the representation and communication of accessible utility content to lay end-users with varied experiential backgrounds on the YRL pages, we have to look through the prism of research in interdiscursive and interlocutive dialogism. Hence, dialogic reference to other texts (Bres 1985; Bres and Nowakowska 2005: *interdiscursive dialogism*) via intertextual paraphrasing and intratextual reformulation in several types of expository definitions (Loffler-Laurian 1983; Jacobi 1987; Adam and Herman 2000). Recourse to *interlocutive dialogic* devices (Bres 1985; Bres and Nowakowska 2005) is equally important, for example, in headings and keyword lists, which may take the form of questions and action-demanding infinitives for goals, as well 2nd-person imperatives and other directives.

4.2 Reformulating utility content

As regards interlocutive dialogism and interactional concerns, qualitative data analysis suggests that highly interactive imperatives ([2]: *check if you can get*) are used together with participial forms of action verbs denoting specific scenarios ([3]: *Selling, buying and carrying knives*), nouns for entities ([4]: notions such as *ASBO, consumer rights*, etc.) and, if rare, non-finite *Wh*-questions ([5]: *How to make a freedom information request*):²⁶

[2] ^b Check if a website can legally sell medicines online; Check if you can get legal aid; Complain about a financial service or product

[3] ^a Selling, buying and carrying knives: the law; ^b Selling, buying and carrying knives

[4] ^a Antisocial behaviour order (ASBO); Consumer rights; Data protection; Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010; Police and crime commissioners; ^b Punishments for antisocial behaviour

[5] How to make a freedom of information request (FOI)

Turning to content on the landing sites, imperatives are a feature of the YRL pages ([6]: *ask ...*; [7]: *Contact ...*). Generally, recourse to the second person ([6]: *If you've been*) and imperatives has a clear perlocutionary effect. In contrast, impersonal constructions and the third person (anybody, everybody, neither you nor me) would present knowledge as not directly oriented towards the needs of the end-user:

[6] If you've been charged with a crime, ask your solicitor or barrister if you are able to get legal aid. (Legal Aid)

[7] Contact your police and crime commissioner (PCC) to make a suggestion or a complaint about how your local area is policed. (Police and crime commissioners)

²⁶ The examples under ([2]) to ([5]) are meaningful keywords in the skyscraper presenting the YRL A-Z itemized list on the Gov.uk page *Crime, justice and the law*. The page was originally visited on June 1, 2016 (cf. Figure 1). On the last access date (September 15, 2018), however, some changes had taken place. In case of differences across the pages, superscript precedes the example to signal access date ('^a' stands for June 1, 2016, '^b' for September 15, 2018).



Another example of interlocutive dialogism is the Question/Answer pattern ([8]: *What ‘substantial’ and ‘long term’ mean*). In a sense, the Q/A pattern is user-oriented because it constructs the user as actively engaged in addressing his own questions and tackling problems. Besides facilitating decoding of ensuing information, questions are highly interactional ways to show user-orientation because they come with the implicit promise of a competent answer. This is also the job of imperatives ([9]: *Report abuse*; short for *How to report abuse*). In a slightly different manner, participial forms ([10]: *Dealing with ...*) come with the promise of a description of a scenario that might be relevant to the specific knowledge construction needs of the reader.

[8] What ‘substantial’ and ‘long term’ mean (Definition of disability under the Equality Act 2010)

[9] Report abuse (Domestic violence)

[10] Dealing with domestic violence (Domestic violence)

Once audience-orientation is established, mediation of knowledge in the legal field calls for intratextual reformulations (Jacobi 1987; Adam and Herman 2000). They bring together term and equivalent reformulation in expository texts which resemble lexicographic definitions in dictionary articles. This involves reconceptualization of terms from source discourses and approximations to specialized meanings. With the exception of relative clauses and substitutive naming, all the defining strategies put forth by Loffler-Laurian (1983) are represented. They may come in diverse combinations and realize subtypes that vary according to the direction of the definition – from term to word and vice versa – or with exclusion vs inclusion of relational expressions (connector, verb, relative clause). Examples comprise associative naming with relational expressions ([11]: *is*) and forms of equivalence ([11]: *or ...*); metalinguistic naming ([12]: *cases known as*); definitions by function ([12]: *normally handles ...*; [13]: *can help meet the costs ...*; [15]: *gives you the right to; has a duty to make ...*); analytical definitions and exemplifications ([12]: *e.g. ...*; [16]: *These changes could include ..., e.g. ...*), with inclusion of *if*-clauses that explicitate the conditions under which specific scenarios may apply ([14]):

[11] Breaking or ‘breaching’ the ASBO is a criminal offence and you can be taken to court. (Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO))

[12] A magistrates’ court normally handles cases known as ‘summary offences’, e.g.: most motoring offences, minor criminal damage, being drunk and disorderly. (Criminal courts)

[13] Legal aid can help meet the costs of legal advice, family mediation and representation in a court or tribunal. (Legal aid)

[14] The fine may have to be paid by your parents if you’re under 16. You might also get a community sentence or, if you’re over 12, a detention and training order (DTO) for up to 24 months. (Antisocial Behaviour Order (ASBO))

[15] The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) gives you the right to access recorded information held by public sector organizations. (How to make a freedom of information (FOI) request)

[16] An education provider has a duty to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ to make sure disabled students are not discriminated against. These changes could include: changes to physical features, e.g. creating a ramp so that students can enter a classroom; providing extra support and aids (like specialist teachers or equipment). (Disability rights)

With these observations in mind, we can now have a quick look at how these devices interact with textual chunking and paragraph structuring within the page. One first example is [1], repeated here for convenience:

[1] Vandalism in the British Crime Survey covers any intentional and malicious damage to private household and their property. [...]

BCS vandalism specifically includes:

- arson (where there is deliberate damage to property caused by fire)
- vandalism to a motor vehicle; and



- vandalism to the home (including doors, windows, gates, fences and belongings in the garden) and to other property. (The nature of vandalism)

The text involves reformulation from the source discourse (circumstantial information: *in the British Crime Survey*) to the web page. Among others, knowledge presentation and communication make recourse to an analytic definition broken down into a bulleted list of hyponyms that are deemed to be potentially relevant to the knowledge construction needs of the user (*BCS vandalism specifically includes: • arson (...) / • vandalism to a motor vehicle; and / • vandalism to the home (...)*). These may be further specified via diverse types of reformulation (e.g., definition by function in (*where there is deliberate damage to property caused by fire*)).

Generally, information is schematized into bulleted lists that separate graphically and fix subordinate components on the page – phrases, as in ([17]), and clauses, as in ([18]-[20], as against [21]):

[17] The police can give you a ‘fixed penalty notice’ for less serious traffic offences, eg for:

- careless or inconsiderate driving
- using a mobile phone while driving
- not wearing a seat belt
- driving too close to another vehicle. (Minor motoring offences)

[18] The police can also decide to:

- take no action
- issue a warning
- offer driver training
- charge you with an offence. (Minor motoring offences)

[19] If the officer thinks you’re under the influence of alcohol or drugs, they can ask you to:

- take a drug test
- do a physical test (a ‘field impairment test’), eg walk in a straight line then turn around and walk back. (Breath test)

[20] The police can stop you at any time and ask you to take a breath test (‘breathalyse’ you) if:

- they think you’ve been drinking
- you’ve committed a traffic offence
- you’ve been involved in a road traffic accident. (Breath test)

[21] You can be fined up to £200 and get penalty points on your licence if you get a fixed penalty notice - you may be disqualified from driving if you build up 12 points within 3 years. (Minor motoring offences)

In *if*-conditionals like ([18]) and ([19]), preposed *if*-clauses are topics (Haiman 1978), textual organizers (Ramsay 1987) and also iconic (sensu Enkvist 1981; Merlini Barbaresi 1988). The apodosis introduces the cause or precondition for the multiple requests embedded in the statement that follows in a ‘leading’ structure of the type ‘If A, (then) B, C, D’. On most occasions, however, ‘trailing’ structures reshuffle causes and consequence (‘A, if B, C, D’), as in ([20]) and ([21]). Besides foregrounding, fixing and contrasting relevant information – or the diverse circumstances in which the apodosis might apply – in end-focus position across oftentimes syntactically parallel subcomponents, it seems reasonable to suggest that giving “a statement of the consequence at the outset [as in ([20])] might catch the reader’s eye and provide a reason to read on” (Bertlin 2016, 33). Overall, structures like ‘If A, B, then C, D’ are not an option, in the same way as the structure ‘If A, B, if C’ is dismissed.²⁷

5. Conclusions

The goal of this descriptive study has been to investigate the visual and written representation of legal knowledge in selected articles and directories of the Gov.uk platform, which transmits and mediates legal knowledge from the UK Government and Ministry of Justice as institutional principals to individual citizens.

²⁷ All paragraph structures are extensively discussed in Bertlin’s (2014) study of best practice in drafting and presenting legislation in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, part of UK Cabinet Office.



The data suggests that the *Your rights and the law* pages at Gov.uk are able to deliver good value to the end-user (i.e. knowledge) and to the institution (in terms of credibility and trust generation).

Written mediation of legal knowledge through the *Your rights and the law* pages at Gov.uk, we have seen, comes with recourse to interdiscursive and interlocutive dialogic devices. Oftentimes, expository reformulations resemble lexicographic definitions in dictionary articles: they may come in diverse combinations and vary according to the direction of the definition, type (analytical or by function), present or absent relational expressions, etc. This involves reconceptualization of terms from source discourses and approximations to specialized meanings.

From a usability point of view, the *Your rights and the law* pages appear to qualify as mature information formats and a powerful means for knowledge construction and representation, as well as engagement and interaction with end-users (GDS-a, GDS-b). They satisfy the standard criteria for usable user interfaces – layout consistency, meaningful headings, itemized keywords and hierarchical organization of expandable content, clear signposting and multiple access routes, etc. Accordingly, information is diluted across pages, and content often graphically schematized into bulleted lists that separate and fix subordinate components on the page. This demonstrates a major concern with the graphic/visual organization of expandable utility content, which is a major prerequisite for encouraging users to turn to the Gov.uk platform rather than other sources for basic self-help, services and documentation.

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