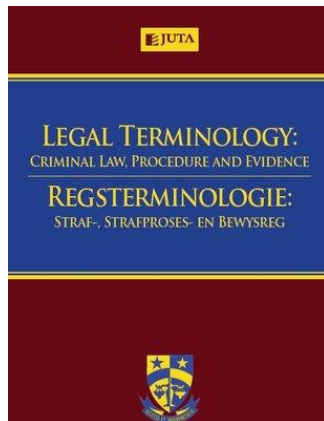


## **Book Review**

### **LEGAL TERMINOLOGY: CRIMINAL LAW, PROCEDURE AND EVIDENCE**



**CENTRE FOR LEGAL TERMINOLOGY  
IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES**

(659 pages)

Juta & Co. Ltd

[www.jutalaw.co.za](http://www.jutalaw.co.za)

**"How often misused words generate misleading thoughts"  
- Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)**

It is more than a century since William Henry Somerset Bell, founder of the South African Law Journal, published the first edition of his South African Legal Dictionary (608 pages) in 1910. It contained "most of the English, Latin and Dutch terms, phrases and maxims used in Roman-Dutch Law and South African Legal Practice, together with definitions occurring in the statutes of the South African colonies". Subsequent editions followed in 1925 and 1951.

Language, and in particular the interpretation and meaning of legal language, has always been central to the administration of justice. But for many years there has not been available a comprehensive and consolidated dictionary of legal terminology to follow in Bell's footsteps. Section 35(3)(k) of the Constitution of 1996 proclaims: "Every accused person has a right to a fair trial, which includes the right to be tried in a language that the accused person understands or, if that is not practicable, to have the proceedings interpreted in that language."

Arising from the 1985 annual general meeting of the South African Translators' Institute (SATI), in 1987 a committee, now known as the Centre for Legal Terminology in African Languages (CLTAL), was formed, consisting of numerous specialist collaborators and expert members, all voluntary contributors. Their main objective is to make legal terminology more accessible and available to all and to make it more comprehensible.

This impressive publication is the first in a series which ultimately aims to provide compilations of legal terms, definitions and explanations in all of South Africa's indigenous languages. The focus in this work is on criminal law, criminal procedural law, and the law of evidence, which is where the greatest current need has been identified.

The editors point out: *"The need for unambiguous communication in the theoretical and applied fields of human activity, such as the legal profession, is constantly increasing...Legal language is one of the most difficult languages for special purposes since only legal experts versed in the special vocabulary can communicate successfully – lay people tend to struggle comprehending the language of law, sometimes called legalese."*

The three sections of the book are divided into English/Afrikaans; Latin /English/Afrikaans; and Afrikaans/English.

- **Latin:** de minimis non curat lex.
- **English:** the law does not concern itself with trifles.
- **Afrikaans:** die reg bemoei hom nie met beuselagtighede nie.

The clarity of expression, accuracy, and plain language of the definitions, translations and explanations guarantees that this volume will undoubtedly for many years to come remain an invaluable source of reference for legal practitioners, judicial officers, law enforcement officials, interpreters, translators, legislators, law students and the media.

The dedication and vision of CLTAL and its collaborators backed by the technical professionalism of publishers Juta has gone a long way to achieving their admirable objectives.

Review by Louis Rood BA, LLB (UCT) of Fairbridges Wertheim Becker.