

LAW, meet LINGUISTICS

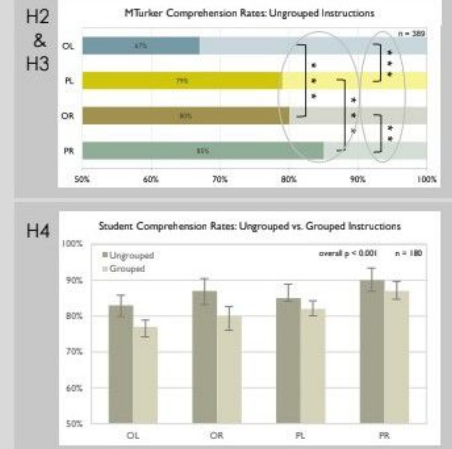
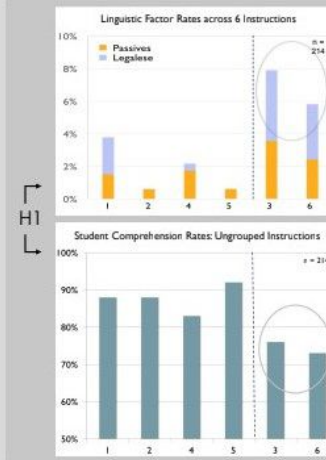
\$1.20 The standard of proof in a civil case is that a plaintiff must prove his or her case by a preponderance of the evidence. This is a less stringent standard that is applied in a criminal case, where the prosecution must prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. By contrast in a civil case such as this one, the plaintiff is not required to prove...

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2012: **Massachusetts Bar Association** contacts a **Ingwist** to help them improve jury instructions.

The **Ingwist** forms a student research team to investigate.

Testing → Results



Hypotheses

- Two linguistic factors, **passive verbs** and **legalese**, decrease comprehension of jury instructions.
- Comprehension will improve if instructions are written in "Plain English."
- Comprehension will improve if jurors read the instructions as they listen.
- Comprehension will worsen when instructions are presented in one group, as they are in an actual trial.

Collaborations

We ran a continuing-education workshop for 35 Massachusetts judges.

Current Jury Instruction

Plain English Jury Instruction

OK, Judges, here's your turn...

Direct & Circumstantial Evidence

We spoke at a national conference for trial consultants.

What was that again?

50% couldn't define "preponderance of the evidence"

80% couldn't define "beyond a reasonable doubt"

More jurors are misunderstanding the instructions than you think.

How often do Linguists help attorneys?

We hosted a conference with our law school on linguistics/law issues.

