

A TRIBUTE TO CYNTHIA ADAMS

PETER K. CRAMER*

I have known Cynthia Adams for over twenty-five years now. At the beginning, I knew Cynthia as the “Legal Writing Prof,” and someone who was very dedicated to working with international students, but that was about all. Later, when I decided to get an LLM from IU Bloomington, her name started to become more familiar to me.

It was in 2005, though, that I met Cynthia in person at the first Global Legal Skills Conference in Chicago, a conference convened by the legendary Mark Wojcik from John Marshall.¹ It has since become the largest event for legal professionals and ESL teachers who are involved in teaching legal skills and legal writing, especially in international environments. At that time, however, it was more like a small gathering around the campfire for a few dedicated legal and language professionals. It was fun to find out about our overlapping interests, especially when talking about teaching LLM students. I came at it from a linguistic perspective while Cynthia approached things from a cross-jurisdictional one.

This was the starting point of a long professional friendship that took us to conferences in places like Mexico, Costa Rica, and Israel, where we first presented insights gained from working together as a lawyer-linguist team.

Around 2010, Cynthia also provided the impetus for creating our first book project on contract drafting for Non-Native Speakers of English (NNs).² In one of our many conversations, she mentioned that so many of the then-current contract drafting books, be it for native speakers or nonnative speakers, rarely contained samples of actual contracts. We brainstormed for a while and discovered a resource, SEC’s EDGAR, the largest public collection of actual contracts involving public companies.

For me, as a linguist trained in law in two different legal systems, Germany and the U.S., the database was a treasure trove of information for language-related activities, often also containing international contracts. As an aside, a database such as that in EDGAR is called a CORPUS in linguistics, a collection of text or speech that can be analyzed for specific patterns. In contract drafting, it can be used to find technical terms or frequently occurring contract phrasing, and it can also be used to find common collocations, i.e., typical word combinations such as *commercially reasonable efforts*. Non-native drafters unfamiliar with the correct idiomatic use often resort to using dictionaries and end up with awkward combinations of synonyms such as in “reasonable trade

* Ph.D., MA.TESOL, and LLM., retired Assistant Dean for Graduate Programs at Washington University School of Law and former Associate Director of the Center for Global Legal English at Georgetown University.

1. *Global Legal Skills Conference*, U. ILL. CHI., <https://glsc.law.uic.edu/about/past-conferences/> (last visited Jan. 12, 2026) (listing Global Legal Skills Conference I, which took place May 7–8, 2005, at the John Marshall Law School in Chicago, Illinois).

2. CYNTHIA M. ADAMS & PETER K. CRAMER, *DRAFTING CONTRACTS IN LEGAL ENGLISH: CROSS-BORDER AGREEMENTS GOVERNED BY U.S. LAW* (2013).

attempts,” instead of the more idiomatic expression, sounding more like being part of a badly translated usage manual from a faraway place.

Interestingly, I believe our early efforts to draw from a large database might today be compared in some ways to the use of large databases in AI-generated document drafting. In our case, we had an enormous database with thousands of contracts, but unlike many of the AI-based systems, we had a superpower in Cynthia Adams, a legal professional who had many years of contract drafting experience, providing top-notch quality control for many parts of our book. On top of sharing her extensive drafting experience, she created comprehensive checklists at the end of most chapters on what to observe and what to avoid when drafting specific contract clauses. Thus, we were able to avoid one of the biggest pitfalls troubling current AI-mediated contract drafting. AI often compiles vast databases and creates output that is based on material that can be faulty or incorrect. With AI, the result is often referred to as GIGO—“Garbage In, Garbage Out.”³ Thus, we were able to put in a system of checks and balances that made our book an early predecessor of what was to follow in AI—but with an inbuilt security system.

Cynthia knew intuitively which passages in the contracts from the database used archaic legalese expressions, and which passages might raise legal concerns. I then focused on the linguistic aspects of contract drafting, such as streamlining verbose passages or pointing out how to avoid ambiguities that might lead to costly litigation, and I provided insights on legal caveats when drafting an international contract.

For the next two years, we then set out to write a contract drafting book for non-native speakers. The second edition was expanded to include native speakers,⁴ and the third edition added extra exercises that involved using AI critically, checking on the outcomes for correctness.⁵ Let’s see what the fourth edition may bring, but one thing is sure: Cynthia Adams will be a driving force and an influence on legal writing for non-native speakers and native speakers for years to come. I will forever be grateful for that first “conference around the campfire,” where I met a compassionate professional and a future friend. Thank you, Cynthia!

3. *Work with New Electronic ‘Brains’ Opens Field for Army Math Experts*, THE TIMES (HAMMOND IND.), Nov. 10, 1957 (describing the use of the term “Garbage In-Garbage Out” in relation to early computers).

4. CYNTHIA M. ADAMS & PETER K. CRAMER, A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DRAFTING CONTRACTS: FROM CONCEPT TO CLOSURE (2d ed. 2020).

5. CYNTHIA M. ADAMS & PETER K. CRAMER, A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO DRAFTING CONTRACTS: FROM CONCEPT TO CLOSURE (3d ed. 2025).