

4.3 Rules of language

The courts may also choose to look at other words in the statute to ascertain the meaning of specific words. To enable them to do this they have developed a number of rules of language to help make the meaning of words and phrases clear. There are three main rules of language:

- *Ejusdem generis*

This rule states that where there is a list of words which is followed by general words then the general words are limited to the same kind of items as the specific words. In the case of *Powell v Kempton* (1899) AC 143, a ring at a racecourse was held not to fall within the terms 'house, office, room or other place' because the list of words indicated that 'other place' should be construed as an indoor place.

- *Expressio unius est exclusio alterius*

Where the express mention of one thing excludes others. Where there is a list of words which is not followed by general words, then the Act applies only to the items in the list. In the case of *R v Inhabitants of Sedgley* (1831) the use of the words 'lands, houses and coalmines' excluded application to other types of mine.

- *Noscitur a sociis*

A word is known by the company it keeps. The words must be looked at in the context and interpreted accordingly. This involves considering other words in the same section or other sections of the Act. In the case of *Muir v Keay* (1875) LR 10 QB 594, the purpose of licensing theatrical or musical entertainment did not fall within the words of the Act covering houses 'for public refreshment, resort and entertainment', because the word 'entertainment' in the Act referred to refreshment houses, receptions and accommodation of the public.