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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF HEDGING

IN ENGLISH AND CHINESE

LEGAL ACADEMIC WRITINGS

ABSTRACT

Hedging, being one of the key features of academic writings, 'express(es) tentativeness and possibility in communication' (4), and 'their appropriate use is crucial'. It has been received great attention in the research fields from semantic, pragmatic and cognitive perspectives. However, most of the studies of hedging expressions in academic writings concern English only, and few touches upon Chinese, let alone a comparative study between English and Chinese academic writings. In addition, there have been few studies on legal academic writings to date. This study aims to make a corpus-based comparative study of hedging expressions in English and Chinese legal academic writings by investigating and analyzing heading expressions from a cross-cultural pragmatic view. The corpus is composed of 10 randomly selected English legal academic writings and 10 Chinese ones published in key academic journals of law from 2012-2013. The framework of hedges in academic writings proposed by Hyland (4) is employed in tagging the corpus. By conducting a quantitative analysis of the overall distribution of hedging devices in English and Chinese in the corpora and a qualitative approach to analyze details of hedges in the corpus, the paper compares the similarities and differences of hedging expressions in academic legal writings in these two languages. It is found that the

main hedges are similar in the two corpora; however, there are fewer hedges in the Chinese corpus than the English corpus. The paper also explores the reasons behind these differences. Through a comparative pragmatic study of hedging expressions based on the corpus, it is hoped that a cross-cultural awareness of hedging expressions in English and Chinese legal academic writings shall be raised among students and researchers.