

Acquisition of Formulaic Expressions in English Legal Contracts and Agreements

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate how second language learners acquire genre-specific formulaic expressions in English legal discourse. The specific type of legal discourse under investigation is English contract and agreement, which is a common and important type of legal documents in modern society. The research questions to be addressed are: 1. Do law majors acquire more formulaic expressions specific to English contracts and agreements than non-law majors? And if so, does their acquisition increase when year of learning law increases? 2. Do people more familiar with English contracts and agreements better acquire formulaic expressions in question? 3. Do people acquire certain types of formulaic expressions better than other types? To study subjects' acquisition of formulaic expressions in law context, a test is designed as the nativeness judgment tests in some previous linguistic researches. After collecting data from 37 valid participants, analyses are carried out using ANOVA tests and the three research questions are then addressed. Second language learners majoring in law acquired formulaic expressions in English contracts and agreements better than learners who do not major in law; second language learners who claim that they have read many contracts and agreements in English do not acquire formulaic expressions in those documents better than learners who claim that they have read some contracts and agreements in English, only some in Chinese, or none at all; second language learners do not acquire

certain type of formulaic expressions in English contracts and agreements, at least those identified in this study by their frequency in legal documents and general contexts, better than other types. Implications can be drawn on study of second language acquisition, pedagogy of particular genre, the study of law, etc.

Reflection

This study acts as the capstone of my undergraduate studies. During the study, I have reflected on the knowledge in my previous courses taken in the university, such as second language acquisition, pedagogical grammar, discourse analysis, associative meaning in semantics, corpora-based analysis, etc. Sometimes it is the ability to make connections that generates new speculations and open up new viewpoints of a certain study. This study also offers me a different perspective of viewing the study of law. I realized that although people would always say that the content is the essence, the power of form cannot be ignored. Last but not least, a chance of research is provided by this course, as well as the spirit of research study and self-motivated study. In the future life, I would always keep a curious and critical mind, realizing interesting phenomena around me, and researching for the reasons.