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EXPLORING THE UNEXPECTED IN LEGAL DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF SPANISH AND BRITISH JUDGMENTS ON IMMIGRATION

Abstract

In spite of being popularly regarded as examples of objectivity, two collections of Spanish and British judicial decisions related to the search terms *migration*, *immigration* and their Spanish equivalents were examined in search for evidence of the use of evaluative vocabulary, which appears to be considerably significant judging by the amount of such lexical items found in both corpora. This research thus introduces a contrastive corpus-based study of two legal corpora through the replication of the *appraisal* theory model. The frequency lists from both corpora, obtained using the software *Lancsbox* (Brezina et al., 2015) were compared by examining and classifying those vocabulary items amongst the top 2,500 types in the lists using the taxonomy provided by appraisal theory. The findings show that the British dataset contains a greater proportion of evaluative vocabulary, particularly as regards the category *affect* within the *appraisal* system. Such findings could be related to the very nature of its legal system, where the law is said to be judge-made, leaving greater freedom for the expression of stance as opposed to the Spanish system, which is codified and may somehow constrain legal actors in the way in which they convey their attitude towards the propositional content of legal texts.

Key words

legal language, corpus-based discourse analysis, appraisal theory, immigration, judicial decisions.

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