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厦门大学

博士学位论文

英语学术论文中强势语的功能研究

A Functional Study of Boosting in English Research Articles

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Abstract

The role played by hedging in research articles has been widely discussed in the literature, but little attention has been paid to its counterpart — boosting, which is an important linguistic resource for writers to intensify their degree of certainty and commitment to propositions and build writer-reader relations. This dissertation attempts to study the frequencies, meanings and functions of boosters and their disciplinary variations based on a corpus of 120 published empirical research articles from six scientific disciplines — Applied Linguistics, Marketing, Sociology, Physics, Chemistry, and Life Science, of which the first three are classified as humanities and social sciences, and the next three, as natural sciences.

The corpus-based study reveals that research article authors boost frequently across a range of disciplines using a variety of boosters, and there are distinct disciplinary differences in the frequencies and forms of boosters. The differences are both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, the frequencies of both overall boosting devices and specific types of boosters are different across the six disciplines. Qualitatively, these disciplines show differences in the way persuasion is attained and certainty and strong claims are encoded through the use of boosting strategies.

The dissertation argues that the quantitative and qualitative differences in the use of boosters across disciplines are related to different disciplinary norms and conventions and different modes of knowledge construction. Various disciplines might be seen as subcultures or academic tribes, which have their own particular disciplinary practices and specific ways of conveying certainty, confidence and commitment with boosters. Humanities and social sciences are soft sciences, in which propositions or claims are usually based on observing patterns of human behaviour. There is no doubt that the empirical study of human behaviour involves more variables than other objects of study, and precise and reliable data are often difficult to obtain. Therefore, writers of humanities and social sciences need to use more

linguistic and rhetorical devices to clarify the relationships between variables and to compensate for the inaccuracy of their data. Boosters, as one of the important persuasive and interactional linguistic devices, therefore, occur at a higher frequency than those in natural science disciplines. Natural sciences are considered as hard sciences. The relatively small number of boosters and high frequency of certainty verbs in natural science texts can be explained by the fact that natural science disciplines tend to stress the validity and objectivity of their research not through rhetorical strategies, but through concrete results or evidence presented by statistics, figures, graphs and tables, which require more certainty verbs to interpret and comment on. It is also worthy of note that although the total number of boosters in natural sciences is smaller, yet boosters still play a very important role in the negotiation of knowledge in research articles of natural sciences, for data or statistics do not mean absolute truth or facts, but are subject to the writer's convincing interpretations. Even when the data are supposed to provide enough evidence for the reliability of claims, rhetorical devices such as boosting are still needed to make the research articles a valid source of information.

Boosters are not only different in different disciplines, but also in different sections of research articles. These differences may be associated with different disciplinary conventions and different modes of knowledge construction on the one hand, and with different functions of each section on the other. For example, since the function of the Discussion section is to discuss the significance of the experimental results or findings and convince readers of the validity of claims, there is generally a higher frequency of certainty verbs (for interpreting and commenting on results and findings) and concur and pronounce boosters (for emphasizing the truth of propositions and building a relationship of solidarity with readers).

Despite the differences across disciplines and research article sections, boosting is on the whole an important persuasive and interpersonal device in research articles of all disciplines to reinforce the strength of propositions, convince readers of the validity of knowledge claims and rule out potential alternative views. It is hoped that this study will fill in the gap in boosting research, contribute to the understanding of

boosting in research articles and shed a little more light on the study of scientific expressions.

Key words: boosters; research articles; corpus

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摘 要

英语学术论文中模糊限制语的使用已受到广泛关注,但与模糊限制语相对应的强势语却较少有人涉及,而强势语是学术论文作者表达对观点的确信、建立作者和读者关系的重要语言手段。本文试图以六个学科的 120 篇实证研究论文为语料研究强势语在学术论文中的发生频率、意义和功能以及强势语在不同学科的使用差异。这六个学科分别为应用语言学、市场营销、社会学、物理学、化学和生命科学,其中前三者为人文和社会科学类学术论文,后三者为自然科学类学术论文。

语料库统计结果表明学术论文作者常常使用强势语表达强调和确信,不同学科在强势语的频率和使用类型上具有明显差异,这些差异即表现在量上也表现在质上。从量上看,六个学科在总体强势语的使用和不同类型强势语的使用频率上都表现出差异,人文和社会科学学术论文使用的强势语总数比自然科学类学术论文多,但是就具体强势语类型来看,自然科学论文中确信动词的使用频率较人文社科论文多。从质上看,这些学科在进行说服、表达确信和强调观点时使用不同的强势语策略。

本文认为各学科在使用强势语方面质和量的差异与各个学科规范、传统和学科知识建构模式有关。每个学科可被看作具有特定学科传统的亚文化或学术部落,它们有各自使用强势语表达确信、自信和责任的特定手段。人文社会科学是软科学,论点的提出通常是基于对人类行为模式的观察,而毫无疑问对人类行为的实证研究比其他研究对象涉及更多的变量,以至于精确可靠的数据不易获得,因此人文和社会科学论文作者需要借助更多的语言和修辞手段来澄清各变量之间的关系,以弥补数据的不足或不精确。因此,作为重要人际互动和劝说手段的强势语在人文社科学术论文的使用频率就比自然科学类学术论文多。自然科学被认为是硬科学,语料库统计结果显示自然科学论文中强势语总数偏低,但确信动词频率较高,这表明自然科学论文倾向于通过图表、图形所呈现的结果和数据强调研究的正确性和客观性,而不是通过修辞手段。需要指出的是,尽管自然科学类学术论文中的强势语总数较人文社科论文低,但是强势语在建构知识方面仍然起着

非常重要的作用，因为自然科学中的数据并不代表绝对真理或事实，它们需要论文作者具有说服力的解读，即使数据为论点提供了足够的证据，作者仍然需要强势语之类的修辞手段说服读者接受论点的可靠性。

强势语不但在不同学科中表现出不同的使用频率，在学术论文的不同部分中也有所不同。这些差异一方面源于学科传统和知识建构模式的不同，另一方面源于各部分功能的不同。比如讨论部分的功能主要是讨论实验结果和发现的重要性，说服读者接受作者的论点，因此在这部分中用来解读结果和发现的确信动词和用来强调观点、建立和读者统一关系的确信副词使用频率较高。

尽管不同学科学术论文中的强势语频率和使用类型不同，强势语可以说是所有学科中重要的实现人际意义的语言手段，用来强调论点、说服读者接受论点并屏蔽潜在的不同观点。本文的研究成果希望能够填补强势语研究方面的欠缺，深化对学术论文中强势语的理解，并对科学语言的进一步研究有所裨益。

关键词：强势语；学术论文；语料库

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