

On the Legal English Features of Online Judgments in the Digital Context

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Abstract

Legal English possesses basic features such as professionalism, accuracy, standardization, and objectivity. Its stylistic style is formal, and it frequently employs formal and solemn words in its vocabulary; in sentence structure, it often uses complex long sentences and complete sentence structures to express legal concepts and legal relationships precisely. This paper takes digital development as the research premise and the features of legal English in traditional judgments as the basis, and explores the features of legal English in online judgments in the context of digitalization.

Keywords

Features of Legal English; Digital Development; Online Judgments

1. Introduction

Legal English refers to the English used to express legal concepts and legal affairs, so it has professional features. Legal English is the combination of law and the English language. It is used in legal documents, legal procedures, legal research and other legal-related fields. Legal English, as a branch of a regulated language, has its own unique linguistic style features. It differs from ordinary English in terms of vocabulary, syntax, professional terms, and expression methods, and the most important and essential feature among them is the accuracy of word choice (Hu, 2007). Legal English has unique features in terms of vocabulary, syntax, style and pragmatics. Its vocabulary includes a large number of professional terms, Latin and Old English words, etc. The sentence structures are complex, mostly consisting of long and difficult sentences. Its aims are to express legal concepts and legal relationships precisely. The style is formal and solemn. In terms of pragmatics, it emphasizes accuracy, standardization and objectivity to ensure the accurate transmission of legal information and the rigorous handling of legal affairs. Legal English plays an important role in international legal exchanges, handling cross-border legal affairs, and

the operation of the domestic legal system.

A judgment is a kind of judicial document issued by the court, which deals with the substantive rights and obligations of the parties and has legal effect. It is the concentrated manifestation and ultimate carrier of the court's exercise of judicial power (Zhang, 2014). An online judgment refers to the court judgment that is published and presented through a digital platform. It is the digital form of traditional judgments in the era of the Internet, usually existing in the form of electronic text, PDF documents, or specialized legal databases. The legal English in online judgments is different from that in traditional judgments significantly. This is a phenomenon that has naturally emerged due to the rapid development of digitalization. The differences between the two mainly concentrate on three aspects, including vocabulary usage, text features, and legal basis. For example, the terms related to "Information Technology" in online judgments will be far more numerous than those in traditional judgments. To adapt to the screen reading habits of the public, the legal English in online judgments is more concise in terms of sentence structure and other language expressions compared to traditional judgments. Complicated and difficult-to-understand long sentences are often replaced by simple and understandable short sentences. Such issues are inevitable and unavoidable during the rapid development of digitalization. In order to keep pace with the times and adapt to the changes brought about by digitalization, the legal English in online judgments must be adjusted accordingly based on the original version. This is to provide a guarantee for improving judicial transparency in the digital context, facilitating the public, legal professionals, and parties to access and understand information such as the judgment results, factual determinations, and legal basis of cases, as well as promoting judicial fairness and the popularization of legal knowledge.

Based on that, this paper selects the legal English of online judgments as the research object under the background of digital development as the research premise, and compares it with the legal English of traditional judgments. Through the method of comparative study, it explores the features of the legal English of online judgments. This article will conduct a study on legal English in online judgments from various perspectives, analyze its changes and developments as well as the meanings it conveys comprehensively, and summarize the legal English features of online judgments in the digital age.

2. The Impact of Digital Development on the Use of Legal English Vocabulary in Online Judgments

In the era of rapid and continuous development of digitalization, the Internet, mobile devices and various intelligent technologies have been widely applied. People's lives and work are highly dependent on the network, and a large amount of personal information, business data and financial transactions are conducted online. At the same time, some cybercriminals will take advantage of the vulnerabilities and com-

plexity of related technologies to commit crimes. For instance, hackers, by deeply understanding the network systems and software, use code vulnerabilities to launch attacks, steal data or control devices. All these criminal acts, even if minor, can damage personal interests, cause personal property losses. Seriously, they can endanger social harmony and stability, even affect the future and destiny of the country.

Not only that, the digital development has broken the previous geographical restrictions, and cybercrimes have also shown a cross-border feature. Criminals can commit crimes globally, taking advantage of the differences in laws and regulatory loopholes in different countries to evade punishment. For instance, some online gambling platforms set up servers abroad and conduct illegal activities targeting users from multiple countries. These criminal acts have had a huge impact on global cybersecurity. From a higher perspective, they will also pose a hindrance to global prosperity and development.

In order to better address the various online criminal phenomena that mentioned above and to enhance the professionalism, accuracy and standardization of online criminal judgments, the legal English of online judgments has adopted a large number of technical terms in its vocabulary usage. Legal terms related to online criminal cases and involving information technology, such as “cybersecurity”, “digital forensics” and “online dispute resolution”, etc., which appear more frequently in online judgments than in an era of slow digital development. Its aim is to address new legal issues arising in the digital age effectively.

In order to explore whether the extensive use of legal English involving information technology terms in online judgments can truly and effectively address the new legal issues arising in the digital age, this article focuses on cross-border cybercrime and conducts a detailed analysis. Cross-border cybercrime is different from domestic cybercrime in terms of judgments and requires more complex considerations, mainly in “Applicable Law”, “Evidence-Related” and “Criminal Acts”. As judgments serve as the carrier of fair judicial practices by judicial authorities, they need to present the final results of complex issues existing in relevant cases within the legal procedures. The aim is to provide behavioral guidance to the public through the judgment results of specific cases, clarify what behaviors are legal and what behaviors are illegal, and play a role in regulating social behaviors. At the same time, it also enables the public to understand the legal provisions and judicial practices, enhance legal awareness and promote the construction of a legal society. High-quality judgments can make it easier for the parties involved to accept the handling result of the case, thereby reducing the occurrence of appeals, petitions, and protests, and achieving the effect of calming disputes; at the same time, it can also demonstrate the characteristics of judicial openness, fairness and justice, and establish the authority of the judiciary (Zhang, 2014). In order to leverage the positive effects of the above statements fully, in the digital age, the legal English of online judgments fol-

lows relevant laws and strictly uses legal terms related to information technology, which can guarantee the accuracy, professionalism, standardization and objectivity of online judgments. Thus, the judgment results of cross-border cybercrime cases can be recognized while also being subject to public supervision, thereby effectively addressing the new legal issues arising in the digital age.

3. The Impact of Digital Development on the Legal English Text Features of Online Judgments

The rapid development of digitalization has greatly changed people's reading habits, making reading anytime and anywhere become a common phenomenon. Digitalization has broken through the limitations of time and space for reading. People can access various digital reading platforms anytime and anywhere through electronic devices like mobile phones and tablets, and obtain a vast amount of reading resources. For example, e-books, online articles and audio books, etc., to meet their immediate reading needs. Due to this, the number of people who insist on reading traditional paper books has shown a significant decrease trend, and the situation of carrying paper books when going out has become even rarer.

Although both are forms of reading, there are significant differences between online reading and traditional paper reading. The main difference lies in the features of the text, which can be divided into two major categories: content length and language style. In terms of content length, online reading tends to prefer shorter and more concise content. To adapt to people's fragmented reading habits, such as short posts on Weibo, News Briefs, and Short Video Scripts, the focus is on quickly transmitting core information. While traditional paper reading has relatively less restrictions on the length of the text, readers have more patience to read long works, such as classic literary masterpieces and academic monographs. Through in-depth narration and detailed description, they build a complete knowledge system or story framework. In terms of language style, the language of online reading is more straightforward and easier to understand, often using colloquial expressions to quickly convey information. For example, some online works adopt a direct and humorous language style, which suits the reading preferences of the general public. However, traditional paper reading is different, its language style is more diverse. Classic literary works may use more elegant and standardized language, emphasizing the beauty and expressiveness of the words, while academic reading materials require precise and rigorous language with a strict logical structure. In addition, in terms of searching for information and grasping key points, traditional paper reading and online reading are quite different. In traditional reading, readers may have to search through multiple books and periodicals to find the target object, which is both time-consuming and laborious. Digital search methods have brought great convenience to information search (Zhou, 2022).

Based on the above comparative analysis results, a conclusion can be drawn: In the

digital age, in order to meet people's reading preferences and to adapt to the current online reading mode, the legal English of online judgments must make certain adjustments in terms of content length and language style. It can make readers grasp the key information quickly when reading online judgments, understand relevant legal knowledge, and reduce the difficulties in understanding caused by complex content or overly abstruse expressions. Thereby, enhance the effectiveness of legal publicity effectively.

The following is a detailed comparative analysis of the legal English in online judgments in the digital age and the legal English in traditional online judgments, focusing on the content length and language style.

3.1. Length and Content

The traditional legal English of online judgments usually elaborates on case facts, legal basis and reasoning process, etc., which provides detailed explanations for the citation and interpretation of various legal provisions. This results in a relatively lengthy overall length of the judgment. For instance, in some complex commercial dispute cases, a significant amount of space may be devoted to outlining contract terms, transaction processes and other details. In the digital age, the legal English of online judgments, with the acceleration of information dissemination speed and changes in people's reading habits, has to a certain extent placed greater emphasis on simplicity and clarity. It highlights key facts and core legal issues, avoids lengthy expressions and aims to enhance information transmission efficiency. For example, for some simple cases with clear facts and clear legal application, the judgment may focus on emphasizing key evidence and main legal basis, omitting some non-key details, thereby shortening the overall length.

3.2. Language Style

Another characteristic of legal English in terms of sentence structure is the frequent use of long sentences, mainly manifested in the use of adverbial phrases and relative clauses. Besides, it also extensively employs complex and compound sentences to achieve the purpose of accurate and rigorous expression (Wu, 2017). Not only that, the legal English of traditional online judgments is usually highly professional and formal, using legal terms extensively, Latin, and archaic English vocabulary, with complex sentence structures. However, in the digital age, the legal English of online judgments still maintains professionalism, but pays more attention to the simplicity and clarity of the language, avoiding overly obscure terms and complex sentence structures as much as possible to facilitate understanding by a wider audience. While ensuring legal accuracy, it enhances the readability of the language, which is conducive to the promotion and popularization of legal knowledge.

4. The Impact of Digital Development on the Legal English Legal Basis of Online Judgments

It is well known that the era of dataization is closely related to cross-border e-commerce and cross-border trade. In recent years, with the continuous advancement of cutting-edge technologies such as big data and artificial intelligence, as well as the deepening of economic globalization, cross-border e-commerce has become an important part of international trade and is favored by overseas consumers (Ruan et al., 2025). Digital technology enables consumers to easily purchase goods worldwide on the Internet, and also allows enterprises to more conveniently expand their international markets. It has broken the geographical restrictions of traditional trade and promoted the rapid development of cross-border e-commerce and cross-border trade, and achieving “Buying Globally and Selling Globally”. However, along with the global economic development, some legal issues have also emerged. For example, disputes over competition rules. Digital platform enterprises depend on their data advantages to form monopolies, such as “big data discrimination” and collusion of platform algorithms, which disrupt the fair competition environment and lead to disputes.

In order to make fair judgments on relevant legal disputes in a professional, accurate, standardized and objective way, online judgments need to cover more laws from different countries or regions as legal bases. This requires that the legal English of online judgments should refer to foreign laws or international practices extensively as legal grounds to support the court’s judgment on the relevant cases, and present the court’s judgment results in a professional, accurate, standardized and objective way.

5. Conclusion

With the rapid development of digitalization, some new legal issues are bound to arise. However, it is necessary to make fair judgments on these legal issues and allow the public to learn more legal knowledge from the trial results of these cases, achieving the effect of promoting legal knowledge effectively. This must be a long-term commitment and continuous improvement. Online judgments serve as the carrier for presenting the judgment results and must strictly adhere to professionalism, standardization, accuracy, and objectivity to present the judgment results. However, it is necessary to clarify that in the digital context, the legal English in online judgments, in terms of vocabulary usage, text characteristics, and legal basis must keep up with the times and be progressive. It must always uphold the goal of “better resolving legal issues”.

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