Linguistic Variation of Pakistani Fiction and Non-Fiction Book Blurbs: A Multidimensional Analysis

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ABSTRACT: *Book blurb text has been widely acknowledged as a distinct register. Present study conducted a quantitative analysis of linguistic variation of online blurbs for Pakistani books with respect to textual dimensions. It also examined textual relations of book blurb register with the sharply distinguished genres studied by Biber (1988) and the promotional varieties (direct mail letters, non-profit grant proposals, print advertisements), by following the multidimensional approach developed by Biber (1988). Corpus constituted 200 online blurbs for Pakistani fiction and non-fiction books. Findings indicated that book blurb register displayed a pattern of linguistic features which was distinguished from other varieties. Contrary to the claims established by previous studies, book blurbs were found different from spoken text. Their relation with advertising text was also found complex. They did not show close resemblance with advertising text on dimensions 1, 2, and 3, but with respect to dimensions 4 and 5, they displayed mutual similarity. Negative scores of book blurbs on dimension 4 characterized them as non-persuasive texts. The study may be significant for writers, publishers and especially for researchers working on book blurb text as a register.*

Introduction

Blurbs provide a brief but engaging introduction of the content of book and its author for the guidance of readers and buyers. Various linguists have described blurbs in different ways. Gesuato (2007) defines them as "instances of informational-promotional literature", which "illustrate the content of given books for their readers' benefit and highlight some of their positive features for their authors' and publishers' benefits" (p. 80). Blurbs present the selected material in a pleasing manner to capture the attention of potential readers and buyers. Their "main purpose is to promote a book and to persuade potential readers to buy it by providing both description and positive evaluation" (Gea-Valor & Ros, 2009, p. 201).

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The multifaceted nature of book blurbs has drawn the attention of researchers enormously. Past studies analyzed the linguistic features of book blurbs only by relying upon the distribution of individual linguistic features and calculating raw frequency scores. A few comparative studies were carried out to compare the language of book blurb register with the language of other promotional varieties but they did not adopt any multidimensional statistical technique to explore the complex phenomena of textual variation among these registers. The findings of previous studies with respect to linguistic variation of book blurbs face validity threat due to methodological inadequacies and idiosyncratic subjective judgments.

The present study aimed to explore the linguistic features of book blurb register and to situate it in relation to a few distinguished genres explored by Biber (1988). It also attempted to examine book blurb text in comparison with the other promotional varieties such as grant proposals, direct mail letters and print advertisements, through multidimensional approach postulated by Biber (1988). A multidimensional approach identifies the distributional patterns of the sets of co-occurring linguistic features in text and their shared communicative functions, defined as dimensions. The current study incorporated first five textual dimensions of 88 MD analysis which exhibited maximum shared variance.

The study attempted to answer the following research questions.

(a) What is the place of book blurb variety in comparison with the genres investigated by Biber (1988) on the basis of 88 multidimensional analysis?

(b) On what textual dimensions is the language of online book blurbs similar or dissimilar with the language of other promotional varieties?

Literature Review

Book blurbs have been extensively studied and analyzed by the researchers. Most of the studies (Kathpalia, 1997; Basturkmen, 1999, 2009; Bhatia, 2004; Gea-Valor, 2005, 2007; Onder, 2013) investigated the generic structure of book blurbs on move and step level. Comparatively little attention has been focused on the analysis of linguistic features of blurbs in past. A handful of research studies which attempted to implement linguistic analysis, happened to rely on the distribution of individual linguistic features.

A noteworthy study conducted by Gea-Valor (2005) analyzed the rhetorical as well as linguistic structure of online fiction book blurbs. Findings of linguistic analysis revealed that blurbs made an extensive use of ellipsis, imperatives and curiosity arousers to impact the readers. The study claimed that "the elliptical syntactic pattern (omission of subject) not only

reminded us of frank spoken text but also brought blurbs closer to advertising discourse" (Gea-Valor, 2005, p. 56).

Gea-Valor and Ros (2009) examined the use of linguistic features such as superlatives and boosters in book blurbs and repeatedly confirmed that "use of syntactic structure (one of the most + adjective) in blurbs was reminiscent of advertising discourse" (p. 212). The study lacked quantitative approach as it did not use any statistical or empirical method to authenticate its findings.

Onder (2013) examined the promotional elements in online book blurbs published by Amazon (UK) and Okouko (Turkey). The study considered the issue of varying number of blurbs (Amazon, 40 and Okouko, 55) in corpus and applied a two tailed Z Test to find significant and non-significant differences, yet the problem of varying length of blurbs in both corpora (Amazon, 16,392 words & Okouko, 10,145 words) was not taken into account. Consequently, the study faced validity threat.

The studies which investigated the linguistic variation of book, have limited significance due to two main reasons. First, the linguistic analysis carried out by them is not approached in relation to different dimensions. The idea of dimension is illustrated by Biber (1988) as, "dimensions are bundles of linguistic features that co-occur in texts because they work together to mark some common underlying function" (p.55). Past researches did not acknowledge the idea of dimension which is integral to explore linguistic variation among registers.

Secondly, all previous studies analyzed the language of book blurb register with reference to distribution of individual linguistic features and the analysis based upon individual linguistic features is found inadequate to encapsulate the complex phenomena of linguistic variation. It is not possible to distinguish among registers by considering the relative distribution of individual linguistic features (Biber & Finegan, 1989; Biber, Conrad, Reppen, Byrd & Helt, 2002; Biber, 2004). The concept of "co-occurrence of linguistic features" is the most important criterion of any register study. Only the co-occurring groups of linguistic features can identify linguistic dimensions. It means that identification of co-occurring patterns of linguistic features is essential for the determination of dimensions. Brown and Fraser (1979) remarked that "it can be misleading to concentrate on specific, isolated [linguistic] markers without taking into account systematic variations which involve the co-occurrence of sets of markers" (pp. 38-39).

Another methodological inadequacy of previous studies (Basturkmen, 1999, 2009; Cacchiani, 2007; Onder, 2013) is their total reliance on raw frequency counts, which is an intrinsically flawed approach to find accurate

results of linguistic variation. No doubt, frequency count may provide an exact quantitative characterization of text, but it is deficient in identifying linguistic dimensions. This point is demonstrated by Biber (1988), that, "by themselves, however, frequency counts cannot identify linguistic dimension" (p. 3), and as discussed in the foregoing paragraph, the identification of dimension is essential to explore linguistic variation among registers. Moreover, the studies did not employ any procedure of normalization of raw frequencies, which is imperative to have an exact calculation of linguistic features in text. Due to varying length of the different extracts of targeted text, "a comparison of non-normalized counts will give an inaccurate assessment of the frequency distribution in texts" (Biber 1988, p.75). This crucial step is altogether missing in previous research studies.

Comparative analysis is an essential feature of register variation. A few studies (Kathpalia, 1997; Gea-Valor, 2005, 2007; Cacchiani, 2007; Onder, 2013) conducted comparative and contrastive analysis of two varieties, but their findings had limited significance. Comparative studies conducted by Cacchiani (2007) and Onder (2013) were based upon raw frequency count. But raw frequency, as discussed earlier, is incapable of identifying linguistic dimensions. Studies conducted by Kathpalia (1997) and Onder (2013) did not employ any statistical strategy to prove their assumptions. Hyland and Diani (2009) and Shaw (2009) compared book blurbs with book reviews. Hyland and Diani (2009) considered "evaluation" as a central activity which characterizes the essential features of review genres including book reviews and book blurbs. Shaw (2009) distinguished between book blurbs and book reviews on the scale of interestedness and disinterestedness (classifying book blurbs as interested genre and book reviews as disinterested genre), both dealt with the same content but from a different standpoint. All these studies based their verdicts on subjective judgments which were not attested empirically, therefore liable to be susceptible.

Present study attempted to conduct a comparative linguistic analysis of online book blurbs and the other promotional varieties, founded on an empirical and statistical multidimensional analytical approach, developed by Biber (1988). This approach is best suited to study register variation because in it "co-occurrence patterns are identified quantitatively, based on the actual distribution of linguistic features in a large corpus of texts" (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1998, p.145).

Research Methodology

The study analyzed 200 online blurbs for fiction and non-fiction books written by Pakistani authors. The web pages of different publishing companies of Pakistan were searched for the newly published books offered by them. Out of all displayed books belonging to different categories, the

two sub-categories of Fiction and Non-fiction books: novels and text books were selected. The online blurbs (following Gea-Valor, 2005, 2007; Onder, 2013) of 100 fiction (novels) and 100 non-fiction (text books) were initially saved in word files. The blurbs were reviewed and minor spelling mistakes were corrected. The titles of books and names of writers were excluded so that accurate computational identification of linguistic features could be made possible. Each book blurb was saved in a separate text file with a distinct code denoting its main category, sub-category (by using alphabetical letters) and serial number. The title of the book, the author name, the year of publication and the name of publishing company was also stored in soft and hard form for record sake.

The study employed Multidimensional analytical approach to register variation (88 MD Analysis) postulated by Biber (1988). This approach explored textual relations between different registers on the basis of co-occurrence distributional patterns of sets of linguistic features. The analysis based upon individual features was found inadequate to encapsulate the complex phenomena of comparative approach (Biber & Conrad, 2009; Crossley & Louwerse, 2009). Instead Biber's 1988 multi-dimensional approach is an appropriate empirical and quantitative approach to explore linguistic variation between two or more varieties of texts (Biber, 1986, 1988; Biber & Finegan, 1989; Biber & Conrad, 2009).

The 88 MD analysis applied on book blurb data of the present study was based on five dimensions. These dimensions were previously identified by Biber (1988) factor solution matrix. Each dimension was defined by a set of co-occurring linguistic features. The five dimensions included:

Dimension 1: Involved vs. Informational Production

Dimension 2: Narrative vs. Non-narrative Concerns

Dimension 3: Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference

Dimension 4: Overt Expression of Argumentation/ Persuasion

Dimension 5: Impersonal (Abstract) vs. Non-Impersonal (Non-Abstract) Style

Methodological process involved: tagging of linguistic features in each of 200 book blurbs, acquiring raw frequencies of linguistic features, turning raw frequencies into normalized frequencies, computation of dimension scores, determining of mean scores for each of five dimensions and situating the book blurb variety in relation to Biber's scale of distribution of genres (continuous parameter of variation, Biber 1988). The mean dimension scores of book blurbs were also compared with the mean dimension scores of other promotional varieties (direct mail letters, non-profit grant proposals and print advertisements) for finding linguistic similarities and differences across them.

Data Analysis

This section presents the results of multidimensional analysis of book blurbs based on 88 factor solution with respect to five dimensions. It is divided into two sub-sections. First will describe the results of the comparison of book blurb register with the genres studied by Biber (1988). Second sub-section will present the textual relations of book blurbs with other three promotional varieties.

Book Blurbs in Relation to Biber's Studies

This sub-section covers detail of the comparison of mean dimension scores of book blurbs with the mean dimension scores of six genres studied by Biber (1988). Book blurbs were placed on Biber's distributional scale along with genres examined by Biber (1988), so that the linguistic characterization of book blurb variety with respect to five textual dimensions could be determined. The five textual dimensions and the sets of co-occurring linguistic features grouped on them were already identified by Biber (1988) through a multivariate statistical technique "factor analysis". Factor analysis identifies the sets of linguistic features which tend to co-occur in high frequency on textual dimensions indicative of shared communicative purposes, they serve to perform in text. Each dimension constitutes two sets of linguistic feature: positive and negative features. Positive features appear on all five dimensions but negative features appear only on dimensions 1 and 3. These positive and negative features stand for contrasted communicative functions. So there exists a complementary relationship between the two. It means if a text has high frequency of positive features, it will have relatively lower frequency of negative features.

Mean scores of the multidimensional analysis of the book blurb corpus as a whole on five textual dimensions has been shown in the following table.

Table 1
Mean Dimension Scores of Book Blurb Register

Dimensions	Mean Scores
1-Involved vs. Informational Production	-13.89
2-Narrative vs. Non-narrative Concerns	- 2.82
3-Explicit vs. Situation- Dependent Reference	11.21
4-Overt Expression of Persuasion	- 5.25
5-Abstract vs. Non-Abstract Information	- 0.11

INVOLVED

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35- | Face-to-face conversations
30-
25-
20- | Personal letters
     | Public conversations
15-

10-

 5-
     | Prepared speeches
 0-
     | Professional letters
-5-

-10-
     | Book blurbs
-15- | Academic prose

-20-
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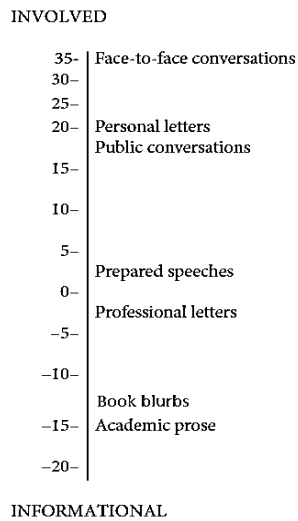
INFORMATIONAL

Figure 1. Mean scores of Dimension 1 for book blurbs and six genres studied by Biber (1988) Dimension 1- Involved versus Informational Production Adapted from Biber (1988)

The above figure indicated that on dimension 1, book blurb register obtained low negative scores, marking that blurbs were informational in nature and dealt with interpersonal relations in a secondary manner. They were carefully written and revised before they were finally accomplished. Results indicated that blurbs were produced under conditions which permitted careful choice of words, so they had lexical variation and textual density. The mean scores achieved by book blurb register placed it almost closer to press reviews but a little less informational as compared to academic prose. Book blurbs showed totally opposite concerns with face-to-face conversation which appeared as a highly involved, generalized and interactive genre on dimension 1 (Involved vs. Informational Production). Academic prose had the lowest score on the negative polarity of this dimension marking a highly informational genre. The most representative sets of co-occurring features, on negative polarity of this dimension of variation were few in number. Nouns, prepositional phrases, type/token ratio, word length and attributive adjectives had larger negative weights on this dimension. High frequency of all these features indicated high integration of informational material in book blurb text. Besides these powerful sets of co-occurring features having negative weights, other positive features such as, private verbs, contractions, present tense verb, first person pronoun, second person pronoun, general emphatics, amplifiers, WH questions are considered to be highly powerful in non-informational, involved and interactional text found on the opposite polarity. These positive linguistic features are found in lesser number in the informational production. This complementary relationship of positive and negative features has been adequately discussed by Biber (1988, 1992, 1995, & 2004). Complementary relationship signifies that when

positive linguistic features occur with high frequency in a text, the negative linguistic features occur with low frequency and vice versa. The claim established by Gea-Valor's (2005) study that book blurb language was similar to spoken text as well as informational text, was not evidently proved. The sets of features related to interactional text were relatively found in lesser number in the informational text. Book blurb register might be linguistically characterized as an informational production rather than spoken.

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NARRATIVE

    7–   | Romance fiction
    6–   |
    5–   |
    4–   |
    3–   |
    2–   | Biographies
    1–   |
         | Prepared speeches
    0–   |
         | Face-to-face conversations
   –1–   |
         |
   –2–   | Professional letters
         | Academic prose
   –3–   | Book blurbs
         |

NON-NARRATIVE
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Figure 2. Mean scores of Dimension 2 for book blurbs and six genres studied by Biber (1988) Dimension 2- Narrative versus Non-Narrative Concerns Adapted from Biber (1988)

Dimension 2 of 88 MD analytical approach distinguishes between narrative and non-narrative concerns. Book blurb variety indicated non-narrative concerns (Figure 2) on dimension 2, which exhibited exposition, description and procedural information. Book blurbs usually focus on the description of book in question. The major interesting turns of the plot are slightly exposed to arouse the interest of the readers. Informational material regarding contents of book and author's life and works are presented in a sequential procedure to influence the reader. The co-occurring set of negative linguistic features comprising present tense verbs and attributive adjectives, though, appear in a less noticeable frequency on dimension 2, and yet mark the concerns that are other than narrative. Present tense verb has much larger weight on dimension 1 as a strong positive feature and attributive adjectives appear with comparatively lower score on the negative polarity of dimension 1. Present tense verb is used to deal with immediate matters and attributive adjectives are used for the elaboration of nominal information. The two genres (studied by Biber, 1988) showing opposite communicative concerns on dimension 2 were Romantic fiction and Academic prose. Romantic fiction achieved the maximum score on positive polarity as a text with highly narrative concerns and Academic prose obtained

the lowest score with non-narrative concerns. Book blurb register established its resemblance with Academic prose on negative polarity. It was much different from face-to-face conversation, which, as a highly involved genre on dimension 1, placed itself at an almost intermediate position on dimension 2. The sets of positive linguistic features marking narrative concerns (past tense verbs, third person pronouns, perfect aspect verbs, public verbs, synthetic negation and present participial clauses) appeared in low frequency in the book blurb text. Less positive scores of book blurbs on dimension 2 implied their non-narrative concern with a little prominent loading of present tense verbs and attributive adjectives.
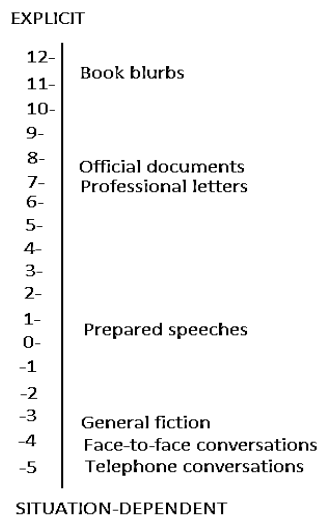
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EXPLICIT

12-
11-   Book blurbs
10-
 9-
 8-   Official documents
 7-   Professional letters
 6-
 5-
 4-
 3-
 2-
 1-   Prepared speeches
 0-
-1
-2
-3   General fiction
-4   Face-to-face conversations
-5   Telephone conversations

SITUATION-DEPENDENT
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Figure 3. Mean scores of Dimension 3 for book blurbs and six other genres studied by Biber (1988). Dimension 3- Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference Adapted from Biber (1988)

As indicated in the above figure 3, book blurb register obtained the highest positive score on dimension 3 indicating it as a highly explicit piece of discourse. The dominant primary sets of positive co-occurring features constitute three relative clauses; WH relative clauses on object positions, WH relative clauses on subject positions and pied piping constructions. Phrasal co-ordinations and nominalizations have comparatively smaller positive weights. WH relative clauses are generally used for the exact and specified identification of referents in an explicit manner. They are also used as markers of integration and idea-unit expansion. The co-occurrence of WH relative clauses with phrasal co-ordination on this dimension indicated that book blurb variety was characterized not only with referential explicitness and context independence but also with integrated informational reference. Of Biber's (1988) studied genres, official documents and professional letters, as highly explicit genres achieved the maximum positive scores, whereas face-to-face conversation as a highly situated text achieved the lowest scores.

Book blurbs showed their closeness to official documents and professional letters on dimension 3 on positive polarity. The features found on negative polarity comprising time adverbials, place adverbials and other adverbs were found in lesser frequency in book blurb variety. Book blurb text and conversational text were again placed on two opposite polarities on dimension 3. In later works of Biber (e.g., Biber, 2010) this dimension "Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent context", has been referred to as "Elaborated vs. Situation-Dependent Reference".

OVERTLY ARGUMENTATIVE

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3-  |  Professional letters
    |  Editorials
2-  |
1-  |
0-  |  Face-to-face conversations
    |  Academic prose
-1  |
    |
-2  |
    |  Press Reviews
-3  |
-4  |  Broadcasts
    |
-5  |  Book blurbs
    |
-6  |
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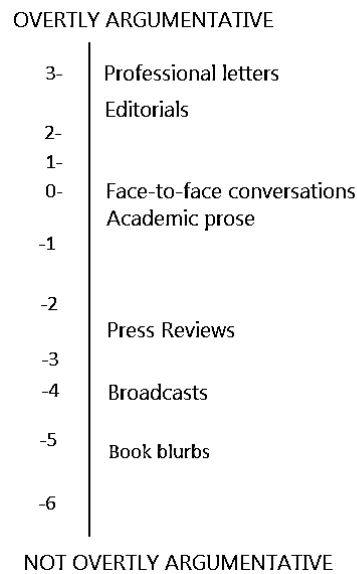
NOT OVERTLY ARGUMENTATIVE

Figure 4. Mean scores of Dimension 4 for book blurbs and six other genres studied by Biber (1988)

Dimension 4- Overt Expression of Persuasion/ Argumentation Adapted from Biber (1988)

Dimension 4 is a unique dimension, as all sets of features found on this dimension have positive weight. Book blurb variety obtained the lowest score on this dimension characterizing itself as not overtly argumentative. A typical argumentative text is written to persuade the reader. First, several perspectives are presented for the consideration of the reader. Second, arguments are given for and against these perspectives, but ultimately the whole discussion drives towards a final conclusion and tries to convince the reader that this conclusion is preferable to all others. The purpose of blurbs did not include consideration of alternative perspectives or logical argumentation that one perspective was superior to others. Blurbs tended to present direct information about the contents of book, plot, characters and the author. It was left up to the reader to accept or reject the book. Book blurb variety appeared as a non-persuasive and non-argumentative variety on the extreme negative polarity of dimension 4. The sets of positive co-occurring linguistic features characterizing professional letters and editorials (found in relatively lesser frequency in book blurb variety) on dimension 4

comprise infinitives, prediction modals, possibility modals, necessity models, suasive verbs, conditional subordination and split auxiliaries. The common function shared by these co-occurring sets of linguistic features on dimension 4 indicate that the dimension determines "the degree to which persuasion is marked overtly, whether overt marking of speakers' point of view or assessment of the advisability or likelihood of an event presented to persuade the addressee" (Biber, 1988, p.111). Book blurb register showed closeness to "Broadcasts" on dimension 4 at the lowest position exhibiting a markedly non-persuasive stance. Biber in his later works (1995 & 2010) relabeled this dimension and referred to it as "overt expression of argumentation" implying that argumentation describes better the shared communicative function of the dominant sets of linguistic features on dimension 4. Commenting on the precise function and labeling of this dimension, Connor and Upton (2004) also argued that "argumentation" far better captures the function of features on this dimension than "persuasion" (p. 250).

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Abstract
   6-      Academic Prose
   5-      Official Documents
   4-
   3-
   2-
           Press Reviews
   1-
   0-      Book Blurbs

  -1
  -2       Prepared Speeches; Interviews
  -3
           Romantic fiction, face-to-face conversation
           Telephone conversation
  -4
Non-Abstract
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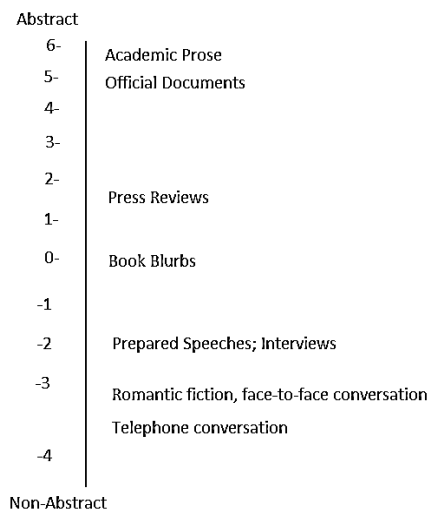
Figure 5. Mean scores of Dimension 5 for book blurbs and six genres studied by Biber (1988) Dimension 5- Abstract/Impersonal versus non-abstract/non-Impersonal information Adapted from Biber (1988)

Dimension 5 distinguishes among the varieties with abstract/impersonal focus from the texts with non-abstract/non-impersonal focus. The above figure 5 illustrated that, of Biber's (1988) studied genres, academic prose and official documents achieved the highest positive scores on this dimension. Whereas romantic fiction, face-to-face conversation and telephone conversations acquired the lowest scores. Highest positive score of academic prose and official documents may be attributed to the informational nature of these genres which essentially requires an abstract and impersonal framework for the realization of respective communicative functions. Impersonal quality is usually attributed to an abstract and technical style. The representative features which strongly lend impersonal quality to

text are by-passives, agentless passives, past participial clauses and past participial WHIZ deletions. Conjuncts and adverbial clauses also support by-passives and agentless passives to produce impersonal quality.

Book blurbs displayed low scores on this dimension, (the closest one to 0.0). They almost fell in the middle of academic prose (typical written) and telephone conversations (typical spoken), just beside popular lore. The undistinguished position of book blurbs indicated that they included a few texts which had impersonal focus and few others which had non-impersonal focus. If compared with academic prose, book blurbs turned out to be highly personal and when put in comparison with face-to-face conversation, they appeared highly impersonal. The reason of having low personal features may be attributed to the fact that book blurbs involved informational production. Negative scores achieved by book blurbs on dimension 1 indicated the integration of informational material and considerable lacking of interactive and affective features characterizing conversational language. The same distinction was maintained here on dimension 5.

The claims established by past studies regarding close resemblance of book blurb language with spoken text was again disregarded here on dimension 5, where face to face conversation resided at the lowest level showing the maximum interactional and personal focus. Book blurbs appeared as an intermediate type of discourse which did not show any sharp leanings either towards highly personalized focus or the opposite extreme.

Biber (1988) labelled this dimension as 'Abstract vs. non-abstract information', which in his later work (2010) was changed to Impersonal vs. non-impersonal style.

Book Blurbs in Relation to Promotional Varieties

This section compared the mean dimension scores of book blurbs with the mean dimension scores of other promotional varieties investigated on the basis of 88 MD analysis. The promotional varieties were direct mail letters by fund raisers (Connor & Upton, 2003), non-profit grant proposals (Connor & Upton, 2004) and print advertisements (Shakir, 2013).

The comparison helped in determining the status of book blurb register as a promotional variety in relation to other promotional genres. It further elaborated the textual relations (linguistic similarities and differences) found among book blurbs and promotional genres. In addition to this, the off-cited claim of previous studies regarding close resemblance of book blurbs and advertising text was also assessed quantitatively in terms of textual dimensions.
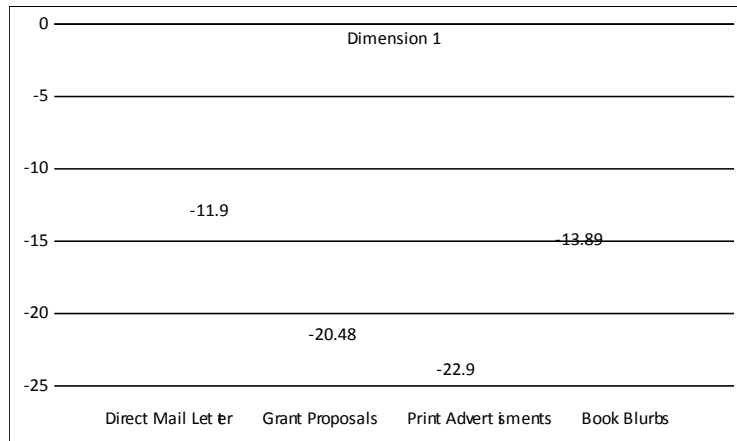
Figure 6. Book blurbs versus other promotional registers on Dimension 1

Results for direct mail letters and grant proposals are based on Connor and Upton (2003, 2004 respectively). Results for print advertisements are based on Shakir (2013).

Figure 6 showed the mean dimension scores of book blurbs and other three promotional varieties; direct mail letters by fund raisers, non-profit grant proposals and print advertisements on dimension 1. Positive scoring on this dimension shows the relation of variety with involvedness and negative scoring with informational production. All promotional varieties exhibited their connection with informational production due to common promotional communicative function (marketing) they performed (Bhatia, 2004). Although certain variations in the degree of their informational involvement may also be noticed due to reasons other than linguistic. The differences may be due to "the specificity of product, they promote……the selection and size of the market or audience they target" (Bhatia, 2005, p. 219). The mean dimension score of print advertisement achieved the maximum negative score on the informational polarity of first dimension indicating the highest frequency of all informational features.

The score obtained by Book blurbs (-13.89) indicated its less informational focus than grant proposals (-20.48) and print advertisements (-22.9). The closeness of book blurb text with direct mail letters was clearly noticed on dimension 1. The claim held by a number of influential studies about the similarity of book blurb language with advertising text was not validated on Dimension 1.
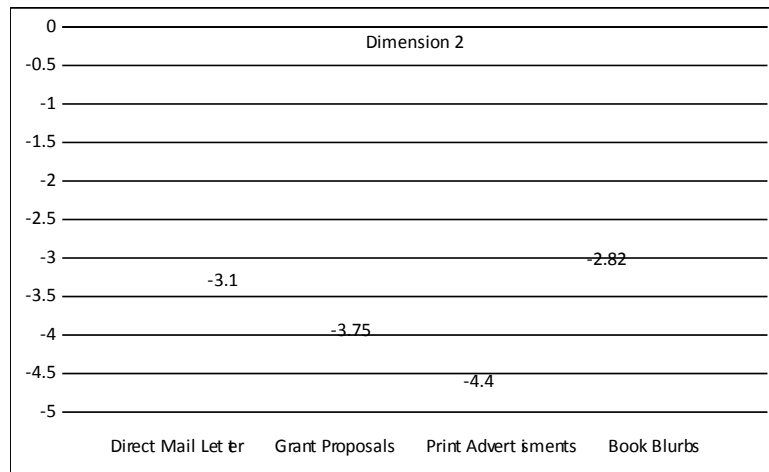
Figure 7. Book blurbs versus other promotional registers on Dimension 2.

Results for direct mail letters and grant proposals are based on Connor and Upton (2003, 2004, respectively). Results for print advertisements are based on Shakir (2013).

On dimension 2 (Figure 7), all promotional genres demonstrated low scores indicating their mutual similarity in having non-narrative concerns. The non-narrative perspective may include the presentation of expository information in a straightforward and concise manner. It may also take into account the procedural information which is event driven and provides step-by-step description of what to do, or it may contain description of actions in progress either for purely informational or entertainment purposes.

Book blurbs, on negative polarity, showed closeness to direct mail letters instead of advertising text, hence contradicting the claim of previous studies regarding the resemblance of book blurb language and advertising text. The mean score of print advertisements was notable with respect to dimension 2, as it had the lowest score of all the three. If compared with the mean values of Biber's (1988) studied genres (Figure 2), print advertisement appeared as the most non-narrative of almost all the other genres including academic prose, official documents and broadcasts.
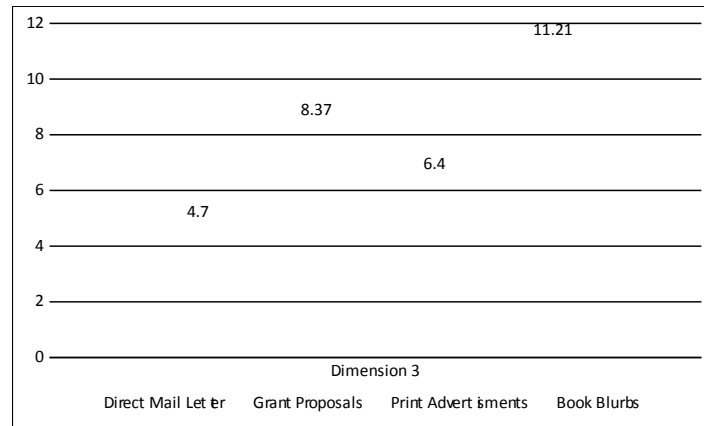
Figure 8. Book blurbs versus other promotional registers on Dimension 3.

Results for direct mail letters and grant proposals are based on Connor and Upton (2003, 2004 respectively). Results for print advertisements are based on Shakir (2013).

Book blurbs exhibited interesting results on dimension 3, Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference. They were situated higher than other three genres clearly positioning them as informational text which presented informational material in an exceedingly elaborated and explicit manner as opposed to situation-dependent text which relied on direct and extensive reference to the physical and temporal situation for understanding. Blurbs did not bear close similarity to print advertisements which displayed a moderate score as compared to grant proposals' relatively higher scores showing more proximity to book blurbs.
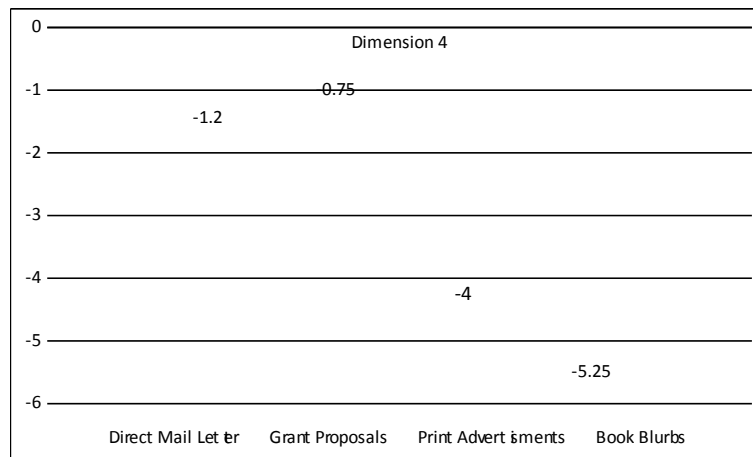
Figure 9. Book blurbs vs. other promotional registers on Dimension 4.

Results for direct mail letters and grant proposals are based on Connor and Upton (2003, 2004 respectively). Results for print advertisements are based on Shakir (2013).

The mean scores of all promotional varieties on dimension 4 'Overt Expression of Persuasion' fell in the negative range. Negative scores showed that the texts did not tend to be argumentative or persuasive. Dimension 4 appeared as a strong dimension (negatively) in book blurb text (-5.25) which surpassed all the three other promotional varieties. High negative scores of book blurbs indicated that they were not a persuasive text. They neither argued a point nor attempted to change the opinion of readers. The nearest genre found parallel to book blurb is advertising text with little lower scores.
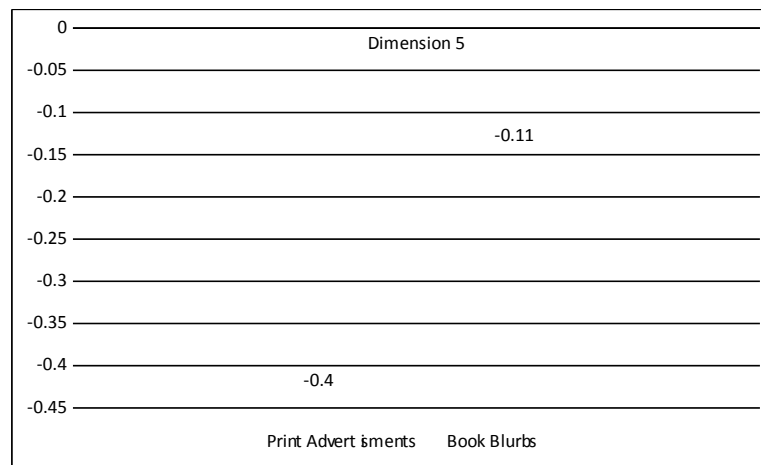

Figure 10. Book blurbs vs. other promotional registers on Dimension 5.

Results for print advertisements are based on Shakir (2013).

The above figure showed comparison only between mean scores achieved by book blurbs and print advertisements, with respect to dimension 5 of MD analysis. Connor and Upton's studies about direct mail letters (2003) and non-profit grant proposals (2004) contained analysis from 1 to 4 dimensions. Only print advertisements (Shakir, 2013) attempted analysis on dimension 5. Therefore, book blurb register could be compared merely with print advertisements on this Dimension.

Book blurbs achieved slightly low scores on this dimension (almost close to 0.0), which indicated that blurbs included some texts which were impersonal and some others which had non-impersonal focus. The difference between the mean scores of book blurbs and print advertisements was not significant enough to be noticed. Rather both of them might be considered parallel to each other at the border of impersonal and non-impersonal style.

Findings

The study analyzed linguistic variation of book blurb register and compared it with the genres studied by Biber (1988) and three promotional genres investigated on the basis of 88 MD analysis. It not only highlighted the status of book blurbs in relation to other genres but also provided an opportunity to quantitatively evaluate the subjective claims and hypothetical assumptions launched by previous studies.

A few studies (Gea-Valor, 2005, 2007; Gea-Valor & Ros, 2009) sought resemblance between book blurb language and spoken text. This claim was evaluated on all five textual dimensions but no supporting empirical evidence was found to verify it. On dimension 1, 'Involved vs. Informational Production', face-to-face conversation (mean score, 35.0, representing spoken text) and Book blurbs (mean score, -13.89) were placed at two opposite polarities, representing involved and informational production respectively. On dimension 2, face-to-face conversation was identified as an almost undistinguished genre (being very close to 0.0), whereas book blurb register (-2.82) showed marked tendency of having non-narrative concerns. Mean scores on dimension 3 again placed the both varieties at two extreme polarities, book blurb (11.21) as a highly explicit and elucidated text and its counterpart as a strong situated text. Book blurbs had markedly low scores on dimension 4 and in comparison, face-to-face conversation was placed at an intermediate location. Their positions were reversed on dimension 5, here book blurbs almost fell in the middle, very close to 0.0 and its counterpart showed significantly low scores. The findings nullified the claim that book blurb text was an involved and interactional text focused to develop interpersonal connection with the reader. Rather it appeared to be situated at opposite pole integrated with informational material.

Another assumption supported by previous studies (Cacchiani, 2007; Gea-Valor, 2005) was related with the persuasive nature of book blurb text. The strong position of book blurbs as a non-persuasive text on dimension 4 negated this assumption. As a matter of fact, book blurbs' scores on dimension 4 was rather surprising, as it showed blurb text to be strongly non-persuasive. Apparently, blurbs give the impression of being highly persuasive texts which focus on persuading the reader or prospective buyer to grab the book. But linguistically they did not involve any linguistic feature which could mark persuasive or argumentative expressions in blurbs. They had strong position on negative polarity of dimension 4 which clearly indicated that they did not involve more than one possibilities and then convince the reader to opt one of them. They presented all information plainly, leaving it up to the reader to accept or reject it.

The linguistic description of book blurbs in relation to other promotional varieties indicated the similarities and differences between promotional genres on textual dimensions. Despite having common functional purpose, these promotional genres did not show a consistent linguistic structure. They displayed linguistic variation resulting from their being related with different subjects and areas. A few studies (Gea-Valor, 2005, 2007, 2011; Gea-Valor & Ros, 2009) claimed that book blurb was an advertising discourse. This claim was also evaluated in this section by positioning book blurb as a promotional variety in relation to other promotional varieties including print advertisements. Book blurbs were found different from print advertisements with respect to dimensions 1, 2, and 3. Anyhow, they stood closer to print ads only on dimensions 4 and 5.

Conclusion

The present study analyzed the linguistic characteristics of book blurb register by using 88 MD analysis. It tried to determine the overall textual relations across book blurbs and a few sharply distinguished genres studied by Biber (1988) by situating them (book blurbs) on a continuous parameter of variation representing textual dimensions. It also attempted to determine the similarities and differences among book blurbs and other promotional varieties such as direct mail letters, non-profit grant proposals and print advertisements with respect to five textual dimensions.

The study found a couple of interesting facts about book blurbs. The off-cited claims established by previous studies regarding the resemblance of book blurbs with spoken text and advertising text were evaluated quantitatively on textual dimensions. Blurbs' relationship with spoken text was not proved on all five dimensions. On dimension1, book blurb register obtained low scores and stood closer to academic prose as an informational production. Book blurbs established their resemblance with press reports on dimension 2, showing non-narrative concerns. Blurbs obtained highest scores on dimension 3 indicating highly explicit and elaborated reference closer to official documents and professional letters. On dimension 4, book blurbs showed resemblance with broadcasts and press reviews and on dimension 5, with professional letters and editorials.

Book blurbs were not found similar to advertising text on all five dimensions. They were relatively less informational and exhibited less non-narrative concerns than print advertisements, a highly informational genre with marked non-narrative concerns. Book blurbs appeared as highly explicit and elaborated variety, whereas print advertisements were focused on comparatively less explicit references. Anyhow, both varieties showed almost similar level of non-persuasive and non-impersonal expression.

Present study, since preliminary in its field, has limitations too. The corpus is compiled only from fiction and non-fiction books. Due to small corpus size, the findings may not be generalized beyond the context of this study. Inclusion of wider range of categories coupled with a large representative corpus of Pakistani book blurbs may lead to more generalized results. The study is further limited in the utilization of methods. Five dimensions used to characterize book blurb language in this study, are already determined by Biber (1988). A new MD analysis was required to identify new dimensions specific to Pakistani context. Further studies may be extended to new MD analysis of the selected data.

Despite these inadequacies, the current study, as being first corpus based multidimensional study of the language of book blurb text, may set new horizons for the prospective researchers to divert their attention towards the highly potential statistical approach (88 MD analysis) to explore linguistic variation between two and more varieties. It will also explore new possibilities for the application of MD analysis on other promotional texts such as sales promotion letter, job application letter and book reviews to assess the degree of mutual similarities and differences on different textual dimensions. Future researches on book blurb text may also be conducted with respect to diachronic perspective to identify the phenomena of change and mutability in linguistic features of book blurb text in accordance with the changing needs of readers and unusual expansion of marketing strategies.

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