

Discourse in the Professions

Perspectives from corpus linguistics

Edited by

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The genre of grant proposals: A corpus linguistic analysis

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Introduction

Grant proposals have been explored as a distinct genre of academic writing. Myers (1990), in fact, has described grant writing as “the most basic form of scientific writing: the researcher must get money in the first place if they are to publish articles...” Connor and Mauranen (1999: 47) have also recognized that grant proposals are a significant part of the professional writing of most academics, noting that they represent “a genre that all academics will have to come to terms with at some point of their career, usually the sooner the better.” In his study, Myers looked at the drafts and final products of two biologists’ research proposals, and interviewed both authors about their writing processes. Myers concluded that grant proposals are from start to finish designed to persuade “without seeming to persuade” (1990: 42). He found two primary elements that together account for much of the persuasive appeal of academic grant proposals; the first included how researchers situated themselves in relationship to the academic community – that is his/her status – as represented by the home institution, publications, previous funding, claims about relevance of previous work, etc. The second was the question of how well the researcher situated the planned work within the previous research in the field, balancing originality with adherence to expected conventions.

Drawing on the work of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993), Connor and Mauranen (1999) sought to extend Myers’ exploration of the persuasive nature of academic grant proposals through genre analysis, the identification of “a linguistic/rhetorical system of genre-specific ‘moves’ to describe and evaluate” a genre (Connor 2000: 2). Connor and Mauranen (1999) looked at 34 pro-

posals from European Union research grant applications, written in English primarily by Finnish scientists, and identified ten recurrent moves that not only overlapped with those of academic research papers (cf. Swales 1990) and promotional genres (cf. Bhatia 1993) but included moves specific to the genre of grant proposals.

Connor (2000) further explored the genre moves defined by Connor and Mauranen by using them to analyze fourteen research grant proposals written by five humanities and science researchers for US government and private funders. She found the developed system of moves “clear and meaningful” to the researchers, and with minor modification proved reliable for describing the moves of these proposals.

Grant proposals, however, are not a genre exclusive to academia. The writing of grant proposals is of primary importance to almost all non-profit organizations whether they are working in education, arts, human services, or elsewhere. Yet, there has been **very little research** looking at their distinct linguistic characteristics. As the success of grant proposals is certainly essential to non-profits, having a more detailed understanding of what, linguistically, makes a proposal persuasive is valuable.

The first goal of this study was to examine the linguistic and rhetorical features of promotion and persuasion in grant proposals written by non-profit organizations. Following the lead of Connor and Mauranen (1999) and Connor (2000) in their studies of academic grant proposals, we applied a **Swalesian genre analysis (Swales 1981)** to identify rhetorical “moves” common to non-profit grant proposals.

A second goal, however, was to experiment with applying corpus linguistic techniques to textlinguistic investigations, providing a potentially more powerful evaluation of text features (Flowerdew 1998; Upton and Connor 2001). The previous studies described above looking at academic research proposals were limited to the hand analysis of relatively few proposals. With the development of corpus linguistic techniques that allow for the automatic processing of large numbers of texts, new avenues for exploring this genre to determine what linguistic features might contribute to their persuasive appeal are now available. Consequently, we used a **multidimensional analysis technique** (Biber 1988) to develop a linguistic profile of the genre. We then applied the multidimensional analysis to the individual rhetorical moves in order to evaluate common linguistic features of specific moves.

The overall purpose of this study was to highlight key areas in which the

genre of non-profit grant proposals proves to be distinctive. Once genre-specific moves are identified, their contribution to the persuasive nature of grant proposals and the range of variation within the genre that is exhibited can be explored. Further, by combining a corpus-based linguistic dimensional analysis with a Swalesean genre analysis, we hoped to be able to present a more accurate and detailed description of the genre of non-profit grant proposals.

Description of the corpus

The grant proposals used in this study are drawn from the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication (ICIC) fundraising corpus. The ICIC fundraising corpus data collection began after two international conferences were organized at IUPUI (Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis) by ICIC and the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy (October 1997, August 1998). An important aspect of the conferences was the collaboration between linguistic scholars and practicing fundraisers in discussing issues of fundraising. This collaboration resulted in the collection of a nearly, two-million word, computerized databank of fundraising texts consisting of the most important fundraising genres – direct letters, case statements, grant proposals and annual reports. The corpus is gathered from six separate fields in the non-profit sector (Education, Health/Human Services, Arts/Culture, Environment, Community Development, and Other Organizations). Among the organizations representing the field of Education were such non-profits as the Indiana University Foundation, IU School of Dentistry, and the IUPUI School of Liberal Arts. The field of Health and Human services was represented by organizations such as the American Cancer Society, Salvation Army, and Goodwill Industries. Agencies like the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis Civic Theater, and Eiteljorg Museum, etc. fall into the category of Arts and Culture. The Environment section was represented by such non-profits as Pelican Harbor Seabird Station, Environmental League of Massachusetts, and the Humane Society for Greater Nashua. Representing the field of Community Development were organizations such as the Southeast Neighborhood Development and Community Development Corporation. The category Other Organizations included organizations that do not fall into any of the five above-mentioned categories (e.g. religious organizations). This section contained organizations such as the League of Greek Orthodox Stewards, Elijah House, and

Table 1. ICIC fundraising corpus organization types

Type	n
Health and Human Services	82
Environment	24
Community Development	21
Education	44
Arts and Culture	45
Other	20
Total	236

Table 2. ICIC fundraising corpus document types

Types	Org. n	Item n	Word n
Direct-mail Letters	75	45	94,235
Invitations, Newsletters	172	445	922,212
Case Statements	12	13	121,780
Grant Proposals	27	68	154,021
Annual Reports	51	84	523,770
Totals		856	1,816,018

Note:

Org. n = the number of organizations represented in this type in the corpus

Item n = the number of items of this type in the corpus

Word n = the number of words in the documents of this type in the corpus.

the Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies. Tables 1 and 2 describe the data gathered for this corpus.

The data used for the research drawn from the above corpus included 68 grant proposals from 27 organizations. Grant proposals from Health and Human Services accounted for the largest part of the corpus (60 out of 68). Table 3 provides the breakdown of grant proposals by organization type.

Each grant proposal was scanned into a computer and double-checked for accuracy. Each proposal was then coded to indicate non-profit field, organization, and organization size (based on income). This information was obtained through questionnaires and interviews conducted with the agencies represented in the corpus.

Table 3. Number of grant proposals in the corpus by non-profits type

	Number
Health and Human Services	60
Environment	3
Community Development	2
Education	0
Arts and Culture	3
Other	0
Total	68

Identifying rhetorical moves of grant proposals

In order to identify rhetorical moves in the grant proposals, the system of moves developed by Connor and Mauranen (1999) was adopted. They identified ten obligatory moves in European Union research grant proposals: territory, gap, goal, means, reporting previous research, achievements, benefits, competence claim, importance claim, and compliance claim. The Connor and Mauranen set of moves and definitions is given in Figure 1.

Five out of 68 proposals in the ICIC fundraising corpus were chosen randomly and then analyzed in order to draft the initial set of moves that appeared to be used by writers of non-profit grant proposals. After an initial calibration session with the five proposals, a brief description of disagreements and changes were made, and move definitions were finalized. With this set of definitions, another ten proposals were analyzed and the moves marked. In an effort to gain a high inter-rater reliability, our four member research team consisting of Connor, Upton, and two research assistants, 1) reviewed the marked moves on the 10 proposals; 2) discussed the differences between the moves of research grant proposals and those of non-profit grant proposals; and, finally, 3) revised the definitions of the moves as a research team.

With the revised set of move definitions, the ten sample proposals were reanalyzed and a consensus was obtained by the research team. The final set of moves for the genre included the following seven moves: territory, gap, goal, means, competence claim, importance claim, and benefits. *Territory* explains the present situation in which the field is placed and general needs in this area are explained. *Gap* points out that there is a gap in the present situation by indicating the problems or specific needs which the organization faces.

Territory: establishes the situation in which the research is placed or physically located. There are two types of territory: (1) that of the “real world,” the world outside the research field; and (2) that of the field of research in which the proposal itself takes place.

Gap: indicates that there is a gap in knowledge or a problem in the territory, whether in the “real world” (for example, environmental, commercial, financial), or in the research field (for example, pointing out that something is not shown or certain). This move serves to explain the motivation of the study.

Goal: is the statement of aim, or general objective of the study. In other words, it explains what it is the researcher wants to get done.

Means: includes the methods, procedures, plans of action, and tasks that the proposal specifies as leading to the goal.

Reporting Previous Research: refers to text that reports on or refers to earlier research in the field, either by the proposing researcher or by others.

Achievements: describes the anticipated results, findings, or outcomes of the study.

Benefits: explains the intended or projected outcomes of the study which could be considered useful to the “real world” outside the study itself, or even outside the research field.

Competence Claim: contains statements to the effect that the research group proposing the work is well qualified, experienced, and generally capable of carrying out the tasks set out.

Importance Claim: presents the proposal, its objectives, anticipated outcomes, or the territory as particularly important or topical, much needed, or urgent with respect to either the “real world” or to the research itself.

Compliance Claim: makes explicit the relevance of the proposal to EU objectives, usually with highly specific reference to directives and/or the set goals of the program in question.

Figure 1. Definition of moves in the European Union grant proposals

General objectives of the grant are represented in *goal*. That is, goal expresses what the organization will do with this grant. In *means*, the requested amount, detail procedures such as timetable and budget, and evaluation of the proposed project are included. In order to achieve confidence from grant-givers, general information about the organization, its ability to conduct the proposed project, and its ability to obtain other funding sources are explained in *competence*

claim. *Importance claim* discusses the proposed project's importance. *Benefits* states possible advantages which can be acquired by the target population from the proposed project.

In contrast with Connor and Mauranen's (1999) system developed for academic grant proposals, the three moves of *reporting previous research*, *achievement*, and *compliance claim* did not appear in the new system for non-profit proposals (see Figure 2).

Two researchers then applied the final system of moves to all the proposals. A third researcher analyzed ten randomly selected proposals, and a high agreement was found between the analyses. Figure 3 includes a sample proposal with moves tagged.

The results of the moves analysis on the non-profit grant proposals are shown in Table 4. Word counts and percentages for the moves indicate that the *competence claim* accounted for 44 percent of all the text of the proposals. The second largest part was *means*, accounting for 30 percent. Three moves, namely *competence claim*, *means*, and *gap* accounted for more than 80 percent of the text in the non-profit grant proposals. *Territory* (4%), *goal* (4%), *importance claim* (1%), and *benefits* (5%) accounted for the remainder.

Multidimensional analysis of the non-profit fundraising corpus

This analysis is based on the multidimensional approach to register variation developed by Biber (1995), which by design requires a corpus-based approach

Table 4. Word counts and percentages for moves

	Word count	Percentage
Territory	3,376	4%
Gap	11,443	13%
Goal	3,988	4%
Means	26,694	30%
Competence Claim	39,354	44%
Importance Claim	1,115	1%
Benefits	4,093	4%
All Grant Proposals	90,063	100%

Move 1: Territory

Suggests the present situation or general needs in this area

Move 2: Gap

Indicates the problems or specific needs which the organization in question faces

Move 3: Goal

States general objectives of the grant, what the organization will do with this grant

Move 4: Means

- a. Requested amount
- b. Procedures
 - specific projects to be done with the grant
 - how the money will be used
 - time table and budget
- c. Evaluation of the proposal project

Move 5: Competence claim

- a. General information about the organization (e.g., mission, history, current board)
- b. The ability of the organization to conduct the proposed project
- c. Other funding sources to which the organization has submitted a request

Move 6: Importance claim

States the importance of the proposed project

Move 7: Benefits

- a. Directly related to the proposed project
- b. Related to the target population

Figure 2. Final moves and definitions for non-profit proposals

to investigating language use. Biber's approach seeks to systematically describe the linguistic characteristics of different types of texts in English and to explain variation in text types using a notion that he calls textual *dimensions*. According to Biber (1988:55) "dimensions are bundles of linguistic features that co-occur in texts because they work together to mark some common underlying function." Biber uses a multivariate analysis to identify which of 67 linguistic

GRANT REQUEST TO KIWANIS FOUNDATION OF INDIANAPOLIS, INC. BY PLEASANT RUN CHILDREN'S HOMES, INC.

(Begin Competence claim)Pleasant Run Children's Homes was established in 1867 to care for children orphaned by the Civil War.(End Competence claim) (Begin Territory)The founders believed the need would be a temporary one, and in time, every child would have a safe, nurturing and happy home to live in.

Although more than a hundred and twenty years have passed and the needs that Pleasant Run addresses have changed, that hope remains alive ... that in time, all children will have the loving, supportive homes they deserve. (End Territory)

(Begin Competence claim)Today, Pleasant Run is a not-for-profit agency that serves seriously troubled children who have been abused and neglected. Our clients are referred by county welfare caseworkers or probation officers, by state special-education officials or by parents in cooperation with health-insurance providers. Regardless of how these children come to us, our objective is to help them become healthy, happy, contributing members of society.

One of Pleasant Run Children's Homes programs is treating children ages 7 to 18 in one of our five group homes. It is in this setting that children are provided a homelike environment while providing structure and supervision to help stabilize their behavior and lives. (End Competence claim)

(Begin Goal)This grant request is for recreation equipment for our residential group on Cooper Road.(End Goal) (Begin Benefits)This home is in need of age appropriate recreation equipment for boys ranging from age 10 to 15.(End Benefits)(Begin Gap) Currently, our Cooper Road home has only a basketball court.(End Gap)

(Begin Importance claim)Recreation equipment is important in the lives of these young boys. Not only do they have lots of energy to spend, this type of activity helps build self-esteem for children who have had very little positive reinforcement in their lives. It is also a way to teach team-building skills.(End Importance claim)(Begin Competence claim)The children Pleasant Run Children's Homes serve often have suffered abuse and neglect, some have even been abandoned.(End Competence claim)

(Begin Means)The equipment under consideration for purchase is manufactured by Creative Playgrounds Ltd. It is a 9 station course made out of treated pine. The cost is \$4,784.00.(End Means)(Begin Importance claim) We appreciate your consideration of this request. If you do decide to provide the funding for this equipment, please know that you will be providing hours and years of enjoyment to children who have very little fun or play in their lives.[End Importance claim)

Figure 3. Sample grant proposal tagged for rhetorical moves

1) INVOLVED VS. INFORMATIONAL

Positive features:

private verbs
THAT deletion
contractions
present tense verbs
second person pronouns
DO as pro-verb
analytic negation
demonstrative pronouns
general emphatics
first person pronouns
pronoun IT
BE as main verb
causative subordination
discourse particles
indefinite pronouns
general hedges
amplifiers
sentence relatives
WH questions
possibility modals
non-phrasal coordination
WH clauses
final prepositions

Negative features:

nouns
word length
prepositions
type/token ratio
attributive adjectives

2) NARRATIVE VS. NON-NARRATIVE CONCERNS

Positive features:

past tense verbs
third person pronouns
perfect aspect verbs
public verbs
synthetic negation
present participle clauses

Negative features

present tense verbs
attributive adjectives
past participle WHIZ deletions
word length

3) EXPLICIT VS. SITUATION-DEPENDENT REFERENCE

Positive features:

WH relative clauses on object position
'pied piping' constructions
WH relative clauses on subject position
phrasal coordination
nominalizations

Negative features:

time adverbials
place adverbials
adverbs

4) OVERT EXPRESSION OF ARGUMENTATION

Positive features:

infinitives
prediction modals
suasive verbs
conditional subordination
necessity modals
split auxiliaries

Figure 4. Linguistic features of four dimensions of variation. From Biber (1988; 1995) based on a factor analysis of 67 linguistic features in 481 texts from 23 spoken and written genres. Features are explained in Biber (1988: 221–245).

features typically co-occur, with each group of co-occurring features defining a dimension. Based on the assumption that features do not randomly co-occur in texts but in fact together serve a functional purpose, Biber has defined five dimensions, or continua, along which registers in English vary as reflected by their linguistic features.

Figure 4 outlines four of the major dimensions and the features that define them. In the first dimension, “Involved vs. Informational Production,” we see that private verbs (verbs like *think* and *believe* that reflect unseen cognitive activity), *that* deletion, contractions, etc. tend to co-occur in texts. On the other hand, nouns, long words, prepositions, etc. also tend to co-occur. However, when the positive features occur, the negative features tend not to occur, and vice-versa; that is, they are in complimentary distribution. These positive and negative features define the two ends of the continuum that makes up this dimension.¹

When looking at the types of registers that display these positive features, *face-to-face conversations* is a genre that has a high positive score. These features reflect face-to-face conversation’s focus on interaction and affective concerns – that is, interpersonal involvement. Official documents and academic prose, however, have strongly negative scores on this dimension. They tend to have many nouns, long words, prepositions, etc. These features reflect these texts’ emphasis on the precise presentation of content rather than on interactive or affective matters.

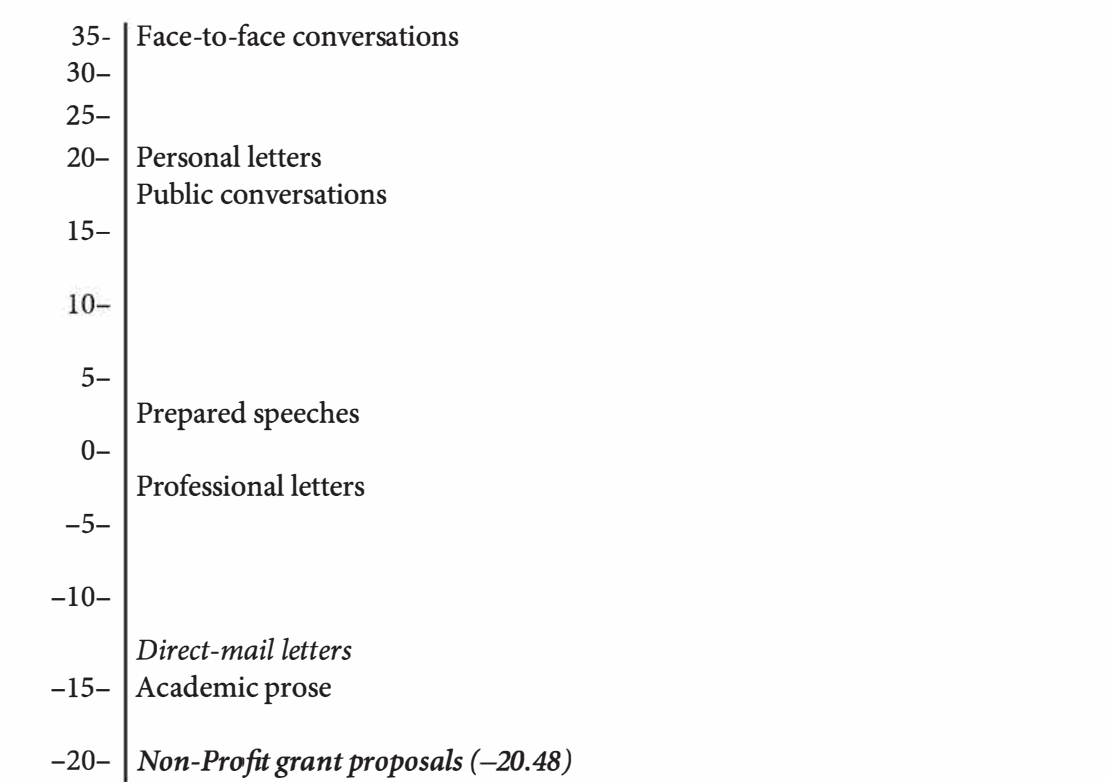
As with Dimension 1, the other three dimensions discussed in this paper have titles that reflect the qualitative interpretation of the functions of its linguistic features as well as the genres that are strongly marked – positively or negatively – on the dimension. The other three dimensions used in this study – which include “Narrative versus Non-narrative Concerns,” “Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference,” and “Overt Expression of Argumentation” – are also shown in Figure 4. The last dimension, “Overt Expression of Argumentation,” is unique in that it only has positive features. That is, there is no set of linguistic features that tend to co-occur when the positive features are absent, as is the case for the other three dimensions.

Calculating mean scores for various types of texts on each of these dimensions allows us to provide complex linguistic descriptions of each type and also allows for complex comparisons among the categories. As noted by Conrad (1996:308), “certain types of texts may, for example, be very different from each other with respect to their narrative focus but very similar with respect to

informational production and impersonal style.” Consequently, this multidimensional analysis permits a more thorough evaluation of a genre than would the examination of only one or two linguistic features, which is typical of many corpus studies.

Each of the 68 grant proposals was analyzed by a computer program designed to identify all occurrences of the linguistic features listed in Figure 4. Counts of each feature in each text were normed to 1,000 words and then standardized to the corpus used in Biber’s (1988) study to allow for comparisons with the findings in that study. These standardized counts were then averaged across all letters to determine a mean score for each of the four dimensions for this genre.² Typical of studies that use multidimensional analysis, a qualitative analysis of how the linguistic features in each dimension functioned in the

INVOLVED



INFORMATIONAL

Figure 5. Mean scores of Dimension 1 for Non-profit grant proposal (in bold), Direct-mail letters (in italics) and six other English registers – Involved Versus Informational (Adapted from Biber 1995).

NARRATIVE

7–	Romance fiction
6–	
5–	
4–	
3–	
2–	Biographies
1–	
0–	Prepared speeches
	Face-to-face conversations
–1–	
–2–	Professional letters
	Academic prose
–3–	<i>Direct-mail letters</i>
	Non-profit grant proposals (–3.75)

NON-NARRATIVE

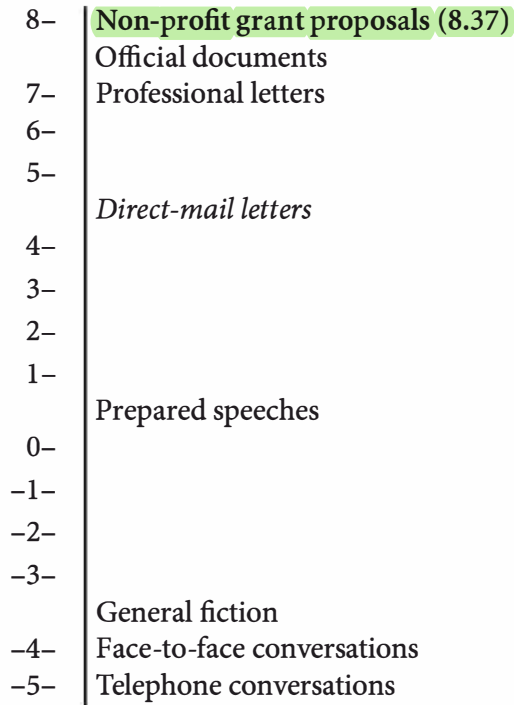
Figure 6. Mean scores of Dimension 2 for Non-profit grant proposal (in bold), Direct-mail letters (in italics) and six other English registers – Narrative versus Non-Narrative Concerns (Adapted from Biber 1995).

texts was then conducted. This was done by examining samples of texts to look for specific examples of how the dimensions were reflected within the genre.

In this study, the application of Biber's multidimensional analysis was designed to answer the following questions: (1) Is the grant proposal genre a distinguishable genre? (2) Are linguistic features, as represented by the linguistic dimensions, consistent across the genre, or do they vary significantly across respective moves, with the linguistic dimensions being but an "average" of the combined moves? The hypothesis for the latter question was that linguistic features of specific moves would vary from the "average" linguistic features for the whole genre as a result of the specific "goals" for each move. We expected there to be a "linguistic realization" of the rhetorical features.

Mean scores of the multidimensional analysis of the entire group of grant proposals are shown in Table 5. The scores range from –20.48 on the involved versus informational production to +8.37 on the explicit versus situation-dependent dimension. A more meaningful analysis for the comparison of

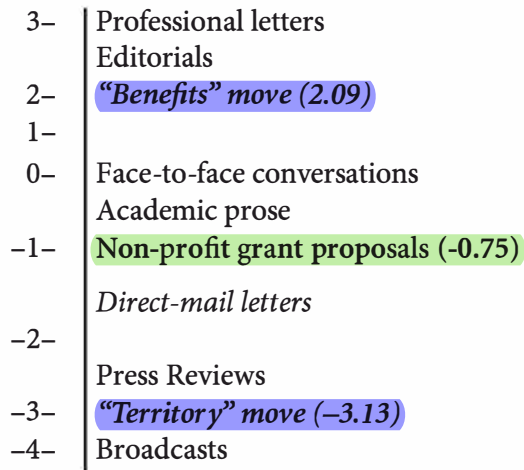
EXPLICIT



SITUATION-DEPENDENT

Figure 7. Mean scores of Dimension for Non-profit grant proposal (in bold), Direct-mail letters (in italics) and six other English registers – Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference (Adapted from Biber 1988).

OVERTLY ARGUMENTATIVE



NOT OVERTLY ARGUMENTATIVE

Figure 8. Mean scores of Dimension 4 for Non-profit grant proposal (in bold), two grant proposal "moves" (in bold italics), Direct-mail letters (in italics) and six other English registers – Overt Expression of Argumentation (Adapted from Biber 1995).

Table 5. Textual dimensions scores

Dimension	Dimension score
Involved vs. Informational Production	-20.48
Narrative vs. Non-Narrative Concerns	-3.75
Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference	8.37
Overt Expression of Persuasion	-0.75

genres is given in Figures 5–8. Figures 5–8 situate the genre of grant proposals in relation to other genres previously studied by Biber (1988) and Connor and Upton (2003).

In Dimension 1 (see Figure 5 above), non-profit grant proposals have the lowest scores of any genre. Genres with low scores in Dimension 1 are highly informational; they acknowledge interpersonal relations in a secondary manner. They are written with considerable care, sometimes even being revised and rewritten, and thus they can show considerable lexical variety and informational density.

In Dimension 2 (see Figure 6 above), non-profit grant proposals again have the lowest score of any genre. Genres with low scores in this dimension are similar to one another in that they do not have narrative concerns. These non-narrative purposes include (1) the presentation of expository information, which has few verbs and few animate referents; (2) the presentation of procedural information, which uses many imperatives and infinitival verb forms to give step-by-step description of what to do, and (3) description of actions usually in progress, that is, actions in the present tense, a straightforward and concise packaging of information.

Dimension 3 (see Figure 7 above) places non-profit grant proposals higher than any other genre. Genres high in this score are informational texts that mark referents in an elaborated and explicit manner (as opposed to situated texts that depend on direct reference to, or extensive knowledge of, the physical and temporal situation or discourse production for understanding).

Finally, in Dimension 4 (see Figure 8 above) – *overt expression of argumentation* – non-profit grant proposals place slightly above direct-mail letters. Negative scores show a text is not argumentative (i.e. the text does not consider several possibilities and then seek to convince the reader of

the advisability or likelihood of one of them). Instead, these texts tend to be more of a *reportage* of events and thus do not involve opinion or argumentation at all. However, this dimension in these grant proposals is not particularly strong (negatively), which indicates that the genre is “relatively undistinguished along this dimension...there is no general characterization as persuasive or not; rather certain texts within these genres are persuasive, while others are not” (Biber 1988: 151).

It is important to make the distinction here between argumentation and persuasion, as Biber (1988) tends to use these terms somewhat interchangeably when describing this dimension. He originally called Dimension 4 “Overt Expression of Persuasion,” noting that it shows “the degree to which persuasion is marked overtly, whether overt marking of the speaker’s own point of view, or an assessment of the advisability or likelihood of an event presented to persuade the addressee” (Biber 1988: 111). In his 1995 text, Biber renames this dimension as “Overt Expression of Argumentation,” but still describes it as “reflecting overt argumentation or persuasion” (Biber 1995: 161). As we pointed out in our study on direct mail letters (Connor and Upton 2003), Dimension 4 really does not describe persuasion as much as argumentation. After considering the linguistic features included in this dimension, such as prediction modals (e.g. will/would/shall), necessity modals (ought, should, must) and especially “suasive verbs” (e.g. command, insist, demand, beg), it makes sense that the grant proposals in our corpus would not score high in this dimension. Unlike editorials, which do score high in this dimension, grant proposals – like direct mail letters – do not necessarily argue a point of view or try to change the reader’s position. Instead of using verbs calling for action and arguing a point of view on logical grounds, as the suasive verbs in Biber’s list generally do, grant proposals (and direct mail letters) likely reflect the distinction that rhetoricians (Kinneavy 1971) are now making between “persuasion” and argumentation.

Kinneavy (1971), most notably, has argued that persuasion involves not only traditional rational appeals (which is the realm of argumentation) but also ethical and emotional appeals. In other words, an argumentative text is classified as persuasive, but not all persuasive texts are argumentative. We would argue that the linguistic features in this dimension simply describe the degree of argumentation used in a genre, saying little about its overall level of persuasiveness. Indeed, what are grant proposals, not to mention direct mail

letters, if not documents intended to persuade donors to contribute money to a worthy project or cause?

In conclusion, grant proposals, like direct-mail letters in our previous research, are distinguishable from other genres that linguists have studied. Grant proposals are highly informative; they are expository in nature even though they may include stories; they are non-situated as texts; and, finally, they are persuasive, if not argumentative, in nature.

Multidimensional analysis of the individual rhetorical moves

In order to examine the linguistic features of individual moves, the multidimensional linguistic analysis was performed on the seven moves that occurred in these non-profit grant proposals. The expectation was that since each rhetorical move has a distinct and identifiable semantic function, these distinct functions would be realized through the use of distinct and consistent linguistic features, resulting in different dimensional scores for each move. In fact, contrary to our expectation, the dimensional analysis did not distinguish one move from another, except in one case.

As shown in Table 6, the variation for each of the moves within the dimension scores was, on the whole, not particularly noteworthy. In Dimension 1, Involved vs. Informational Production, all of the scores were strongly negative, with scores ranging from -15.64 to -22.47 (overall Dimension 1 Score = -20.48), indicating that all of the moves were fairly equally informational in their structure. In Dimension 2, Narrative vs. Non-Narrative Concerns, the scores for each move were also closely grouped together, representing fairly common non-narrative structures, with scores ranging from -2.75 to -4.22 (overall Dimension 2 Score = -3.75). Again, in Dimension 3, Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference, the dimension scores were fairly consistent across the moves, ranging from 6.61 to 10.49 (overall Dimension 3 Score = 8.37), indicating that all the moves used linguistic structures that provided fairly explicit reference. Only with Dimension 4, Overt Expression of Argumentation, did the different moves show interesting variation in their scores. While the overall score for Dimension 4 was -0.75, two moves – competence claim (-2.46) and territory (-3.13) – used very distinctly “non-argumentative” linguistic structures, while one move – benefits (2.09) – proved to be quite argumentative in

Table 6. Linguistic dimensions by rhetorical move

Dimensions	Involved vs. Informational Production	Narrative vs. Non-Narrative Concerns	Explicit vs. Situa- tion-Dependent Reference	Overt Expres- sion of Argu- mentation
benefits	-21.89	-3.56	10.49	2.09
competence claim	-22.47	-3.32	8.67	-2.46
gap	-16.00	-2.50	6.61	-1.21
goal	-22.61	-4.22	8.74	-0.19
importance claim	-17.99	-3.33	8.94	1.69
means	-20.02	-4.04	7.85	1.50
territory	-15.64	-2.75	7.62	-3.13
Dimension Score	-20.48	-3.75	8.37	-0.75

Note: Only “interesting” dimension is Dimension 4, Overt Expression of Argumentation. Relatively strong in the “benefits” move. Relatively strongly lacking in “competence claim” and “territory” moves. See Table 4 above.

nature. The relationship of these two moves to the overall Dimension score is more clearly seen in Figure 8.

Upon further reflection about the lack of variation in the dimension scores among the moves for Dimensions 1–3, these results do make sense. Grant proposals are very carefully edited, tightly packed, documents. This feature lead to the fairly strong “informational” score (Dimension 1) for the genre, and it is not surprising that each of the moves reflected this informational aspect as well since a lot of work goes into succinctly, but clearly, making the appeal for funding. Similarly, it is obvious that grant proposals as a whole are not narrative in nature, hence the negative score in Dimension 2, and clearly none of the individual rhetorical moves that comprise the genre have a narrative nature. The lack of significant variation in the scores in this dimension, then, is also not surprising. The same can also be said for Dimension 3; because of the need to be succinct and clear, grant writers are very explicit about the points they are making, including the exact need being addressed and the exact use for which funding will be used. It should not be unexpected that this linguistic feature would carry through each of the respective moves.

The variation shown between some of the moves in Dimension 4, on the other hand, also intuitively makes sense. This dimension reflects whether or not the language that is used is argumentative in nature; that is, whether it seeks to convince the reader of the advisability or likelihood of an option.

While the overall genre scored as moderately lacking in overt expression of argumentation, one move in particular – *benefits* – actually scored fairly positive in this dimension (2.09). Again, intuitively this makes sense, as it is in this move that the grant writers try to “sell” the value of the work they seek to accomplish with the grant; they are, in fact, trying to convince the reader of the need (advisability) for the proposal. On the other hand, the *territory* move reflected a strong lack of “overt expression of argumentation” (–3.13), which again makes sense since the function of this move is merely to outline the context in which the grant activity will take place. The nature of this move is to be descriptive, not argumentative, as is clear from the example territory move given in Figure 3; more than half of this example seeks only to provide a brief history of the organization.

Even though we anticipated greater variation between moves within each of the four Dimensions, the fact that the only notable variation that is apparent is within Dimension 4, in retrospect, seems logical. Even though each of the moves has distinct semantic goals, with regards to the multidimensional analysis, each achieves those different semantic goals using similar linguistic structures.

Discussion and implications for teaching

Comparing the results of this study with our earlier study (Connor and Upton 2003), the linguistic dimensions of grant proposals very closely parallel those of direct mail letters. This suggests that philanthropic discourse may use common linguistic features across genres to pursue a common goal (i.e. to persuade recipients to donate/award funds). These common features reflect strongly informational, closely edited texts that use an explicit, precise and non-narrative structure to appeal to potential donors.

Further, the linguistic dimensions of the rhetorical moves do not seem to vary from the overall linguistic dimensions of the genre, with the notable exception of two moves in Dimension 4. Clearly there must be something other than linguistic features that accounts for the obvious variation in purpose reflected by the different moves. These results underscore the necessity to study more closely the semantic dimensions of moves. This is consistent with genre theory in general. As Swales (1981) argues in his original work on rhetorical moves in research articles, individual moves have specific functions as

they develop together the overall purpose of a piece of text or a genre. Swales goes on to show how specific words and their collocations characterize individual moves. For example, the move *gap* is associated with expressions such as “there is a problem,” “not enough is known yet about so and so,” or “more needs to be done.” We believe that moves in a grant proposal should also be studied for such frequently occurring words and expressions. That knowledge will assist in the operationalization of moves.

As noted at the start of this chapter, the overall purpose of this study was to highlight key areas in which the genre of non-profit grant proposals proves to be distinctive. A primary motivation for understanding not only non-profit grant proposals but also other non-profit genres like direct mail letters (Upton 2002) is to be able to train novice writers in the genre, including non-native speakers of English, to effectively use the common rhetorical moves and linguistic structures that work together to create a persuasive document. Just as Swales’ (1981) study of the rhetorical moves of research studies has provided a concrete tool for teaching novice writers what to look for when reading and what to include when writing research articles, we believe the rhetorical move structure model presented in this chapter provides an equally useful tool for those who read and write non-profit grant proposals. Similarly, instructing novice writers of the genre on the linguistic structures (i.e. “dimensions”) that are typical to non-profit grant proposals should also help them in both evaluating and writing effective proposals.

In short, the purpose for seeking to understand the language of the genre is ultimately to improve the training of novice writers and to encourage the development of better and more effective grant proposals. This study provides an important contribution to those ends by more clearly outlining some rhetorical and linguistic features common to the genre.

Notes

1. The positive and negative designations are used only to distinguish between the two opposing ends of the continuum for a dimension; the values do not signify a greater – or lesser – than relationship between the two poles.
2. We are grateful to Doug Biber for assisting us with the computer analysis for this stage of the study.

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