

Linguistic Dimensions of Direct Mail Letters

Connor, U. & Upton, T. A. (Forthcoming). Linguistic dimensions of direct mail letters. In C. Meyer & P. Leistyna (Eds.), *Corpus Analysis: Language Structure and Language Use*. Amsterdam: Rodopi Publishers.

Abstract

In this article, we explore how corpus-based techniques can broaden our understanding of how lexical and grammatical features help to shape and define the persuasive features of philanthropic direct mail letters by allowing us to examine the patterns of dozens of linguistic features across a large number of texts. Using 316 direct mail letters from 108 organizations across five philanthropic fields, we use a multidimensional analysis technique, developed by Biber (1988), to develop a linguistic profile of the genre. This profile is based on five linguistic "dimensions" that are determined by which of 67 linguistics features typically co-occur. Based on the assumption that linguistic features do not randomly co-occur in texts but in fact together serve a functional purpose, these dimensions can be used to show how genres vary, as reflected by their use of different linguistic features, in order to accomplish generic goals. Our findings show that philanthropic direct mail letters are indeed a unique genre, displaying a pattern of linguistic features that are quite distinct from other common genres.

1. Introduction

Fundraising texts are fascinating: they persuade, inform, request, catch one's eye, wrench one's heart, and twist one's arm in a tidy attractive package. The weight upon these odd texts is, in fact, enormous. Nonprofit organizations depend to a larger or smaller extent on fund raising texts for operating expenses or for funding to

accomplish capital goals. And yet, these texts are still not well understood.

Philanthropy, a word of Greek origin meaning “loving mankind,” is the active effort to promote human welfare. A major component of philanthropy, certainly in the United States, is the attempt to entice others to contribute to particular philanthropic endeavors – that is, to give to nonprofit (or not-for-profit) organizations seeking to serve others. According to the American Association of Fund-Raising Council (AAFRC), charitable giving in the U.S. in 2000 surpassed \$200 billion dollars, representing a 6.6% increase over 1999. Indeed, since 1997, giving has increased by more than \$12 billion annually. Giving has also gained ground in the context of the total economy. Since 1995, when philanthropy represented 1.7% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), giving as a share of GDP has steadily increased, reaching 2.1% in 1999, before leveling off at 2.0% in 2000 despite dramatic fluctuations in the stock market (AAFRC, 2001).

Philanthropic discourse is persuasive in nature. Its primary purpose is to persuade people to contribute to worthy causes or to underwrite philanthropic programs. Because of its persuasive purpose, fundraising has a great deal in common with promotional materials such as sales letters and job applications (Bhatia, 1998). In order to pursue a better understanding of philanthropic discourse, the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication (ICIC) has initiated an effort to carefully study the language of fundraising by collecting a large corpus of fundraising material from over 200 non-profit organizations. These organizations, of various sizes, represent the following fields: health and human services, arts and culture, environment, community development, and education. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the linguistic features of the direct-mail letters that are included in the ICIC Fundraising Corpus.

2. Direct Mail Letters

Direct mail letters in nonprofit fundraising represent the genre of promotional texts. Their purpose is to sell a product, in the case of a direct mail fundraising letter a good cause. Despite their importance, they are not well-understood. In order to lay groundwork for the linguistic work we have begun with the corpus of fundraising materials at ICIC, it may be helpful to review some research of marketing specialists focusing on fundraising for nonprofit causes.

A whole industry has developed around mail letters in nonprofits as “experts” offer advice for fundraisers in books and newsletters. As an example, let us examine two articles in the Letter Clinic column of The Fund-Raising Institute Monthly Portfolio. The Fund-Raising Institute is a well-respected private company in Ambler, Pennsylvania, that specializes in the training of fundraisers. The advice columns are two pages long.

The first example comes from the letter clinic of the Monthly Portfolio, titled “Super-personalization. Handwritten P.S. produces powerful computer letters,” by Krambeer (1989). It argues for the importance of the altering “by the human hand” of the computer letter: “In an increasingly competitive and computerized fund-raising profession, the annual appeal has become routine and in most cases absolutely automated. The handwritten P.S. adds an element of intimacy, a touch of familiarity to the solicitation. And allows the fund-raiser a rare opportunity to truly communicate with the donor.” A sample letter was included in the column.

The second sample column, titled “Tending’ your direct mail pieces. Use direct mail to bring donors into the fold” by Thompson-Haas (1994), presents more general strategies for writers of direct mail letters. The column begins with a metaphor that compares direct mailing to tending to a lawn: both provide clear observable products and both require careful attending. The column is further organized into three sections: visualize success, be specific, and up the stakes. The first section advises writers how to “visualize how donors will respond

when they get to their mailboxes and find a mailing from [your] institution.” The second section urges appealing to specific segments within donor groups: “The more segmented the audience, the more specific the message can be. The more specific the message, the greater its appeal and the greater the results.” The section titled “Up the stakes” is less focused; it mentions that fundraisers can learn a great deal from sales campaigns of a book publisher and that the more pages a letter has the more successful it is. “Not all people will read every word on every page—but that’s unimportant. Studies show that donors tend to first read the salutation (hence, the importance of the personalized mailing), then the name of the signer, and then the P.S. (which is why it is important to restate the reason for the mailing and the type of action you are requesting of them in the P.S.).” Finally, the column ends with a list of “helpful hints,” which includes things such as “tell people what you plan to tell them. Tell them, and then tell them what you’ve told them”; personalize our letters and change references to “you,” rather than “I,” “us,” or “we”; and pay attention to the product’s visual appearance such as format, graphics, paper stock, and type.

It is fair to say that the advice given in the columns above seem to come from the knowledge bases of mass marketing rather than linguistics. A great deal of emphasis is put on the physical appearance of the letter. Language use, with the exception of reference to the “you” emphasis popular in American business letter writing, does not appear an important consideration. Even though donor segmentation is recommended, no specific advice is given about how to appeal to specific audiences.

Linguists’ interest in the direct mail letter is relatively new. The only published research by linguists on the direct mail letter for fundraising purposes have been those by Mann and Thompson (1992), whose edited volume provided analyses of a single direct mail letter by a number of well-known linguists, and the cross-cultural research by

Abelen, Redeker, and Thompson (1993), whose article compared the rhetorical structure of U.S. and Dutch fund-raising letters. Mann and Thompson's volume showcased the merits of particular linguistic/rhetorical analyses (such as the Rhetorical Structure Theory and the topical structure analysis). However, the purpose of the volume was not necessarily advancing knowledge about the fundraising letter as a text type. Abelen, Redeker, and Thompson's treatise, on the other hand, provides a great deal of valuable information about the direct mail fundraising letter as an object of linguistic/rhetorical study.

In the study, Abelen et al. compared eight US-American with eight Dutch fundraising letters from nonprofit organizations engaged in environmental protection activities. A Rhetorical Structure Analysis, with three major classes of relations—interpersonal, ideational, and textual—was used. Interpersonal relations—motivating, justifying, and so forth to achieve acceptable and convincing communication—played a bigger role in the US letters than the ideational and textual relations that deal with clarity. These were used more often in the Dutch letters. The American letters were “found to have more persuasive character than the Dutch letters” (p. 343). The American letters were dominated by interpersonal relations, while the Dutch letters were more factual. These differences were interpreted as “reflecting the influence of culture-specific factors like marketing strategies and interactional style.” (p. 343). Abelen et al. explain that written communication styles in the U.S. tend to be less formal and more reader-oriented than in many other countries. Also, the marketing and advertising styles between the two countries differ. The U.S. is said to have “a distinct tradition in the art of masterful salesmanship” with Americans being used to hard sales techniques, while “Europeans expect a ‘softer’, more indirect approach” (p. 324). Similar differences in style are observed in direct-mail advertising, including philanthropy, between the two countries.

Abelen et al.'s study is significant as the first cross-cultural comparison of fundraising letters. Yet, the data in the study were

limited to a small number of letters in one kind of nonprofit. The goal of this study is to provide a better understanding of the linguistic characteristics that underlie the persuasive aspect of direct mail letters. The two research questions addressed in this paper are (1) What are the linguistic characteristics of the direct mail letter genre; and (2) How do these features compare to other English genres?

3. Method

3.1. The Corpus

The ICIC Fundraising Corpus includes over 900 fundraising documents from 236 organizations and totals nearly 2 million words. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the different types of organizations included in the corpus. The documents in the corpus include not only direct mail letters but also newsletters, case statements, grant proposals, and annual reports. Table 2 shows the total number and the total number of words of each type of document as well as the number of agencies represented in the corpus.

[Insert Tables 1 & 2 About Here]

The data used for this study included 316 direct mail letters from 108 organizations in six fields. The total number of words analyzed was 191,540. Table 3 provides the number of organizations, letters and words broken down by each of these six fields.

[Insert Table 3 About Here]

Each letter was scanned into a computer and double-checked for accuracy. Each 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 most of the agencies represented in the corpus.

3.2 Multidimensional Analysis

This study is based on the multidimensional approach to register variation developed by Biber (1988, 1995), which by design requires a corpus-based approach to investigating language use. Biber's

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

Table 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 dimension¹.

[Insert Table 4 About Here]

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 conversation's focus on interaction and affective concerns – that is, involvement. Official documents and academic prose, however, have strongly negative scores on this dimension. They tend to have many nouns, long words,

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.

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, shown in Table 4, that are used in this study are 'Narrative versus Non-narrative Concerns,' 'Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference,' and 'Overt Expression of Argumentation.' 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), "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" (p. 308). 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.

3.3. Procedures

Each of the 316 direct mail letters were analyzed by a computer program designed to identify all occurrences of the linguistic features listed in Table 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 genre². Typical of studies that use multidimensional analysis, a qualitative analysis of how the linguistic features in each dimension functioned in the texts was then conducted. This was done by looking at samples of texts to look for specific examples of how the dimensions were reflected within the genre.

4. Results

The mean scores of the direct mail letters for each of the four dimensions examined in this study are given in Table 5.

[Insert Table 5 About Here]

According to Biber (1988), the linguistic features of Dimension 1, Involved versus Informational Production, represent a continuum "marking high informational density and exact informational content versus affective, interactional, and generalized content" (p. 107). The mean score of the direct mail letters on this dimension was -11.9. Genres with low scores in Dimension 1 are highly informational and acknowledge interpersonal relations only in a secondary manner. They are written with considerable care, usually going through several drafts, and thus they can show considerable lexical variety and informational density. Letters of this type can be interactive (e.g., using first and second person pronouns), but their primary focus is informational rather than involved. That direct mail letters very much have this characteristic can be illustrated by the following example³:

(1) Health & Human Resources: W061

Young women are growing up in an ever-changing society. As a contributor to the Council in past appeals I know that you are aware of our mission--to prepare girls with ethical values, character, a desire to succeed and a commitment to their

² We are grateful to Doug Biber for assisting us with the computer analysis for this stage of the study.

³ Texts are labeled as follows: Organization Type:Text Number.

community. This letter is our 1997 request for a gift to the Annual Campaign for support of our operating budget. This year's Annual Campaign goal is \$65,000. We invite you to consider a contribution. Your gift, along with the many others we receive, will provide vital resources for today's Girl Scouts to become tomorrow's community and business leaders.

While the interpersonal pronouns "I", "our", "we, and "you" are used several times, this text is clearly not interactional in nature but instead is tightly and carefully written to convey a lot of detailed information in a succinct manner. This text has a high frequency of nouns and prepositions (e.g., *As a contributor to the Council in past appeals; and request for a gift to the Annual Campaign for support of our operating budget*), while showing fewer characteristics of involved, interactional language such as private verbs, THAT deletion, or contractions.

The mean Dimension 1 scores for a variety of genres are plotted along with the mean score for the direct mail letters in Figure 1. It is interesting to note that these direct mail letters are much more informational even than professional letters⁴ and are very much like academic prose on this dimension – and quite unlike the personal letters that we tend to consider them modeled after.

[Insert Figure 1 About Here]

Dimension 2, Narrative versus Non-narrative Concerns, is described by Biber (1988) as follows: "Overall, this dimension can be considered as distinguishing narrative discourse from other types of discourse. It might also be considered as distinguishing between active, event-oriented discourse and more static, descriptive or expository types of discourse....[the] narrative concerns marked by considerable reference to past time, third person animate referents, reported speech, and depictive details; non-narrative concerns, whether expository,

⁴ Biber describes his sample of 10 professional letters as having been written in an academic context, but dealing with administrative, as opposed to 'intellectual,' matters.

descriptive, or other, marked by immediate time and attributive nominal elaboration" (p. 109). The mean score of the direct mail letters on this dimension was -3.1, which marks them as strongly non-narrative.

Genres with low scores in this dimension are similar to one another only in that they do not have narrative concerns (Biber, 1995). 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, action in the present tense. Example 2 illustrates the non-narrative features of direct mail letters.

(2) **Environmental: ZL188**

You are invited to accept this free trial membership, including a free issue of AUDUBON magazine, for two months without obligation. Simply move the token on your invitation from the top to the bottom, detach along the perforation, and return it as soon as possible in the postage-paid envelope. Later, if you wish to continue as a member, you may do so simply by paying our bill for only \$20. You may also take advantage of our special 2-year membership offer for \$30, a savings of almost 60% off our regular 2 year rate. Or you may cancel your membership and owe us nothing. As an Audubon member, you will experience the wonders of our planet in a magazine widely considered to be the most beautiful published anywhere. At the same time, you will be helping to preserve those wonders through your support of America's most effective conservation group.

This text is clearly expository, reflecting a straightforward and concise packaging of information. And like most expository texts, the ratio of main verbs to other parts of speech is quite low, with the verbs generally occurring in the present or future tense. It also includes a lot of procedural information, indicating the steps that one should go

through in order to get their free issue of the magazine, and then how to subscribe to the magazine if they wish to continue receiving it, which is reflective of non-narrative texts. On the other hand, there is little use of the past tense or third person pronouns which is common in narrative texts.

The mean Dimension 2 scores for a variety of genres are plotted along with the mean score for the direct mail letters in Figure 2. It is interesting to note that direct mail letters are more strongly non-narrative than almost all the other genres – spoken or written – analyzed by Biber (1988), including professional letters and academic prose.

[Insert Figure 2 About Here]

Biber (1988) describes Dimension 3, Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference, as follows: "Considering both positive and negative features, the dimension underlying Factor 3 seems to distinguish between highly explicit, context-independent ['text-internal'] reference and nonspecific, situation-dependent reference" (p. 110). The direct mail letters, with a mean score of 4.7, score strongly in the explicit reference range of the dimension. 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.

This feature of direct mail letters can be seen in the following example.

(3) Health and Human Resources: YL010

It is through support from individuals like yourself, that we are able to care for thousands of individuals each year who may not otherwise have been able to afford proper home health care or even basic services. I wanted to briefly share with you some of the specific uses of the funds that are donated each year. Our nursing staff has used funds for: buying prescriptions for

patients who need them, but can not afford them; providing transportation to physician's offices for shut in patients; paying utility bills when there is an immediate jeopardy of shut off; medical supplies not covered by Medicare or other payers; fans and heaters for individuals; and even basic needs like food.

Reflective of genres that score high in this dimension, this example includes the use of WH relative clauses (*who may not otherwise...*, *who need them...*, and *when there is an immediate jeopardy*) and phrasal coordination (*fans and heaters for individuals, and even basic needs like food*). As this relatively high score would indicate, there are also relatively few uses of time or place adverbials or adverbs in general. The mean Dimension 3 scores for a variety of genres are plotted along with the mean score for the direct mail letters in Figure 3.

[Insert Figure 3 About Here]

Biber (1988) originally called Dimension 4 "Overt Expression of Persuasion." He noted that it has only features with positive weights and that it "marks 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" (p. 111). In his 1995 text, Biber renames this dimension as "Overt Expression of Argumentation," but still describes it as "reflecting overt argumentation or persuasion" (p. 161). With a mean score of -1.2, the direct mail letters fall in the negative range of this dimension. Negative scores show that 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 a 'reportage' of events and thus do not involve opinion or argumentation at all. However, this dimension in these direct mail letters is not particularly strong (negatively), which indicates that the genre is relatively undistinguished along this dimension. According to Biber, this could be because "there is no general characterization as persuasive or not; rather certain texts within

these genres are persuasive, while others are not" (Biber, 1988, p. 151). Or it could be because this genre as a whole does "not involve argumentation or persuasion" (Biber, 1995, p. 162).

As there are only common, co-occurring linguistic features for texts that score positively on this dimension, and the direct mail genre is marked by the absence of dimension 4 features, no text example is given. Figure 4, nevertheless, plots the mean Dimension 4 scores for a variety of genres along with the mean score for the direct mail letters.

[Insert Figure 4 About Here]

5. Discussion and Implications

The dimension 1 score (involved vs. informational production) was rather surprising in that it shows these letters to be strongly informational. On the surface, these letters give the impression that they are focusing on developing an interpersonal connection with the reader, but linguistically these are very closely edited, informationally dense letters having much in common with academic prose.

The Dimension 2 score (narrative vs. non-narrative concerns) was also rather surprising in that these letters come across as strongly non-narrative. One of the first impressions that one often has about direct mail letters is that they usually relate some gripping narrative tale. While it is indeed true that many if not most include narrative elements, what make these stand out within a letter is in fact their juxtaposition to the more common non-narrative, expository material.

The Dimension 3 score (explicit reference), was what one would expect. It is not at all surprising that these letters go to great effort to be very explicit as to what they are asking for and why.

We were at first rather taken aback at the Dimension 4 score, which indicated that these letters showed a lack of overt expression of argumentation or persuasion. Direct mail letters are nothing but persuasive in their style, and probably one of the more overtly persuasive genres there are. However, 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 direct letters in our corpus would not score high in this dimension. Unlike editorials, which do score high in this dimension, direct letters do not necessarily argue a point of view, try to change the audience's position, or find a solution to a problem. Instead of using verbs calling for action and arguing a point of view on logical grounds, as the suasive verbs in Biber's list do, direct mail letters likely reflect the distinction that rhetoricians are now making between "persuasion" and argumentation.

The definition of persuasion has evolved and is no longer seen as synonymous with 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. Clearly Biber (1995) recognized this developing distinction between argumentation and persuasion and sought to address this by renaming his Dimension 4 (from 'Overt Expression of Persuasion' to 'Overt Expression of Argumentation'). Nevertheless, his more recent description of this dimension still suggests he sees some parity in these ideas (e.g., "this dimension can be interpreted as reflecting overt argumentation or persuasion" (p. 161)). Obviously this quibble with nomenclature has no impact on how these letters scored on this dimension, only with how this dimension is described. We would argue that the linguistic features in this dimension simply describe the degree of argumentation used in a genre, saying little about its persuasiveness.

In summary, what this analysis tells us is that direct mail letters are very much a distinct and unique genre. What makes this genre all the more interesting is that it contains some counter-intuitive features. These include the fact that these letters are more like academic expository texts than like personal letters; they have a strong information focus as opposed to the involved, interpersonal features we

expected to see; they are mostly expository in structure, only sprinkled with narrative tales; and they tend to be highly polished, closely edited texts, which is counter to the impression they attempt to give as quickly penned, chatty letters.

This dimensional analysis of linguistic features provides valuable information about characteristics of the fundraising letter genre. However, an important feature of promotional discourse, namely its persuasiveness, is not fully explored by this type of analysis. The very essence of these texts is to persuade the audience in the most effective manner possible. Some of the ways to achieve such persuasion are not covered by the dimensions analyzed in this study. Features related to achieving the communicative goal of these persuasive letters need to be identified through other analyses. Such analyses conducted using the sample have included the study of the rhetorical "moves" (Upton, 2000), metadiscourse (Crismore, 2001), and persuasive appeals (Connor, 2001).

Furthermore, the analyses in this paper and the ones mentioned above also rely on the texts in the sample without considering the contextual richness of the philanthropic corpus collected. The headers provided with each text inform about the intended audience of the letters, the field and size of the nonprofit and, in some cases, even the success rate of the letters. This information allows for continued study of the sample and makes the analysis all the more valuable to practitioners. For the linguistic dimensions applied in this study, this information could be used to shed information about variation in letters across philanthropic fields. For example, do letters from one philanthropic field, say, health and human services, more involved or narrative than letters written in the field of education? Analyses like this will reveal important information about characteristics of subgenres of fundraising letters as clearly these letters are not one monolithic genre, but exhibit variation depending on purpose and situation.

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Table 1

ICIC Fundraising Corpus Organization Types

Type	<u>n</u>
Health and Human Service	82
Environmental	24
Community Development	21
Education	44
Arts and Culture	45
<u>Other</u>	<u>20</u>
Total	236

Table 2

ICIC Fundraising Corpus Document Types

Type	Org. <u>n</u>	Item <u>n</u>	Word <u>n</u>
Direct Mail Letters	108	316	191,540
Invitations, Newsletters	172	445	922,212
Case Statements	12	13	121,780
Grant Proposals	27	69	156,021
Annual Reports	51	84	523,770
Totals		927	1,915,623

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

Table 3

ICIC Fundraising Corpus: Direct Mail Letters by Organization Type

Type	Org. n	Item n	Word n
Health/Human Services	33	91	54,187
Environmental	10	13	8,126
Community Development	10	17	10,875
Education	27	118	72,583
Arts and Culture	16	63	37,485
Other	12	14	8,284
Total	108	316	191,540

Table 4

Linguistic Features of Four Dimensions of Variation

<p>1) INVOLVED VS. INFORMATIONAL</p> <p>Positive features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 <p>-----</p> <p>Negative features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> nouns word length prepositions type/token ratio attributive adjectives 	<p>2) NARRATIVE VS. NON-NARRATIVE CONCERNS</p> <p>Positive features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> past tense verbs third person pronouns perfect aspect verbs public verbs synthetic negation present participle clauses <p>-----</p> <p>Negative features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> present tense verbs attributive adjectives past participle WHIZ deletions word length <p>3) EXPLICIT VS. SITUATION-DEPENDENT REFERENCE</p> <p>Positive features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> WH relative clauses on object position 'pied piping' constructions WH relative clauses on subject position phrasal coordination nominalizations <p>-----</p> <p>Negative features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> time adverbials place adverbials adverbs <p>4) OVERT EXPRESSION OF PERSUASION</p> <p>Positive features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> infinitives prediction modals suasive verbs conditional subordination necessity modals split auxiliaries
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Note: From Biber, 1988, based on a factor analysis of 67 linguistic features in 481 texts from 23 spoken and written genres. Features are explained in Biber, 1988, pp. 221-245.

Table 5

Textual Dimensions Scores

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Dimension Score</u>
Involved vs. Informational Production	-11.9
Narrative vs. Non-Narrative Concerns	-3.1
Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference	4.7
Overt Expression of Persuasion	-1.2

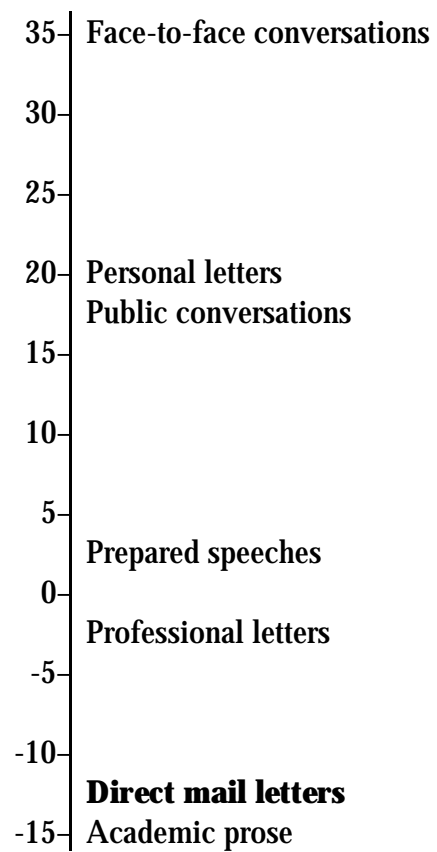


Figure 1. Mean scores of Dimension 1 for Direct mail letters (in bold) and six other English registers: "Involved versus Informational." Adapted from Biber (1995).

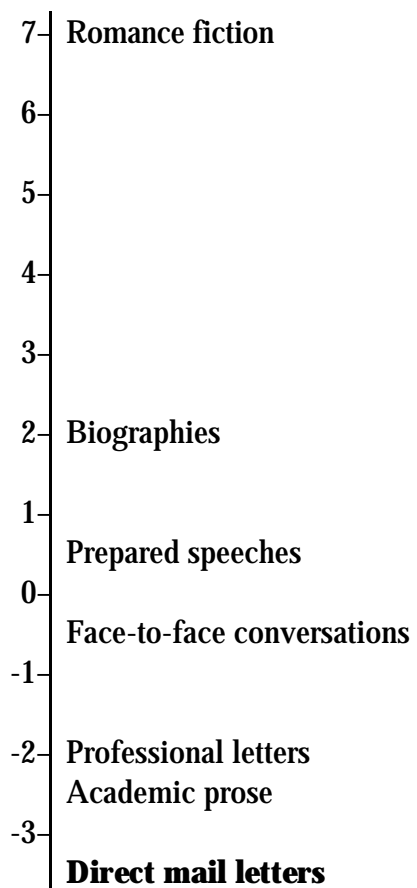


Figure 2. Mean scores of Dimension 2 for Direct mail letters (in bold) and six other English registers: "Narrative versus Non-Narrative Concerns." Adapted from Biber (1995).

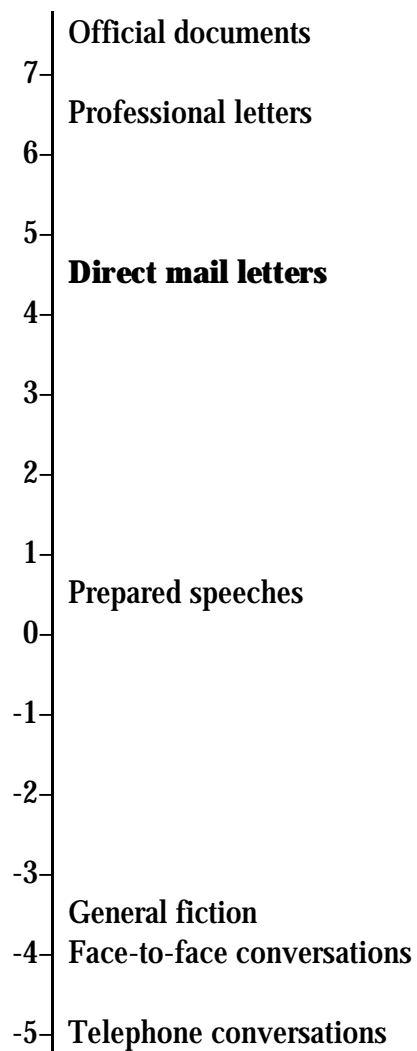


Figure 3. Mean scores of Dimension 3 for Direct mail letters (in bold) and six other English registers: 'Explicit versus Situation-Dependent Reference.' Adapted from Biber (1988).

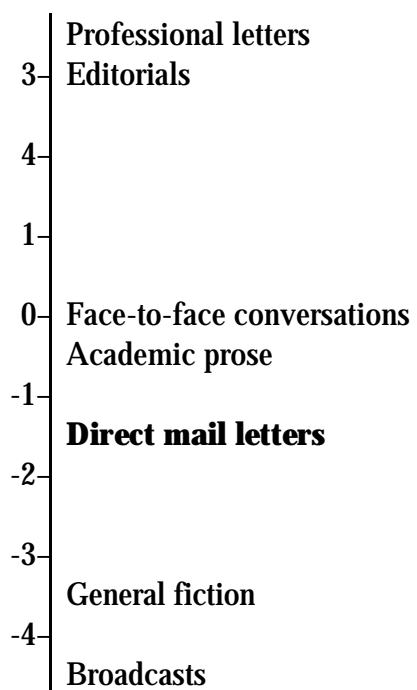


Figure 4. Mean scores of Dimension 4 for Direct mail letters (in bold) and six other English registers: 'Overt Expression of Persuasion.' Adapted from Biber (1988).