English across Borders: Exploring Register Variation in South Asian Newspaper Editorials

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a multidimensional analysis of Pakistani, Indian, and Bengali newspaper editorials, and they are also compared with British newspaper editorials. The purpose of the study is to explore lexico-grammatical patterns of change in English used in the countries separated by geopolitical divisions which remained parts of the British colony. A specialised corpus developed for this study consists of 288 text files of press editorials taken from May 2020 to May 2021 which were tagged using Biber's tagger. Z score formula was used for the computation of dimensions' score. Further, ANOVA was used to find the differences and similarities between the editorials from the selected countries. The data was also compared with British press editorials. The results indicate that Pakistani press editorials are the most informational and abstract among all the countries. Indian press editorials are the most non-narrative and the least abstract. Bengali press editorials are the most explicit and argumentative and the least informational. British press editorials are the least non-narrative, explicit, and argumentative among the selected countries. The results provide substantial evidence that the newspaper editorial registers of these countries are not only different from British press editorials but, after the partition of India, each country has developed its own norms of producing discourse also.

Keywords: World Englishes, Indian English, multidimensional analysis, Pakistani English, register variation

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This study attempts to explore lexical and grammatical patterns of variation in the register of newspaper editorials from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The British ruled the Indian sub-continent for about two hundred years. One of the imprints of the British legacy is the English language which remained the language of the colonizers during all those years. English came here as the language of the traders and then became the language of the colonizers and, finally, it has become the language of trade. English, which the British brought to these countries centuries ago, has become the language of education, business, and international communication in this part of the world.

Due to global development, languages all over the world are evolving. Localized varieties of English are also emerging over time. The study of these varieties of English has caught the attention of many researchers. They studied these varieties from various perspectives using different approaches. The multidimensional approach is the most comprehensive in studying linguistic variations in different registers (Omidian et al., 2021). Several studies used Biber's MD model (1988, 2006) to study linguistic variation in different languages around the world, for example, Sardinha et al., (2014) conducted an MD analysis on the Portuguese language. Likewise, Biber et al., (2006) worked on Spanish and Jang (1999), on Taiwanese. It further helps to explore patterns of change in different varieties of English.

The MD approach was also used to study newspaper register (Ali, 2018; Ali & Sheeraz, 2018; Shakir & Deuber, 2018; Alvi, 2017; Ahmad & Ali, 2017, etc.). Although several research studies use the MD approach on newspaper registers, most of them compare Pakistani or Indian English with American or British English. These studies lack a comparison of Pakistani English with other neighbouring varieties of Englishes. Ali (2020) compares different English varieties of South Asian Englishes, but it studies newspaper reportage register. There is a need to study other registers and sub-registers including short stories, emails, letters to the editor, editorials, etc. This research attempts to study register variation in editorials to explore if the countries which remained part of the British colony for a long time and separated by the geopolitical division have developed their own lexico-grammatical patterns of English.

The objectives of the present study are (a) to study register variation in editorials to explore if the countries which remained part of the British colony for a long time and separated by the geopolitical division have developed their own lexico-grammatical patterns of English, and (b) to identify similarities and differences among Pakistani, Indian, and Bengali press editorials in comparison with British press editorials.

Localized varieties of English in South Asia have been studied from various perspectives ranging from postcolonial writing back perspective (Ashcroft et al., 2002) to nativization point of view (Kachru, 1980, 1997; Bolton, 2008) to variationist

perspective (Biber, 2006; Biber and Conrad, 2009; Egbert, 2015; Egbert and Plonsky, 2015; Biber and Egbert, 2016). Either it was by exploring interlanguage, vernacular transcription, syntactic fusion, untranslated words, code-switching and glossing (Ashcroft et al., 2002), or by locating lexical innovation, translation equivalence, contextual redefinition, and rhetorical and functional styles (Kachru, 1980). The local texts were claimed to be the varieties of English based on individual linguistic features (Ali & Masroor, 2017).

In terms of tracing systematic patterns of co-occurring linguistic features, the multidimensional model of linguistic variation has an advantage over other methods of studying variation between varieties of a language or between languages. Most previous attempts to analyze variation between languages or between varieties of languages were mostly limited to locating specific linguistic features. Biber (2006) believes that studying linguistic variation by relying on individual characteristics and ignoring co-occurring linguistic features is unjustified. He developed a corpus-based, comparative and quantitative approach to study language variation. He asserts that the goal of the development of the MD approach was to examine the extent of variation between registers. Biber et al., (2015) claim that the multidimensional approach "[…] investigates overall patterns of register variation and achieves more generalizable results than in other methodologies. It is based on the analysis of large corpora […]" (p. 152).

The MD approach has been widely used to study variation between different registers, sub-registers, varieties of English, and different languages. Some studies approached South Asian Englishes from a variationist perspective. There are several studies, that apply Biber's MD approach on different Pakistani English registers (Ahmad & Ali, 2017; Ahmad & Mahmood, 2015; Iqbal & Danish, 2014; Shakir, 2013; Ali et al., 2018; Ali & Sheeraz, 2018; Shakir & Deuber, 2019; Ali, 2020). These studies are limited in scope since they compare Pakistani English to British English and, in some cases, American English. Yet, the distinction between the varieties of English used in South Asian countries remains blurred. As a result, it can easily be labelled under the cover terms of South Asian English or Indian English. Thus, there is a need to investigate the distinctions and similarities among these South Asian Englishes to see if they can be labelled as South Asian English and Indian English or they are distinctive varieties of English.

Before the 1947 partition, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were part of the Indian subcontinent. English spoken and written in this part of South Asia is known as Indian English. The other varieties were overshadowed under the cover term of Indian English. Some studies attempted to study English used in other countries of South Asia as independent varieties (Ali, 2020, Ali et al, 2020). A few researchers studied the lexical stress patterns of Pakistani English (Kamran et al., 2017). Mahmood and Hussain (2016) compared Pakistani, Indian, and British English. They conducted their study using *International Corpus of English* (ICE). Moreover, English used in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh was also studied by Ali and Shehzad

(2019). However, the prime focus of these studies was the news reportage, student writing, creative writing, etc. Other registers also need to be investigated and analyzed. The present study attempts to explore lexico-grammatical patterns of variation in newspaper editorials from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh which were part of the subcontinent before partition.

Research methodology

Many linguists were dissatisfied with the studies previously conducted on the register and varieties of English with the key focus on individual linguistic features (Bernstein, 1970; Ervin-Tripp, 1972; Hymes, 1974). Biber (1988). They largely introduced the concept of co-occurrence of linguistic features. Biber's MD approach (1988; 2006), which applies multivariate/ multidimensional statistical techniques to investigate variation in a language, was considered suitable for this study. We have used it as a theoretical framework for this study.

The specialised corpus prepared for this study consists of twelve newspapers, three newspapers from each country (see table 1 for details). From each newspaper, twenty-four texts spread over one year (May 2020 to May 2021) were taken. The newspapers are selected based on wide circulation/ readership and availability of online data.

Bangladesh	The Daily Star
	Daily Sun
	The Independent
Britain	The Guardian
	The Sunday Times
	Morning Star
India	The Indian Express
	The Times of India
	The Telegraph
Pakistan	Dawn
	Pakistan Observer

	The News International

Table.1 *Countries and Newspapers taken for the analysis*

The following abbreviations were used in the paper: Editorial (ED), Pakistani press editorial (PPE), Indian press editorial (IPE) Bengali press editorial (BPE), British press editorial (BRPE), text (T), The Times (TT), The Independent (TI), The Telegraph (TTL), Morning Star (MS), Daily Sun (DS), The Indian Express (IE), Dawn (DN), The Times of India (TI), The Sun (TS), The Guardian (TG), and Pakistan Observer (PO).

An equal number of text files (72 text files per country) were collected from each county. After collecting the text files, each text was converted into machine-readable form. The cleaning of the data and marking up the files with specific codes were the next steps. After compilation of the corpus, it was run through Biber's tagger. It tagged each text file for 150+ linguistic features. The raw counts and scores of the linguistic features were obtained. After normalizing the frequencies, dimension scores were computed. The scores were computed by adding the standardised frequencies of all the linguistic features that load positively on a dimension and subtracting the standardised scores of all features that load negatively. We applied Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which compared the mean differences among the editorials from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Britain. Linguistic features in a dimension are grouped to perform a specific communicative function. MD approach enables the identification and functional interpretation of dimensions.

Results and discussion

Biber (1988) labelled the first dimension as Involved vs. Informational discourse. A large number of linguistic features group on this dimension. On the positive side, *private verbs, second-person pronoun/ possessive, verb 'do', pronoun 'it', discourse particle, nominal pronoun, adverbial-hedges, modal of possibility, coordinating conjunction-clause connector,* and *stranded proposition* are some of the linguistic features that create involved discourse. Involved discourse 'foregrounds the speaker or writer's opinion, attitudes and feelings, and the relationship between addressor and addressee' (Cameron & Panovic, 2014, p. 25). On the other side, *attributive adjectives, nouns,* and *prepositions* create informational discourse. Attributive adjectives elaborate information (Biber, 2006). Further, the information focus of the text is indicated by nouns. A preposition is defined by Chafe (1985) as 'a device for integrating information into idea unit' (p. 237). These three linguistic features together perform the function of producing informational discourse.
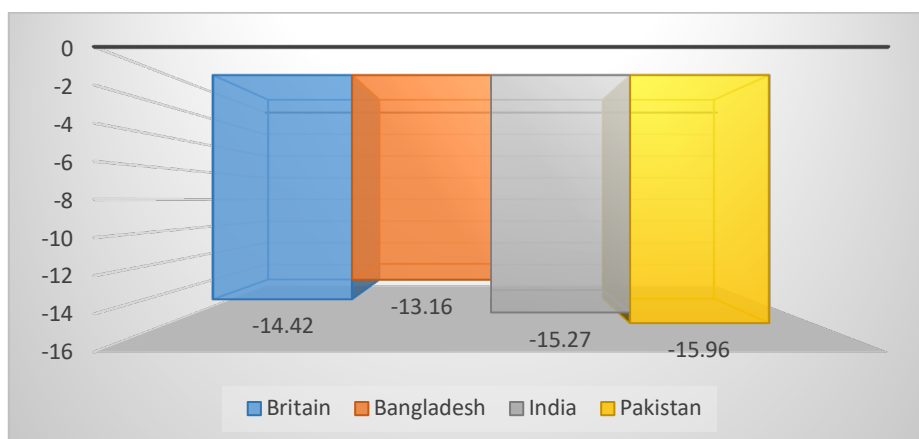
Fig.1 *Comparison of British Editorials with Pakistani, Bengali, and Indian Editorials on Dimension 1 (Involved vs. Informational discourse)*

The results indicate high informational density on factor 1. On this dimension, Pakistani press editorial (PPE), with a mean score of -15.96, is the most informational. The following excerpt from the Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn*, illustrates the density of informational discourse:

> *PAKISTAN* ranks among the *world*'s most rapidly urbanising *countries*. Final census *figures* show that just *under* 76m people — or 36.44pc of the *populace* — lived *in cities in* 2017 compared to 43m who lived *in urban areas* back in 1998...This is because the *Pakistan Bureau* of Statistics' definition of '*urban*' tends to be based *on cities*' administrative limits, which leaves out '*urbanising*' or '*peri-urban*' *areas* that extend beyond the *demarcated boundaries*. (EDDNT23)

A dense presence of informational linguistic features – nouns, attributive adjectives, and prepositions-- mark the density of informational discourse in PPE. Indian press editorial (IPE) shows the second-highest informational discourse. The mean score of IPE is 15.27, that is, slightly less than PPE. Bengali press editorials (BPEs) show a significant difference in the mean score from PEE and IPE. With a mean score of 13.16, they produce the least informational discourse. The excerpt is taken from the Bangali newspaper *The Sun*:

> *Friendship* to all, *malice* to none' was the core mantra of *Bangabandhu's foreign policy*. This principled stand on *foreign relations* originated *in* the *early phase* of his *political career*. He was opposed *to Pakistan* taking an *explicit foreign policy in favour* of *pro-US defence* pacts when he was still a *young leader* during the mid-1950s. (EDTST7)

British press editorials (BRPEs), with a mean score of 14.42 are more informational than BPEs and less informational than PPEs and IPEs.

PPE, IPE, and BPE are not only different from each other in producing informational discourse, but they also show variation from BRPE in their discourse production. However, PPE and IPE are slightly different from each other.

Narrative vs. non-narrative concern

Biber (1988) labelled the second dimension as Narrative vs. Non-narrative Concern. Linguistic features like *public verbs, third-person pronouns, past tense verbs*, and *verb-perfect aspects* together perform a function of creating narrative discourse. The negative pole of this dimension is named as a non-narrative concern. In Biber's (1988) study, there was no negative linguistic feature. However, in this study, linguistic features like *place adverbial, the pronoun* it, that *deletion,* and *present tense verbs* together perform a function of producing the non-narrative discourse. According to Coates (2008), non-narrative discourse presents a first-hand account of the event. The results indicate that all the countries provide a first-hand account of events to their readers through newspaper discourse.
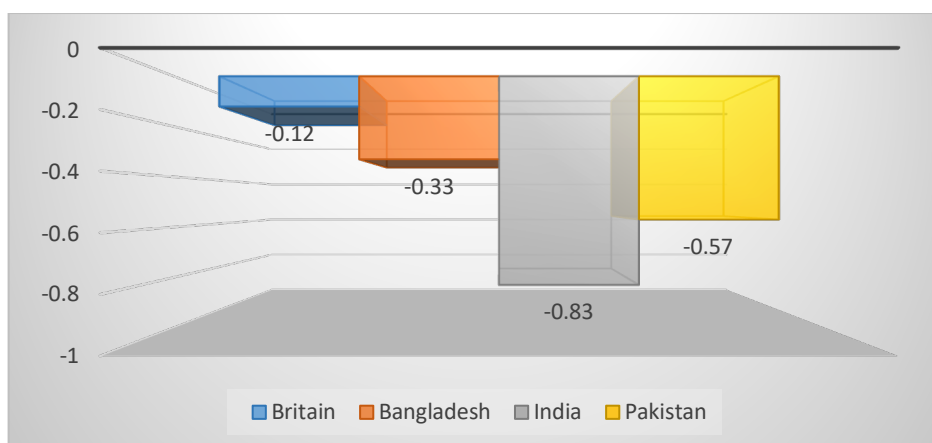

Fig.2 *Comparison of British Editorials with Pakistani, Bengali, and Indian Editorials on Dimension 2 (Narrative vs. Non-narrative Concern)*

The results of the analysis show differences between the discourse of the selected countries. On this dimension, IPE, with a mean score of -0.83, is the most non-narrative among other newspapers, while BRPE (-0.12) is the least non-narrative. BPE with a mean score of -0.33 is more non-narrative than BRPE. PPE (-0.57) is slightly less narrative than IPE and more non-narrative than BPE and BRPE. In the following example, from the Indian newspaper, *The Indian Express*, the italicised words are the instances of linguistic features that create non-narrative discourse:

> Bangladesh *has* reiterated *its* demand for a joint survey of the New Moore Island (which *it* calls South Talpatty) and rejected as untenable India's claim *on* the island *in* the Bay of Bengal. (EDIET21)

Another excerpt has been taken from the British newspaper, *Morning Star* to show how BRPE produces the least non-narrative discourse:

> *It is* the first of Japan's major newspapers to make the move and joins some regional newspapers that *have* recently added to the growing opposition to holding the Olympics. Coming out against the Olympics could be significant since the newspaper, like many *in* Japan. (EDMST15)

The italicised words in the above example are presenting the linguistic features that are primary markers for producing non-narrative discourse. The example shows the least number of non-narrative linguistic features when compared with the example of the IPE.

Explicit vs. situation dependent discourse

Linguistic features like *singular noun-nominalization, wh-pronoun-relative clause-object position, coordinating conjunction-phrasal connector, wh-pronoun-relative clause-subject-position* and *wh-pronoun-relative clause-object position with prepositional fronting (Pied-piping)* perform a function of producing explicit discourse on positive polarity. While *adverb of time, adverb of place,* and *adverb other* produce situation-dependent discourse on negative polarity.
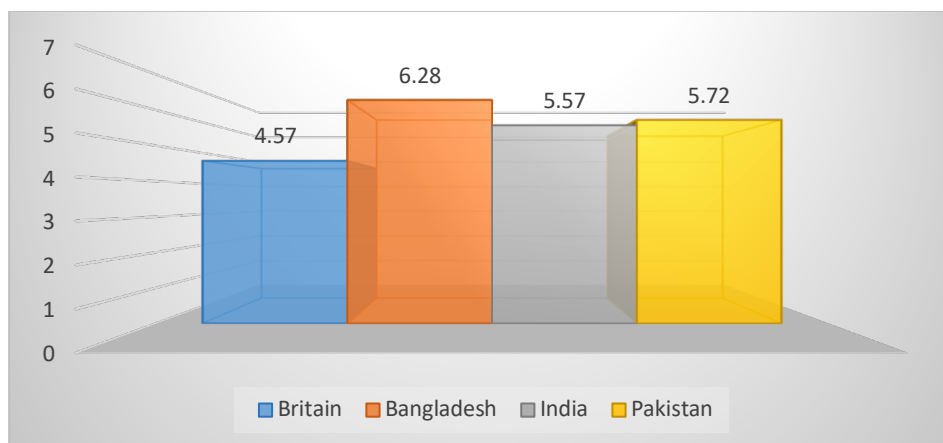

Fig.3 *Comparison of British Editorials with Pakistani, Bengali, and Indian Editorials on Dimension 3 (Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Discourse)*

Figure 3 shows that all the countries with positive mean scores produce explicit discourse. On this dimension, BPE, with a mean score of 6.28, is the most, while BRPE, with a mean score of 4.57, is the least explicit among the selected

countries. PPE (5.72) is slightly less explicit than BPE. IPE, with a mean score of 5.57, is slightly more explicit than BRPE and slightly less explicit than PPE.

Kluender (2004) asserts that "*Wh- pronoun-relative clauses* are used for more exact and explicit reference" (p. 67). Chafe and Danielewich (1986) further note 'coordinating conjunction-phrasal connector is used for idea unit expansion' (p. 245). They are primary markers of producing explicit discourse. The following example has been taken from the Bengali newspaper, *The Independent*:

> As matters stand today, a great majority of our graduates for want of quality *education* do not get job *while* few of them get optimum service, *but* others do low-paid services. The university is the highest seat of knowledge, *where* research is required. (EDTIT8)

The italicised words are examples of linguistic features like *wh-clauses*, *coordinating conjunction-phrasal connector* (but), and *nominalization* (education). BPEs are the most explicit among other countries.The following example has been taken from the British newspaper, *Morning Star*. It shows fewer features of explicit discourse as compared to the example taken from BPE:

> Britain's First Sea Lord told viewers: "This is a tangible *expression* of how the country can go out into the world. *And* so we have a fantastic new capability and *when* we deploy, it speaks to our values, our interests, *what* we stand for." (EDMST11)

In the example above, words like *expression*, *and*, *when* and *why* show patterns of explicit discourse.

Overt Expression of Argumentation/ Persuasion

Biber (1988) labelled this dimension as Overt Expression of Argumentation. *Infinitive verb, persuasive verb, subordinating conjunction-conditional, adverb within auxiliary, modal of prediction,* and *modal of necessity* together perform a function of producing argumentative discourse. In Biber's (1988) study, there was no linguistic feature on negative polarity. The results of the study show that newspapers of all the selected countries produce argumentative discourse. Like dimension 3, on this dimension, BPE shows the highest mean score. BPE, with a mean score of 2.16, produces the most argumentative discourse. PPE (1.88) is slightly less argumentative than BPE. IPE, showing a mean score of 1.19, is less argumentative than PPE. The results suggest that there is a significant difference between the mean score of Britain and other countries. BRPE, with a mean score of 0.36, produces mixed-purpose discourse. According to Biber, the closeness to zero dimension score indicates that a particular discourse is mixed-purpose. It means that BRPE shows a tilt towards producing argumentative discourse.
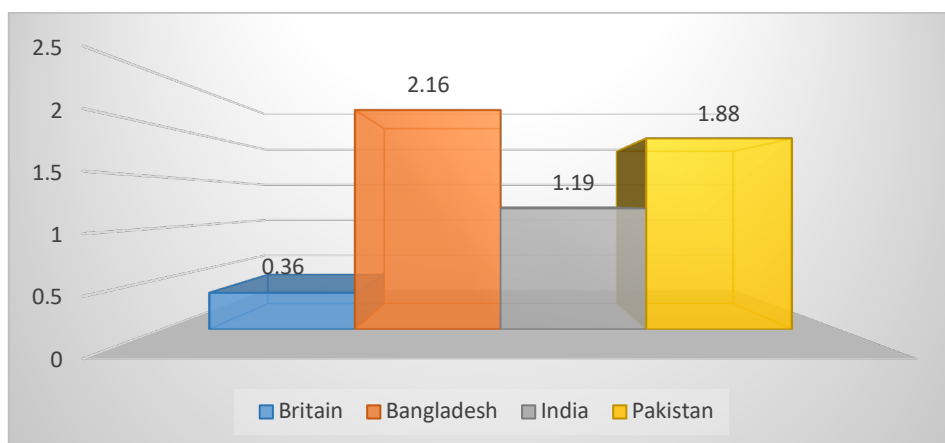
Fig.4 *Comparison of British Editorials with Pakistani, Bengali, and Indian Editorials on Dimension 4 (Overt Expression of Argumentation)*

Biber (1988) asserts, '*suasive verbs* imply intentions to bring about some change in the future' and are primary markers for producing argumentative discourse. The following example is from the Bengali newspaper, *Daily Sun*:

> They *should* not forget that life … Doing job in a public or private organisation *should* not be the only objective of education…They *should* open the gate … In such a search, they *need to be* innovative, passionate, sincere, and determined. You *have to* prove that you are fit for your survival. You *have to* do everything to strengthen your legs *to* stand strong. Yes, you *have to* take the risk for a breakthrough. (EDDST5)

A dense presence of suasive verb (*should*), modal of necessity (*need to be, have to*) and infinitive verb (*to)* marks the presence of argumentative discourse. The following excerpt has been taken from the British newspaper, *The Times*:

> Boris Johnson *must* be open on his Stormont House intensions. Mr Beattie's alternative course is *to* "investigate things when evidence comes up . . . If we don't have that evidence then we don't [investigate]". That *would* be a meagre response *to* people like the Ballymurphy families. (EDTTT18)

In the above-given example, *must, to,* and *would* demonstrate the patterns of argumentative discourse. Like dimensions 2 and 3, on this dimension also, BRPE shows the lowest mean score. The above-given excerpt from a British newspaper demonstrates that BRPE uses fewer linguistic features that produce argumentative discourse.

Abstract/ Impersonal Vs. Non-Abstract/ Non-Impersonal Information

This dimension has been labelled as Abstract/ Impersonal vs. Non-Abstract/ Non-Impersonal information (Biber, 1988). Linguistic features like *conjuncts, adverbial subordinate other, by passives, agentless passives, past participial WHIZ deletions,* and *past participle clauses* create abstract discourse. According to Biber (1988), 'in passive constructions, the agent is demoted or dropped altogether, resulting in a static, more abstract presentation of information' (p. 228).
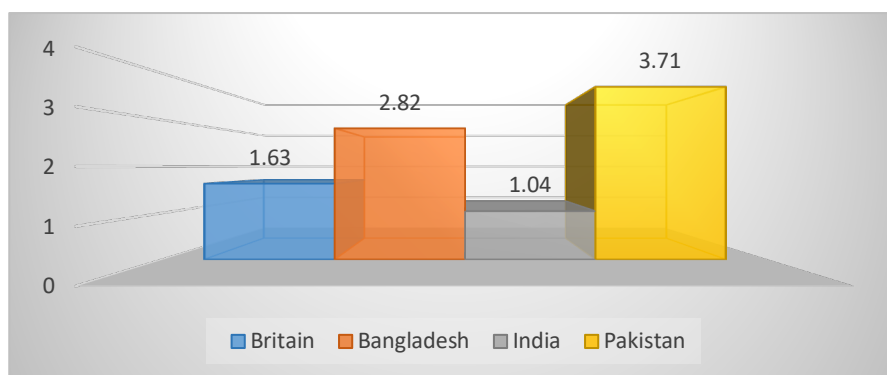

Fig.5 *Comparison of British Editorials with Pakistani, Bengali, and Indian Editorials on Dimension 5 (Abstract/ Impersonal vs. Non-Abstract/ Non-Impersonal)*

Like Biber's (1988), in this study, there is no negative linguistic feature on this dimension. PPE, with a mean score of 3.71, is the most abstract, while IPE, with a mean score of 1.04, is the least abstract among all countries. BPE (2.82) is slightly less abstract than PPE. BRPE, with a mean score of 1.63, is marginally more abstract than India. This following excerpt taken from the Pakistani newspaper *Dawn* is an example in this context:

> This includes a 16-year-old girl *who was stabbed to death by her father* in August 2020; a 24-year-old woman from Jamshoro, *who was pelted with stones and beaten to death by her husband* and brother-in-law in June 2020; and two teenage sisters in North Waziristan, *who were shot dead by their relatives in May 2020.* (EDDNT22)

A dense presence of *by- passive* in the above-given excerpt is an example of impersonal discourse. In contrast, IPE shows the least impersonal discourse. The following example has been extracted from the Indian newspaper, *The Telegraph*:

> Investors *have been attracted by the prospect of capital gains* in crypto trades like moths to a flame — with many of them badly singed while clinging desperately to a mother lode in search of a valuation peak. (EDTTLT19)

The italicised sentence is an example of impersonal discourse. It clearly shows that IPE uses fewer linguistic features of impersonal discourse as compared to the examples taken from PPE. BPE is slightly more impersonal than IPE. Further, the

results indicate that BRPE uses more linguistic features of abstract discourse than IPE. The overall findings reveal that all the selected countries exhibit lexico-grammatical variation in producing discourse.

The results indicate a considerable difference in the editorials of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Britain on Biber's 1988 five textual dimensions. PPE is the most and BPE is the least informational among all the countries. BRPE is more informational than BPE, while IPE is less informational than PPE. On dimension 2, all the countries with a difference in their mean scores, show non-narrative discourse. However, the mean score of BPE is close to 0 dimension score indicating a mixed purpose discourse. On dimension 3, BPE is the most, while BRPE is the least explicit. IPE and PPE, with a slight difference, are slightly more explicit than BPE. There is a significant difference in the mean score of BPE and BRPE in producing argumentative discourse. BPE is the most and BRPE is the least argumentative. IPE and PPE are also different in argumentative discourse production. On dimension 5, PPE is the most abstract, while IPE is the least abstract among all countries. BPE is slightly less abstract than PPE, and BRPE is slightly more abstract than India. So, on all the five dimensions, Pakistani, Indian and Bengali press editorials are not only different from British press editorials but also show marked differences from each other.

The study is likely to be helpful for the researchers working on South Asian Englishes. It provides scope for researchers to further compare the findings of this study with other registers. The canvas of the present study can further be expanded to all the South Asian countries, and they can further be compared with one another. The study can also be significant in the ESP context. Language teachers may use the tagged corpus in the language classroom for the students of journalism. It may also be useful for syllabus designers of journalism and media studies.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and publication of this article.

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