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**STUDYING MULTIDIMENSIONAL PATTERNS OF CHANGE
OVERTIME IN WRITING LETTER TO EDITOR**

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Abstract:

This study is an attempt to identify the patterns of linguistic variation providing an insight into how the language of letter-to-the-editor(LE) which represents the language of the common members of public as opposed to the professional experts or editors changed over a period of seventy years. Biber's (2006) new multidimensional analysis was used to explore the linguistic variation in LE from Pakistani English newspapers over a period of time. The findings of the study show that the lexico-grammatical patterns of LE change over time. It shifted from mixed purpose to informational to opinionated discourse. During the period of seventy years, it became less argumentative. It also showed a transition from informational discourse to dialogical reporting and from context-oriented to explicit discourse. English language teachers and syllabus designers should consider this linguistic variation while designing courses for English language learners.

Introduction:

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language in developing countries have been the focus of research for a long time. In Pakistan, while English language teaching and learning have been a challenge for the teachers and learners since its inception, it maintained its position as the language of official correspondence, academia, literary production and mass communication and different genres and registers developed and shaped over time. The scholarly interest in the use of English language in Pakistan has invited the researchers to study its various genres or registers from academic to fiction to internet register from several perspectives. In this backdrop, LE serves as a potential source and invaluable data in providing an insight into how the common members of the public use language who are not the professional experts of language like newspaper staff or editors.

Multidimensional studies have long been exploring linguistic variation in newspaper register differentiating it from other registers. LE has also been studied from various perspectives (Ali, 2018; Alvi, 2017; Batool, 2015; De Silva, 2011; Raeymaechers, 2005; Westin, 2002). From a range of various approaches and methods, Biber's multidimensional analysis (2006) has been selected to identify the linguistic characteristics of this particular sub-register. This study is an attempt to identify the patterns of linguistic variation and provide a detailed insight into how the language of LE changed over a period of seventy years.

Literature Review:

Language of press reportage has been studied extensively throughout the world. Bell (1991) asserts that the language of media not only plays an important part in shaping the thoughts of the readers but also provides a platform for expressing their ideas. A content analysis of Flamish newspaper letters to the editor was done by Raeymaecher (2005). He interviewed editors. In addition to several other letters, he wrote 100 letters to the publisher. He offered a description of the selection criteria and the editing of the letters. In the likewise manner, De Silva (2011) examines the correspondence section of four Portuguese newspapers. She took letters to the editor over a span of a month. She conducted the content analysis of letters complemented by participant observation. An ethnographic approach was used to observe the procedures that journalists and editors follow when choosing letters for publication. Semi-structured interviews have also been conducted with the chief editors. The findings confirm that the public debate that takes place in the section of the letters is a formation of selected opinions and views.

Many researchers emphasised on the need for a comprehensive approach for analyzing linguistic variation among registers. Helt (2001), finds the multidimensional approach to be the most viable tool for the analysis of linguistic variation in register studies as it goes beyond the phonological and isolated syntactic variation. This approach is suitable to study linguistic variation in register, sub-registers, dialect and between dialects.

Previous multidimensional analyses focused on a number of registers. The language of media, particularly newspapers register has also remained the focus of research for a long time. Research studies further focus the sub-genres including advertisement (Shakir, 2013), news reportage (Ahmad, 2015; Ali, 2019; Ali et al., 2020), editorials (Alvi, 2017; Ali, 2018; Ali et al., 2020), etc. Various approaches have been used to study these sub-genres. A few studies analysed a range of registers including newspaper and its sub-registers as a part of overall research (Biber, 1988; Egbert, 2014; Nini, 2015 etc). The same registers or sub-registers from various countries, i.e., Pakistan and other South Asian countries (Ali, 2020) have been compared and analysed.

Pakistani press editorials have been studied both synchronically and diachronically. Opinion page has remained the focus of MD studies with a special emphasis on editorials. A few

studies have included LE also, however, it has been studied as a part of editorial drop-ed section. A separate study has also been conducted on LE exclusively, however, it is a synchronic investigation comparing LE to editorials concluding that LEs have simple linguistic structure while editorials follow complex textual structures (Batool, 2015). Arafat (2016) analysed letter to the editor section in biomedical journals. The goal of the analysis was to briefly explain the structure and intent of the letters. The study concluded that there should be unbiased, factual, simple, brief, and positive discussions of facts in letters. Alvi (2017) compiled a corpus of newspaper editorials. She compared Pakistani editorials with British editorials. She divided editorials into three categories: editorials, op-ed and letter to the editor. Pakistani Editorial Corpus (Pak. Ed) consisted of 250 editorials. The findings of the study show that The Frontier Post stands closest to British newspaper editorials except for narrative aspect, Dawn shows a significant linguistic difference from a British newspaper on four dimensions.

Another approach was to study variation in the same genre over a period of time (Westin, 2002). Biber & Conrad's (2014) study took eight registers (drama, journals, letters, fiction, newspapers, medicine, science and legal register) from ARCHER corpus and drew a multidimensional comparison between four time periods: 1650 to 1699, 1700 to 1799, 1800 to 1899 and 1900 to 1990. Ali (2018) compared diachronic data with synchronic data of Pakistani press editorials using MD model. Further, another study analysed newspaper editorials, op-eds and letters to the editor (Ali & Sheeraz, 2018), however, the analysis was restricted to Biber's (1988) old textual dimensions which were specific to his own corpus. Later, Biber (2006) added more linguistic features to the existing list and introduced new MD which allows generating dimensions specific to the corpus under study.

The new multidimensional analysis does not depend on already established dimensions. It uses newfactor analysis to identify new dimensions. Biber (2010) suggests that new multidimensional allows the researchers to explore new dimensions while dealing with a variety of diverse corpora from different domains. So, the present study attempts to conduct new multidimensional analysis to further explore linguistic variation specific to the corpus of LE.

Methodology:

This is a diachronic study which aimed at focusing Pakistani LE from 1947 to 2016. Three time periods were selected – 1947 to 1951, 1971 to 1975 and 2012 to 2016). Table 1 provides details regarding the selected newspapers.

Table 1: List of Newspapers

Newspaper	Founding Year
Dawn	1947
Business Recorder	1965
The News	1991
The Nation	1986

LE, which reflects the general public's or reader's opinion, are published on the editorial page. To find the linguistic variation in the use of linguistic features in the language of in everyday life, LEs were selected. For the first and second phases, LEs were not available online, so they were scanned and by using OCR converted to computer-readable form. For the third phase, the data was available online. The following table gives details about the three periods, number of LEs and number of words.

Table 2: Number of letters obtained from selected newspapers

Time	Dawn	Business Recorder	The News	The Nation	Total
Period 1: (1947-1951)	120 (25826)	-	-	-	120 (25826)
Period 2: (1971-1975)	60 (18223)	60 (18585)	-	-	120 (36808)
Period 3: (2012-2016)	30 (3440)	30 (13912)	30 (9236)	30 (13646)	120 (40234)
Total					102868

After the compilation of the corpus, a detailed procedure was followed to analyse linguistic variation in the data. With the help of new factor solution, MD provides a scope to explore new textual dimensions specific to the corpus. The new MD analysis does not rely on the study of any genre concerning previously defined textual dimensions, but rather on new factor analysis.

Firstly, the data was tagged for a wide range of linguistic features. Then the raw counts of the linguistic features were obtained and the raw scores were transformed into normalized frequencies. After that, the dimension scores were computed and factor analysis was used to recognize the sets of co-occurring features. Later these sets of co-occurring features are referred to as dimensions that are interpreted according to their shared communicative function. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to find the linguistic variations between the selected phases. The factor analysis identified the four sets of co-occurring linguistic features. So, four new textual dimensions were identified in the present study by using new MD (2006). Once the dimensions were identified, a functional interpretation was provided.

Analysis and Discussion:

Dimension 1: Opinionated Discourse vs Informational Discourse

Eight positive features and one negative feature form the first dimension. Positive features include to-verb-stance all, mental verbs, nominative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, relative pronouns, coordinate conjunction, infinitives and tt-ratio. On the negative polarity of this dimension falls only one feature, i.e., prepositions. Based on the occurrences of these linguistic features, this dimension is labelled as Opinionated Discourse vs. Informational Discourse (see Table 3).

Table 3: Factor structure of dimension 1 (Opinionated discourse vs. Informational discourse)

	Positive Features	Negative Features
verbs	To-verb-stance all (0.46), mental verbs (0.42)	prepositions Prepositions (-0.54)
Pronouns	Nominative pronouns (0.36), demonstrative pronouns (0.29), relative pronouns (0.82)	
Conjunctions	Coordinate conjunction (0.26)	
Infinitives	Infinitives (0.51)	
Other	tt-ratio (0.48)	

Table 4 displays the mean, standard error, lower bound and upper bound of LE in the three selected phases. In the first phase, LEs show the least opinionated discourse. The closeness to zero mean score indicates that LEs (0.023) are producing mixed purpose discourse in the first phase.

Table 4: Mean, standard error, lower bound and upper bound of LE on D1

Dependent Variable: New_ D1				
Phase	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
1.00	.023	.074	-.169	.122
2.00	-.161	.074	-.306	-.015
3.00	.312	.074	.167	.457

However, with time LEs (-0.161) become informational. Interestingly, in phase 3, again LEs with a mean score of 0.312 start producing opinionated discourse.

The following excerpt has been taken from a Pakistani newspaper, Dawn. Linguistic features like coordinate conjunctions (and), demonstrative pronouns (those), infinitives (to), mental verbs (desiring) mark the presence of opinionated discourse, while the presence of the linguistic feature like prepositions (in, with, to, for, of) produce informational discourse. The following excerpt from phase one is an example of mixed purpose discourse.

In spite of advance payment of court got only 20 copies with great difficulty I appeal to the organizer of the Choudhry Muslim League much larger number of membership forms are available both in Sindhi and Urdu **and those** should be no refusal when a person asks **for** membership forms **and** there should be no impediment in the way of persons **desiring**to make the Muslim League a truly representative body. (LE, PH.1, DN)

In phase 2, LEs show informational discourse. The following excerpt is from the newspaper, Business Recorder.

We thank you **for** your Brief Recordings and observations **on** the financial working **of** our company (8th May). While going **through** your comments we have observed that some questions have been raised **in** the report which needs necessary clarifications **on** our part **for** the general information of all concerned. **In** the first place the commentator has raised a question **in** the beginning of Para No. 1 as **to** the details **of** the raw materials sold. (LE,PH.2.BR)

The above excerpt is an example of informational discourse. The words in bold are the examples of linguistic feature, i.e., preposition (for, on, of, though, in) that produce informative discourse.

In phase 3, LE again started producing opinionated discourse. The results of the present study match with the results of Esser and Umbricht (2014). They endorse the fact that 20th-century media reporting is inclined towards producing opinionated discourse and thus become biased. Barnhurst (2005) is also of the opinion that the news style is opinion-based, more action-packed, much briefer and also localized to a great extent.

The following example has been taken from the newspaper, The Nation.

The power crisis looms large in a developing country like Pakistan **and** it is important **that** people play **their** role as well in saving electricity **and** waking up **and** raising **their** voices as a society against power theft. The overall health of a nation also improves with the education of girls because when women are **aware** about good

nutrition **and** diet, the benefits of breastfeeding **and** the importance of hygiene, the risks of disease **and** illness in families is much lower. (LE, PH.3,TN)

Co-ordinate conjunction and that clauses always combine together and try to generate the personal stance propagating the ideology of the media (Biber 1988; Biber et al., 1999). In the excerpt from phase 3, the bold words are the examples of linguistic features that produce opinionated discourse.

Dimension 2: Argumentative vs Narrative Discourse

Dimension 2 is marked with ten positive and one negative linguistic feature. Present verbs, verb be, predicative adjectives, attributive adjectives, adjective of stance all, modals of possibility, modals of necessity, pronoun it, subordinating conjunction causative and nouns of stance fall on positive polarity and produce argumentative discourse. On the other hand, past tense produces narrative discourse on the negative polarity. Based on the co-occurrence of these linguistic features this dimension is named as Argumentative vs. Narrative Discourse.

Table 5: Factor structure of dimension 2 (Argumentative vs. Narrative discourse)

	Positive Features	Negative Features
verbs	Present verbs (0.65), be (0.38),	Past tense Past tense (-0.52)
Adjectives	Predicative adjectives (0.51), attributive adjectives (0.40), adjective of stance all (0.28)	
Modals	Modals of possibility (0.35), modals of necessity (0.27)	
Pronoun	It (0.28)	
Subordination	Subordinating conjunction causative (0.29)	
Nouns	Nouns of stance (0.25)	

The presence of adjective of stance all with the loading of .28 and the nouns of stance with the loading of .25 seem to hint at the sense of argument and convincing opinion in news writing as news writing has always been found concrete with logical arguments. The coupling of modals of possibility and necessity with the present verbs and stance nouns indicates a certain sense of argumentation in LE of Pakistani print media.

Table 6: Mean, standard error, lower bound and upper bound of LE on D2

Dependent Variable: New_ D2				
Phase	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
1.00	.510	.076	.361	.660
2.00	.262	.076	.113	.412
3.00	.123	.076	-.027	.272

Table 6 indicates that in phase 1, LE with a mean score of .510 are the most argumentative, however, over time they become less argumentative. The following example shows a dense presence of argumentative linguistic features in Pakistani LE.

The daily conflicting and contradicting press reports **make** the confusion more confounded about the fate of those persons who have given Pakistan as **final** choice and hence they are afraid that they **might** be left in India after the 15th August 1947. I **hope** the authorities will take **immediate** steps to allay the fear caused by the rumour

and **make** the position clear, so that people concerned **shouldknow** where they **stand**. (LE, PH.1, DN)

In the above-given example from Dawn, the dense presence of linguistic features like present tense (make, hope, stand), attributive adjectives (final, immediate), modals of possibility (might), modals of necessity (should) creates non-argumentative discourse.

In phase 2, LE (0.262) shows less argumentative discourse than it shows in phase 1. The following excerpt taken from Business Recorder is an example in this context.

The surviving weaknesses vis a vis the listed companies that **encourage** in discipline are the vestiges of the past that **must** be radically eradicated. These **twin** shortcomings have often meant sufferings for the investors. The image **has to** be corrected and made brighter and we **regard** this task to be of **prime** importance. Men at the helm of its affairs have to be men of vision and high propriety.(LE, PH.2, BR)

The excerpt is from the 2nd phase. Linguistic features like present tense (encourage, regard), attributive adjectives (twin, prime), modal of necessity (must, has to, have to) together perform a function of producing non-argumentative discourse.

LEs, in phase 3, are the least argumentative among all the three phases. This trend indicates that with time LE becomes less argumentative and starts showing their tilt towards producing narrative discourse. The following excerpt has been taken from The News.

Both countries **should** mutually **build** a cricket stadium at the Wagah-Attari border. As the teams will not **have to** tour the other country to play the match, no visa formalities **will** be required. Similarly, spectators can be seated on their respective side of the border. The stadium **could** be a good venue for conducting ODIs and T20s matches. (LE, PH.3, TNS)

In the 3rd phase, the bold words are the example of linguistic features like modals of necessity (should, have to), present tense (build) and modals of possibility (could, will) which create non-argumentative discourse.

Dimension 3: Informational Reporting vs. Dialogic Reporting

Dimension 3 includes 6 positive and 3 negative linguistic features. Positive linguistic features include noun nominalization, noun premodifiers, abstract nouns, attributive adjective, topic adjectives and word length. First-person pronouns, second-person pronouns and third-person pronouns fall on negative polarity.

Table 7: Factor structure of dimension 3 (Informational reporting vs. Dialogic reporting)

Positive Features		Negative Features	
Nouns	Noun nominalization (0.52), noun premodifiers (0.26), abstract nouns (0.25)	Pronouns	First-person pronouns (-0.39), second-person pronouns (-0.27), third-person pronouns (-0.33)
Adjectives	Attributive adjective (0.59), topic adjectives (0.33)		
Other	Word length (0.80)		

Based on the co-occurrence of these linguistic features this dimension is labelled as ‘Abstract informational vs. Dialogic Reporting’. Among all the positive linguistic features, word length has the highest loading of (.80) which co-occur with attributive adjective (.59) and the co-

occurrence of these two features tends to produce abstract informational discourse as word length and attributive adjective are rich sources of information in any text (Biber 1988).

Table 8: Mean, standard error, lower bound and upper bound of LE on D3

Dependent Variable: New_ D3				
Phase	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
1.00	-.420	.080	-.577	-.262
2.00	-.380	.080	-.537	-.223
3.00	.053	.080	-.104	.210

On dimension 3, in phase 1 and 2, LE produce dialogic reporting on the negative polarity. In phase 3, LE has been found producing informational reporting. In phase 1, LE with a mean score of -0.420 produces the most dialogic discourse.

The following excerpt from Dawn is an example of dialogic reporting in phase 1.

I should like to point out that it is utterly impossible to interview the Rent Controller of the local Government. **I** may add that during my visits to the Rent Control Department and my long waits there, **I** invariably found dozens of people wanting to have something done but bitterly complaining of having received no help whatsoever from the Department, notwithstanding the fact that **they** had paid daily visits there for a number of days. (LE, PH.1, DN)

In the above-given excerpt, the dense presence of 1st person pronouns (**I**) creates dialogic reporting. Third-person pronoun (**they**) is also a linguistic feature that creates dialogic discourse.

Phase 2 shows relatively less dialogic reporting as compared to phase 1. The excerpt taken from Business Recorder is an example in this context.

Shareholders are lay people and it is indeed meant and expected that **they** would not understand all, the norms for the auditors should be rigid so that the whims and the vagaries are exposed. **I** hope this falls within the purview of the Security & Exchange Authority. Are these not aberrations and should **they** not be rectified so that neither the workers nor the shareholders lose? (LE, PH.2, BR)

The bold words in the above excerpt are the examples of linguistic features that perform the function of producing dialogic discourse.

In phase 3, LE shows informational discourse. LE with a positive mean score of 0.053 produces informational discourse.

December 16 left another blow on our hearts, every eye was weeping and burdened by **unbearable** loss. Pakistan became the first to witness such **atrocious** barbarism. Immediately after the incident, the **electronic** media was flooded with blood splattered footage of the school, **dead** bodies of the **young** martyrs, wailing **family** members and many such lamenting images. (LE, PH.3, TN)

A dense presence of pre-modifying nouns (**family**, **electronic**) and attributive adjectives (**unbearable**, **atrocious**, **dead**) creates informational discourse.

Dimension 4: Context-oriented Reporting

Factor 4 marks the presence of four positive linguistic features with no negative linguistic feature. The functional interpretation of these four positive linguistic features seems to be simple. Communication verbs with a high loading of (.63) co-occur with other verbs (0.5) and create context-oriented reporting.

Table 9: Factor structure of dimension 4 (Context-oriented reporting)

Positive Features	
Verbs	Communicative verbs (0.63), other verbs (0.50), the verb stance all (0.47)
Adverb	Adverb of time (0.27)

The example has been taken from Dawn.

Hot blooded people **talk** of revenge for what has happened to Muslims in Hindustan. I would **suggest** that we should have mobile propaganda units similar to those of National War Front which we used to have **during** war time... I am confident all the needs of our nation can be fulfilled. Beggary, poverty, need and crimes like robbery, theft, misappropriation etc., will all disappear miraculously, as every needy person, who is not scribed **above** has a right to receive necessary help from Zakaat.(LE, PH.1, DN)

Biber (1988) argues that adverbs are a key source of context-oriented and situation-dependent discourse. Adverbs lead the discourse to a certain context where the presence of place and temporal adverbs helps the reader to understand the context more appropriately. Communicative verbs (talk, suggest) and adverb of time (during, above) are the examples of linguistic features that produce context-oriented discourse.

This trend of producing context-oriented discourse in phase 1 gradually shifted towards an explicit trend. In phase 2 and 3 LEs produce explicit discourse. In the second phase, LE (-0.030) shows its tilt towards context-oriented discourse. In phase 3, LE(-p.327) explicitly produces context-oriented discourse.

Table 10: Mean, standard error, lower bound and upper bound of LE on D4

Dependent Variable: New_ D4				
Phase	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower bound	Upper bound
1.00	.017	.075	-.129	.164
2.00	-.030	.075	-.177	.117
3.00	-.327	.075	-.473	-.180

The excerpt has been taken from the newspaper, Business Recorder.

Anywhere in the Middle East or the West, one never has to **ask** the embarrassing question. they invariably go **in** for the appointment of chartered accountants and that this trend appears to have developed out of lack of information about the existence of professional bodies or due to professional prejudice chartered accountants want to maintain their singularity by keeping others **away**. (LE, PH.2, BR)

The bold words are the examples of linguistic features (adverb of place and adverb of time) which produce mixed purpose discourse.

The following excerpt from phase 3 is an example of explicit discourse. LE of phase 3 falls on negative polarity and produces explicit discourse.

Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif is very enthusiastic **about** constructing roads and flyovers in Lahore...It has never been associated with any political organisation in Pakistan or **anywhere** else in the world...If we see just **below** the waterline, we often start to see patterns, or the recurrence of events. (LE, PH.3, TNS)

In the above-given example from The News, the bold words are the examples of linguistic features that produce explicit discourse.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The above section has comprehensively discussed the linguistic variation among LE in the three phases on four new textual dimensions. On D1, in phase 1, LE is opinionated, however, with the time they start showing informational trend in phase 2 and 3. On D2, in phase 1, LE is the most argumentative but it becomes less argumentative over time. On D3, in phase 1, LE is the most informational, while in phase 3 it shows relatively a less informational trend. In phase 3, LE starts producing dialogic reporting. As far as D4 is concerned, in phase 1, LE is context-oriented but in phase 2 and 3 it shows a tilt towards producing explicit discourse. The results of the study indicate that language is a changing phenomenon and there is a change in the use of linguistic features overtime.

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