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Understanding the Moves of Grant Proposals: Exploring the Role of Stance

Corpus linguistics studies analyze textual variation in complete texts, usually based on genre or register. Recently, corpus linguists (e.g., Flowerdew, 1998, 2004) have recommended the examination of linguistic and textual features in separate sections (or "moves") of texts as determined by the purpose of the section.

We will report on the use of stance in non-profit grant proposals. Specifically, we will analyze stance markers in rhetorical moves in the 148,000-word corpus of non-profit grant proposals at the Indiana Center for Intercultural Communication. A previous study (Connor and Upton 2003) found that Biber's (1995) multidimensional analysis (MDA) was unable to clearly distinguish differences in the linguistic dimensions between rhetorical moves. Each move within the genre appears to have the same basic syntactic structure as measured by MDA, even though each serves a different rhetorical function. It would be expected that common semantic "realizations" would have a common underlying structural explanation. Based on work done by Connor and Gladkov (2004) on rhetorical appeals, it is hypothesized that rhetorical moves also can be distinguished by the use of stance markers.

The rhetorical move structure of grant proposals developed by Connor and Mauranen (1999) for research proposals was adapted for use with nonprofit grant proposals, and the moves were hand tagged in the data. The moves include territory, gap, goal, means, competence claim, importance claim, and benefits. The grammatical and lexical marking of stance were analyzed using a program developed to tag stance markers. The analysis consisted of first comparing stance use in these proposals with previously known stance use across such registers as academic, fiction, conversation, and newspaper writing (Biber et al, 1999). Second, the use of individual stance markers in the individual moves was analyzed for better understanding of how rhetorical moves work in proposals and how they can be taught to novice writers.

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