

Article

## Analyzing Language Features of Construction Contracts from The Multi-Dimensional Perspective

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**Abstract:** In recent years, China's active participation in the international construction market has led to a greater demand for the comprehensive demystification of construction contracts from the language perspective. Nevertheless, scarcity can be felt concerning that perspective. This study aims to explore language features via the multi-dimensional approach proposed by Biber. A corpus-driven method was adopted on the basis of five real construction contracts. The salient language features were uncovered statistically by adopting the Multi-dimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT), and a series of visualized results displaying lexico-grammatical features and general genre features of construction contracts from different dimensions were also output. The results revealed that nouns and normalization were densely employed in construction contracts. Meanwhile, language variables like phrasal coordination, predicative modals, passive voice, and suasive verbs were excessively employed. The results also uncovered that adverbs and be as the main verb were counted as underused. As to the general genre features, the results suggested that the contracts were written documents with informational, non-narrative, context-independent, self-assertive, and abstract features. Those features stem from the communicative purposes of construction contracts, rendering construction contracts the formal style, explicit communicative purposes, objective stance, and authoritative position. Though with limited language features, we can still obtain an insight into the interpretation and teaching of construction contracts.

**Keywords:** language features; construction contract; multi-dimensional approach; lexico-grammatical features; general genre features

### Introduction

As China actively participates in the international construction exchange, an increasing number of corporations are swarming into China, bidding for construction projects of various kinds. Simultaneously, many Chinese companies and personnel are going abroad, taking part in overseas construction projects. According to the figure released by the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2022), as of the end of 2021, the total value of the newly signed construction contracts is \$201.7 billion. Under such circumstances, the role of construction contracts becomes increasingly prominent in carrying out construction projects. Thus, a comprehensive demystification of English construction contracts is essential for those engaging in or will participate in overseas construction exchanges in China.

Construction contracts are legally binding agreements between two or more parties to perform a construction project (Wang & Yang, 2016). They identify stakeholders' rights and obligations, formulate dispute settlement mechanisms, lay down rules to safeguard the interests of all relevant parties, and are enforceable in line with the system of laws for the construction process (Ning & Wu, 2019; Sweet et al., 2015;

Wang & Yang, 2016). A construction project can bind together employers, contractors, engineers, builders, designers, regulators, purchasers, and users of buildings in addition to the professional complexity ranging from materials to management, finance, insurance, and arbitration. (Murdoch & Hughes, 2008). All those mentioned determine that construction contracts are rather complex in organization, contents, and language styles to coordinate the complicated issues. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding needs an all-around analysis involving the contents and the language (Bhatia, 2008).

For many Chinese practitioners, the most daunting task is not dealing with professional issues but breaking the language barriers that pose a great challenge to the understanding and interpreting of construction contracts (Qi, 2004; Wang & Li, 2016). That is quite true in China, where English is a foreign language, and not all people engaging in English contracts are proficient in English (Ning & Wu, 2019). To comprehensively understand and interpret a construction contract, we need to familiarize ourselves with the general styles and lexico-grammatical features to cater to the requirement of a given construction project (Wang & Li, 2016). Simply put, getting to know about the language features of construction contracts is essential to gaining a comprehensive understanding (Li et al., 2020). Therefore, great efforts are needed to carry out a linguistic exploration.

For the above-mentioned reasons, this study aims to explore language features of construction contracts from two perspectives, i.e., lexico-grammatical features and general genre features. Correspondingly, two research questions are formulated:

- i. What are the lexico-grammatical features of construction contracts?
- ii. What are the general genre features of construction contracts?

By answering those research questions, a profile of the language features of construction contracts will be depicted, which can shed light on the understanding and interpretation of construction contracts for those relevant to contract work in the construction industry.

## Literature Review

As to the studies of construction contracts, we can find two tendencies. Some studies focus on how to deal with disputes or conflicts stemming from the complexity of construction contracts (Elkhayat & Marzouk, 2022). The others deal more with the problems arising from the laws, regulations, customs, and cultures when carrying out construction contracts (Wang & Li, 2016). In other words, most studies are interested in coping with the issues related to professional practices and professional cultures (Bhatia, 2017). As to the research concerning construction contracts from the language perspective, quite a small number can be found when retrieving relevant studies from Web of Science, Scopus, and CNKI databases.

Of the small number of studies, two studies are most frequently cited by Chinese scholars. Liu (2008) adopted a Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective to explore the language features of the FIDIC conditions. This study concluded that the FIDIC contract had some unique features on the scale of field and ideational, tenor and interpersonal, and mode and textual levels. Limited as linguistic aspects are, this research proved that exploring construction contracts from the language perspective was feasible and insightful. Based on an overseas construction contract, Cheng (2009) thoroughly explored the language features of an overseas construction contract. This study found that language variables like modal verbs, normalizations, adverbials, adverbial clauses, attributive clauses, and passive structures were quite frequently used in construction contracts. Although the study did not provide a sufficient exploration of the reasons behind those language variables, it shed some light on the lexical and grammatical features of construction contracts.

There are also other studies concerning the language of construction contracts, but most studies are more concerned with how to simplify the language of construction contracts or how to analyse construction contracts from the perspective of natural language or other digitalized language (Wang & Li, 2016; Ning & Wu, 2019; Mc Namara & Sepasgozar, 2021; Padhy, 2021; Elkhayat & Marzouk, 2022). In view of the above situation, we can adopt Biber's multi-dimensional approach for textual analysis of construction contracts. In 1988, Biber initiated a systematic exploration of genre variations from multiple perspectives. In this endeavour, he identified the major linguistic features of particular genres, which were given rise to by the frequent employment of specific linguistic variables that were countable and comparable in specific texts

(Nini, 2019; Mu, 2021). This approach can specify quantitatively the co-occurrence patterns within a set of variables. Nini (2019) refined Biber's approach and developed a tool that can tagger a given text and compute frequencies of the major linguistic variables (details will be provided in the Methodology).

By outputting the results from multiple perspectives, the linguistic features of a given genre can be explicitly revealed. Such a perspective with a multi-dimensional approach is effective for exploring professional genres. Under the scope of SFL, specific lexical-grammatical items can serve specific functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In that sense, the intensive employment of particular lexico-grammatical variables in specific genres will result in specific language features with particular functions, serving certain goals.

In other words, specific linguistic features are functional in one way or another through the appropriation of specific lexico-grammatical variables. In return, we can obtain abundant information on language variables by examining the functions of a given genre, which will further help us uncover how language variables are manipulated to obtain certain ends. Thus, language variables, language features, and functions form a network of realizing specific communicative purposes of a given genre. In that sense, we can have insight into the language features of construction contracts by exploring the language variables and their functions.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design

A corpus-driven method was employed in this study, while a mixed method was adopted in this study. Under the scope of Biber's multi-dimensional approach, the researchers focused on uncovering the language features of construction contracts from two perspectives, namely, lexico-grammatical features and general genre features. Firstly, the researchers built a small corpus of construction contracts that followed FIDIC criteria. The reason for taking such a small corpus is that FIDIC contracts are conventionalized in format and rigid in language, and a small corpus of legal texts can also provide great insight into the target genre's language features (Bhatia, 1993; Mouritsen, 2019). Secondly, the contracts were processed on two scales. On the quantitative scale, the construction contracts were processed for statistical description via a series of statistical results concerning the language features of the construction contracts on different scales. In the qualitative aspect, the results were analysed from functional perspectives geared to the professional contexts. By adopting the mixed method, a thicker description was uncovered, shedding light on the generic features of construction contracts.

### 2. Data Collection

To ensure the data's validity, we employed five real construction contracts: two from the archive of our university (Hebei University of Architecture), one from a business partner of our university, and two downloaded from the Law Insider, an open-access website sharing numerous real contracts. Of the various documents of the construction contracts, the Particular Conditions are chosen, for they are the most representative document for the key stakeholders to ensure their specific interests or needs. With the information concerning privacy removed on request, the contracts were transformed into "txt." format with the Baidu APP or transcribed manually. Then, the transcribed texts were further checked by the writer and two colleagues who are experts in construction contracts. With that, the data were ready for textual analysis.

### 3. Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, Nini (2019) developed the MAT based on Biber's research of text features from multi-dimensional aspects. It is a program for Windows to produce a series of visualized diagrams revealing the general genre features and lexico-grammatical features of a corpus or the target texts, along with the statistical information of major variables. In other words, it explores the target texts or corpus within the dimensions put forward by Biber (1988) and identifies a target text as a specific genre type through a computerized process. It can bring forward the statistical information of 67 linguistic variables and generate

statistical descriptions of the given variables, which reveal detailed features corresponding to Biber's criteria. Moreover, the MAT can output another series of diagrams concerning the overused and underused variables uncovered by their z-scores. A z-score can reflect the distance of a language variable from the mean of the language variables in general use. Thus, it will be able to reveal how frequently a language variable is used and whether it is used in the regular category, with the regular scores ranging from -2 (not included) to 2 (not included); namely, if the score of a variable is zero, such a variable is used on the average level compared with its general use. If a score is higher than 2 or lower than -2, it is overused or underused. Because of the limitation of the space, the lexico-grammatical exploration of this study was mainly concerned with the variables that are calculated as underused and overused.

With regard to the general genre features, this study mainly focused on the six dimensions put forward by Biber. They include the dimension of "Involved vs. Informational Production", the dimension of "Narrative vs. Non-narrative Concerns", the dimension of "Explicit vs. Situation-dependent Reference", the dimension of "Overt Expression of Persuasion", the dimension of "Abstract vs. Non-abstract Information", and the dimension of "On-line Informational Elaboration". When texts of a given genre were put into the program, the program generated scores based on the textual features. The ranges of the scores can display the criteria that the texts belong to, as displayed in Table 1. Besides, this program can generate graphs about the general genre features of a given genre. Each graph corresponds to a dimension introduced above, revealing the scores range of given texts. Such revelation can further display the salient linguistic features explicitly based on the scores range and the range they are in, as revealed in Table 1. Meanwhile, the given texts were compared with other common genres in a visualized manner. Thus, the comparison made construction contracts more conspicuous in the general genre features.

To be brief, the language features were revealed on two scales. One focused on the lexico-grammatical features uncovered by z-scores. The other was primarily concerned with general genre features. In so doing, a thicker description of the language features of construction contracts was presented.

Table 1. Biber's dimensions

Dimension	Variable	Description
1	Involved vs. Informational Production	A low score means the text is full of information and is rich with nouns and nominalizations. A high score indicates that affection abounds in the text, and present tense is a dominant grammatical variable.
2	Narrative vs Non-narrative Concerns	1) A Low score reveals that the text does not focus on narration. Past tense is not frequently used. 2) A high score means that the text is narration-oriented with a large number of past tenses and third-person pronouns.
3	Explicit vs Situation-dependent Reference	A low score means that the text is closely related to its context and presents many adverbs. A high score indicates that the text is independent of its context and presents many nominalizations.
4	Overt Expression of Persuasion	A high score reveals that the author hopes to impose his ideas as well as their assessment onto the readers, with many modal verbs being presented.
5	Abstract vs Non-abstract Information	A high score on this dimension implies that the genre is technical and formal in providing information, and there are many passive clauses and conjuncts in the text.
6	On-line Informational Elaboration	A high score shows that the text is information-oriented, and the information needs to be produced in real-time, in which many postmodifications of noun phrases are included.

Source: Adapted from Nini's study (2019, p. 7).

## Findings

### 1. Lexico-grammatical Features

In terms of lexico-grammatical features of construction contracts revealed by the z-scores of the language variables in the corpus, we can see in Table 2 that adverbs (RB) and be as the main verbs (BEMA) are averagely identified as underused. Nouns (NN) and nominalizations (NOMZ), phrasal coordination (PHC), and predictive modals (PRMD) are overused on average, according to the results. Meanwhile, we can see some variations in different contracts. For example, in the third contract, the type-token ratio (TTR) was overused, indicating that the language in this contract is relatively rigid (Biber, 1988; Nini, 2019; Song, 2020).

Table 2. Screenshot of Z-scores of Salient Language Variables

Filename	AWL	NN	NOMZ	PHC	PRMD	RB	[BEMA]	[BYPA]	[PASS]	TTR	[SUAV]	Underused_variables	Overused_variables
1	1.65	2.55	2.4	3.52	4.74	-2.99	-2.26	1.08	0.7	-1.99	2.06	RB [BEMA]	NN NOMZ PHC PRMD [SUAV]
2	2.45	2.59	4.28	4.7	4.74	-2.99	-2.43	3.15	0.47	-1.08	0.97	RB [BEMA]	AWL NN NOMZ PHC PRMD [BYPA]
3	1.57	2.37	2.49	5	6.64	-2.98	-2.09	1.23	1.68	-2.18	1.58	RB TTR [BEMA]	NN NOMZ PHC PRMD
4	1.92	2.87	2.74	5.48	4.74	-2.89	-2.32	0.85	-0.03	-0.4	1.45	RB [BEMA]	NN NOMZ PHC PRMD
5	2	2.32	3.02	3.7	4.4	-2.74	-2.17	1.54	0.59	-1.89	1.39	RB [BEMA]	NN NOMZ PHC PRMD
MEAN	1.92	2.54	2.99	4.48	5.05	-2.92	-2.25	1.57	0.68	-1.51	1.49	RB [BEMA]	NN NOMZ PHC PRMD

As can be observed in the table, other contracts' type-token ratios (TTR) are on the negative scale, suggesting that lexical and grammatical varieties are not rich in the contracts of this study. Besides, suasive verbs (SUAV), average word length (AWL), and by-passives (BYP) are also prominently used in specific contracts.

### 2. General Genre Features

Along with the detailed statistics of the language variables, general genre features have been explored via the MAT. As stated previously, the MAT program automatically undertook the analysis concerning the general genre features based on Biber's tagger and output the results in tables and graphs.

From Table 3, we can find that each construction contract's score of a specific dimension was computed, with the scores in the same criteria and close to each other on every dimension. Based on the scores, the construction contracts are identified as leaned exposition after a synthesized analysis via the MAT. According to Biber (1988) and Nini (2019), learned expositions belong to the genre that is geared to information provision, trying to expound the material process in a formal and systematic way. Such a criterion includes official documents, academic prose, and press reviews (Biber & Conrad, 2019).

Table 3. Screenshot of general genre description of construction contracts

Filename	Dimension1	Dimension2	Dimension3	Dimension4	Dimension5	Dimension6	Closest Text Type
1	-18.08	-3.5	10.15	6.87	3.28	-0.97	Learned exposition
2	-20.48	-4.3	11.99	5.82	2.27	-2.29	Learned exposition
3	-19.88	-3.13	10.43	5.96	2.29	-1.97	Learned exposition
4	-20.36	-3.11	11.27	4.9	1.84	-0.31	Learned exposition
5	-17.5	-3.96	10.44	5.46	3.26	-1.08	Learned exposition
CC	-19.26	-3.6	10.86	5.8	2.59	-1.32	Learned exposition

In addition, the MAT has outputs six graphs revealing the general genre feature of the contracts on the six dimensions with the comparison to other common genres, including conversations, broadcasts, prepared speeches, personal letters, general fiction, press reportage, academic prose, and official documents. These visualized graphs revealed explicitly the general genre features of the construction contracts from the dimensions introduced previously from different perspectives.

As introduced, the first dimension is mainly concerned with the functional perspective of construction contracts, i.e., whether they are geared to providing information or involving closely related readers. As revealed in Table 1 and Figure 1, construction contracts have an average score of -19.26 and overlap with broadcasts, general fiction, press reportage, academic prose, and official documents in this dimension. They are closest to official documents, which means they belong to the official and information-oriented genre. In other words, construction contracts are not only dense with information but also are employed to inform the relevant parties in a formal style. According to Table 1, such a result suggests that nouns and nominalizations are widely used in construction contracts, with many long words and adjectives (Biber, 1988; Nini, 2019; Tessuto, 2012).

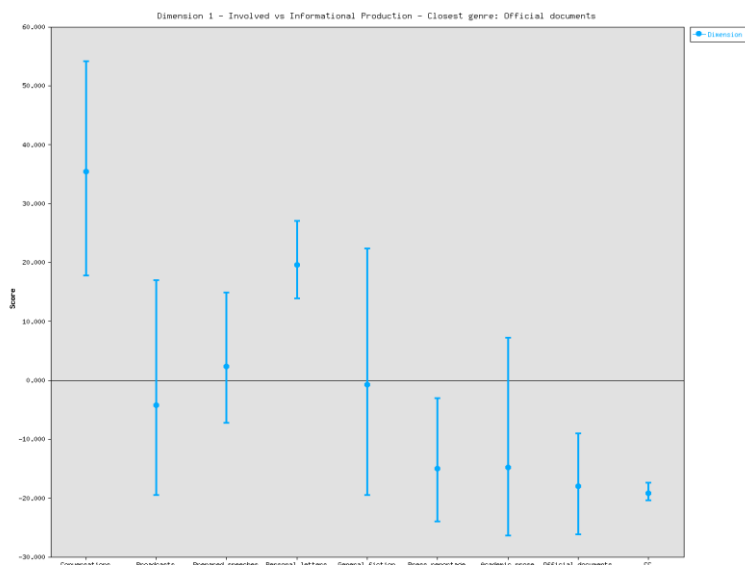


Figure 1. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 1

On Dimension 2, “Narrative vs. Non-Narrative Concern”, the average score of construction contracts was -2.75, with all the scores of construction contracts on this dimension being close to each other. Such scores mean that the construction contracts in this study are non-narrative in nature, and the present tense is frequently employed. As revealed in Figure 2, construction contracts are closest to official documents in general genre features in this dimension. In other words, construction contracts, in this aspect, are more about expounding the facts publicly and clearly.

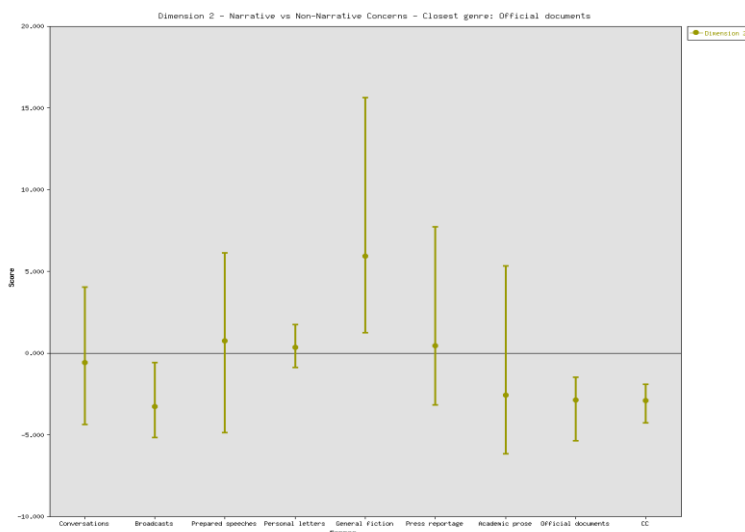


Figure 2. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 2

On the third dimension, “Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference”, the score was 10.86, as revealed in Table 3. It is a high score suggesting that the language of this dimension is independent of the immediate contexts of a given construction contract to realize their communicative purposes. That means construction contracts embrace a broader picture and deal with issues that are in the general sense, making a common standard or code of conduct for those who are involved in a specific construction project. According to Nini (2019), the result meant that nominalizations were widely employed, representing the rules and procedures that regulate and guide the behaviours of participants throughout the construction process.

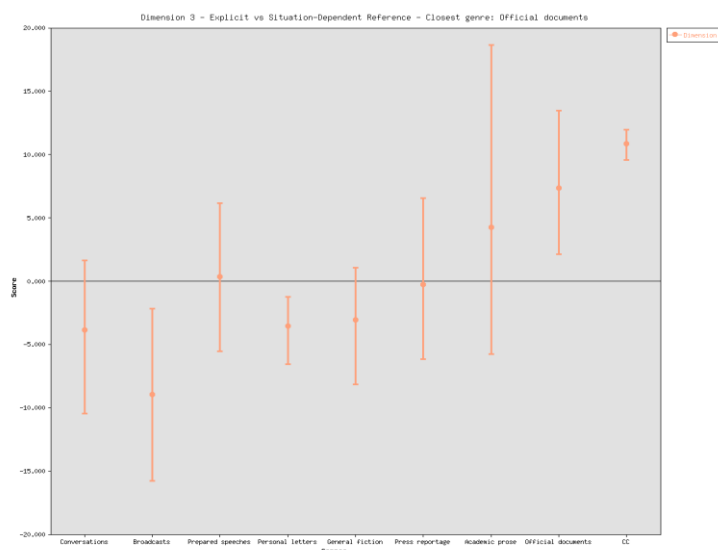


Figure 3. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 3

On the dimension of “Overt Expression of Persuasion”, construction contracts had a score of 5.8, as revealed in Table 3. According to Table 1, such a feature indicates that stakeholders’ ideas and their evaluation or judgment toward given issues are revealed in construction contracts (Nini, 2019). In this dimension, construction contracts are closest to personal letters, featuring many modal verbs, as shown in Figure 4. Such a feature suggests that construction contracts are documents with a strong self-assertive stance, setting a clear-cut standard for rights and wrongs. This is a feature that is quite different from the conventional belief that construction contracts belong to the genre with a strong impersonal stance.

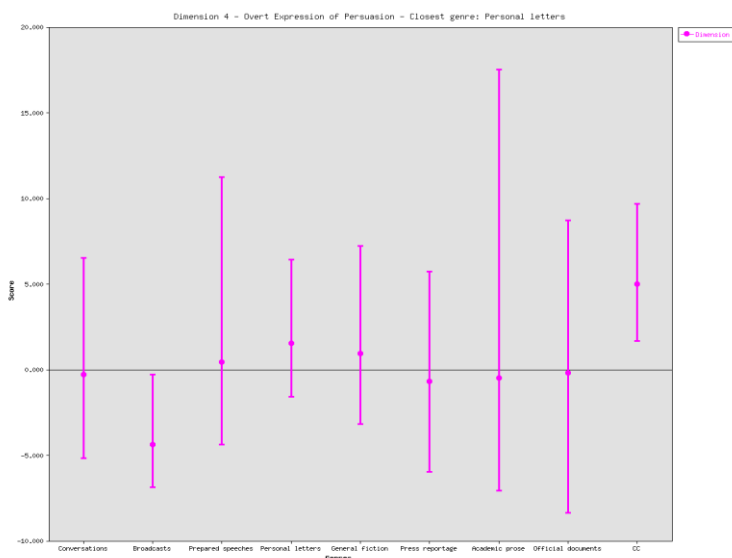


Figure 4. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 4

With regard to Dimension 5, “Abstract vs. Non-Abstract Information”, the construction contracts have a score of 2.59 (See Table 3). This score indicates that construction contracts are on the abstract scale, providing information in a technical and formal manner (Nini, 2019). As revealed in Figure 5, construction contracts are closest to official documents and close to academic prose in the way of presenting information. Such a feature suggests that terms related to given fields or industries are extensively adopted (Biber, 1998).

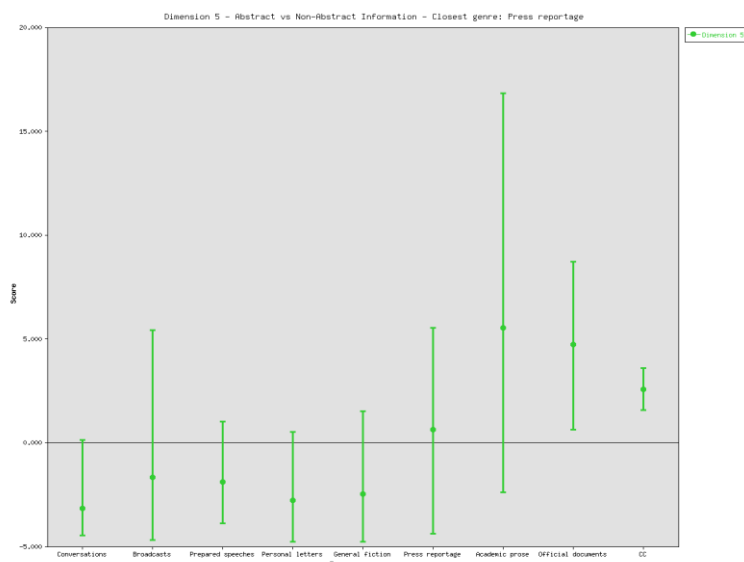


Figure 5. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 5

On Dimension 6, “On-line Informational Elaboration”, which aims to reveal the target genres’ timeliness, construction contracts have a score of -1.12, as revealed in Table 3. That suggests construction contracts belong to the genre that represents information with less real-time constraints. As revealed in Figure 6, construction contracts are closest to broadcasts that focus on stating issues explicitly and objectively (Biber, 1988). In other words, it is not for real-time communication but for long-term information. Since a high score means an abundance of spoken language (Nini, 2019), a score of -1.12 means spoken language is unsuitable for construction contracts. To put it simply, construction contracts are not for on-line informational elaboration but for representing the information geared to the whole construction process.

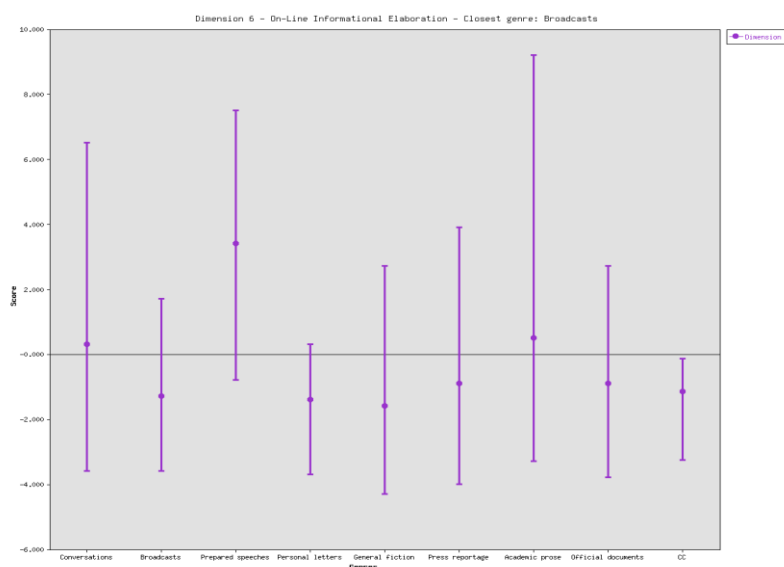


Figure 6. The generic feature of construction contracts on Dimension 6



## Discussion

The language features of construction contracts revealed via the multi-dimensional approach are the results of the communicative purpose of construction contracts.

### 1. Lexico-grammatical Features

#### *Nouns and Nominalizations*

From the functional perspective, nouns and nominalizations can better meet the requirement of holding information, for they can increase the density to the maximum limit (Biber, 1988; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Carlo, 2015), which can make relevant clauses of a construction contract as inclusive as possible. In carrying out construction projects, every detail needs to be considered to guarantee the smooth progress of the construction and safeguard the interests of related parties. Therefore, construction contracts are used to identify all the relevant details and set a clear boundary of rights and duties of the parties involved. Besides, nouns and nominalizations are efficient devices for representing the details (Liu, 2018), which can condense information in the most direct and explicit way (Heidari Kaidan et al., 2021). Furthermore, nouns and nominalizations can also strengthen the formal and authoritative nature of construction contracts (Liu, 2008; Tessuto, 2012; Breeze, Orts, 2015; Heidari Kaidan et al., 2021 ). This can be seen in the following example:

#### Example 1

*“Time for Completion” means the time for completing the Works or a Section (as the case may be) under Sub-clause 8.2 [Time for Completion] with any extension under Sub-clause 8.4 [Extension of Time for Completion], calculated from the Commencement Date (Excerpt from Contract 1).*

As revealed in the example, “Time for completion”, “the time for completing the Work or a Section”, “extension under Sub-clause 8.4”, and “Commencement Date” load all the essential information straightforwardly. In such a manner, construction contracts can effectively pack up all the information needed directly and formally to fulfil their functions of serving the construction process. Therefore, nouns and nominalizations are widely adopted to represent the numerous elements, issues, or other material processes that are common in construction projects. Meanwhile, Example 2 also has a strong touch of legality, for the abundant use of nouns and nominalizations can add extreme formality and authority to construction contracts (Qi, 2004; Carlo, 2015), which helps consolidate their legal enforcement and regulative nature (Lv, 2015).

#### *Predictive Modals (PRMD) and Phrasal Coordination (PHC)*

Though predictive modals (PRMD) have an overused frequency, one thing needs to be heeded. That is, “shall” is classified as a predictive modal. But as a matter of fact, “shall” has also been a marker for duty or responsibility with future orientation (Bhatia, 1993; Carlo, 2015; Cao & Zhao, 2019) like the following example:

#### Example 6

*The Contractor shall design, execute and complete the Works in accordance with the Contract, and shall remedy any defects in the Works. When completed, the Works shall be in accordance with the Technical Requirements for which the Works are intended as defined in the Contract (Excerpt from Contract 3).*

In the example, “design, execute and complete the Works” and “remedy any defects” become the duties for the “Contractor” by the employment of “shall”, in which “shall” has a strong connotation of duty and obligation for the task to be carried out.

Phrasal coordination (PHC) refers to the tag that “was assigned for any *and* that is preceded and followed by the same tag and when this tag is either an adverb tag, or an adjective tag, or a verb tag or a noun tag” (Nini, 2019, p. 30). It is a simple way to extend meanings by combining elements (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). By adopting phrasal coordination (PHC) frequently, drafters can clearly put more information in a given clause, helping straighten out issues efficiently.

### *Passive Voice*

Passive voice, including agentless passives (PASS) and by-passives (BYP), is also employed frequently in construction contracts. The use of passive voice will render the given genre an objective tone through its impersonal style and can help provide information technically, abstractly, and formally ( Rasmussen & Engberg, 2017). That can be seen in “(t)he requirement of the service agent should be fulfilled prior to ...” and “(t)he Works are intended as defined in the Contract ...”. In the sentence, “the requirement” and “the Work” are highlighted by allocating them the positions of “theme”. Such an arrangement makes the clause more formal and objective. The features mentioned above further suggest that the language of the contracts is more than information-laden, objective in stance, and written in nature (Biber, 1988).

### *Suasive Verbs (SUAV)*

As for reasons for the adoption of suasive verbs (SUAV), we can find the answers from the perspective of the communicative purpose of the contracts. As mentioned earlier, construction contracts are employed to cope with events that may not necessarily happen to the parties involved (Wang & Yang, 2016). For that reason, some clauses are presumptive or tentative. Meanwhile, resolving various disputes in a friendly way is encouraged so as to ensure the sound progress of the construction project (Sweet et al., 2015). Those reasons combined determine the adoption of softer tones in specific situations. In other words, by adopting the variables that decrease the rigidity of the tone to impinge on the behaviours of those involved with polite strategies (Orts, 2015). In other words, the use of suasive verbs (SUAV) can give this section a touch of softened tone without weakening its legal-binding functions (Song, 2020).

### *Adverbs (RB) and Be as the Main Verb (BEMA)*

Adverbs (RB) are counted as underused, which can be understood from the characteristics of adverbs and the language features of construction contracts. As an efficient device for specifying specific actions or states, adverbs (RB) are widely adopted in various genres. However, as discussed previously, there are many variables for setting the circumstances or conditions in construction contracts. The wide use of those variables has decreased the chances of employing adverbs (RB), leading to lower frequencies compared with their general use.

Be as the main verb (BEMA) is also commonly employed in many genres. Nevertheless, the nature of construction contracts determines that it is unsuitable for coordinating various relationships in the construction process. As discussed, construction contracts are more about informing or instructing the participants about what to do or how to do something. Thus, transitive material clauses with actors and recipients or goals are preferred. From the SFL perspective, the function of such clauses is for doing, not for happening (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014 ), in which sentences with verbs as predicates are preferable to the structure of the be as the main verb (BEMA), which can convey meanings effectively and forcefully (Bhatia, 1993).

## 2. General Genre Features

In the first dimension, construction contracts are more of information production. We can attribute it to the function of construction contracts. As revealed, construction contracts are used to cope with a large number of complicated issues that require all related details to be well handled. For that reason, construction contracts need to be inclusive of all the information concerned. In the sense of metafunction, the language in construction contracts on this dimension is less of an interpersonal function but more of an ideational function (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), representing facts, necessities, and procedures of the construction process. Meanwhile, a construction contract is not for arguing or absorbing readers' attention but for expounding relevant issues, regulating the behaviours of parties involved, and instructing those about the procedures to follow (Murdoch & Hughes, 2008). Such a function also determines that the non-narrative feature in Dimension 2 is more appropriate for that end.

Regarding the feature of being situation-independent, it is because construction contracts are usually drafted beforehand to ensure the smooth progress of the construction process. In that sense, construction contracts need to go beyond the immediate context of a given issue and embrace a bigger picture. In other

words, construction contracts need to extricate themselves from the boundaries of the immediate context in the language respect. From the professional perspective, we can say a construction contract is usually drafted based on prediction and experience (Li et al., 2020). In that sense, all the details to be stipulated are usually in common sense in a regular situation. Thus, the language of construction contracts is prefabricated to suit those issues in the regular state. Simultaneously, construction contracts involve parties of diverse interests. That demands they must remain an unbiased and impersonal stance. Such a requirement means that the language of construction contracts should be in line with the objective stance. All those features, as mentioned above, lead to the situation-independent nature of construction contracts with the appropriation of specific language resources. From the SFL perspective, the language resources in construction contracts are more of a representation of the whole construction process. Thus, language resources must be geared to the field of the construction industry as a whole rather than specific situations in lengthy construction periods.

In terms of construction contracts' closeness to personal letters in Dimension 4, it goes against our conventional idea of legal genre and contracts, which are deemed rigid and formal. However, we can figure out the reasons when studying them carefully. As we all know, construction contracts are used to regulate the relations between different parties. Therefore, they must inform the parties of what and how to do something when performing the contracts. To achieve those ends, drafters usually adopt modal verbs to strengthen assertiveness. Thus, languages for assessment and certainty are frequently used to clarify issues. Such features can be revealed from the ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Firstly, language resources are geared to the clear and objective representation of all the rights, obligations, procedures, requirements, and other issues concerning construction projects on the ideational level. Secondly, language strategies are utilized to make all parties accept the terms and follow the conditions on the interpersonal scale. Finally, the adoption of affirmative sentences and modal verbs, along with the reduced hedges, are on the textual level.

With regard to the abstract feature in Dimension 5, we can attribute it to the nature of the construction process, which is highly professional and technical. As revealed previously, the whole construction process is inclusive of a great many details. Such details are industry-related, with the area covering building, engineering, business, management, human resources, finance, technology, and the environment (Ning & Wu, 2019). To state all those issues clearly, drafters need to adopt more technical terms and patterns corresponding to the industry and handle them proficiently. Regarding "not for on-line informational elaboration" in Dimension 6, the reasons are similar to those of Dimension 3. As discussed, construction contracts are usually drafted beforehand. They are used to guide the regular work in the construction process in common sense with impartiality, not to provide immediate responses to what is going on.

In a word, all the features mentioned are the results of the complex construction process, in which diversified issues need to be addressed (Li et al., 2020). Simply put, the general genre features displayed on multi-dimensional perspectives converge to serve a general communicative purpose: to perform construction contracts successfully while safeguarding all parties' interests to the greatest extent amid the complicated features of the construction process. Knowing all the features is conducive to a better understanding of construction contracts.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study found that nouns (NN) and nominalization (NOMZ), phrasal coordination (PHC), and predicative modals (PRMD) were overused in construction contracts. Meanwhile, adverbs (RB) were identified as underused along with *be* as the main verbs (REMA) because of the special nature of construction contracts. When it comes to the general genre features of the construction contracts used in this corpus, it was found that construction contracts had the features of being informational, non-narrative and expository, context-independent, self-assertive, abstract, and written. These features further make construction contracts informative and regulative. In other words, construction contracts have a formal style, explicit communicative purposes, objective stance, and authoritative position on the general genre scale. Identifying those language features is conducive to a thicker understanding of construction contracts for the practitioners. It is also of great significance for shedding light on the courses that are related to the teaching of construction contracts,

helping those who are not proficient in English familiarize themselves with the language characteristics efficiently.

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