Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review
www.plhr.org.pk

RESEARCH PAPER

A Corpus-Based Multidimensional Analysis of Pakistan's Diplomatic Discourse on the Belt and Road Initiative

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the linguistic characteristics of diplomatic discourse pertaining to BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) within Pakistani diplomacy. Seeking to inquire into linguistic patterns as well as communicative functions embedded in the selected diplomatic discourses, the study is underpinned by the analytical lens of Biber's (1988) multidimensional framework. Its aim is to investigate these discourses using a self-compiled specialized corpus made up of press releases issued by the MOFA (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan) from 2013 to 2023. The findings reveal that the selected texts tended to be formal, abstract, informationally dense, impersonal, non-narrative and strategically persuasive. Such characteristics reflect the communicative objectives of diplomatic discourses which lay emphasis on clear, strategically intentional and positively representative communication, carefully designed to promote bilateral cooperation with China and to foster optimism regarding BRI and CPEC. Further, these discourses reflect Pakistan's steadfastness in completing and advancing CPEC on time. At a broader level, the study highlights the need to probe diplomatic discourses so as to map the underlying functions and strategic deployment of language in international relations.

KEYWORDS	Multidimensional Analysis, Corpus, Diplomatic Discourse, BRI, CPEC

Introduction

Purpose, context as well as social functions systematically influence how language functions which are susceptible to variation transpire. While these variations can be analyzed through the prism of register, genre and style, the first of these presents a highly effective approach to inquiring into how linguistic characteristics run parallel to communicative functions within specific situations. Halliday and Hasan (1989) define register as semantic configurations created by field, tenor, and mode which in turn are realized through lexico-grammatical patterns. Ure (1969) defines it as "situationally differentiated language variety" (p.107), whereas style reflects aesthetic and individual preferences (Biber & Conard, 2009). Genre, on the other hand, pertain to the structural organization of the entire text (Bhatia, 1993).

Linguistic variation plays a crucial role in understanding language in context. The study of language can be divided into the examination of its use and structure (Biber et al., 1998). Without considering the key notion of linguistic variability, it is impossible to fully analyze language forms (Reppen et al., 2002). Furthermore, linguistic variation is structured in nature, users choices vary with regards to the non-linguistic factors. These factors include speakers' relationship, production circumstances, purpose and

demographic aspects. Csomay and Crawford (2024) state that the examination of variation aims at understanding language change involving different reasons and contexts. Variability is embedded in human language, people use varied linguistic features according to the situation and different speakers may utter similar things employing different linguistic techniques (Biber, 1995). One of the most comprehensive models to examine linguistic variation is Multidimensional Analysis (MDA) proposed by Biber (1988). MDA systematically identifies the patterns of co-occurring linguistic features that unfold implicit communicative functions. It is a corpus-based analysis that applies multivariate statistical techniques like factor analysis to indicate linguistic dimensions. According to Biber (1992) the co-occurrence of linguistic features exhibit shared interactive purposes and each dimension comprises of clusters of linguistic features with similar functions. Biber (1988) identified 67 linguistic features in the following six dimensions:

1. Involved vs Informational Production
2. Narrative vs Non-narrative Discourse
3. Situation-dependent vs Elaborated Reference
4. Overt Expression of Argumentation
5. Abstract/Impersonal Style
6. On-Line Informational Elaboration

In this context, this study aims to explore the dominant linguistic patterns across all six dimensions and the role of linguistic features in Pakistani diplomatic discourse in the context of BRI and CPEC from 2013 to 2023. It examines how Pakistani discourses function across Biber's six dimensions and how various features help in framing the diplomatic stances within the international community. Despite the rapid growth of linguistic tools, they are rarely utilized to investigate the linguistic features of diplomatic discourses (Zhang et al., 2023). It is important to examine the language of diplomacy to understand how it plays role in the maintenance of diplomatic ties. The diplomatic ties of Pakistan and China initiated in 1951 (MOFA, 2022). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project under the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), and CPEC plays a crucial role in shaping the future of their diplomatic ties (Shah, et. al., 2020; Ali, 2017) as China is an economic giant in South Asia (Afzaal & Chishti, 2021; Rahim, et. al., 2018 Imtiaz, Aet. Al., 2023) and its rise has shifted the attitudes of neighboring states (Zheng, 2019), under these rapid geopolitical transformations it is important to critically evaluate the diplomatic discourses of Pakistan in order to explore how different linguistic features are reflecting diplomatic goals.

Literature Review

Several studies have examined the discourse surrounding the economic aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Afzaal & Jamali, 2023; Afzaal, 2023). Cao and Xiao (2013) analyzed abstracts from both Chinese and native English academic writing, employing Multidimensional Analysis (MDA) alongside colligation, as well as semantic and grammatical examination. Their findings revealed that native English writing tends to employ more intensifying features, while Chinese academic writing often relies on passive constructions and abstract nouns. Similarly, Hardy and Römer (2013) applied MDA to upper-level students' writing across sixteen disciplines, identifying variations in four key functional dimensions based on disciplinary differences. Friginal and Weigle (2014) explored academic essays and found multiple co-occurring patterns by using MDA and highlighted its potential in characterizing L2 writing at an extensive level. Moving forward, Friginal and Mustafa (2017) conducted a comparative study on U.S and Iraqi abstracts published in academic journals. The findings revealed cultural differences on dimensions 1, 3 and 4. Pan (2018) focused on writing styles across different academic levels including

masters theses, PhD dissertations and research articles written by L1 and L2 writers in the field of applied linguistics. The results showed that L2 writing is less narrative and engaged in comparison to L1 writing. Xu and Zhang (2023) worked on the conclusion sections of linguistics research articles to examine the linguistic patterns. This study unfolded that these conclusions were technical, abstract and minimally persuasive in nature. Alamri (2023) conducted a comparative examination of research abstracts written by international and Arab writers and found that Arab writers were more information-focused and evaluative whereas international writers used more informationally dense structures and carry narrative style. The variation was observed across dimensions 1, 2, 3 and 5. In another recent study, Ali (2024) compared the academic writings of British and Saudi students.

In the field of spoken discourses, Cheng (2021) investigated learner speech by using ICNALE corpora to understand how the academic genres, proficiency and gender influence stylistic choice. The study unveiled that higher proficiency learners produced more narrative, elaborative and involved discourses. Huang and Sang (2024) studied oral arguments in the U.S supreme court showing that judges were more stance-driven and argumentative whereas attorneys had impersonal style and preferred elaboration. In the political domain, Zhang et al. (2023) compared the diplomatic discourses of China and US by employing MDA. The results classified Chinese discourses as 'learned exposition' and US discourses as 'involved persuasion' highlighting the strategic and ideological nature of diplomatic discourse. Sheng and Li (2024) also compared the press conferences held by the governments of China and America to explore the interpreted and non-interpreted English discourses by using MDA. The results show that interpreted discourse are equally persuasive but display higher information density, more narrative content, lower engagement, carry reference clarity and are more abstract and less elaborate in nature.

Similarly, Yao et al. (2024) conducted a MDA of interpreted and non-interpreted language used in Chinese press conferences. The study found out that interpreted language is more informational and objective and less narrative and elaborate. Moreover, it is closer to formal register as compared to non-interpreted discourse. These studies show the significance of MDA in examining the linguistic variation and features within the texts. However, it lacks application in political discourse particularly in diplomatic communication in the Pakistani context. Therefore, this study is set out to focus on Pakistan's diplomatic discourses on BRI and CPEC to comprehend the underlying functions the linguistic features perform in shaping the diplomatic stances.

Material and Methods

This study uses a mixed method approach to examine the dominant linguistic features across all six dimensions introduced by Biber (1988) and the role of these linguistic features in Pakistani diplomatic discourses from 2013 to 2023. This study uses Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT) by Nini (2021). It is a corpus-tool designed to replicate Biber's (1988) MDA model for investigating the functional features of English language texts. Biber (1988) introduced six dimensions and 8 text types (see Table 1). MAT generates grammatical annotations for the input data and yields statistical data required for the text-type examination. It maps the corpora onto the proposed dimensions and identify the strongly associated text type. Additionally, it offers visual representations of the dimensions scores for all the six dimensions for a clear interpretation. Its algorithm closely reflects Biber's framework by following the same principles. The tagging is carried out using Stanford Tagger which has been adapted to identify the specific linguistic features mentioned in Biber's (1988) multidimensional model. This study uses MAT version 1.3.3 (2021) to analyze the diplomatic discourse of Pakistan on BRI and CPEC. The

corpus of this study comprises of official press releases published on the website of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan in the context of BRI and CPEC from 2013 to 2023.

Table 1
Biber's Dimensions and Text Types

Dimensions
Involved vs Informational Production
Narrative vs Non-narrative Discourse
Situation-dependent vs Elaborated Reference
Overt Expression of Argumentation
Abstract/Impersonal Style
On-line Informational Elaboration
Text Types
Intimate Interpersonal Interaction
Informational Interaction
Scientific Exposition
Learned Exposition
Imaginative Exposition
General Narrative Exposition
Situated Reportage
Involved Persuasion

Results and Discussions

This section presents the findings of MDA on Pakistani diplomatic discourses concerning BRI and CPEC. The results for all six dimensions are interpreted separately to better comprehend the communicative function of the linguistic features. It outlines dimension scores, including z-score mean, mean values and standard deviation for the associated linguistic features.

Table 2
Linguistic Features on Dimension 1

Pakistan (D1)	Linguistic Features	z-score (mean)	Mean	SD
Involve versus Informational production	Second personal pronouns	-0.68	0.06	0.21
	Do as pro-verb	-0.82	0.01	0.03
	First personal pronoun	-0.80	0.64	1.00
	Causative subordinators	-0.59	0.01	0.02
	Discourse particles	-0.51	0.00 0.01	
	Hedges	-0.46	0.00	0.00
	Amplifiers	-0.59	0.12	0.21
	Sentence relatives	1.91	0.09	0.11
	Direct WH-questions	-0.31	0.00	0.01
	Possibility modals	-1.22	0.15	0.17
	WH-clauses	-0.53	0.01	0.03
	Adverbs	-2.85	0.45	0.30
	Conditional Subordinators	-1.09	0.01	0.03
	Contractions	-0.73	0.01	0.02
	Nouns	4.28	33.29	3.19
	Total prepositional phrases	0.64	12.66	1.24
	Type-token ratio	--	116.07	11.19

Table 2. displays the z-scores, mean values and standard deviation of linguistic features embedded in Pakistani diplomatic discourses regarding BRI and CPEC on

Dimension 1: 'Involved versus Informational production.' These features are second personal pronouns with -0.68 z-score mean, 0.06 mean and 0.21 standard deviation (SD), do as pro-verb (z= -0.82),(m= 0.01) and (SD=0.03) SD, first personal pronoun -0.80, 0.64 and 1.00, causative subordinators: -0.59 , 0.01 and 0.02, discourse particles -0.51, 0.00, and 0.01, hedges -0.46, 0.00 and 0.00, amplifiers: -0.59, 0.12 and 0.21, sentence relatives 1.91, 0.09 and 0.11, direct WH-questions: -0.31 z-score mean, 0.00 mean and 0.01 SD, Possibility modals -1.22 , 0.15 and 0.17, WH-clauses -0.53, 0.01 and 0.03, adverbs -2.85, 0.45 and 0.30, conditional subordinators -1.09, 0.01 and 0.03, contractions -0.73 , 0.01 and 0.02 and finally nouns with a z-score mean of 4.28, 33.29 mean and 3.19 SD respectively. The total prepositional phrases on Dimension 1 consist of a mean value of 12.66 and a standard deviation of 1.24, while the type-token ratio carries116.07 mean value and 11.19 SD.

Table 3
Linguistic Features on Dimension 2

Pakistan(D2)	Linguistic Features	z-score(mean)	Mean	SD
Narrative versus Non-narrative concerns	Past-tense verbs	-0.13	3.60	1.33
	Third personal pronouns	-0.79	1.22	0.56
	Perfect aspect verbs	-0.63	0.53	0.36
	Public verbs	0.40	0.99	0.62
	Present participial clauses	0.51	0.19	0.18

Table 3. shows the linguistic features on Dimension 2 'narrative vs non-narrative concerns' along with the z-scores, mean and SD found in Pakistani diplomatic discourses. These discourses consist of the following linguistic features: Past-tense verbs -0.13 z-score mean, 3.60 mean value and 1.33 standard deviation, Third personal pronouns z = -0.79, m= 1.22 and SD= 0.56, perfect aspect verbs -0.63, 0.53 and 0.36, Public verbs 0.40, 0.99 and 0.62, present participial clauses has 0.51 z-score mean, 0.19 mean value and 0.18 SD respectively.

Table 4
Linguistic Features on Dimension 3

Pakistan (D3)	Linguistic Features	z-score(mean)	Mean	SD
Explicit versus situational dependent references	WH-relative clauses on subject positions	-0.55	0.10	0.11
	Nominalizations	2.53	5.63	1.20
	Time adverbials	-0.66	0.29	0.21

Table 4 highlights the scores of linguistic features of Pakistani diplomatic discourse on dimension 3 'Explicit versus situational dependent references'. The linguistic features on this particular dimension are WH-relative clauses on subject-positions with a -0.55 z-score mean, 0.10 mean value and 0.11 standard deviation, nominalizations 2.53 z-score mean, 5.63 mean value and 1.20 standard deviation. Lastly, time-adverbials -0.66 z-score, 0.29 mean value and 0.21 standard deviation respectively.

Table 5
Linguistic Features on Dimension 4

Pakistan (D4)	Linguistic Features	z-score(mean)	Mean	SD
Overt Expression of persuasion	Infinitives	0.07	1.53	0.51
	Prediction on Modals	0.34	0.30	0.23
	Suasive verbs	0.66	0.49	0.35
	Necessity modals	0.34	0.14	0.19
	Split Auxiliaries	-0.93	0.32	0.21

Table 5 presents the scores for linguistic features embedded in Pakistani diplomatic discourse on Dimension 4 'Overt Expression of persuasion'. These linguistic features are: infinitives with a z-score mean 0.07, 1.53 mean value and 0.51 standard deviation,

prediction on modals 0.34 z-score mean, 0.30 mean value and 0.23 standard deviation, suasive verbs with 0.66 z-score mean, 0.49 mean value and 0.35 standard deviation, necessity modals 0.34 z-score mean, 0.14 mean value and 0.29 standard deviation and split auxiliaries with a z-core mean of -0.93, 0.32 mean value and 0.21 standard deviation respectively.

Table 6
Linguistic Features on Dimension 5

Pakistan (D5)	Linguistic Features	z-score(mean)	Mean	SD
Abstract versus non-abstract information	Conjuncts	-0.09	0.11	0.11
	Other adverbial subordinators	0.64	0.17	0.17

The linguistic features in Pakistani diplomatic discourse along with their z-score mean, standard deviation and mean values on Dimension 5 'Abstract versus non-abstract information' are displayed in Table 6. These linguistic features are conjuncts -0.09 z-score mean, 0.11 mean value and 0.11 standard deviation. Moreover, it consists of other adverbial subordinators 0.64 z-score mean, 0.17 mean value and 0.17 standard deviation respectively.

Table 7
Linguistic Features on Dimension 6

Pakistan (D6)	Linguistic Features	z-score(mean)	Mean	SD
Online informational elaboration	Demonstratives	**-0.45**	**0.80**	**0.40**
	That relative clauses on object positions	**0.15**	**0.10**	**0.20**
	That clauses as verb complements	**1.02**	**0.63**	**0.45**

The table 7 exhibits the scores of linguistic features of Pakistani diplomatic discourse on Dimension 6 'Online information elaboration'. The following linguistic features are embedded on this specific dimension: demonstrative -0.45 z-score mean, 0.80 mean value and 0.40 standard deviation, that relative clauses on object positions 0.15 z-score mean, 0.10 mean value and 0.20 standard deviation and finally that clauses as verb complements 1.02 z-score mean, 0.63 mean value and 0.45 standard variation respectively.

This research utilizes a comprehensive MDA framework to examine the dominant linguistic patterns and their role in Pakistani diplomatic discourses in government press briefings, and official stances. The linguistic analysis reveal that Pakistani diplomatic discourse is highly informational on Dimension 1. The frequent use of nouns (z= 4.28) and prepositional phrases (z= 0.64) indicate the abstract, informational and expository discourses which are common in formal registers and a key feature of diplomatic discourse. As stated by Wu and Cao (2011) diplomacy refers to a highly official mode of communication. The low scores of personal pronouns show distance from personal engagement and the less frequent use of adverbs, conditionals, hedges and possibility modals signals the fact-focused, objective style adopted in the construction of these discourses on BRI and CPEC. The sentence relatives (1.91) are more frequent showing characteristic of formal writing. This depicts that the main function is to present policies and agreements regarding BRI and CPEC with precision and clarity. According to Chen (2011) and Wang (2012) the imperative to communicate essential diplomatic information effectively under time limitations compels spokespersons to formulate remarks that are information-rich and retain an impartial tone. This method guarantees precise and authoritative discourse on diplomatic issues, eliminating superfluous embellishment or subjectivity.

Moreover, the low scores for past tense verbs (-0.13) and present aspect verbs (-0.63) on Dimension 2 indicate a lack of narrative structure, reflecting a non-narrative orientation. In contrast, the high scores for public verbs and present participial clauses suggest a predominance of descriptive exposition. These discourses are primarily constructed to report current events, official meetings, and diplomatic visits between Pakistan and China, reinforcing their 'all-weather friendship' and highlighting the progress of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The frequent use of third-person pronouns further underscores the indirect and formal nature of the references.

On Dimension 3, the high frequency of nominalizations (z = 2.53) points to the presence of explicit and abstract information, while the low scores for time adverbials and WH-relative clauses suggest a reduced reliance on situational or time-bound cues. This abstract and explicit style aligns with the core communicative goals of diplomatic discourse, which aims to inform stakeholders about the strategic activities and achievements of these large-scale projects.

Moving forward, on dimension 4, the use of suasive verbs (0.66), necessity modals and prediction modals implies a persuasive tone, and the low use of split auxiliaries (-0.93) suggests lack of conversational emphasis. The Pakistani diplomatic discourse is embedded with strategic persuasive elements that advocate for the success of BRI and CPEC. The use of infinitives suggest anticipation and persuasiveness towards timely completion of projects under CPEC and future cooperation with China. The use of persuasive lexical items is a strategic tool to maintain ties. According to Isoroilovna (2024) the language of diplomacy is viewed as a tool of persuasion as it exhibits the interests and stance of a state. The construction of Pakistani discourses aims for enhanced cooperation with China.

Based on analysis, Dimension 5 indicates that abstract structures of information are prevalent in Pakistani diplomatic discourses. The prominent deployment of adverbial subordinators (0,64) supports the assertion of diplomatic positionalities, indicating as the former do a tendency towards logic-based arguments which are in line with abstract reasoning as well as multi-functionality. Such an argumentative style is key to articulating Pakistan's stance as well as role in BRI and CPEC, given that the country's strategic geographical location is not only conducive to connecting the region but also to ensuring that CPEC initiatives are completed successfully (Khan et al, 2019).

The texts analyzed in the present study are characterized by the use of 'that' verb complements (z = 1.02). As a key feature of the diplomatic register, the use of this linguistic feature suggests organized, formal and informational discourses. On the other hand, Dimension 6 is indicative of low online elaboration, reflected in the sparse deployment of demonstratives (-0.45) and object 'that' relatives (0.15). The recurring 'that' verb complements underscore the formal as well as explanatory essence of the selected discourses, demonstrating that they are deliberate and structured. Analysis suggests that there are observed divergences between informative and objective discourses within the diplomatic language of official Pakistani press releases. According to Wang (2012), such differences can be explained by the fact that the language chosen by diplomats is influenced by the need for the information to be complete, logical, factual and clear. This leads to the articulation of a strategic communicative style wherein diplomatic communicators strive to be coherent and precise when communicating their countries' national interests and diplomatic stances. Overall, the findings of the study indicate that Pakistani diplomatic discourses on BRI and CPEC are carefully designed to foster cooperation with China and to promote a positive image of both mega projects to the world at large. The study found that across all six dimensions, the diplomatic discourses are formal, abstract, strategic, informationally-dense and clear as well as persuasive. In this way, the linguistic choices

within these diplomatic discourses perform an important role that includes communicating information effectively and strategically with an eye to maintaining international relations and ensuring positive representation.

Conclusion

Based on the use of MDA to probe the linguistic features of Pakistani diplomatic discourses on the Belt and Road Initiative, the findings demonstrate that the selected texts are informative, non-narrative, convincing as well as abstract, characterized by a frequent occurrence of nouns, prepositional phrases and nominalizations. The latter allow for more formal and structure discourses, while the minimal deployment of personal pronouns or hedging point to the official stance evident within the texts. The discourses studied in the present investigation are constructed to build-up cooperation and showcase the progression of CPEC. The results highlight the skillful institutional construction which aligns with the strategic and official communication within the diplomatic sphere. Pakistani discourses are carefully constructed in order to exhibit the diplomatic advancements and promote the positive stance regarding these mega projects. This study not only helps to comprehend how language is pivotal to molding ideology and communicating the interests of the state on the global platform but also to capture the capacity of diplomatic discourse in creating stronger bilateral relations. Finally, it is worth noting that the study limits its analysis to an examination of Pakistani diplomatic discourses within the context of BRI and CPEC.

Recommendations

In future, researchers can undertake comparative and diachronic studies to probe the evolution of diplomatic registers over time as well as across varying geopolitical contexts. Furthermore, researchers can also extend the analysis to encompass other genres, including orations, interviews, and policy documents. This would enable deeper insights into communicative strategies deployed within diplomatic discourses. Additionally, researchers within the Pakistani context, can explore how diplomatic language is deployed while engaging with other countries. This would furnish pertinent insights into how linguistic choices help to construct and maintain international relations.

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