A Corpus-Based Study of Explicit Versus Situation Dependent Reference in Online University Prospectus

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Abstract

This research explores the language of online university prospectus of different cultures as a register in connection with the third dimension of Douglas Biber's (1988) model of Multidimensional Analysis (MD), i.e. Explicit Versus Situation Dependent Reference. The corpus has been collected and compiled from four hundred sixty prospectuses of the universities of Pakistan, India, United States of America, United Kingdom and Australia. A corpus-based methodology is used. The data has been analyzed through Biber's MAT (Multidimensional Analysis Tagger) and dimensional scores are computed in consideration of the features related to Dimension 3 of MD analysis. By analyzing the co-occurrence of linguistic features, this research tries to explore how the prospectuses, produced across the five countries, lie on the continuum of Explicit vs. situation dependent discourse.

Keywords: Multidimensional Analysis, Online University prospectus, Dimension 3,Corpus-based, Linguistic Features

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities use different strategies to promote themselves. This is termed as Marketisation. It increases the competition among the various universities across the world. One of the major promotional tools used by universities is Prospectuses.

According to Merriam Webster dictionary (2013), prospectus is "A printed statement that describes something (such as a new business or investment) and that is sent to people who may want to be involved in it or invest in it". According to O'Farreell (1998), Schools compete for clients/ parents by selling their reputation through image manipulating publications such as brochures, prospectuses, websites and reports as cited in (Maree, 2004). Most studies refer prospectuses as a traditional mean of advertising (Maringe, 2006). Hui (2009), performed critical discourse analysis (CDA) of introductory pages of online university prospectus and analyzed its language. The language of online prospectuses is promotional and performs many functions, i.e., providing information, attracting and persuading students etc. previous studies (Fairclough, 1993;Teo, 2007, & Maree 2005), considered it as a promotional tool.

This paper scrutinizes the co-occurrence of linguistic features in online university prospectuses of various cultures by applying Dimension 3 of Douglas Biber's (1988) model of MD analysis. He gave five dimensions to study the variation in the text due to co-occurrence of specific linguistic features. The mean score on Dimension 3, i.e., 'Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Reference' is studied. Prospectuses are explored under the domain of Register Analysis. According to Biber (1995), Conrad & Biber (2001), register is a term for any language variety defined in situational terms that includes relationship between speaker and hearer, the topic, speakers' purpose in communication, spoken or written mode, and the production circumstances. Register analysis studies situational components and linguistic features explicitly; the functional interpretation is based on comparison between the two.

Biber (1988) studied sixty seven linguistic features in twenty three genres in written and spoken texts. He studied seventeen written and six spoken texts and analyzed them through MD analysis including academic prose, press reportage, fiction, letters, conversations, interviews, radio broadcasts and public speeches (Biber 2006). "Texts with high scores on this dimension (Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Reference) are characterized by frequent co-occurrences of WH relative clauses, pied-piping constructions, phrasal coordination, and nominalizations, together with infrequent occurrences of place and time adverbials and other adverbs…" (Biber, 1988, p.42).

Online university prospectus displays such variation. It is due to different functions the language of online prospectus performs to attract the students. It can be persuasive, implicit, explicit, promotional, informational etc. No proper study was conducted with reference to Dimension 3 of MD analysis by Biber (1988) on selected five sections. This study aids the researcher to explore whether the distinction which exists between

countries on cultural dimension provided by Hofstede (1991) linked with respect to prospectuses produced across different countries or not and also highlights the promotional nature of prospectuses. According to de Mooij (2010), advertising is made of culture. And it varies across cultures. She states that people classify information in different ways across cultures, so when people organize information when designing a website, they will do this according to their own culture practice.'

1.1   Research Objectives

The present study centers on the following research objectives:

- To establish the language of online university prospectus a promotional register through Dimension 3.
- To examine the language variation of the online university prospectus among different registers through Dimension 3 of MD analysis by Biber (1988).
- To find out language variation of online university prospectus across different cultures.
- To explore the 'Explicit' and Situation dependent' linguistic features in various parts of online university prospectus.

2. METHODOLOGY

A corpus-based quantitative approach is used to analyze prospectus language. Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT) and Biber (1988) model is applied for the data analysis and tagging. Frequencies are gathered quantitatively and interpretation of co-occurrence of linguistic features is applied.

2.1   Data Collection and Compilation of Corpus

The corpus has beem compiled from prospectuses of five countries, i.e., Australia, India, Pakistan, United Kingdom and United States of America. The data of four hundred sixty universities have been compiled from each country. Five major sections of online university prospectuses, i.e., About us, Library, Departments, Facilities and Vice chancellor message is collected by using internet. The corpus is built on two thousand one hundred sixty four files. These files have been later tagged in MAT (Multidimensional Analysis Tagger). According to Nini (2013), "The Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT) is a program for Windows that replicates Biber's (1988) tagger for the Multidimensional functional analysis of English texts, generally applied for studies on text type or genre variation" (p.01). It generates a grammatically interpreted version of text or corpus selected along with the statistics desired to accomplish genre analysis.

Table below shows the detail of corpus files.

Table 01: Number of Corpus Files

Countries	Sections of Online Prospectus					Total Number of Files
	About us (ABT)	Department (DPT)	Facilities (FC)	Library (LIB)	Vice Chancellor Message (VCM)	
Australia (AUS)	93	93	91	68	52	397
India (IND)	100	100	100	100	100	500
Pakistan (PAK)	81	60	66	68	78	353
United kingdom (UK)	86	83	86	86	73	414
United States of America (USA)	100	100	100	100	100	500
Total Number of Files	460	436	443	422	403	**2164**

Each file has been assigned a specific name as the data was collected from five countries so it facilitated the researcher in data analysis and interpretation. Countries have been abbreviated similarly. A tag count is done through Biber's tag count program to be followed by the normalization of the data out of one thousand words for each text. The score of positive features (e.g. WH relative clauses on subject position, WH relative clauses on object position, pied piping constructions, phrasal coordination and nominalizations etc.) on Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Reference were summed up and subtracted from the sum of the negative features (e.g. time adverbials, place adverbials, and other adverbs (excluding hedges, amplifiers, emphasizes).

3. DISCUSSION

In the light of score obtained from MAT, the nominalized results in the form of mean scores on all dimensions are studied. Dimension 3 mean scores of each country are separated and compared with mean scores of other countries. The results were represented graphically. Inter and intra country category mean scores on dimension 3 (Explicit vs. Situation dependent Reference) were studied similarly. The overall positive results display that the mean scores of categories of online university prospectuses on Dimension 3 has more explicit and elaborated, endophoric references then situation dependent, exophoric references. Australia has the highest scores; Pakistan has relatively low scores but stood at second place so both has more explicit features then India and USA with relatively low scores. UK has the least scores on Dimension 3 so it shows more situation dependent features then explicit ones.

3.1. Cross country Comparison of Online University Prospectuses

The following graph shows the comparison of mean scores of online university prospectus of different countries on Dimension 3. It is confirmed from the given mentioned graph that all the online university prospectuses show explicit features as they all carried positive scores. From above results, Australia carries highest score, i.e., 14.54 and UK carried the least mean score, i.e., 12.48. Hence both are at opposite extremes; Australia is characterized as highly explicit and UK as highly situation dependent. Pakistan has almost similar scores to Australia hence is highly explicit. India and USA are more explicit than situation dependent. UK displayed least scores so is highly Situation dependent.
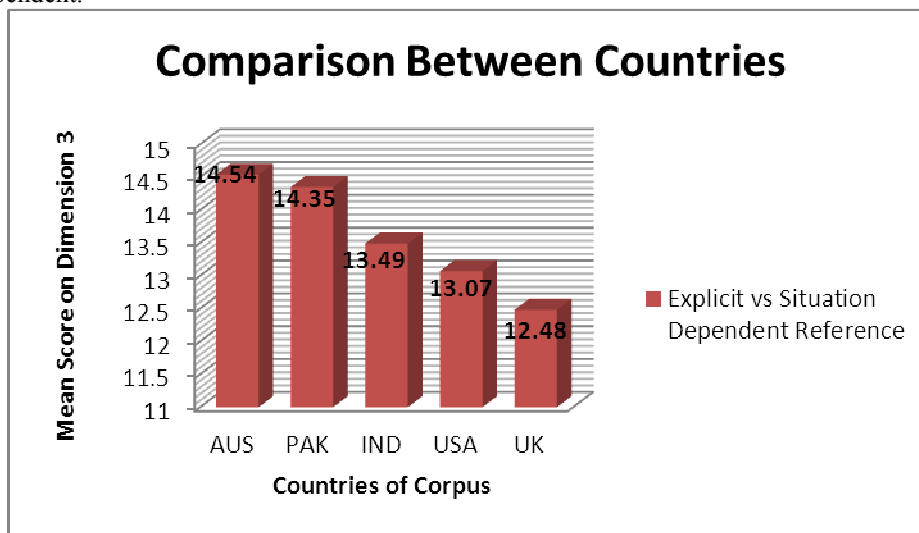

Figure 3.1: Online University Prospectuses on Dimension 3

With respect to Dimension 3 the scores of different sections of online university prospectuses of different countries display considerable variation. The following figure clearly illustrates the variation.
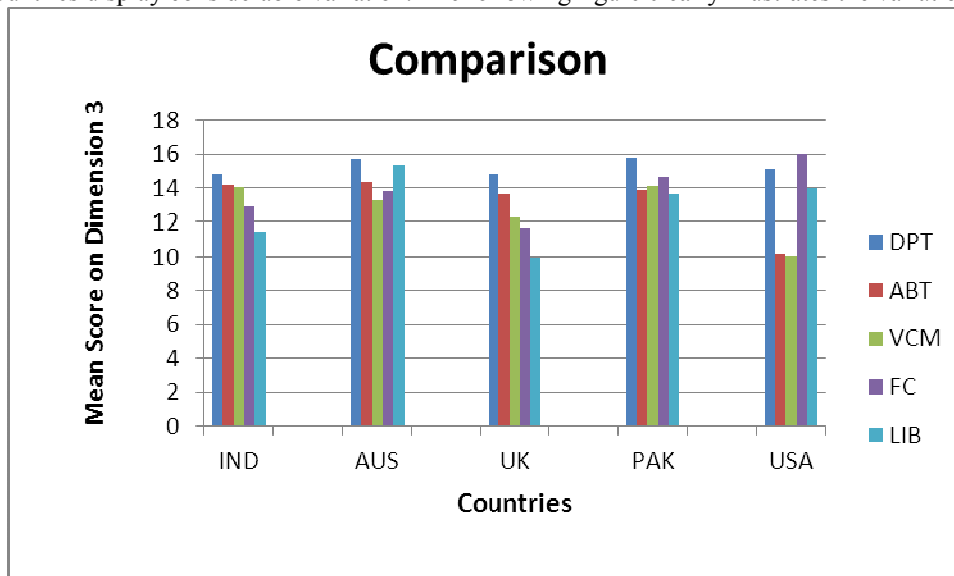

Figure 3.1: Sections of Online University Prospectuses on Dimension 3

The figure reveals that Australia and Pakistan are more explicit as compared to other countries data. It further demonstrates that DPT section among all the sections show highest positive scores and thus is most explicit and LIB section shows the less positive scores and hence is more Situation dependent. ABT and FC shows moderately high scores on this dimension whereas VCM shows moderately low scores.

3.2. Features Causing Explicitness

The highly positive scores and least positive scores on dimensions are due to distribution of certain features that represents a dimension. Biber (1988) used sixty seven linguistic features which fall into sixteen major grammatical categories. The categories are:

- Tense and aspect markers
- Place and Time adverbials
- Pronouns and Pro-verbs
- Questions
- Nominal forms
- Passives
- Stative forms
- Subordination features
- Prepositional phrases, adjectives and adverbs
- Lexical specificity
- Lexical classes
- Modals
- Specialized verb classes
- Reduced forms and dispreferred structures
- Co-ordination
- Negation

According to Biber (1988), "…. Features from same grammatical category can have different functions, and features from different grammatical category can have a shared function. As such, these features provide a solid basis for determining the underlying functional dimensions in English...'' (p.72). The functional dimension explains the co-occurrence pattern between the features identified by the factor. Frequency counts of linguistic features have been used by factor analysis to identify sets of features that co-occur in texts. Dimension 3, 'Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Reference' uses factor 3 that differentiate between highly explicit reference and situation dependent reference. This dimension closely relates to the difference between exophoric and endophoric reference (Haliday & Hasan 1976).

These features distinguish between highly explicit and elaborated, endophoric reference from situation dependent, exophoric reference on Dimension 3 are due to co-occurrence of following features:

i. WH relative clauses on object positions (WHOBJ)
ii. Pied piping constructions (PIRE)
iii. WH relative clauses on subject positions (WHSUB)
iv. Phrasal coordination (PHC)
v. Nominalizations (NOMZ)
vi. Time Adverbials (TIME)
vii. Place Adverbials (PLACE)
viii. Adverbs (RB)

There are three forms of relative clauses that are assembled as primary positive features on Dimension 3, the WH relative clauses on object positions, WH relative clauses on subject positions and pied piping constructions. WH relative clauses are considered as tools for identification of explicit, elaborated referents in a text. Phrasal coordination and nominalizations shows smaller positive weights on this dimension. There are three features which have large negative weights on Dimension 3, i.e., time adverbials, place adverbials and other adverbs. Place and time adverbials are used for reference of place and times. They are used for locative and temporal reference.

The frequency counts features are nominalizing to text length of one thousand words, e.g. if the dimensional mean score of Australia on Dimension 3 is 14.54 the whole dimensional file is analyzed and the score lowest on this dimension and highest mean score on this dimension were obtained. The mean frequency score of these features are presented in the appendices. Then the category causing highest and lowest mean score on Dimension 3 was analyzed in 'Feature File' with nominalized frequency. The features falling under the lowest and highest text file have been graphically represented. The given graphs from the selected countries shows the results of features on Dimension 3 and will further elaborate the point discussed earlier.

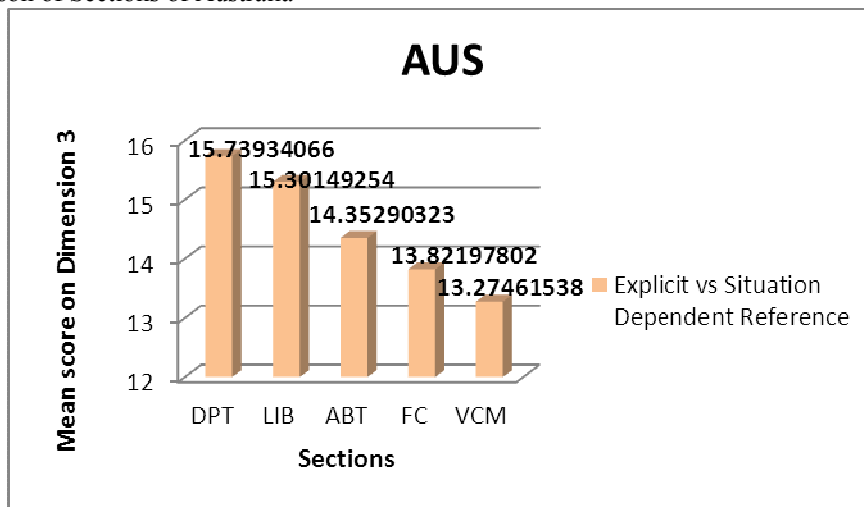3.2.1. Comparison of Sections of Australia

Figure 3.2.1.1: Comparison of sections on Dimension 3

The above graph revealed that in the online university prospectuses of Australia, DPT section possesses highest positive score of 15.739 making it highly explicit. The least positive mean score of VCM, i.e., 13.27 on contrary to DPT mark it more situation dependent and less explicit. LIB section displayed relatively low mean score then DPT still falls in category of highly explicit. ABT and FC shows less positive results.

The variation in the result is due to co-occurrence of above mentioned linguistic features. The comparison of DPT and VCM sections of Australia on the basis of linguistic features is given in graph below.
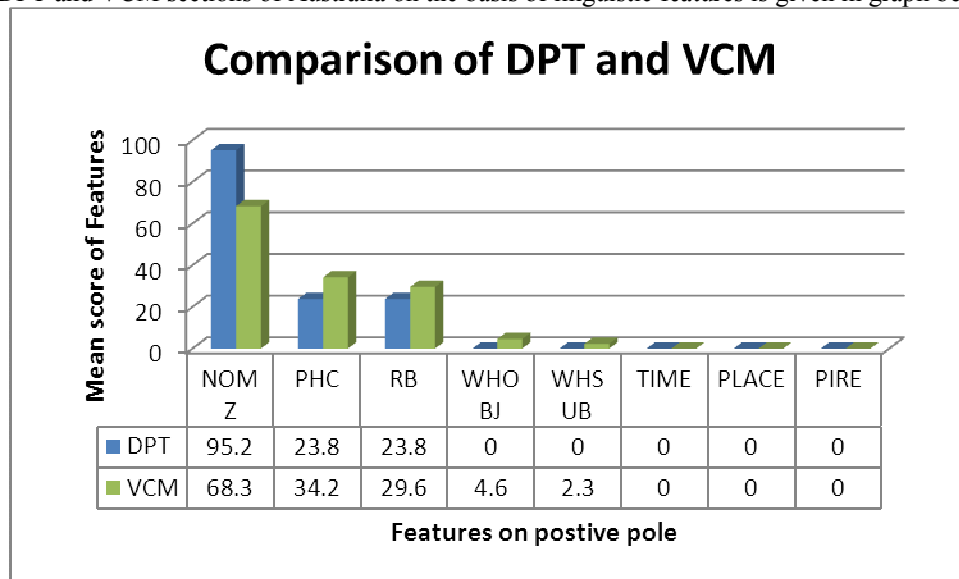
Comparison of DPT and VCM

	NOMZ	PHC	RB	WHOBJ	WHSUB	TIME	PLACE	PIRE
DPT	95.2	23.8	23.8	0	0	0	0	0
VCM	68.3	34.2	29.6	4.6	2.3	0	0	0

Features on postive pole

Figure 3.2.1.2: Linguistic features of DPT and VCM Sections

The above graph displays that NOMZ and PHC shows the highest score and thus are responsible in making it more explicit. The overall score of positive features is greater than RB (adverbs) that is negative feature, resulting Australia more Explicit and less Situation dependent. Similarly WH clauses on subject and object positions also adds explicitness to the online prospectuses.

3.2.2. Comparison of Sections of India

The sections of online university prospectuses of India showed considerable variation in scores. The following graph elaborates the variation.
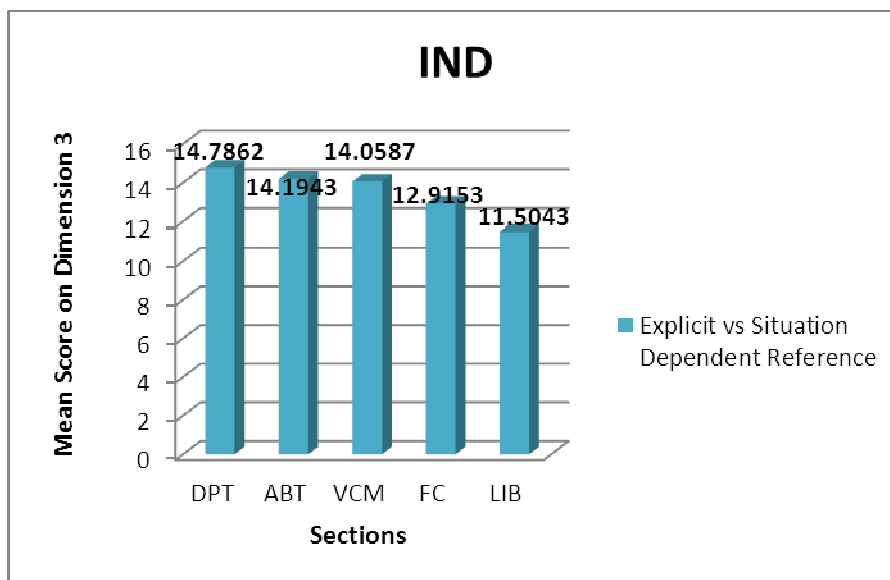
Figure 3.2.2.1: Comparison of sections on Dimension 3

The graph highlights that DPT section of online university prospectuses of India have highest positive mean score, i.e., 14.7862 on Dimension 3 making it highly explicit while LIB section shows the lowest positive mean score, i.e., 11.5043 so it's more situation dependent and less explicit. ABT, VCM have moderately high scores and FC has moderately low scores on Dimension 3.

This variation is due to co-occurrence of certain linguistic features on this dimension as highlighted in Biber (1988).

	NOMZ	PHC	RB	PLACE	TIME	WHOBJ	WHSUB	PIRE
DPT	64.8	23.3	5.2	0	0	0	0	0
LIB	66.6	14.2	8	1.8	1.8	0	0	0

Features on Positive Pole
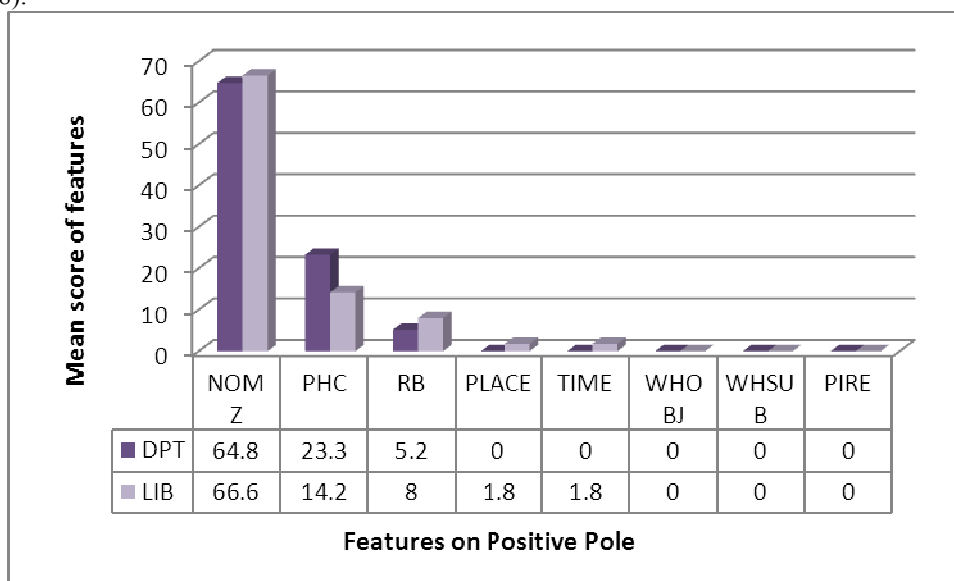
Figure 3.2.2.2: Linguistic features of DPT and LIB Sections

The graph exhibits that the positive features, i.e., NOMZ, PHC has the highest mean score on Dimension 3. While comparing them with LIB section DPT shows the highest mean score NOMZ and PHC in DPT is 64.8 and 23.3. In LIB its 66.6 and 14.2. RB (adverbs) is more in LIB than in DPT. Place (PLACE) and Time (TIME) adverbials are also present in LIB. The cumulative positive score of both features (i.e., NOMZ, PHC) in DPT section is higher than LIB thus making it more Explicit and LIB more situation dependent. The overall score of positives features in both sections is greater than negative features making India more explicit.

3.2.3 Comparison of Sections of Pakistan

The variation in sections of online university prospectuses is evident from the following graph.
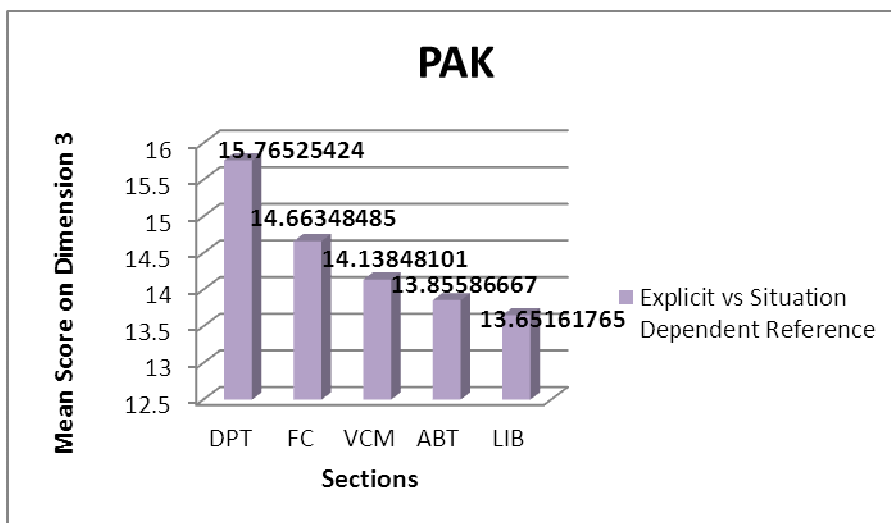
Figure 3.2.3.1*: **Comparison of sections on Dimension 3**

It is highlighted from the graph that in Pakistani online university prospectuses DPT section has highest positive scores so therefore it was highly explicit whereas LIB section shows the lowest positive scores on Dimension 3 thus is highly situation dependent. FC shows moderately high positive scores so is more explicit. VCM and ABT showed relatively low positive scores so are less explicit and more situation dependent.

The deviation in results is due to the co-occurrence of positive and negative linguistic features in the text.
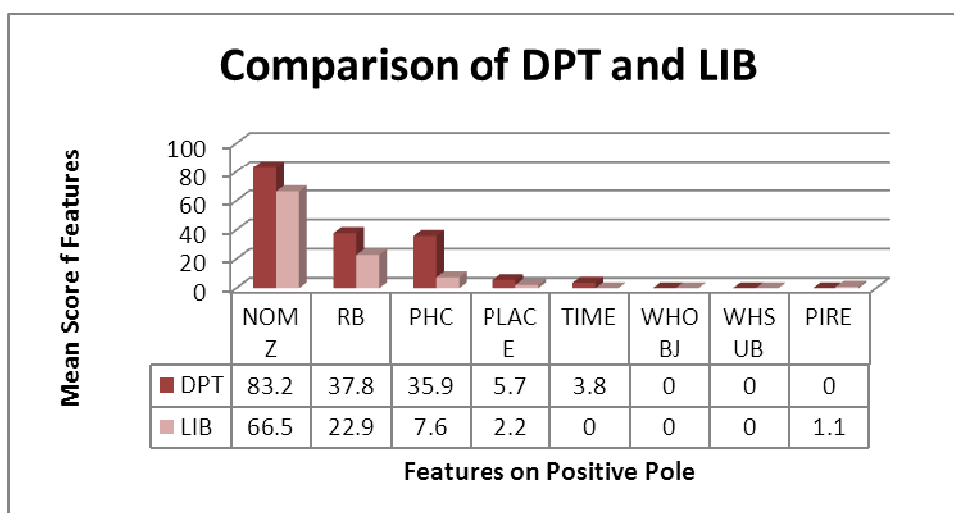
Figure 3.2.3.2: Linguistic features of DPT and LIB Sections

The graph highlights that positive features, i.e., NOMZ and PHC has the highest mean score in the selected sections. The comparison among the two sections displayed that the DPT section has highest NOMZ and PHC score that is 83.2 and 35.9 on this dimension. The co-occurrence of negative features is also evident from the graph. RB (adverbs), Place (PLACE) and time (TIME) adverbials are again higher in DPT and less in LIB section. The collective score of positive features (NOMZ and PHC) is higher in DPT section then in LIB making DPT more Explicit and LIB more situation dependent. The greater positive mean score on Dimension 3 makes Pakistan more Explicit.

3.2.4 Comparison of Sections of United Kingdom

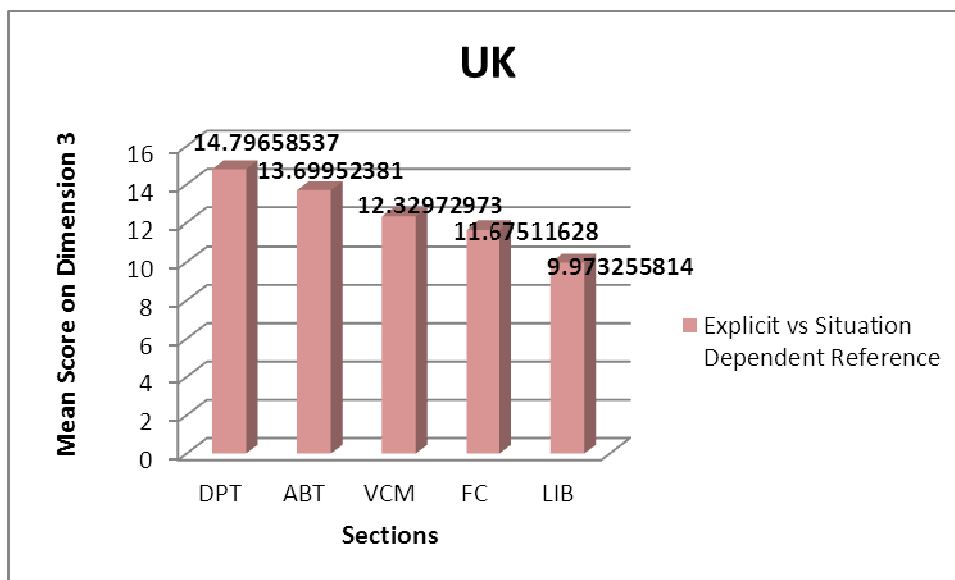Following graph elaborates the variation among different sections of online university prospectuses of UK.

Figure 3.2.4.1: Comparison of sections on Dimension 3

DPT section of UK online prospectus shows highest positive scores on Dimension 3. ABT and VCM showed moderately high scores and showed more explicit features whereas FC showed moderately low positive scores on Dimension 3 so are more situation dependent. The linguistic features that cause the variation are evident from graph in Figure 3.2.4.2 that shows comparison between DPT and LIB section.
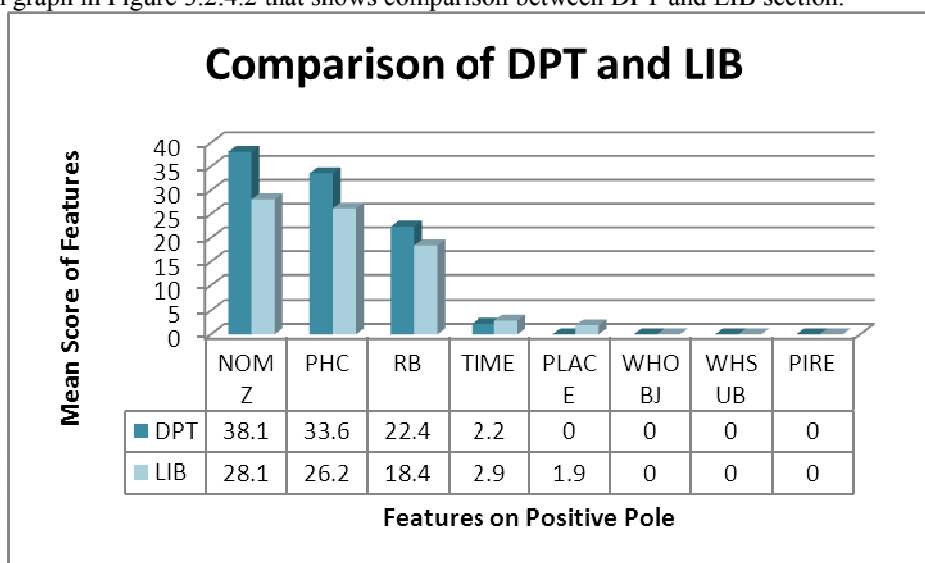

Figure 3.2.4.2: Linguistic features of DPT and LIB Sections

The graph indicates both positive and negative features on Dimension 3. DPT section has the highest mean score of Nominalization (NOMZ) and Phrasal coordination (PHC) that is 38.1 and 33.6 respectively. RB is higher in DPT as well but the combined score of positive feature is greater than the negative features making DPT more Explicit. LIB on the other hand has low mean score of NOMZ (28.1), PHC (18.4), RB (26.2) but moderately high score on TIME and PLACE. Both TIME and PLACE adverbials add situation dependent characteristics to the data. Hence LIB is more situation dependent. The results make UK more Explicit and less situation dependent.

3.2.5. Comparison of Sections of USA

The graph presenting the comparison of different sections of online university prospectuses showed the variation. Figure 3.2.5.1 revealed the details.
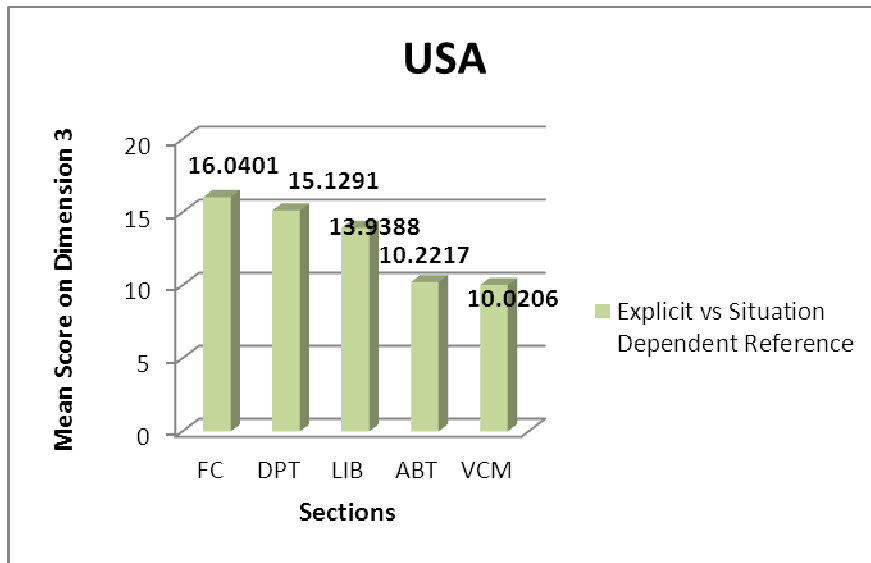
Figure 3.2.5.1: Comparison of Sections on Dimension 3

Here FC shows the highest positive score on Dimension 3, i.e., 16.0401 and VCM shows least positive mean score, i.e., 10.0206. DPT and LIB showed moderately high scores and are more explicit then situation dependent. ABT shows moderately less positive scores and thus is more situation dependent. Graph in Figure 3.2.5.2 revealed the linguistic features that cause variation in the results. It also shows the comparison of linguistic features between FC and VCM sections of online university prospectuses of USA.
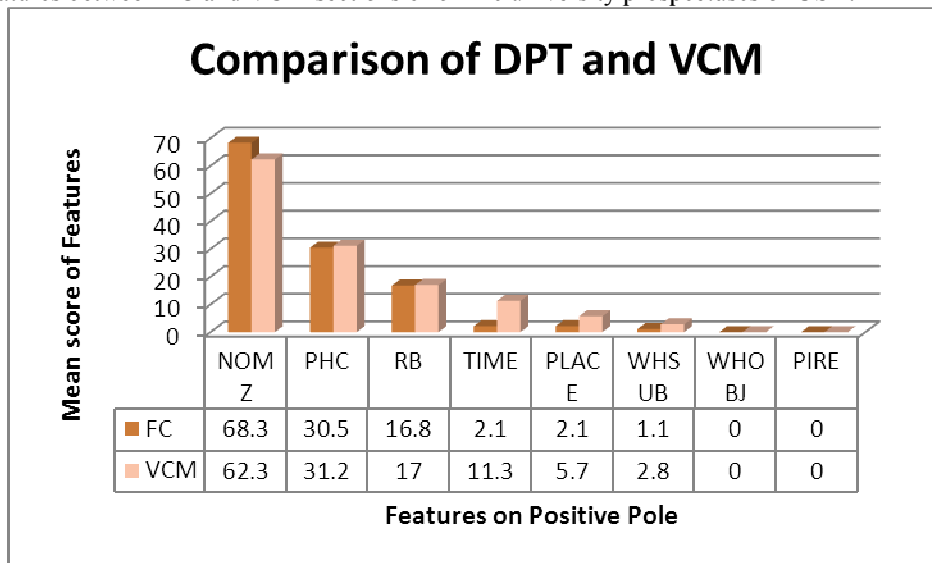

Figure 3.2.5.2: Linguistic features of DPT and VCM Sections

The graph revealed both positive and negative features. The cumulative mean score of NOMZ, PHC is greater in FC then in VCM. The negative features, i.e., RB (17), TIME (11.3), PLACE (5.7) have higher mean score on Dimension 3 in USA making VCM more situation dependent. The overall mean score of positive features is greater than the negative features hence making USA more explicit and less situation dependent.

3.3 Cross country comparison of Each Section of Online University Prospectus

Every section has its different score on every country. The graphical representation is as under.

3.3.1 ABT variation in countries

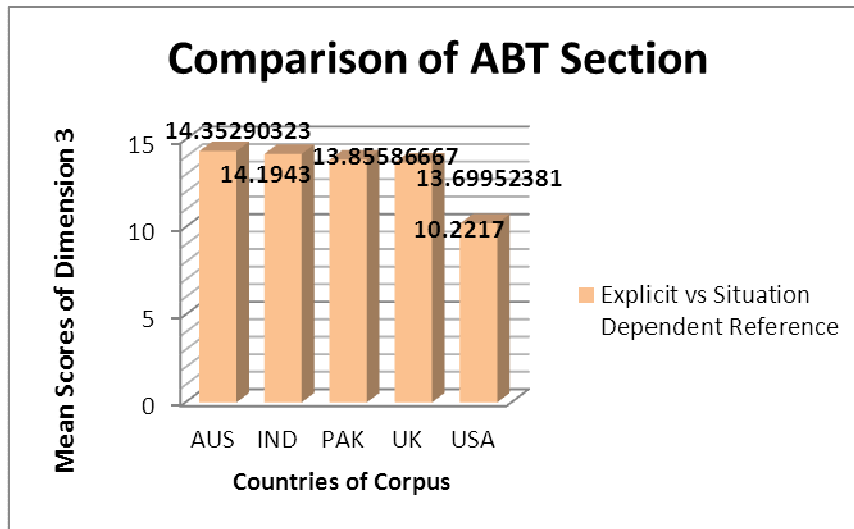About section in target countries also showed variation. Following graph displays it clearly.

Comparison of ABT Section

Figure 3.3.1: ABT Section of Online University Prospectuses

It is reveals that ABT section of Australia shows the highest score on Dimension 3 thus is highly explicit and USA shows least positive scores hence showing least occurrence of positive features thus is more situation dependent. IND, PAK and UK shows relatively low scores hence are more explicit and less situation dependent.

3.3.2 DPT variation in countries
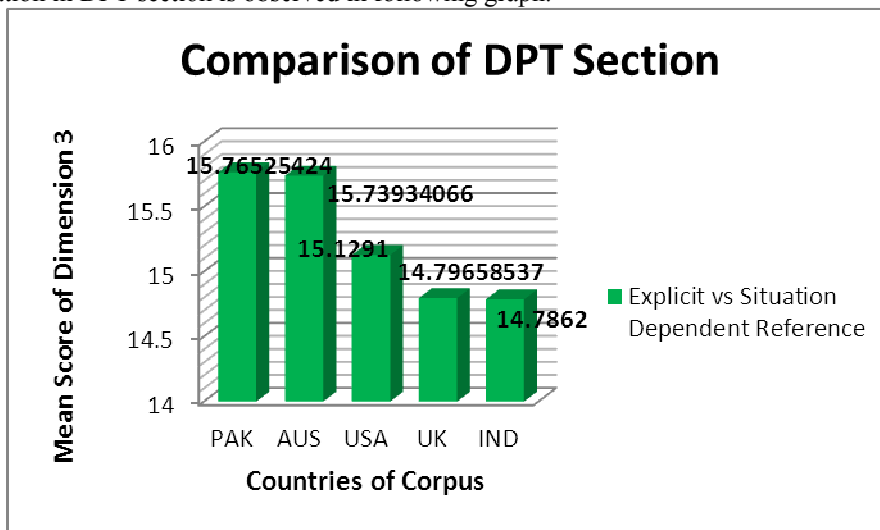Similarly variation in DPT section is observed in following graph.

Comparison of DPT Section

Figure 3.3.2: DPT Section of Online University Prospectuses

The graph demonstrates that PAK and AUS have the highest scores on this dimension hence proved the co-occurrence of positive features in the prospectuses. On contrast to it UK and IND shows the least positive scores and hence proved to be more Situation dependent. USA displayed intermediate position between the two extremes, therefore is more explicit and less Situation Dependent with reference to specific section of online university prospectus.

3.3.3 FC variation in countries
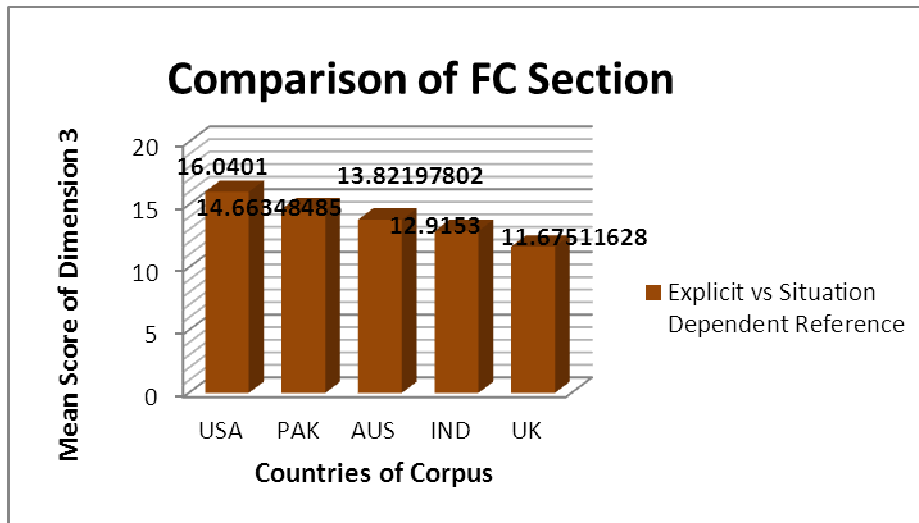FC section also displayed variation on Dimension 3.

Comparison of FC Section

Figure 3.3.3: FC Section of Online University Prospectuses

USA has maximum positive score on Dimension 3 and UK has least positive scores. PAK and AUS shows moderately less positive scores hence are more explicit and less situation dependent. IND shows moderately less positive score and is more situation dependent with reference to specific section of online prospectuses.

3.3.4 LIB variation in countries

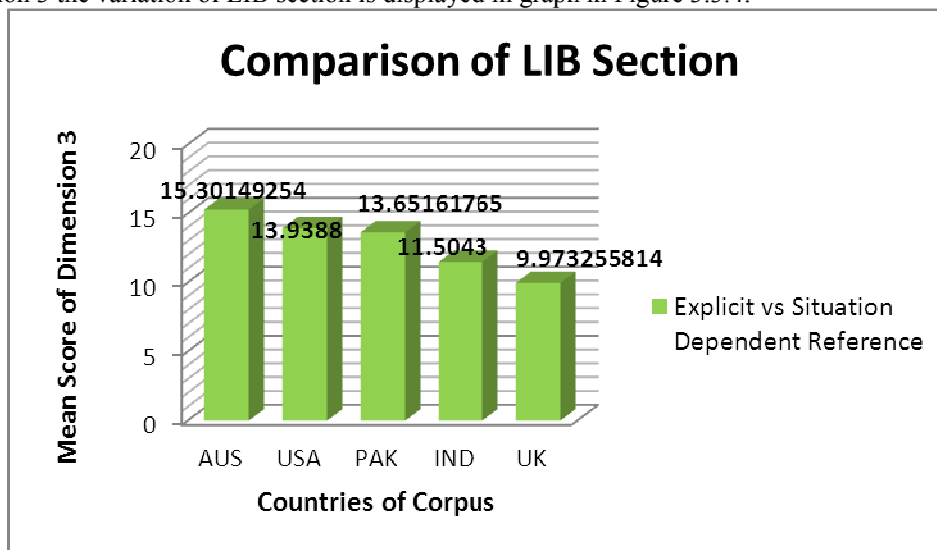On Dimension 3 the variation of LIB section is displayed in graph in Figure 3.3.4.

Comparison of LIB Section

Figure 3.3.4: LIB Section of Online University Prospectuses

It is evident that AUS shows the maximum positive score on Dimension 3 and UK displayed lowest positive scores. USA and PAK showed moderately high scores on this dimension and are more explicit. IND shows moderately low positive scores so is more situation dependent.

3.3.5 VCM variation in countries

VCM indicates deviation in scores as well. Following graph reveals the variation in detail.
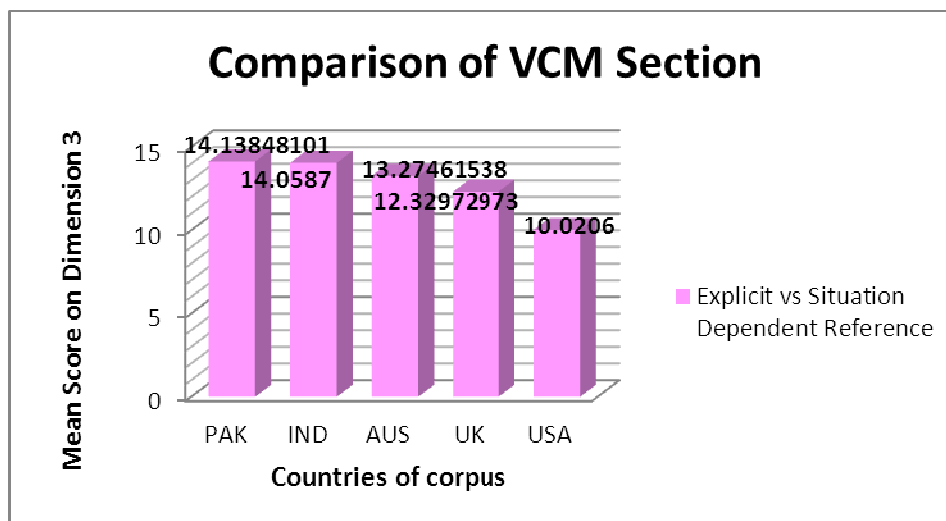
Figure 3.3.5: VCM Section of Online University Prospectuses

The graph indicates that PAK have highest positive then USA, having least positive score and is highly situation dependent. IND and AUS show moderately high positive scores and thus are more explicit. UK show moderately less positive scores on this dimension hence is more situation dependent.

3.4 Comparison with Biber's (1988)and Hofstede (1991) Score

Biber (1988) discussed twenty three genres and defined their score on all the five dimensions. The mean score on Dimension 3 and the co-occurrence of linguistic features linked it to official documents. Prospectus language has much higher score on dimension 3, i.e., 13.5 which is higher than official documents, i.e., 7.3. This mean it's more explicit then official documents. The publication of Online University prospectus varies across cultures. Hofstede (1991) develops cultural dimensions to study cross cultural communication. Among his five dimensions the present study discusses Dimension 1, i.e., Individualism vs. Collectivism. The score of countries on this dimension is compared with the countries selected for data collection.

Hofstede (1991) scores on his dimension 'individualism vs. collectivism' and mean score on dimension 3 is given below in the table.

Table 02: Countries with Scores

Sr #	Countries	Individualistic Score	Explicit Mean Score
1	Australia	90	14.54
2	Pakistan	14	14.35
3	India	48	13.49
4	USA	91	13.07
5	UK	89	12.48

'Individualistic communication' means 'low context 'communication and 'collectivist communication' means the opposite. The scores of Hofstede (1991), show that USA, Australia and UK are more individualistic countries whereas India and Pakistan and more collectivist. According to this it is assumed that 'Explicit' countries are more Individualistic while the 'Situation dependent' more collectivist. But the above mentioned tables show the opposite results.

University prospectuses are written to grasp the maximum customers including national and international students and give more information. This required more explicit information then situation dependent references. Hence the variation in results is evident. Moreover they also intend to display the culture and promotional features together in prospectus. The Individualistic countries deliberately show the collaborative and interactive environment in order to grab more students/ customers from all over the world.

4. CONCLUSION

In the concluding section the research has succeeded in achieving the objectives of the study by analyzing the prospectus language through register analysis. This research study explores the language of online university prospectuses of five target countries on Douglas Biber's (1988) model of 'Multidimensional Analysis'. It studied the prospectus on Dimension 3 of MD analysis, i.e., Explicit vs. Situation Dependent Reference. The result of analysis of co-occurring linguistic features on Dimension 3 proved it more 'promotional, informational and explicit' on this dimension. This study is the first to explore prospectus linguistically via MD analysis. The previous studies explore it under the domain of CDA.

In the present study 'Register Analysis' is applied to make prospectus a promotional register. As

prospectus serves the purpose of communicating with the masses so its language is promotional, explicit, and informational. The main purpose is to welcome and persuade the prospective student/customers to get admission in the institution. The graphical results show that Australia and Pakistan are more explicit as compared to other countries data. It further demonstrated that DPT section among all the sections show highest positive scores and thus is most explicit and LIB section shows the less positive scores and hence is more Situation dependent.

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