

Register variation in malicious forensic texts

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Malicious forensic texts

Malicious forensic text (MFT): a text that is a piece of evidence in a forensic case that involves threat, abuse, spread of malicious information or a combination of the above.

Malicious forensic texts

Do you ever want to see your precious little girl again? Put \$10,000 cash in a diaper bag. Put it in the green trash can on the devil strip at corner 18th and Carlson. Don't bring anybody along. No kops!! Come alone! I'll be watching you all the time. Anyone with you, deal is off and dautter is dead!!!

Threat

John,

Slander

Thought you should know that your so called mate - Jack Smith, has been boasting to audiences at the shoot is involved with, about your little business arrangements. That is that you are managing the firm for him tax dodge, even though the 'firm' carries no stock of its own, and in return he has paid for everything.

Dear senator Helms
you the hell
think you are
fascists nazi
you nazis make me
sick

Abuse

Dear Madame,
You are nothing but a dirty old slut-bitch-whore to every man that comes around, just like your old woman and other ancestors. Send me plenty of money by next Sunday, or I'll have you killed by Sunday night. Your grand children should be burned to death as you watch. Like you no good.

Abuse + Threat

Research questions

- How do English MFTs compare to other important registers of the English language?
- Which situational parameters are the most useful to describe MFTs and to predict some of the variation in their language?
- Is it possible to establish an initial categorisation of MFTs based on their linguistic features?

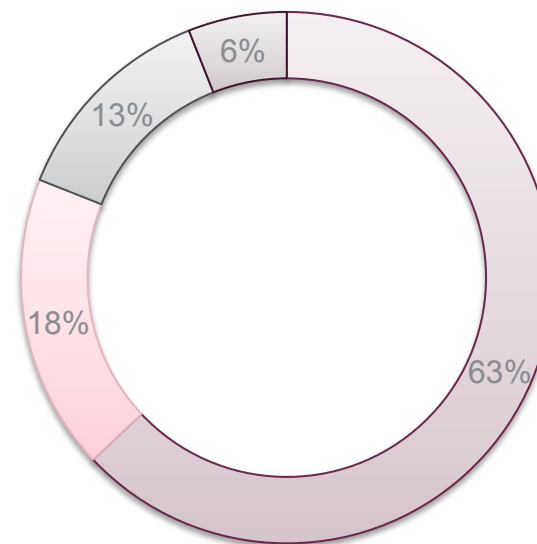
The MFT corpus

104 texts

36,792 tokens

Average text length: 354 tokens
(min: 100; max: 1596)

Sources



■ FBI Vault ■ Private collections ■ Internet searches ■ Textbooks

Methodology

Context



- + personal
- threatening
- + slander
- ...



- personal
- + threatening
- slander
- ...



- + personal
- + threatening
- + slander
- ...

Linguistic features

The Situational Parameters

Biber's (1994) Situational Parameters of Variation

TABLE 2.2 Major Situational Characteristics of Eleven Registers

Register	I.A. Addressor	I.B. Addressee	III.A. Domain	III.BC Share Timeplace		IV.A. Mode	V.A. Production	VI.B. Purposes:		
								VI.A. Factual	Persuade	Inform Ent
Personal letter	sg/pl	sg/pl	pers	familiar		wr	rev	—	—	med —
Professional letter	sg	sg	work	—		wr	rev	—	—	high low
Letter of recommendation	sg	pl	work	no		wr	rev	fact	high	med low
Face-to-face conversation	sg/pl	sg/pl	—	yes		sp	online	—	—	— —
Lecture	sg	pl	—	yes		sp	planned	fact	low	high low
Sermon	sg	pl	rel	yes		sp	planned	spec?	high	high med
Novels	sg	unen	art	no		wr	rev	imag	low	low? high
Narration	—	—	—	—		—	—	—	—	— —
Psychology article	sg/pl	unen	acad	no		wr	rev	fact	med	high low
Expository prose	—	—	—	no		wr	rev	—	—	high low
Academic prose	sg/pl	unen	acad	no		wr	rev	—	—	high low

Many do not apply to MFTs

Some distinctions within MFTs are not captured

The Situational Parameters



Binary or multiple options per Parameter:

threatening vs non-threatening

*harm to addressee vs harm to third party
vs harm to both addressee and third
party)*

Methodology



Context

+ personal
- threatening
+ slander
...



- personal
+ threatening
- slander
...



+ personal
+ threatening
+ slander
...

Linguistic features

5% modal verbs
15% personal pronouns
30% nouns
...

1% modal verbs
40% personal pronouns
20% nouns
...

10% modal verbs
15% personal pronouns
25% nouns
...

Linguistic features



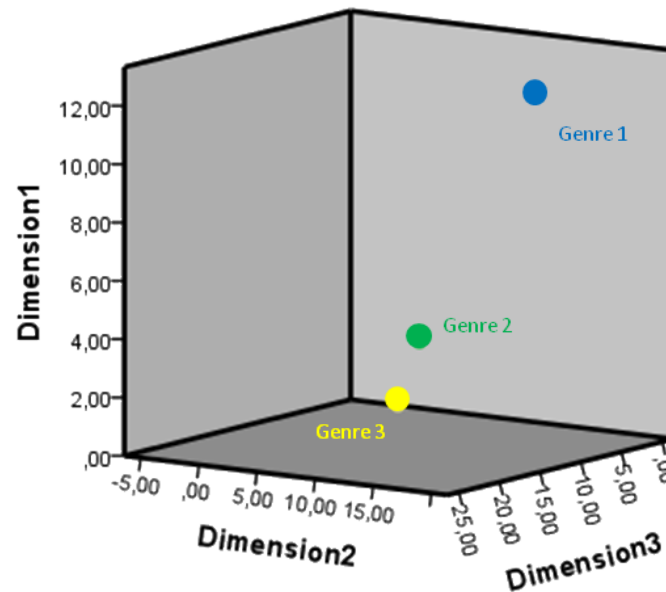
Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (Nini, 2014)

<https://sites.google.com/site/multidimensionaltagger/>

Biber's (1988) Variation across Speech and Writing

68 linguistic features:

relative frequencies of personal pronouns, adverbs, adjectives, sentence relatives, past participles, etc.

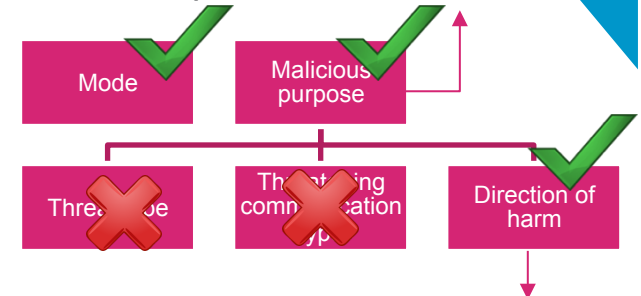


Results

Dimension 1 – Involved vs Informational Production



Dimension 4 – Overt Expression of Persuasion



Dimension 2 – Narrative concerns

Malicious purpose

Dimension 4

Overt Expression of Persuasion

Threatening

VS

Non-threatening

- Modal verbs
- Suasive verbs
- Conditional subordinations

Threatening MFTs

Professional letters

Speeches

Other genres

Malicious purpose

Letter collected from the FBI Vault addressed to Senator Helms – Dimension 4 score = 15.79

Dear Senator Helms,
or to whoever reads this letter first.

Inform everyone who are national senators and representatives and say or show this letter amonge them.

A desolation has been decreed upon the nation and upon those in the nation. If I do not receive \$25,000 dollars in cashiers checks at \$25 each these things shall take place.

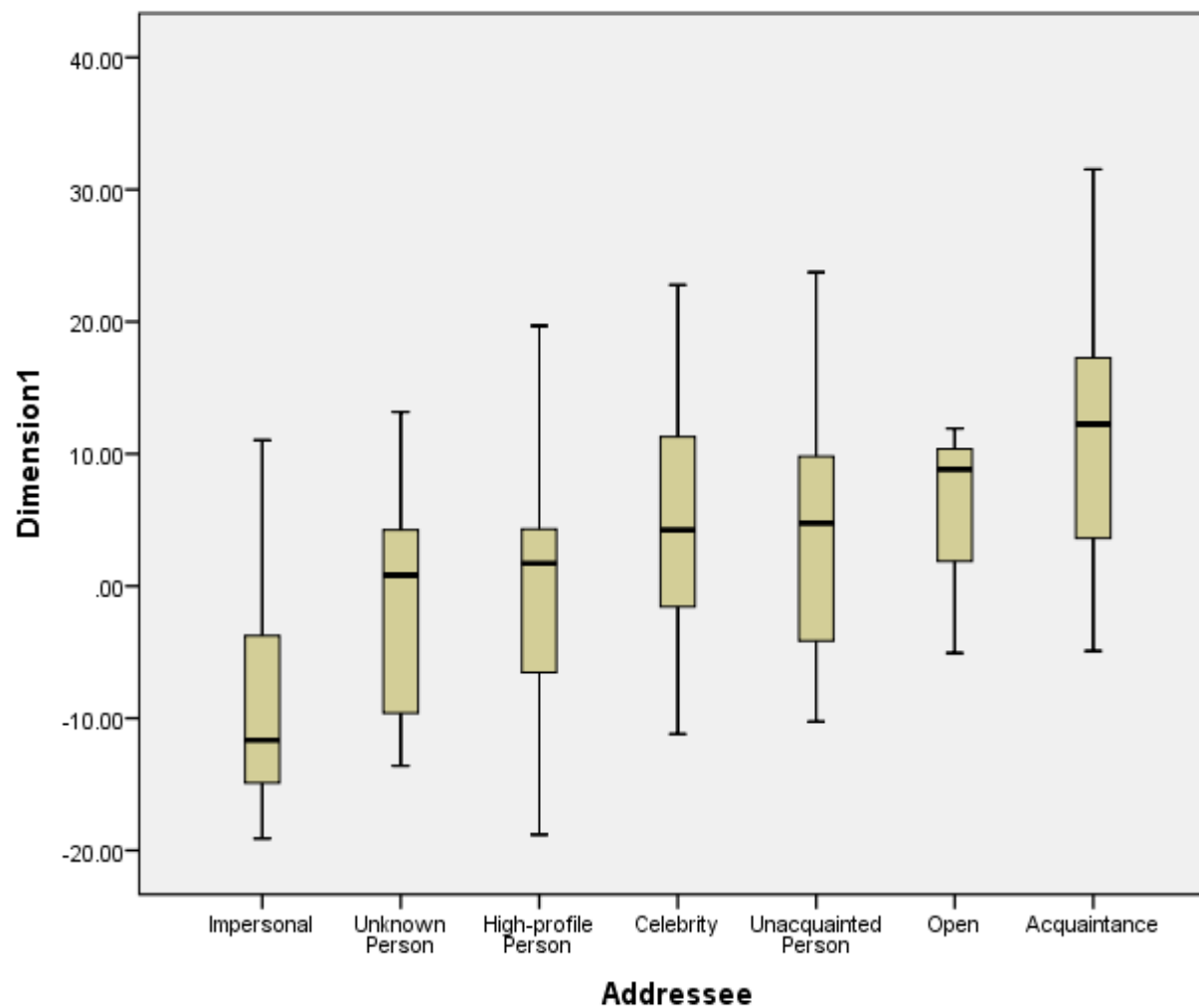
The two wings of the capital building shall crumble to the ground. It will happen in this manner.

Twenty four hours after this letter is read by anyone the walls of the two wings shall being to shake and will shake for 30 minutes. At the end of thirty minutes the walls will slowly give way allowing any and all who are in there to flee. The crumbling will last for 30 minutes and at the end of the 30 minutes period all of the two wings of the capital shall be crumbled to the ground.

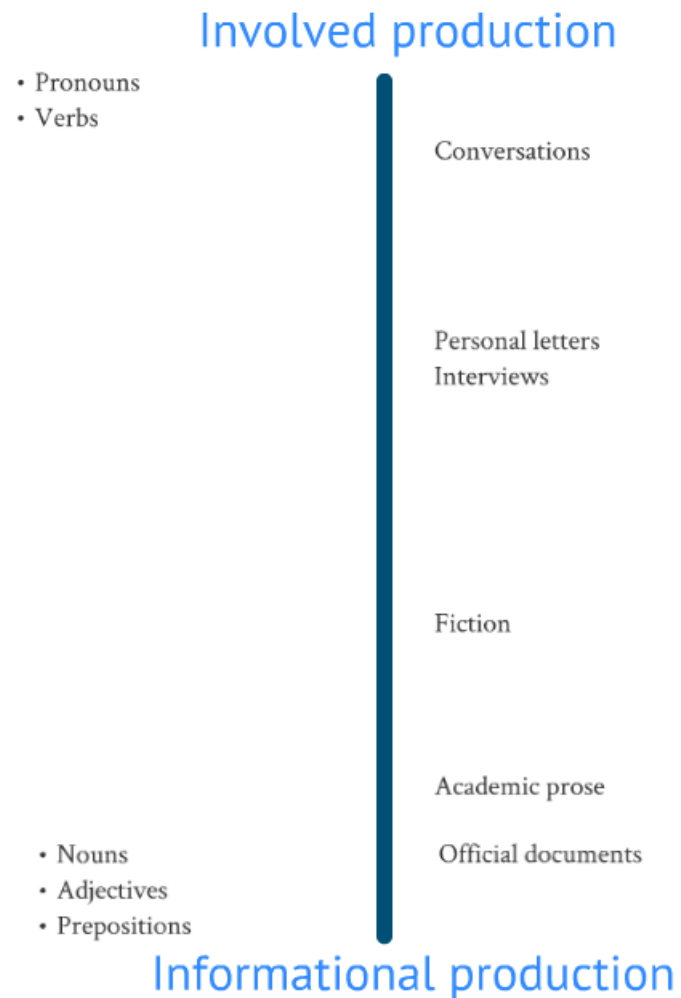
The part that holds the dome shall not be harmed, just the outer wings.

I will deal with the SBI official here in Murfreesboro N.C.

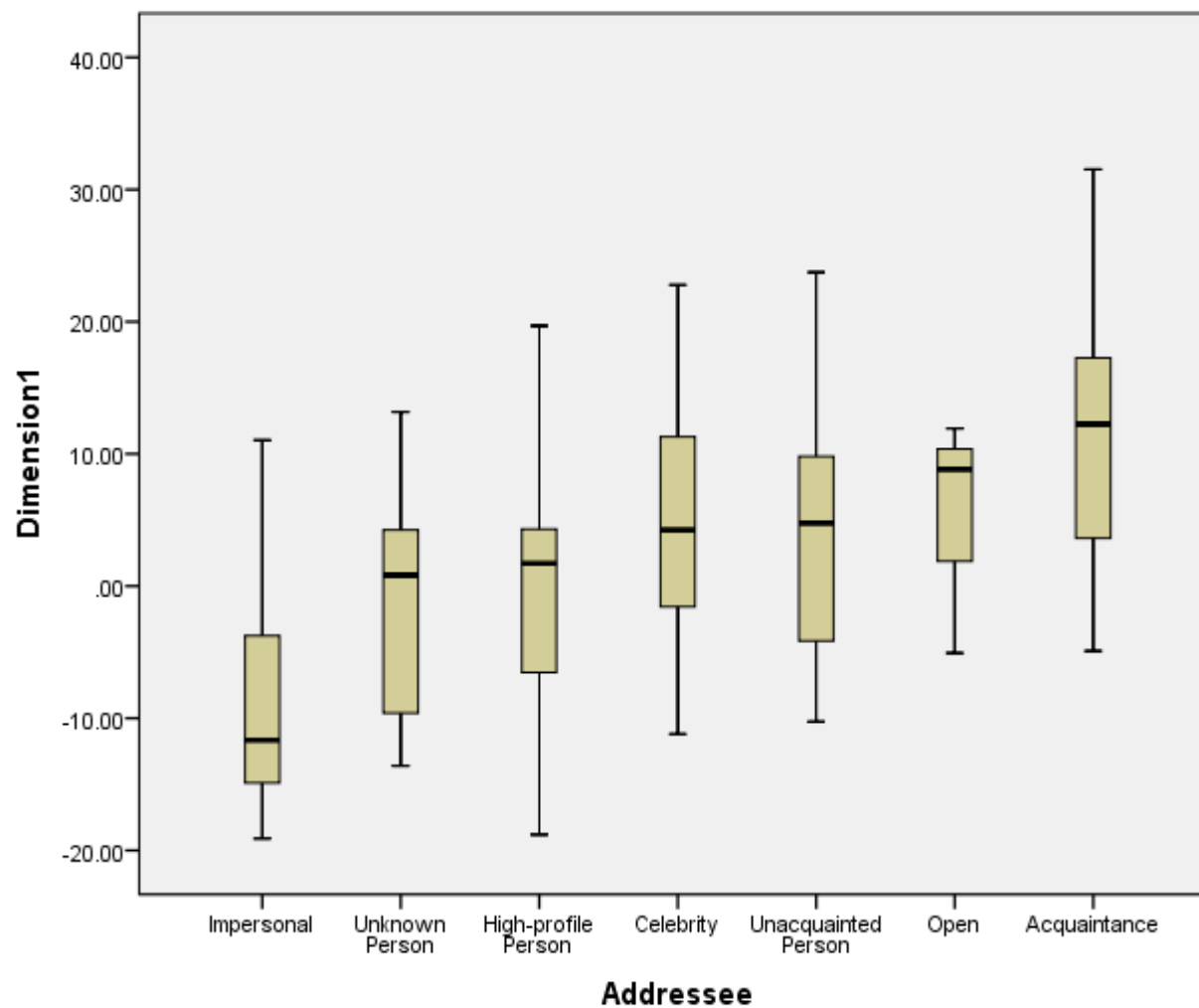
Addressee



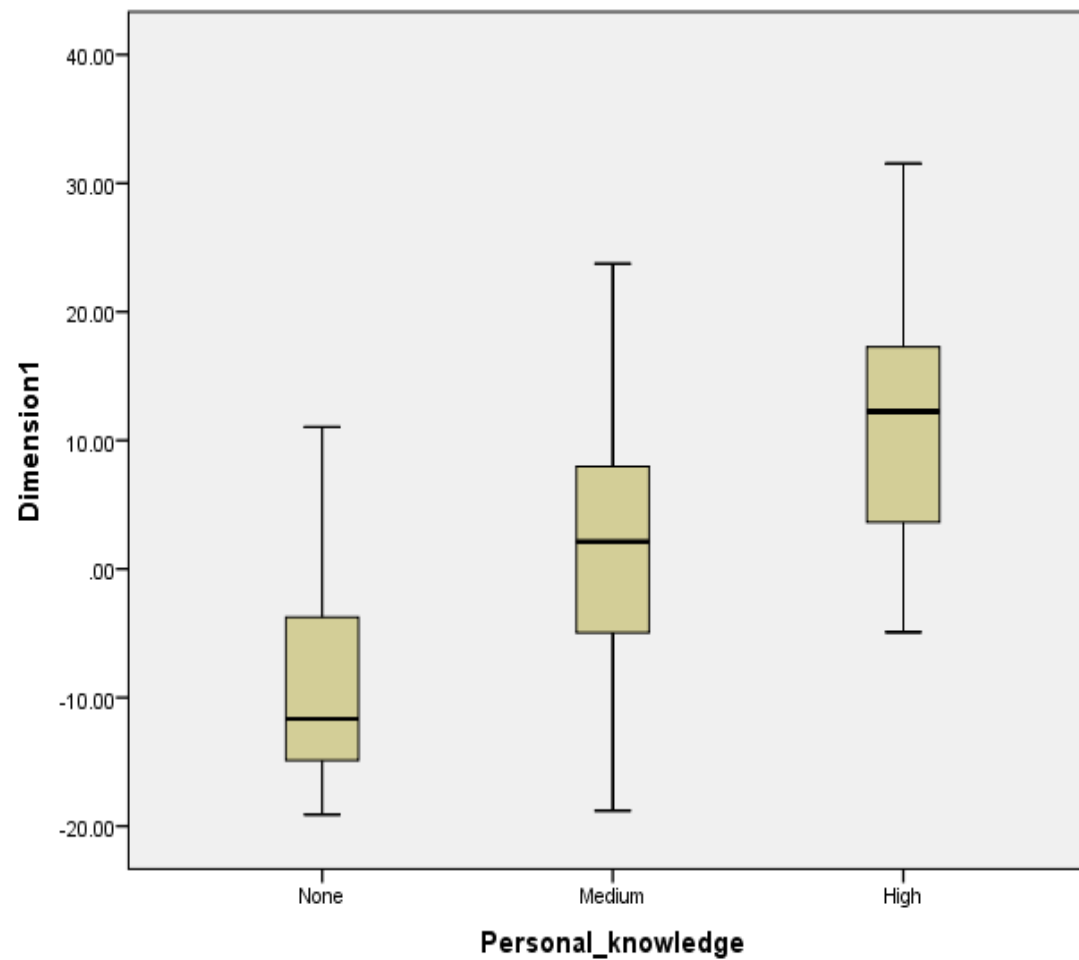
Addressee



Addressee



Addressee



Addressee

Involved production

- Pronouns
- Verbs

Conversations

High personal knowledge MFTs

Personal letters
Interviews

Low personal knowledge MFTs

Fiction

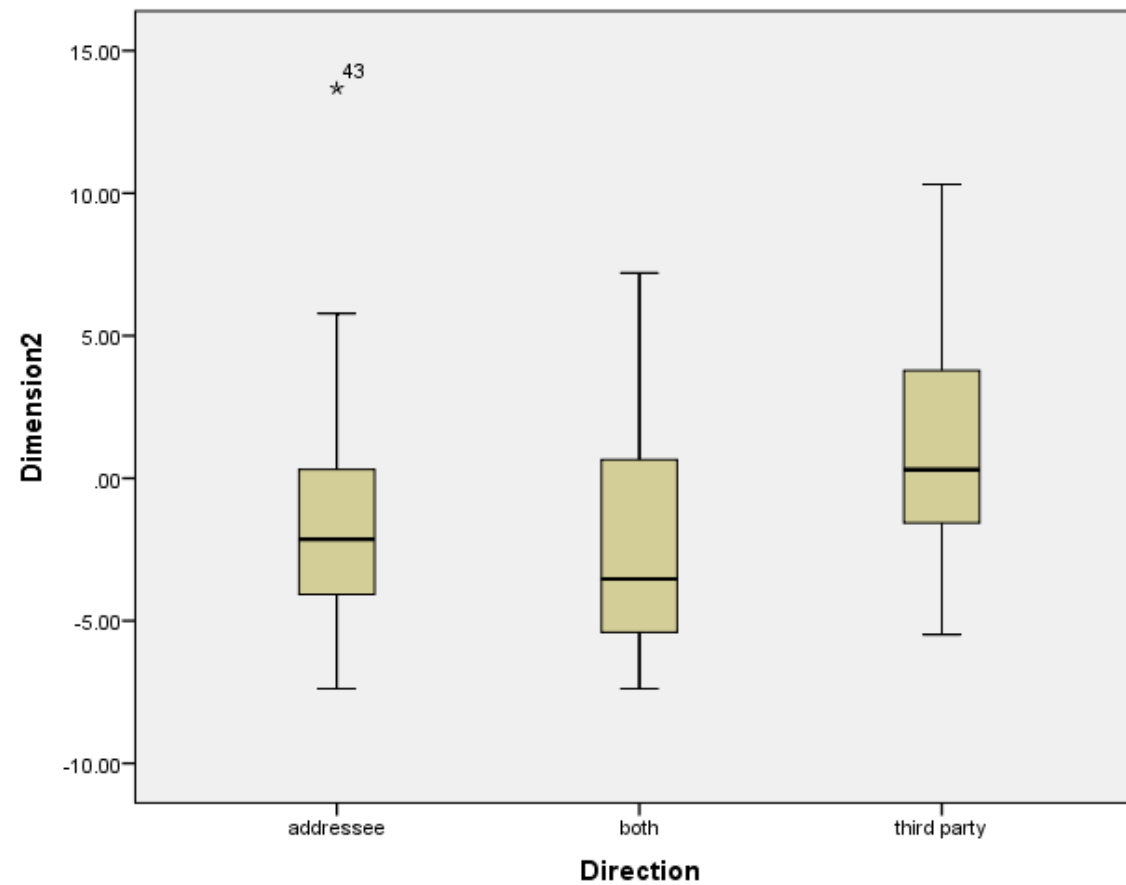
Academic prose

Official documents

- Nouns
- Adjectives
- Prepositions

Informational production

Direction of harm



Direction of harm

Dimension 2 Narrative

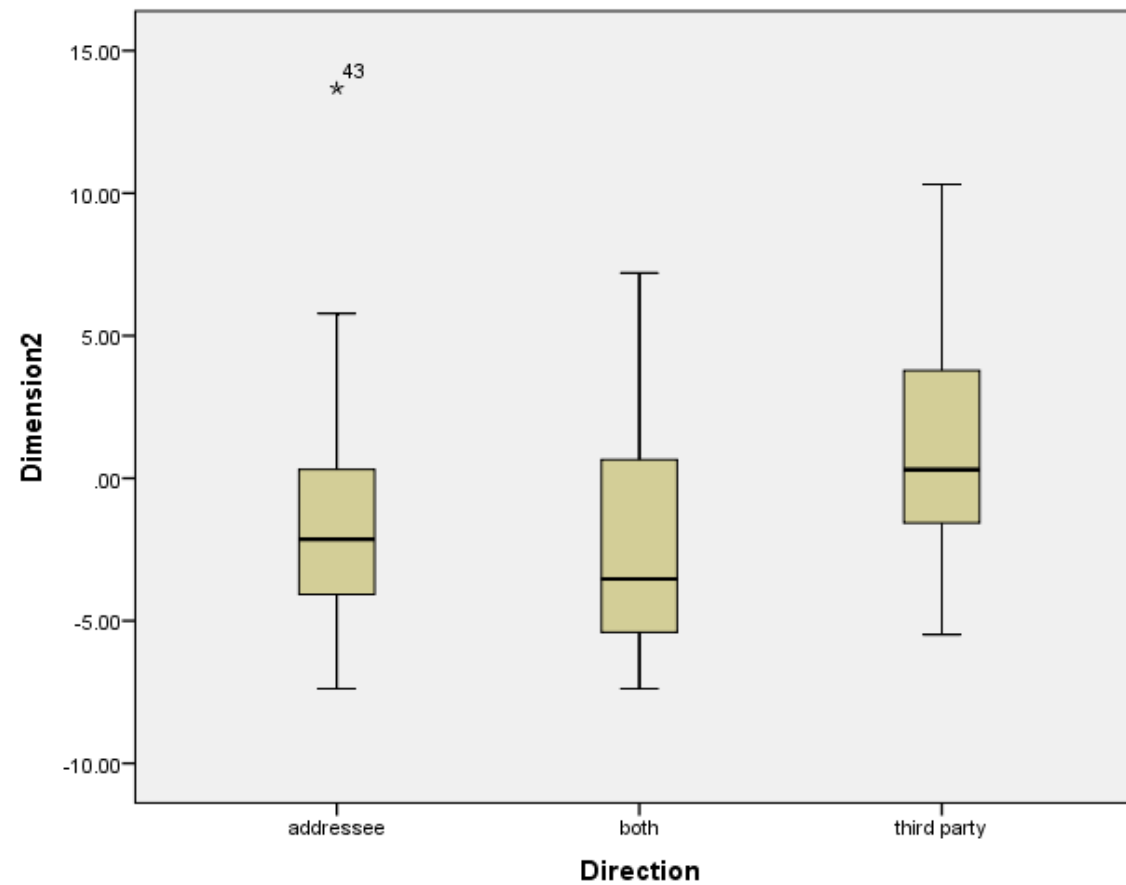
- Past tense
- Third person pronouns

Fiction

Other genres

Non Narrative

Direction of harm



Direction of harm

Dimension 2 Narrative

- Past tense
- Third person pronouns

Fiction

MFTs with harm directed to a third party

Other genres

Non Narrative

Direction of harm

Letter collected from Pennebaker (2011: 255) tagged as 'harm to third party' – Dimension 2 = 5.04

Ms. Livingston:

I think you should know that David Simpson **has** perpetuated the idea that you have **no** credibility among your colleagues. **He says** you altered depositions and falsified expense reports at your last job in New York. **He says** this is the reason you left so abruptly.

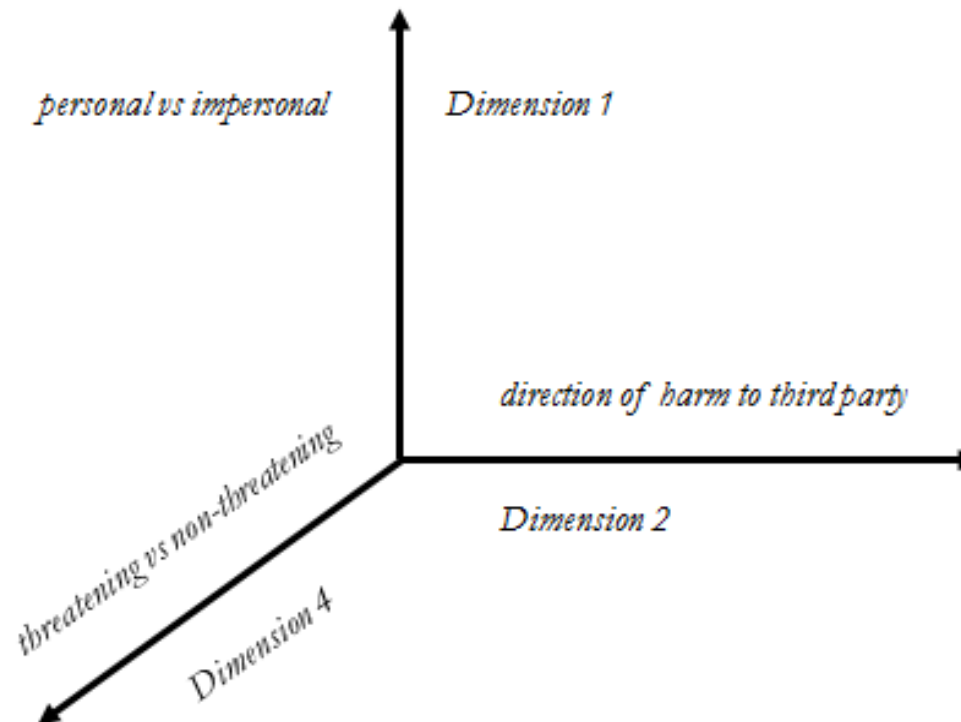
He has spread these stories to people in various departments, including Billing, Personnel, Public Relations and to those at the executive level. It is uncertain how and when our senior partners will deal with this. But if you start getting the cold shoulder, you will know why.

When I first heard of this, I was surprised, but took what he said at face value. Of course, this was before I learned of his voracious appetite for propagating half-truths, gossip, and outright lies, all in the name of somehow making himself look knowledgeable and "better."

Such a pity. **He** obviously has talent, but it is all negated by his vile, malicious tongue. All I can think of is a tremendous sense of insecurity. But I digress. I just **thought** you would like to know.

A friend

Three dimensions of variation



Research questions

- How do English MFTs compare to other important registers of the English language?
 - MFTs are situated in between personal and professional letters. They are a particular type of persuasive professional letters
- Which situational parameters are the most useful to describe MFTs and to predict some of the variation in their language?
 - Malicious purpose, Addressee type, Direction of harm
- Is it possible to establish an initial categorisation of MFTs based on their linguistic features?
 - Three linguistic dimensions separate MFTs: D1, D2, and D4

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