

Linguistic Evaluation Of Written Communication In Indian Construction Sector: A Review And Framework

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Abstract : *Effective communication plays a vital role in fostering understanding and coordination among the members of any organization, irrespective of their positions in the organizational hierarchy. Along with transmission of information, organizational communication performs various other crucial functions like instructing, advising, guiding, motivating, negotiating, requesting and warning etc. It is therefore imperative to ensure that communication is clear, concise, complete, correct, concrete, courteous and considerate. As much of the significant communication is in the written form, it is essential to evaluate the overall efficacy of the language used in the written documents like reports, letters, circulars, memos, agendas, minutes and agreements etc. The language use does not merely determine the accuracy of information but also influence interpersonal relationship among the stakeholders. There have been numerous instances of misinterpretation of the message leading to interpersonal and organizational conflicts. In order to measure the effectiveness of written communication, the language used should be evaluated at various levels so as to understand its overall impact on communication. This paper attempts to carry out a systematic literature review in order to identify the research done so far on linguistic analysis in the areas apart from humanities and literature. It aims to explore if such analysis has been done in the context of the Indian construction industry. Upon a comprehensive review of literature, this paper proposes a conceptual framework for carrying out a linguistic analysis of the written communication in construction documents. The framework would also enable to measure the conformity of the language used to the seven Cs (Clarity, Conciseness, Completeness, Concreteness, Consideration, Courtesy and Correctness) of effective communication. Thus, not only some crucial insights about the language used will be gained but also the overall effectiveness of the written communication can be measured.*

Keywords : *Linguistic evaluation; Written communication; Conceptual framework; Indian construction industry*

INTRODUCTION

The Indian construction industry involves four major sectors viz. Construction, Real Estate, Infrastructure and Projects which are popularly called CRIP sectors. The industry involves numerous large-scale, medium-scale and small-scale organisations. Construction projects involve many internal and external stakeholders that need to work in close coordination.

Without effective communication, such coordination is not possible. In fact, ineffective communication leads to creating misunderstandings and on many occasions causes conflicts. It is therefore imperative that the organisational communication conforms to the essential seven Cs of effective communication viz. Clarity, Conciseness, Completeness, Concreteness, Consideration, Courtesy and Correctness. The most

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crucial factor in observing these principles is the judicious use of language. As almost all written communication takes place in English, an appropriate use of the English language may foster conformity to the seven Cs thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of communication.

Organisational communication performs several important functions like coordination, negotiation, imparting necessary information, persuasion, motivation, giving orders, instructions, advice and suggestions etc. Through all these functions not only messages are transmitted but also relationships are developed. Formal, cordial and polite communication strengthens positive relationship among the internal and external stakeholders. Writing in English is a very demanding skill. Almost 70% of organisational communication is written communication. There are formal letters of various kinds like sales, order, requisitions, applications, invitation, grievances, appointment, confirmation, resignation, wishes, congratulatory etc. Similarly, professionals have to write reports, notices, circulars, agenda, minutes and emails etc. Writing is more challenging than speaking as it requires utmost accuracy with respect to grammar, spellings, punctuations, formal vocabulary and the overall presentation of text in paragraphs following suitable formats. Care is not only required with these syntactic and lexical aspects but also with the semantic and stylistic aspects of the language used in order to ensure that the seven Cs are observed.

A systematic linguistic evaluation can offer useful insights into how the language should be used for communication at syntactical, lexical, semantic and stylistic levels. Language is an important tool for communication, be it informal or formal. In fact, it is the selection of syntactic compositions, tone and an appropriate linguistic style that determines the overall effectiveness of communication. In Applied Linguistics, a study of the language used in a text for analyzing its syntactic (use of sentence structures),

lexical (choice of words), semantic (meaning conveyed) and stylistic (style of expression) is called linguistic analysis (Hiray *et al.* 2017). Effective communication can foster a good interpersonal relationship between the sender(s) and the receiver(s). Clear and unambiguous language with a formal and polite tone may nurture healthy business relationships among the parties involved. As communication is the lifeblood of any organisation, it has implications beyond mere exchange of messages and information. Therefore, this paper proposes a framework for the linguistic evaluation of the language used in written documents in the construction industry so as to ensure that the seven Cs are complied with.

LINGUISTIC EVALUATION: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Linguistics is an academic field that scientifically studies language and all its aspects. There are different branches of Linguistics like Phonology, Phonetics, Syntax, Lexis, Semantics, Pragmatics, Morphology and Stylistics. Linguistic evaluation of a written text refers to a comprehensive analysis of the language used in any context largely at the syntactic, lexical, semantic and stylistic levels.

The syntactic analysis refers to the study of syntax, which means sentence structures for their grammaticality and acceptability. There are numerous ways by which a written sentence could be grammatically composed. The three basic sentence types are simple, compound and complex. Similarly, there are many other structures like Active and Passive voices, Superlative, Comparative and Positive degree compositions, affirmative and negative structures, direct and indirect speeches, assertive, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory sentence types etc. which need to be framed grammatically correctly. The accurate use of tenses can resolve the issue of ungrammatical compositions to a great extent. Quite often, grammatical inaccuracy leads to inappropriateness of the compositions conveying

distorted or ambiguous meanings. The structure variability can determine the level of complexity in the text. The preference to a certain type of structures over other structures is a stylistic feature. The stylistic analysis includes the study of diction which refers to the choice of words by the writer. The presentation of the text using certain formats and standard layouts, tone and the meaning conveyed, too are part of stylistic analysis. The outcomes of the analysis can give us insights into a peculiar style of writing and its impact on communication. The semantic analysis refers to the study of the meaning conveyed. It explores if the intended meaning is conveyed accurately or there is ambiguity in it. The meaning can be conveyed directly or indirectly through the words or structures chosen to assign a specific tone which carries the intended meaning. Ambiguity causes miscommunication and misunderstanding and therefore it is essential to ensure clarity in communication. This can be achieved by using simple language and words as per the understanding level of the receiver. Finally, the lexical analysis aims at studying the words used by the writer and classifies the words into informal and formal words or colloquial and technical/scientific/business words. Such analysis can provide insights into the most appropriate words to be used in a specific context so as to ensure clarity and also comply with the other Cs of communication.

The objective of the linguistic analysis in the context of this study is not merely to study the linguistic competence of the writer; it largely focuses on the nature of the language used for writing and its impact on communication. Such a study could also be useful in studying the impact on comprehension on the part of the receiver as well as its impact on the interpersonal relationship between the sender and the receiver. The study can offer valuable insights into how the language used in writing influences the seven Cs of communication, thereby affecting the overall

effectiveness of communication.

OBJECTIVES

- i) To carry out a comprehensive literature review in order to measure the extent of work done in the area of linguistic evaluation of written communication with reference to the Indian construction sector.
- ii) To propose a framework for the linguistic evaluation of written communication in order to examine its conformity to the seven Cs of communication.

METHODOLOGY

This study attempts to measure the extent of work done so far through a comprehensive literature survey and review. Based on the findings from the literature review and the established practices of linguistic evaluation, a new framework for the linguistic evaluation of written communication is proposed. The framework may enable the researchers to evaluate some essential linguistic aspects of the language used in construction documents including letters, reports, circulars, proposals etc. The proposed framework would also facilitate to evaluate the conformity of the linguistic factors to the seven Cs of communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Various research papers dealing with the linguistic evaluation of written communication in different contexts were explored and reviewed. However, despite a comprehensive literature survey using all the major established sources for identifying relevant research papers, a very few papers could be found on the linguistic evaluation of texts done in the fields other than literature and humanities. There is no literature available that offers any insights into the linguistic evaluation of the language used in the documents of the Indian construction industry. There are a few studies available that examine the language used in contracts, but no study was found on the evaluation of other construction documents.

However, a few research papers dealing with the linguistic analyses in some relevant contexts have been reviewed and discussed in this section. As the proposed study deals with syntactic, semantic, lexical and stylistic analyses of the language used in construction documents, a few studies that used such analyses have been examined for understanding their objectives, methodology and results.

Syntactic analysis examining grammatical compositions focuses on their grammatical accuracy and acceptability. Namgay and Singha (2016) analysed the grammatical linguistic patterns in the social science and technology textbooks. They evaluated the effectiveness of such patterns in identifying the key concepts highlighted in those textbooks and also measured the suitability of the identified linguistic patterns in other fields. Similarly, McNamara (2010) analysed the linguistic features of writing quality. This study was carried out to examine the degree to which a high and low proficiency essays can be predicted by the linguistic indices of cohesion, syntactic complexity, the diversity of words used by the writer, and characteristics of words.

Durst (1987) explored the cognitive and linguistic demands of analytic writing. The objective of the study was to investigate the thinking processes students employed and the text structures they produced in analytic writing. In analytic writing, students employed more varied and complex thinking operations than in summary writing, asking more complicated questions, making higher-level plans, and spending more time interpreting the readings and evaluating their own essays. Analytic writing is useful with respect to investigative reports or research articles/proposals.

Attan et al. (2013) attempted to determine the expectations of employers in respect of communication. The study primarily had two research questions: (i) what criteria do employers adopt in evaluating written assignments? and (ii) what is the

minimum level expected for acceptance of completed tasks in the workplace? A questionnaire survey was carried out for the purpose of the study. The respondents were essentially human resource personnel from different fields like the automotive, oil & gas, media, medical and higher education. The respondents were given a few written analyses drafted by students, and they were expected to give their responses on whether the quality of written analyses was acceptable. The study aimed at knowing their criteria in determining the acceptability of the written analyses, their views of good and poor writing and their expected minimum level of written work quality. The results revealed that the employers placed importance on accuracy of reporting, conciseness, correct use of expressions and terminologies and maturity of thought, among others. On the basis of these inputs, a draft rating scale of the expected writing ability of graduating students deemed relevant for the workplace was developed. The study provides some crucial insights into what employers expect with respect to the writing quality of their employees.

Anson and Forsberg (1990) examined the transitions made by writers from academic to professional discourse communities. Six university senior students had participated as subjects in the study. This was an empirical study based on group discussions, written course journals, transcriptions of taped, discourse-based and general interviews and a 15-page retrospective analysis of each subject's writing on the job. This paper highlights a significant difference between academic writing and professional writing and emphasises the need to bridge the gap. The paper describes the transitional journey of a senior university student from academic writing to professional writing through the phases titled "expectation", "frustration" and "accommodation". The paper recommends the extension of the pedagogy of professional writing.

Cruz and Parina (2015) carried out a stylistic analysis

of Legal English used in court resolutions. They evaluated the meanings of disputed terms in two different ways, in terms of definitions and in terms of how far the word deviates from its typical use and that different approaches to word meaning can have severe jurisprudential implications. This study also involves a lexical analysis which identifies the disputed terms and further carries out a semantic analysis of those terms in order to investigate the stylistic features of Legal English. Berry *et al.* (2003) studied the linguistic sources of ambiguity in contract drafting and software specifications. The study identified some common ambiguities that make many software requirement specifications and legal contracts difficult to interpret correctly. This emphasises the need of linguistic evaluation that helps highlight ambiguities and suggests the necessary corrective measures.

Many researchers have emphasized a clear and concise use of language in order to facilitate mutual understanding and strengthen relationship among the internal and external stakeholders working on a project. Kennedy *et al.* (1997) assert that as language is the primary medium of communication, it should be used not only for ensuring understanding of information but also for fostering effective interpersonal relationship among the stakeholders. A systematically and precisely drafted contract fosters clear communication ensuring smooth functioning of a project. With reference to contract documents, Haapio (2011) suggests that such documents should be written to make them easily comprehensible even to the non-legal professionals like the contracting parties over the legal administrators and arbitrators. These researchers have studied and recommended clarity in expression in writing to enhance the readability and comprehension of the vital documents such as contracts. However, the analysis of language in such studies is only restricted to the study of readability and comprehension on the part of the receivers.

In a significant study pertaining to the Business

Contract Language (BCL), Neal *et al.* (2003) explored the requirements for developing a BCL so as to ensure clarity. They identified a base set of requirements for a contracting framework; a major part of which is concerned with the specification of a language which can be used to express contracting semantics which they call BCL (p. 1). They recommend a succinct syntax which can improve the communicative power in the contract document. Though this study makes a significant contribution to the study on the syntactic aspects of language, it is not concerned with the stylistic and semantic analyses of the language used in construction documents. It specifically focuses on contracts and not other documents used in the construction industry.

Ashipu and Umukoro (2014) did a lexical analysis of the legal language register in selected court cases in Nigeria, emphasising legal and abstract words used by the judicial officers in the course of speaking and writing legal documents. The study summarizes that the legal register use makes the language of law a typical and distinguishes it from other varieties of language. Rameezdeen and Rodrigo (2013) argue that “contract conditions mentioned in construction contracts are very difficult to read, with college level reading skills needed to comprehend half of the clauses. “The study establishes a linear relationship between readability and comprehension; it proves that improved readability increases the comprehension of a contract clause” (p.1). This study outlines the significance of readability and comprehension and therefore it could be deduced that the writers need to take into account these factors while drafting their documents.

Gales (2012, p.118) in his review of Gozdz-Roszkowski's book titled 'Patterns of Linguistic Variations in American Legal English: A Corpus-based Study (2011)' argues that “the legal language is heterogeneous, researchers have mainly focused on describing lexico-grammatical aspects found across all

legal categories e.g., the use of passive voice, shall, archaic adverbs or on describing one particular type of legal text e.g., testament language or prescriptive legal texts". The other aspects like style and semantic analyses are not directly considered in the linguistic analysis of legal English.

On the basis of the literature survey, it may be concluded that there is little work done with reference to the linguistic analysis of written communication in the Indian construction industry. However, the papers reviewed certainly provided with some significant insights into how the different levels of linguistic analyses could be carried out to address the most compelling issues in writing and thereby communication.

A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR LINGUISTIC EVALUATION

This paper attempts to conceptualise and design a comprehensive framework which could guide on how the language used in written communication be evaluated so as to make sure it complies with the seven Cs of effective communication.

The *Figure 1* describes the conceptual framework which could be used for analyzing the written documents not only in the construction sector but in any industry or context. The reviewer of the written documents should adopt a step by step approach and evaluate the language used at the four levels of linguistic analysis as described in the earlier sections of this paper. However, the steps in the analyses in order to measure the compliance with the seven Cs of communication can be briefly described as follows:

While carrying out the syntactic analysis, the reviewer should observe the grammatical accuracy and acceptability. The core grammaticality depends on the accurate use of tenses and also on the appropriate use of sentence types like simple, compound and complex compositions; similarly, there are many other structures like Active and Passive voices, Superlative, Comparative and Positive degree compositions, affirmative and negative structures, direct and indirect speeches, assertive, imperative, interrogative and exclamatory sentence types etc. which need to be framed grammatically correctly. The accurate use of

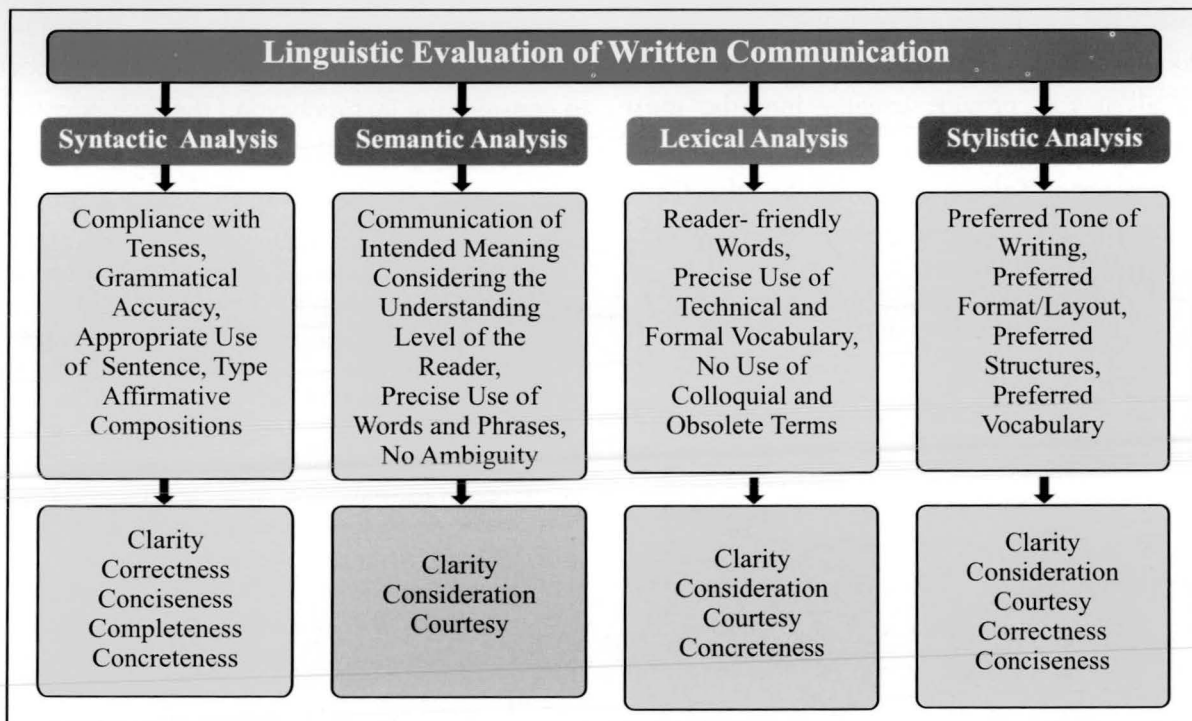


Figure 1: A Proposed Framework For Linguistic Evaluation

tenses can resolve the issue of ungrammatical compositions to a great extent. Use of active and affirmative compositions also enhances clarity. The syntactic analysis covering these aspects can foster clarity, correctness, conciseness, completeness and concreteness of communication.

The reviewer should then try to do the semantic analysis of the language used and explore if the intended meaning is conveyed accurately or there is ambiguity in it. The meaning can be conveyed directly or indirectly through the words or structures chosen to assign a specific tone which carries the intended meaning. The reviewer should focus on the intended meaning and examine if it is precisely conveyed without ambiguity, considering the understanding level of the reader. Here, clarity can be achieved by the precise use of words and phrases and appropriate compositions. Emphasis on unambiguous meaning certainly complies with clarity, consideration and courtesy.

In the third step of the lexical analysis, the reviewer should aim at studying the words used by the writer and classify the words into informal and formal words or colloquial and technical/scientific/business words. Such analysis can provide insights into the most appropriate words to be used in a specific context so as to ensure clarity and also comply with the other Cs of communication like consideration, courtesy and concreteness.

Finally, the stylistic analysis includes the study of diction which refers to the choice of words by the writer. The presentation of the text using certain formats and standard layouts, tone and the meaning conveyed. The outcomes of the analysis can give us insights into a peculiar style of writing and its impact on communication. A neutral and objective tone supports clarity, consideration and correctness whereas the polite tone nurtures courtesy. An appropriate format of writing any document can facilitate clarity and conciseness. Similarly,

appropriate use of structures and vocabulary can foster clarity, correctness and conciseness.

Thus, if applied, the proposed framework can be a practical tool in measuring written communication in order to evaluate its compliance with the seven Cs of communication.

CONCLUSION

The present study as attempted to carry out a literature survey in order to measure the extent of work done in the area of linguistic evaluation of written communication with reference to the Indian construction sector. Though a few useful and relevant studies could be identified and some crucial insights into the linguistic evaluation received, it may be concluded that there is little research done in with respect to the Indian construction industry. This study has also endeavoured to conceptualise a framework which could enable a systematic linguistic evaluation of the written documents not only in the Indian construction sector but also in any industry or sector. Using the proposed framework, the compliance of the written communication with the seven Cs of effective communication can be measured. However, this framework needs to be validated and further extended to consider the factors beyond the factors covered in the proposed four-level analysis.

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