

Exploring Language Features of FIDIC Conditions from the Lens of Multi-dimensional Approach

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Abstract

The increased exchanges of construction endeavors between China and her international counterparts have highlighted the importance of construction contracts, underlining the significance of the FIDIC Conditions for its wide adoption worldwide. However, a language perspective has yet to be adopted when exploring construction contracts. This study aims to uncover the language features of the General Conditions in the Red Book of FIDIC Conditions from the scope of the Multi-dimensional approach, which is conducive to a better understanding of construction contracts. In this study, salient language features of the General Conditions were uncovered in a visualized manner through the employment of the Multidimensional Analysis Tagger (MAT). It was found that nouns and normalization were frequently used in the General Conditions, with high frequencies of attributive adjectives, total prepositional phrases, predictive modals, and passive voice (agentless passives and by-passives). As to the general genre features of the Red Book, it was found to possess the features of being information-oriented, non-narrative, context-independent, self-assertive, abstract, and non-real-time-oriented. Those features further render the conditions formality in style, explicitness in communicative purposes, objectivity in stance, and authority in position. Such findings interrelate with each other and corroborate each other. They are of great professional and pedagogical significance for non-native practitioners.

Keywords: Language Feature, FIDIC Conditions, Multidimensional Approach, Lexico-Grammatical Features, General Genre Features

Introduction

Construction contracts have played an increasingly important role in the world construction exchanges. That is also true with China, with her active participation in the international construction market. According to the figure released by the Ministry of Commerce of China, the turnover of international projects contracted by corporations from China in 2022 is 1042.49 billion US dollars, with an increase rate of 4.3%. Under such a

background, construction contracts become a critical device to safeguard the interests of the parties involved. To ensure the reliability and credibility of construction contracts, standard forms of contracts are preferred by all parties related to international construction projects. One of the most popular contracts is released by FIDIC. FIDIC (Fédération Internationale Des Ingénieurs-Conseils), the International Federation of Consulting Engineers, is the authoritative organization that provides consultation on engineering and construction (Dai, 2020). It formulates and renews FIDIC Conditions of Contracts every few years for various construction projects.

With the evolution of FIDIC Conditions for construction contracts, they have become one of the widest-adopted standards for construction work worldwide. In 1999, FIDIC issued a suite of four forms of construction contracts distinguished by the colours of their covers, in which the Red Book, Conditions of Contract for Construction, is the most widely used one for its close connection with our life (Wang & Li, 2016). That is also true in China, where, in many cases, parties involved in relevant international construction contracts usually adopt the General Conditions of the Red Book directly and draft their particular conditions under its guidelines to fit their specific needs.

For the above reason, it is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of FIDIC Conditions. Significant efforts have been made in China to decode FIDIC conditions better. To the best of the writer's knowledge, most construction-related majors in China's universities have courses concerning FIDIC conditions in their curriculum, in which the Red Book has become a must for students of relevant fields. However, the teaching methods concerning the construction contracts, including the Red Book, seemed relatively rigid and low in efficiency, with word-by-word translation and learning templates by rote as the primary measures (Ning & Wang, 2019).

In view of what has been discussed above, this study aims to explore language features of FIDIC Conditions from two aspects, i.e., lexico-grammatical features and general genre features (functional features). Therefore, two research questions are formulated:

1. What are the lexico-grammatical features of the FIDIC Conditions?
2. What are the general genre features of the FIDIC Conditions?

One thing should be noted. Those two features are not independent of each other but a coin's two sides, revealing language features of FIDIC Conditions from multiple facets.

Review of Literature

With regard to the study of FIDIC concerning the language perspective, scarcity can be found when retrieved in databases like Web of Science, Scopus, and CNKI. Most studies focus on the application of FIDIC to reduce risks or disputes (Mc Namara & Sepasgozar, 2021; Riaz et al., 2023; Abdel-Hamid & El-Din Mostafa, 2023). However, two studies are found to be insightful for exploring FIDIC Conditions and the construction contract based on the FIDIC conditions from the language perspective. Liu (2008) made a thorough exploration of FIDIC Conditions by adopting a Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) perspective. The study summarized that there were some language features in FIDIC Conditions on the scale of field (ideational), tenor(interpersonal), and mode (textual) levels. Though with limited research scope and methods, this study revealed that language variables were effective devices for realizing given functions.

Cheng (2009) carried out a case study based on an overseas construction contract. Via a thorough textual exploration of the construction contract's language features, this study found that certain language variables were quite frequently used. These variables included

modal verbs, normalizations, adverbials, adverbial clauses, attributive clauses, and passive structures. Though with limited samples, this study shed some light on the lexical and grammatical features of construction contracts relevant to FIDIC conditions. There are also a few studies concerning the language of construction contracts. For example, using text mining tools to translate terms or identify risks (Fantoni et al., 2021; Padhy et al., 2021; Elkhayat & Marzouk, 2022). Those studies suggested that language variables can be functional units for dealing with specific issues, and computerized tools are efficient for tapping the language features of a construction contract. However, gaps can be found in tapping the reasons for specific language appropriations and overall generic features of FIDIC Conditions.

To uncover language features of FIDIC Conditions convincingly, we employ Biber's (1995) multidimensional approach for textual analysis. It is a systematic exploration of genre variations from multiple perspectives. In this approach, he identified a series of language features of specific texts. Such features were derived from a cluster of language variables that are frequently employed in specific language variables that are countable and comparable with other genres. In other words, this approach can display the co-occurrence of certain salient language variables within a set of variables in a quantitative manner.

Besides, Biber (1995) identified seven functions closely related to linguistic features, i.e., ideational, textual, personal, interpersonal, contextual, processing, and aesthetic functions. In line with their specific communicative purposes, seven dimensions were formulated, which can reveal the general genre features on different dimensions in a broader sense. Nini (2019) upgraded Biber's approach and produced a computerized tool for textual analysis. As the name, the multi-dimensional analysis tagger, suggests, it can tagger specific texts credibly and output statistical results of the major language variables and reveal the functional features based on the counted language variables, in which six dimensions were proposed (details will be provided in the Method section).

By studying and cross-examining the results from different aspects, we can explicitly uncover the language features of a given genre. Such a scope of adopting the multi-dimensional approach is effective for tapping the language features of a given professional genre (Xie, 2020; Mu, 2021). According to SFL, certain language variables can take on specific functions (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In that sense, the frequent adoption of specific lexical and grammatical variables can give rise to particular language features touching off particular functions for certain communicative purposes. In other words, a genre's functions and certain language features are interdependent. They are the results of the appropriation of specific lexico-grammatical variables. Therefore, we can obtain substantial information concerning language variables by examining the functions of a given genre (Mu, 2021). Simply put, by scrutinizing the language features of a given genre, we can figure out how various language variables are appropriated to realize given functions. We can say that functions of a given genre, language features, and language variables constitute a nexus for specific communicative purposes.

Method

This study took the General Conditions of the Red Book as the research object for their representativeness. The text of the General Conditions was first transcribed into plain text (txt.) for further processing. Then, we input the processed text of General Conditions into the Multi-dimensional Analysis Tagger, which can analyze the use of the 67 significant language variables. Finally, a series of results were produced, which revealed the language features from multiple perspectives.

As mentioned, the MAT is inspired by Biber's research about text variations on different dimensions (Nini, 2019). It is a program for Windows to produce a series of statistical results revealing how lexico-grammatical variables of given genres are employed. In addition, it can classify the target genre into specific genre types on different dimensions which possess specific functions, as revealed in Table 1. To be exact, the MAT first tagged the text of the General Conditions of the Red Book. Then, based on the previous step, it computed the frequencies (per 100 tokens) of the 67 major language variables. Finally, it outputted statistical information in a diagram along with the graphical revelation of functional features in six dimensions.

Besides, the MAT can output the overused and underused variables uncovered by their z-scores. The z-score of a given language variable can reflect the distance of the language variable from the mean of its general use. Thus, it will be able to identify whether a language variable is in the regular category or less (more) frequently adopted than its general use. The score of the regular category ranges from -2 (included) to 2 (included). That is to say, if a language variable's z-score is 0, it is used on the average level. If the z-score of a variable is higher than 2 or lower than -2, we regard it as an overused or underused variable. Thus, we can spot the salient language variables in a given genre. Due to the space limitation, the study primarily focused on the variables whose frequencies exceed one time per hundred tokens and the variables that are computed as "overused" and "underused".

As to the general genre features, this study primarily concentrates on the generic functions based on Biber's multi-dimensional scale because they can reveal functions of the General Conditions in multiple dimensions. Such features can impress the readers with a general picture of the functions from different perspectives. In the MAT program, there are six dimensions for revealing the functional features of specific genres, as revealed in Table 1. Dimension 1 reveals whether a genre functions to involve people or inform the addressees. Dimension 2 concentrates on the style of the functioning. Dimension 3 focuses on whether the genre functions contextually or not. As to Dimension 4, emphasis is laid on whether the genre has the function of persuasion. Then, Dimension 5 switches to figure out whether a genre functions to provide abstract information or non-abstract information. The final dimension is devoted to tapping whether the genre functions to produce real-time information under strict time constraints. When texts of the General Conditions were keyed into the program, the program outputted scores based on those function-related features. The ranges of the scores can display the general genre features of the General Conditions selected from a different perspective, as displayed in Table 1. Besides, the MAT produced detailed statistics about the general language features of a given genre in graphs, uncovering the general genre features clearly and credibly.

Table 1

Biber's functional dimensions of text variety(Nini, 2019, p. 7)

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.

In a word, the MAT produced two kinds of language data: the first kind is concerned with lexico-grammatical features of a given genre; the other is about the general genre features related to the functions of the General Conditions.

Results

Lexico-grammatical Features

As revealed in Table 2, the total average word length (AWL) is 5.05 characters. The type-token ratio (TTR) is 161 tokens in the first 400 tokens. Nouns (NN) and nominalizations (NOMZ) appear 31.03 times per 100 tokens (25.38 and 5.65, respectively), and total prepositional phrases (PIN) have a frequency of 12.69 times per 100 tokens, followed by attributive adjectives (JJ), with a frequency of 4.36 times per 100 tokens. Predictive modals (PRMD) are the fourth, frequenting 2.3 times per 100 tokens. Passive voice, including agentless passives (PASS) and by-passives (BYP), has a frequency of 1.87 times per 100 tokens (agentless passives 1.61, by-passives 0.26).

As revealed in Figure 2, adverb (RB), type-token ratio (TTR), and be as main verb (BEMA) are underused. The overused variables are conditional adverbial subordinators (COND), nouns (NN) & nominalizations (NOMZ), phrasal coordination (PHC), predicative modals

Table 2

Screenshot of prominent language variables from the MAT

J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R
AWL	TTR	NN	NOMZ	PIN	JJ	PRMD	PASS	BYPA
5.05	161	25.38	5.65	12.69	4.36	2.3	161	0.26

Table 3

Screenshot of z-scores of salient language variables from the MAT

NOMZ	NN	PRMD	COND	SERE	PASTP	Underused Variables	Overused Variables
2.54	2.06	4.14	3.95	2.5	2.5	RB TTR BEMA	COND NN NOMZ PHC PRMD PASTP SERE
PHC	BYPA	PASS	RB	BEMA	TTR		
2.3	1.38	0.98	-3.13	-2.31	2.09		

Table 4

Dimension Scores of the General Conditions of Red Book

Filename	Dimension1	Dimension2	Dimension3	Dimension4	Dimension5	Dimension6	Closest Text Type
FIDIC	-17.64	-2.14	8.98	7.74	3.09	-0.79	Learned exposition

(PRMD), past participial clauses (PASTP), and sentence relatives (SERE).

General Genre Features Analysis

As shown in Table 4, the General Conditions are closest to “learned exposition” in the general sense after cumulative counting, which is information-oriented, trying to present information formally and explicitly (Nini, 2019). In the meantime, the MAT also made a comparative analysis with other common genres like conversations, news broadcasts, speeches, letters, general fiction, press reportage, academic prose, and official documents. Results were revealed by six visualized graphs concerning different dimensions.

(1) General genre features on Dimension 1

On the first dimension, identifying whether a given text is for informing or involving, the General Conditions has a score of -17.64, making this document closest to official documents, as revealed in Table 4 and Figure 1. That suggests the General Conditions have a high density of information and are full of nouns, long words, and adjectives (Nini, 2019). Thus, this dimension functions to inform. In other words, the general genre feature of this dimension is information-oriented.

(2) General genre features on Dimension 2

On the second dimension, the score of the General Conditions is -2.14. Such a score means that the conditions are on the non-narratives scale, suggesting that the past tense is not frequently used. On this dimension, the General Conditions are closest to academic prose, as displayed in Figure 2. Therefore, explaining objectively and systematically is a major function of the conditions. Such a feature consolidates that the General Conditions are the tools for clarifying rights and obligations, stipulating the procedures for undertaking tasks, and setting up mechanisms for resolving disputes and other issues related to the construction process. Briefly speaking, the general features of the conditions are non-narrative in this dimension.

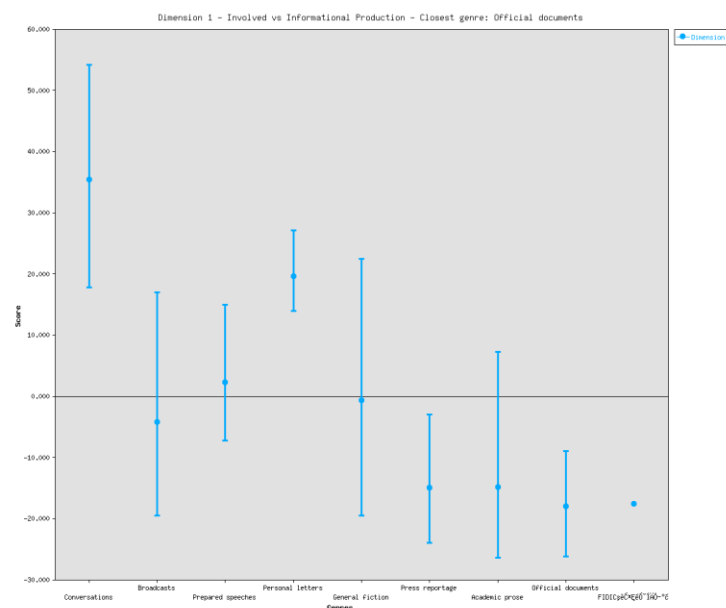


Figure 1 General genre features of the General Conditions on Dimension 1

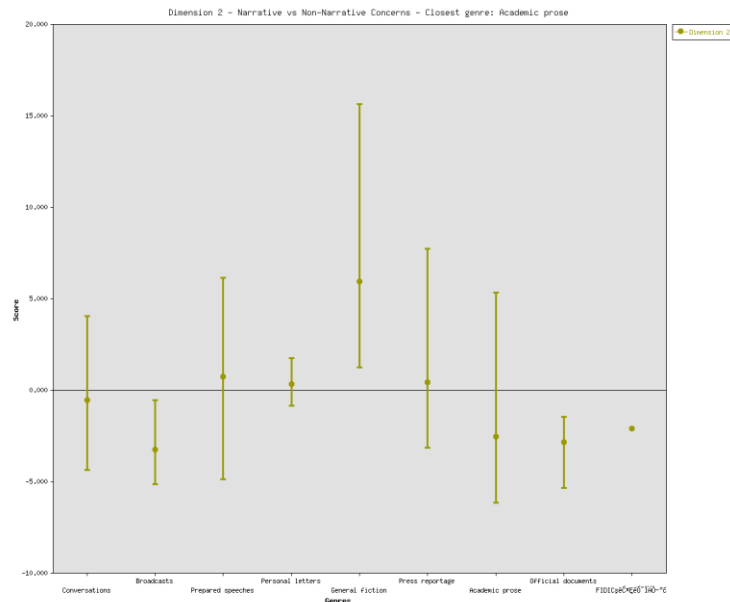


Figure 2 General genre features of the General Conditions Dimension 2

(3) General genre features on Dimension 3

With regard to the Dimension of “Explicit vs. Situation-Dependent Reference”, the score is 8.98. This score suggests that the General Conditions are independent of their immediate context. In other words, the conditions can function independently without the interference of the immediate contexts. As can be seen from Figure 3, they are closest to official documents in the generic function, sharing great similarities with academic prose.

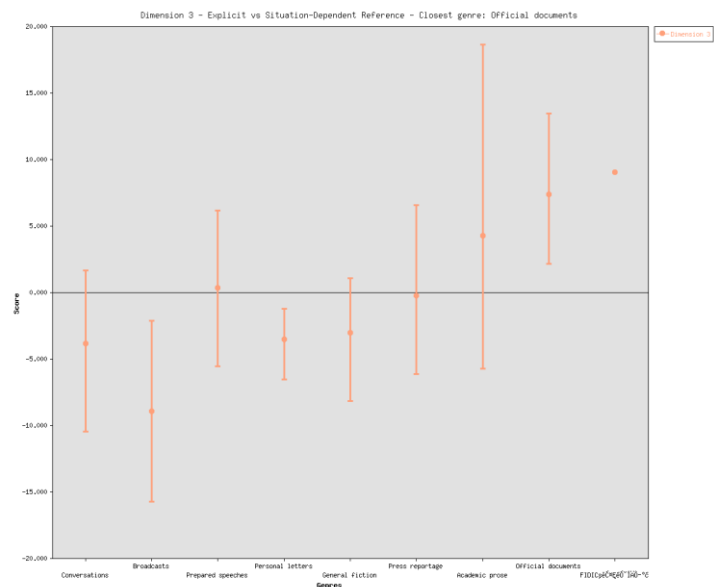


Figure 3 General genre features of the General Conditions on Dimension 3

(4) General genre features on Dimension 4

Table 4 reveals that the dimension score is 7.74 on the Dimension of “Overt Expression of Persuasion”. This score suggests that the General Conditions can state drafters’ ideas or attitudes forcefully along with specific assessments towards given issues. Put in another way, the conditions are formulated to make those engaged accept what is being stated or follow the instructions. Such a score also suggests that many modal verbs were employed in the

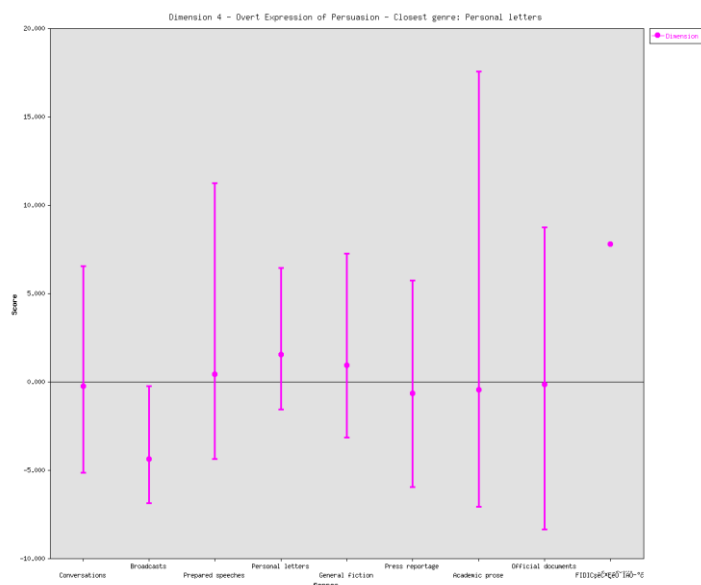


Figure 5. General genre features of the General Conditions on Dimension 4

General Conditions. As shown in Figure 4, on this dimension, the conditions are closest to personal letters, focusing on reaching the consensus of the parties involved and convincing them of the credibility of what has been stipulated. Thus, the general genre feature on this dimension can be summarized as self-assertive.

(5) General genre features on Dimension 5

On Dimension 5, Abstract vs. Non-Abstract Information, the dimension score is 3.09, as revealed in Table 4. We can see from Figure 5, the conditions are closest to official documents.

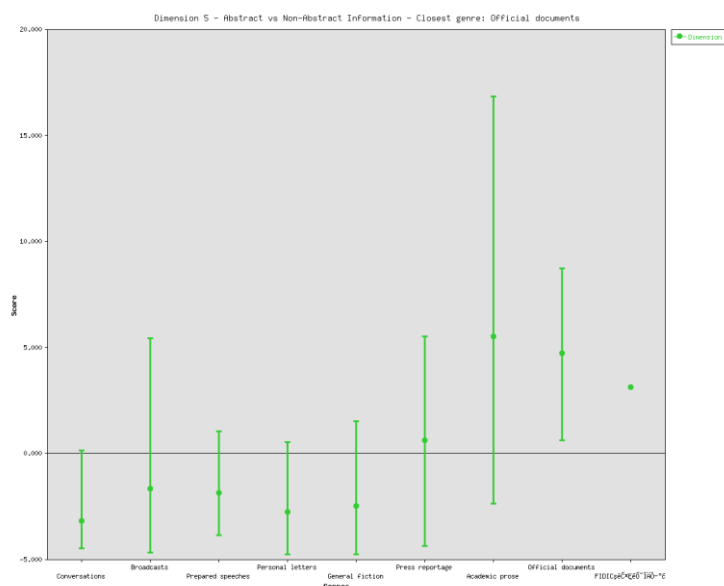


Figure 6. General genre features of the General Conditions on Dimension 5

The score indicates that the General Conditions reflect the context in a moderately abstract manner (Biber, 1995). To realize that end, technical and formal lexical units were employed to provide technical information, along with a large number of passive clauses and conjuncts in the conditions. Hence, the generic function of this dimension suggests that the General Conditions can function abstractly.

(6) General genre features on Dimension 6

The Sixth Dimension focuses on tapping whether the conditions function to produce real-time information under strict time constraints (Nini, 2019). As revealed in Table 4 and Figure 6, the dimension score is -0.79, and the conditions are closest to official documents, indicating that the General Conditions are not real-time-oriented but loaded with information. Furthermore, such a low score means the texts are non-colloquial in language style, proving that the language in the General Conditions of the Red Book is geared toward written documents (Biber, 1995).

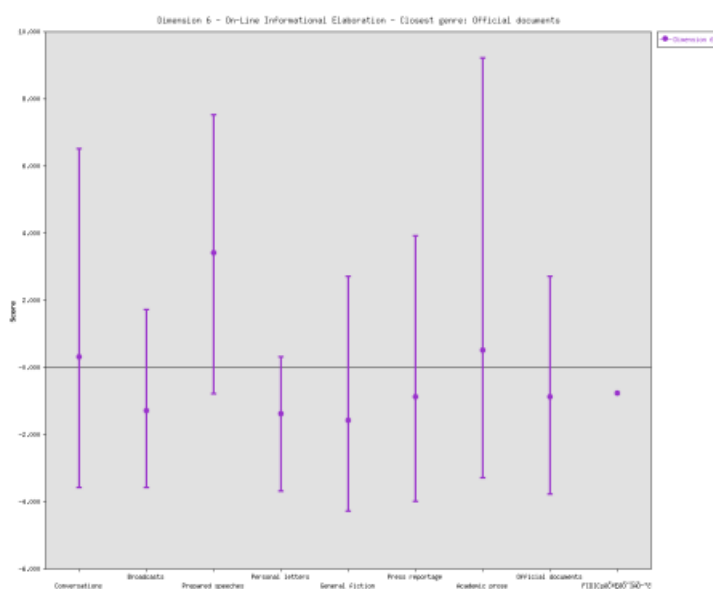


Figure 6. General genre feature of the General Conditions on Dimension 6

Discussion

Lexico-grammatical features

1. Type-token Ratio

The communicative purposes of the General Conditions determine the low type-token ratio (TTR). One key communicative purpose of CC is to clarify, regulate, and guide the participants' behaviors. Hence, it is preferable to realize that purpose directly and explicitly. Thus, language resources are organized efficiently and economically (Cui & Cui, 2020). As can be found in the General Conditions, all the sentences are statements with particular linguistic variables, which is sufficient to serve the functions. The large portions of specific language variables like nouns, nominalizations, prepositional phrases, and adjectives decrease the portions of other variables.

2. Nouns and Nominalizations

The wide use of nouns and nominalizations can better meet the requirement of holding information, for they can increase the density to the maximum limit (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Carlo, 2015), which can increase the information density to the largest extent. When carrying out a construction project, we need to consider every detail to decrease the risks, clarify the rights and obligations, and safeguard the interests of relevant parties. Therefore, the Red Book is adopted to specify relevant details and define the boundaries of rights and obligations of the stakeholders. Nouns and nominalizations are also deemed efficient devices for presenting the key issues (Chen et al., 2018), which can condense information directly and

explicitly (Kaidan et al., 2021). Furthermore, nouns and nominalizations can increase the degree of formality and authority of the General Conditions (Liu, 2008; Orts, 2015; Heidari Kaidan et al., 2021).

3. Total Prepositional Phrases (PIN)

The frequent adoption of total prepositional phrases (PIN) is due to the fact that they are efficient tools for delimiting circumstances for a given event, along with the function of extending the meaning by adding specific elements (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, p.359), the prepositional phrase “can serve as circumstantial adjuncts or, less commonly, as interpersonal Adjunct; and like the conjunction group, it can serve as conjunctive Adjunct”. The complex nature of a construction process determines that various conditions need to be dealt with. Therefore, many prepositional phrases are employed in the General Conditions to gear to the complicated situations for conducting fulfilling specific tasks or triggering certain mechanisms. For instance, “in the event”, “for any reason”, “in accordance with”, and “in connection with” are widely employed in construction contracts.

From a professional perspective, all participants need to coordinate with each other and systematically handle diverse elements or issues. Prepositional phrases can promote and consolidate such coordinated relations in the conditions, which subsequently strengthen the coherence of the language resources in conveying information that includes numerous details or issues.

4. Attributive Adjectives (JJ)

According to Biber (1995), attributive adjectives (JJ) can be tailored to increase information density when combined with longer words. Thus, the abundance of attributive adjectives (JJ) and the long words mean that the conditions are rather information-oriented. To explicitly present the information, all the key terms must be clearly delimited to present the information as desired. To that end, attributive adjectives (JJ) are employed to endow the word they modify with elaborated meanings. In other words, they can be adopted to extend, elaborate, and enhance the meanings of specific words to obtain compactness, conciseness, and information density. For example:

(a) All relevant data in the Employer’s possession on the topography of the Site and on sub-surface, hydrological, climatic and environmental conditions at the Site (Clause 2.5).

As can be seen from the Example, “relevant” sets the criterion for “data”, and the conditions are further enriched and elaborated by “hydrological”, “climatic”, and “environmental”. By adopting the adjectives, the density of information is increased explicitly.

5. Predictive Modals (PRMD) and Phrasal Coordination (PHC)

Though predictive modals (PRMD) are counted as overused, we can find that “shall” plays a dominant role in the conditions, which has long been an important marker for duty or responsibility with future orientation (Carlo, 2015; Cao & Zhao, 2019). For example

The Contractor shall deliver the Performance Security to the Employer, with a copy to the Engineer, within 28 days after receiving the Letter of Acceptance. The Performance Security shall be issued by an entity and from within a country (or other jurisdiction) to which the Employer gives consent and shall be in the form annexed to the Particular Conditions, or in another form agreed by the Employer

(but such consent and/or agreement shall not relieve the Contractor from any obligation under this Sub-Clause) (Clause 4.2.1).

In the example, “shall” denotes what follows is a must for the “Contractor” to deliver the “Performance Security”. That is the same with the other three occurrences of “shall”, in which the “entity” and the “form” of the security are strictly stipulated. In other words, “shall” in this clause explicitly states the contractor’s obligation to carry out the work related to the “Performance Security”. Besides, it integrates the meaning of obligation with a future connotation to guide the work to be done.

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 direct and simple way to extend meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The adoption of phrasal coordination (PHC) frequently can help drafters pack up information directly and efficiently.

6. Passive Voice

Passive voice, including agentless passives (PASS) and by-passives (BYP), has a relatively high frequency in the General Conditions. The adoption of passive voice can bestow the General Conditions an objective tone through its impersonal patterns. It has the functions of presenting information technically, formally, and concisely (Rasmussen & Engberg, 2017; Mu, 2021). By placing the important information in a focal position, the clause can underline the key issues in the conditions. Besides, we can find that most sentences of passive voice are devoid of the actors or with the actors being de-emphasized so that the subject of a given sentence can be emphasized. Take the following clause as an example

All Key Personnel shall be based at the Site (or, where Works are being executed off the Site, at the location of the Works) for the whole time that the Works are being executed. If any of the Key Personnel is to be temporarily absent during execution of the Works, a suitable replacement shall be temporarily appointed, subject to the Engineer's prior consent (Clause 6.12) .

In this example, “Key Personnel”, “Works”, and “replacement” are put into the focal positions, suggesting their significance in the meaning group. It will not weaken the communicative purposes of the clause without mentioning the actors in such a process. In addition, the clause is more concise, with the unnecessary elements being discarded.

7. Adverbs (RB) and Be as the Main Verb (BEMA)

As revealed in the results, adverbs (RB) are frequently employed in the condition. They can increase the density of information by elaborating or setting circumstances (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Song, 2020). Nevertheless, they are counted as underused in the General Conditions. That can be attributed to the characteristics of adverbs and the language features of FIDIC Conditions. As a common variable for specifying specific actions or states, adverbs (RB) are widely used in most genres. Thus, it is natural for their commonness in the CC. However, as mentioned earlier, there are many language resources for putting forward the circumstances or conditions in the General Conditions. Thus, adverbs’ portion is taken by other similar variables, which leads to their decreased use in the conditions.

Be as the main verb (BEMA) is also commonly employed in many genres. Nevertheless,

the nature of CC determines that it is unsuitable for coordinating various relationships in the construction process. As discussed, CC 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. Simply put, the function of the conditions is for doing, not for describing (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), in which sentences with verbs as predicates are preferable to the structure of the be as the main verb (BEMA), conveying meanings in an effectively and forceful manner.

7. Conditional adverbial Subordinators (COND)

According to Nini (2019), conditional adverbial subordinators refer to the occurrence of “if” and “unless”. They are used to introduce the preconditions for specific mechanisms. The complex nature of a construction contract determines that the preconditions must be clearly formulated and delineated. In view of that, conditional clauses are widely employed to define various circumstances. Thus, conditional adverbial subordinators (COND) are frequently adopted because of their efficiency in introducing preconditions. For example,

If the Contractor fails to comply with the Engineer's instruction, the Employer may (at the Employer's sole discretion) employ and pay other persons to carry out the work (Clause 7.6).

The precondition for the “Employer” to choose other persons is clearly introduced by “if”, namely, “the Contractor fails to comply with Engineer’s instruction”. By employing conditional adverbial subordinators (COND), a compact mechanism is set, in which one incidence can trigger a corresponding consequence.

8. Past Participial Clauses (PASTP) and Sentence Relatives (SERE).

Past participial clauses (PASTP) can increase the information density by providing the conditions for given situations. For example,

The Employer and the Engineer shall treat all information provided by the Contractor and marked “confidential”, as confidential (Clause 1.13).

The past participial clauses (PASTP) “provided by the Contractor” and “marked” give “information” a definite clarification, through which the meaning of the sentence is elaborated.

Sentence relatives (SERE) refer to the tagger of “a punctuation mark is followed by the word which” (Nini, 2019, p.23). By adopting sentence relatives, we can replenish the main sentence with more meanings, increasing the density of information. In this sense, they conform to features of the General Conditions, for they need to present much information in their clauses. For example

(i)f any necessary drawing or instruction is not issued to the Contractor within a particular time, which shall be reasonable.

In the example, if there was no “which shall be reasonable”, “within a particular time” would be rather vague. With the sentence relative, the “time” becomes relatively definite. Such a language arrangement not only increases the information density along with exactness and strictness but also avoids the loophole.

General Genre Features

As revealed, the General Conditions are more of information production in the first dimension. In other words, they function to inform the readers. We can attribute that to the communicative purposes of a construction contract. As revealed, a construction contract is used to cope with a large number of complicated issues that require all related details to be clarified and conveyed to the participants. For that reason, the General Conditions need to be inclusive of all the information concerned with all the key issues in the construction process. From the functional perspective, the language in the General Conditions on this dimension is less of an interpersonal function but more of an ideational function (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In other words, language in the conditions functions to represent facts, necessities, and procedures of a construction process. Moreover, drafters employ the conditions to expound on relevant issues, regulate the behaviours of participants, and instruct people about the procedures (Cui & Cui, 2022), not to argue with the readers or absorb their interests.

With regard to the non-narrative feature in Dimension 2, we can find the reasons from the communicative purpose of the general conditions, too. As put forward previously, a construction contract is employed to clarify the key issues, delimit the rights and obligations, and expound on the procedures for addressing technical or professional issues. It is not for sharing personal experiences or describing objects. Therefore, the expository style is more suitable. Besides, as a legal genre, contracts need formal and concise language. From the functional perspective, the non-narrative style is more pertinent to stating complex issues clearly and directly.

In terms of the feature of being situation-independent, we can also find answers in the communicative purpose of the General Conditions. The communicative purpose of the General Conditions is to safeguard the successful performance of a construction process. Therefore, they are geared toward the whole construction process. As stated, they are drafted beforehand and polished numerous times to provide scientific and effective guidelines for carrying out the construction work. In that sense, they need to go beyond the influence of specific situations and embrace a bigger picture. In other words, the language of the conditions must extricate themselves from the fetter of the immediate context. Besides, a construction contract is usually drafted based on prediction and past experience (Li, 2020). Thus, all the details to be presented are usually in common sense in a regular situation. Thus, the language of the General Conditions needs to be prefabricated to adapt to those issues in regular states. Meanwhile, a construction contract involves parties of different interests. That requires the conditions to present information in an unbiased and impersonal position. So, the language of the conditions needs to conform to the objective stance. From the functional perspective, the conditions function to represent the whole construction process. Thus, language variables must target the construction industry as a whole rather than specific situations in the long construction period.

In terms of the conditions' closeness to personal letters in Dimension 4, we need to confine it to a stance perspective. According to Nini (2019), the nature of being persuasive means the writers are quite assertive of what is being stated. That is true with the General Conditions. As discussed, a construction contract sets the criteria for the participants. Therefore, they must inform the parties of what and how to do something with a definite attitude or stance. To realize that end, drafters adopt modal verbs to demonstrate assertiveness. Thus, languages for assessment and certainty are frequently used to clarify issues. In view of ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions (Biber, 1995; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), such features can be revealed from three perspectives. Firstly, language

variables of the conditions are arranged to clearly and objectively represent all the rights, obligations, procedures, requirements, and specifications concerning construction projects on the ideational level. Secondly, the language variables and sentence patterns “persuade” all parties into accepting the terms and following the conditions on the interpersonal scale. Finally, the employment of affirmative sentences and modal verbs, along with the reduced hedges, are on the textual level.

Regarding the abstract feature in Dimension 5, we can attribute it to the nature of the construction process, which is highly professional and technical. To better deal with the industry-related issues concerning building, engineering, business, management, human resources, finance, technology, and environment, drafters need to adopt employment many technical terms and patterns to play up to the industry and handle them scientifically.

As to the feature of “not for on-line informational elaboration” of Dimension 6, the reasons are similar to those of Dimension 3. As discussed, the General Conditions are usually drafted beforehand to guide the regular work in the construction process in common sense with impartiality. They are not for providing immediate responses for specific immediate situations. In other words, the language of the conditions is processed without pressing time constraints.

To sum up, all the features are function-related and result from the complex nature of the construction process, in which diversified issues need to be addressed (Klee, 2018; Li et al., 2020). Meanwhile, they were formed via the manipulation of specific language variables and revealed the overall language features from the functional perspective. Briefly state, the general genre features uncovered from the multi-dimensional perspectives converge to serve the general communicative purpose of the conditions: to fulfill the construction work successfully while safeguarding all parties’ interests to the greatest extent amid the complicated features of the construction process. Though language variables are the pillars of the general genre features, the multi-dimensional genre features can reveal the functions of the General Conditions in different ways. Such a perspective can deepen our understanding of the FIDIC Conditions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the General Conditions of the Red Book features the frequent adoption of nouns and nominalization, propositional phrases, attributive adjectives, predictive modals, and passive voice (including agentless passives and by-passives). Those variables are derived from the communicative purposes of the General Conditions and the nature of the construction process. Besides, professional contexts exert great influence on language manipulations, directly or indirectly. With regard to the general genre features of the General Conditions in the Red Book of FIDIC Conditions, we can find that it has the features of being information-oriented, non-narrative and expository, context-independent, persuasion-oriented, abstract, and written. Though the general features are the results of specific language manipulation, they can reveal the language features of the conditions on a broader scale, mirroring the overall functions from multiple perspectives. These features strengthen the legality of the General Conditions by rendering them the formal style, explicit communicative purposes, objective stance, and authoritative position. Understanding those features will help us better understand the General Conditions, which will be conducive to a better interpretation of the conditions. It is also of pedagogical significance for instructing non-native practitioners.

This paper is significant in that it has made a comprehensive exploration of the General Conditions of the Red Book from the language perspective. The findings can help Chinese practitioners gain a deeper understanding of the conditions. Meanwhile, the multidimensional perspective is also insightful for relevant research to demystify specific genres.

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