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Títol: Register Variation in William Godwin: a Multidimensional Analysis

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Abstract

Register variation studies have varied the way of producing the analysis in recent years showing different perspectives on how to consider a piece of writing or oral production. Biber proposes a way to analyse texts which gives more reliable results, the Multi-Dimensional (MD) linguistic analysis. This methodological approach identifies the agreeing and disagreeing treats by means of dimensions, used to trace different degrees of formality in spoken or written registers. For this reason, in this analysis the MD approach has been used to illustrate the divergence between the registers of both texts, one being far more informal than the other. Upon examination of these sources, it becomes obvious that the targeted audience of both is different showing a great amount of variation in their language and structure as it was expected by the author. The purpose of this paper resides on tracing register variation analysing a selection of linguistic features and chapters. Different written registers were selected using two books from the eighteenth century written by the same author, William Godwin. One them is a narrative, *Caleb Williams,* and the other is a theoretical work, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. This means that the present study, by analysing both books with the MD approach, reinforces the common belief that depending on the reader, whether he was educated or not (with an increasing rise of the middle-class reading public), the language varies, therefore its register, so it can reach its recipients.

KEY WORDS: Synchrony, Multi-Dimensional approach, Linguistic feature, Audience, Register.

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Linguistic Variation in William Godwin: a Multi-Dimensional analysis

1. Introduction

Throughout history, the analysis of language has changed. Before, the following approaches were the common analytical tools: either a historical approach by means of analysing the difference with two or more competing forms in terms of absolute differences, or a sociolinguistic approach taking into account the use of linguistic forms regarding to varieties (Biber and Finegan 1989, 487). One of the most well-known types of variation in a language is the one of *register* which is closely related to *style* but they are not the same. Register would be used, in occasions, in an excessive broad sense, implicating the features that are recognised for the latter term. Style would be related to "the relationships between speakers and their interlocutors or audiences: the dimensions of intimacy/distance, casualness/formality, deference/dominance, peremptoriness/politeness, attention/inattention, and perhaps others" (Zwicky and Zwicky 1982, 214). *Register*, despite its similitude, implies "variation in the form of linguistic expressions according to the formality of the social context of use" (Paolillo 2000, 215). In Lee's words, register is a term used with "lexico-grammatical and discoursal-semantic patterns associated with situations (i.e., linguistic patterns)" (Lee 2001, 46). Of course, a way to investigate register is by means of its "*patterns of variation.* Register variation is inherent in human language: a single speaker will make systematic choices in pronunciation, morphology, word choice, and grammar reflecting a range of non-linguistic factors." (Biber and Conrad 2001, 4). In this paper, register is used in a situational approach, which implies that extra-linguistic factors, with these systematic choices, apply due to the nature of the books selected, focused on a specific target audience with a specific purpose in communication.

For this study, the Multi-Dimensional (MD) approach proposed by Biber (1988) has been adopted to analyse register. Varied types of investigation have been done regarding to MD studies, they go from differences between speech and writing to the investigation of patterns in other languages, and Biber (1995) even uses it to make a cross-linguistic comparison between languages (Biber and Conrad 2001, 4). In this type of analysis, linguistic variation is observed thanks to the co-occurrence of determined linguistic tokens in the above mentioned dimensions of variation. This means that a set of co-occurring linguistic features are classified depending on their negative or positive loadings, as will be explained later (Section 4), with "the assumption that co-occurrence reflects shared function […]. Each

dimension thus characterizes the situational, social, and cognitive functions most widely shared by the co-occurring linguistic features" (Biber and Finegan 1989, 488). The dimensions then create a connection between texts. The study of both texts analyses how situational factors condition the system used by the author, in other words, the type of register used depends on the targeted audience. Obviously, there are features that can be shared between registers but with the MD analysis it can be further examined in order to get better conclusions that earlier types of analysis that were made mostly by dichotomies.

According to Biber's analysis (1988), there are six dimensions of variation in English that relate to the different written and oral features. These dimensions "are based on the assumption that a co-occurrence pattern indicates an underlying communicative function shared by the co-occurring features (Biber and Finegan 1989, 490). In this way,

> the linguistic features represent sixteen grammatical and functional categories: (I) tense and aspect markers, (ii) place and time adverbials, (iii) pronouns and pro-verbs, (iv) questions, (v) nominal forms, (vi) passives, (vii) stative forms, (viii) subordination features, (ix) prepositional phrases, adjectives, and other adverbs, (x) lexical specificity, (xi) lexical classes, (xii) models, (xiii) specialized verbs classes, (xiv) reduced forms and discontinuous structures, (xv) coordination, and (xvi) negation. (Biber and Finegan 1989, 489)

So, after the selection of the dimensions, I am to illustrate that both of William Godwin's books were created with a determined register. This is possible with the analysis of these co-occurrence patterns that leads to the conclusion that a specific audience was targeted in each of the books.

> Moreover, there is importance on the fact that both texts are acknowledged as
>
> literate from a situational perspective [.] They are produced and edited carefully and directed towards a large, specific but unbounded and individuated audience. They differ in that diction describes events and situations for purposes of aesthetic enjoyment, while essays have an informational and sometimes an argumentative or persuasive purpose. (Biber and Finegan 1989, 495)

In connection, there is the need to rise the question that the 18th was a period of changes; changes in terms of the reading public. The emergence of a middle-class which was able to read changed the conception of writing. This involved the expansion of the reading public to which Godwin responded with the creation of both works, *Political Justice* and *Caleb Wiliams*, the former for a literate public and the latter for a more general audience. It is clear that

the 18th century was thus a period of considerable conflict concerning literacy, with markedly different views of intended readers, the appropriate purposes of prose, and appropriate styles. […] Many authors used markedly oral styles that were appropriate for didactic, informational purposes and intended for a broad popular audience; others, in reaction to this popular oral shift, used extremely elaborated, abstract styles to serve persuasive purposes among specialized, elite audiences. (Biber and Finegan 1989, 514)

This paper is organised following this structure. Section 2 explains the methodology used during the analysis, the Multi-Dimensional approach that Biber (1988) proposes. Section 3 describes de corpus that has been used to get the tokens in order to find out the different registers following methodology in section 2. Section 4 shows the analysis, with the different dimensions explained together with the co-occurrence patterns plus the results obtained in this essay. Finally, the features obtained are considered in order to make the conclusion in section 5.

2. Methodology

Both books were analysed adopting Biber's (2004) Multi-Dimensional approach with similar methodological steps:

1. A selection of chapters of the books were chosen depending on thematic content and number of words. An electronic version was used in order to retrieve automatically the relevant instances of analysis. A set of situational characteristics were selected. Research in order to identify the linguistic features to be included in the analysis and their associations was conducted.

2. A computer program (AntConc) was used in order to find the linguistic tokens object of analysis and to find out frequency counts.

3. All texts were post-edited to ensure accuracy in the identification.

4. Analysis of the co-occurrence patterns among linguistic features, using a factor analysis.

5. Dimensions were identified depending on the factors interpreted earlier.

6. Dimensions scores were analysed for each register and compared for both written texts.

The books were already selected depending on the register it was expected from each. The first step, therefore, was to select the chapters that were relevant depending on topic length, and linguistic features. When they had been selected, an online file with the same edition of

the books was searched and the different texts were introduced in the program (AntConc). After the selection of the linguistic features belonging to the different dimensions, the tokens were searched and the frequency counts started with the creation of lists of tokens. Furthermore, the analysis of these co-occurrence patterns was produced and the interpretation regarding its register was concluded. Finally, it was made the comparison between the features of both texts regarding to their register.

3. Corpus

The corpus used for the present study comes from *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (*PJ*[1]) and *Caleb Williams, or Things as They Are* (*CW*). Out of the necessity to express his thoughts on political matters William Godwin wrote *PJ* in 1793. Being only for the educated people of England, a year later he published his novel *CW* aimed to a more general audience so it could reach a major range of people. Both books seek to show the truth hidden under a corrupted government and a system that is not what it looks like, showing "things as they are" (*CW*).

The texts compiled for this analysis has been selected following the criteria of topic and length. The same topics were selected in both books so that the results were more accurate since restricting the parameters should be a way to get a more realistic view of the different registers that were searched for. Length was also relevant in order to select comparable samples of texts. Two samples of approximately 9000 words per text were selected. The information given in a similar number of words is relevant to characterise the different registers and get a more accurate output. For these reasons, the first step was to select the themes in *PJ* since they are perfectly separated from each other, and to count the words. The second step was to find the chapters in *CW* in which the same themes were dealt with and, afterwards, to take into account their length. Some relevant issues were discarded due to the different lengths of the chapter in both books.

As a result, the chapters chosen from each book are concerned with literature, education and morality. Firstly, from *PJ* were selected four chapters with a quantity of 9327 words: 2836 words from book 1, "Of the Importance of Political Institutions", chapter IV, "Three Principal Causes of Moral Improvement Considered. I. Literature. II. Education. III. Political Justice" (*PJ,* 20-27); 2559 words from book 2 "Principles of Society", chapter V.

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[1] *PJ* will stand for the theoretical book *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* and *CW* will stand for the narrative book *Caleb Williams, or Things as They Are,* both written by William Godwin in 1793 and 1794, respectively. For a complete reference of these books see the source of data reference at the end.

"Rights of Man" (*PJ*, 67-72): 1987 words from book VI, "Of Opinion Considered as a Subject of Political Institutions", chapter VIII, "Of Nation Education" (PJ, 350-354); and 1936 words from book VII, "Of Crimes and Punishments", chapter I, "Limitations of the Doctrine of Punishment which Result from the Principles of Morality" (*PJ*, 362-366). Secondly, the amount of 9742 words was selected from *CW* distributed in three chapters which mostly deal with the previous topics (chapters in this case do not have a title): chapter IV, volume I (*CW,* 22-30); chapter XI, volume II (*CW,* 171-178); and chapter III, volume III (*CW,* 214-221).

4. Analysis

The Multi-Dimensional approach that Biber (1988) proposes makes that the great amount of word categories of a text can be analysed in a way that its linguistic variants become organised. It is possible thanks to the co-occurrence patterns of the above mentioned "dimensions of variation" that help to make a comparison between the linguistic features. For the analysis, three of the six dimensions in traditional MD were used, because they refer to a written or oral context and the others were not relevant in this case. Moreover, only one or two variants per loading and dimension were chosen due to the nature of this paper. Even though they are just a minor percentage of Biber's MD, they were enough in the sense that they provided the sufficient information so a comparative analysis with meaningful information was achieved. The analysis was conducted with the frequency counts of each feature. Afterwards, the percentage among the total amount of words was found in order to give a better illustration of the opposite results depending on the nature of the text.

Dimension 1: Information-focused vs. Interactive discourse
•   **Feature with positive loadings:** Nominalisations
•   **Features with negative loadings:** 1st person pronouns, 2nd person pronouns
Dimension 2: Stance vs. Context-focused discourse
•   **Feature with positive loadings:** Mental verbs
•   **Feature with negative loadings:** WH-questions
Dimension 3: Narrative-focused discourse
•   **Feature with positive loadings:** 3rd person pronouns
•   **Feature with negative loadings: -**

Table 1. Dimensions used in the analysis of both texts

Following Biber's classification of the dimensions in *Conversation text types: A Multi-Dimensional Analysis* (2004, 21), table 1 shows the linguistic features that were

analysed in this investigation. Each dimension contains features with positive or negative loadings depending on the register that the texts display. The sets of negative and positive loadings are in complementary distribution, the result is that these linguistic factors that show patterns of co-occurrence state the communicative functions of the texts, as it is asserted by Biber (2004, 20). Consequently, those texts which show a higher percentage of positive loadings in a dimension is expected to have a low frequency of negative loadings in the same factor. At the same time, after the analysis depending on these features, the categorisation of them regarding to a specific register can be done. Linguistic co-occurrence features are organised in table 2 and they show the percentage of the different sets of variables that were selected for this analysis.

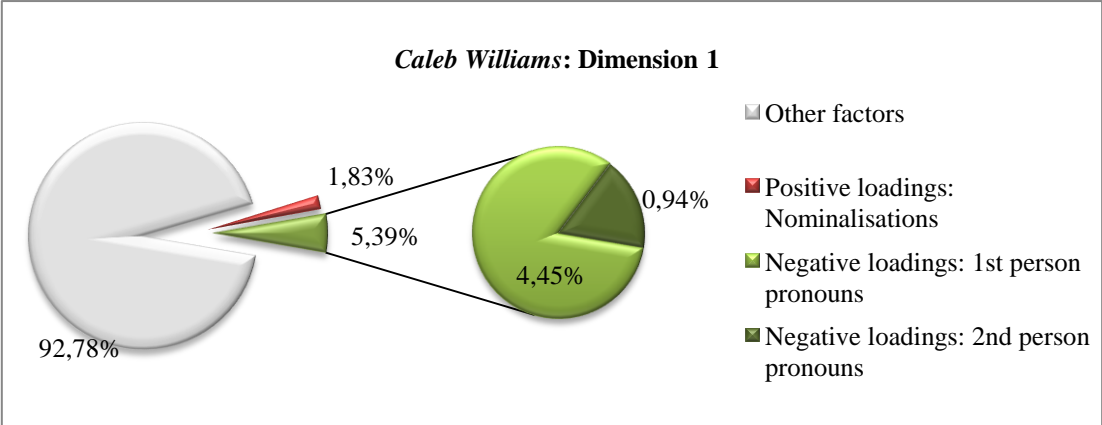|	*Caleb Williams*	*Political Justice*
Dimension 1:		
Positive loadings		
• Nominalisations	**1.83%**	**2.98%**
Negative loadings		
• 1st person pronouns	**4.45%**	**1.70%**
• 2nd person pronouns	**0.94%**	**0.02%**
Dimension 2:		
Positive loadings		
• Mental verbs	**1.27%**	**0.98%**
Negative loadings		
• WH-questions	**0.41%**	**0.09%**
Dimension 3:		
Positive loadings		
• 3rd person pronouns	**4.71%**	**2.26%**

Table 2. Percentage of co-occurrence of the different linguistic patterns in both texts.

Table 2 shows that the above mentioned tendency that the frequency counts are supposed to follow regarding to the different quantity of linguistic features is pretty accurate. There are great differences in almost all of the factors analysed but one. Nevertheless, this was a possible outcome since even Biber himself acknowledges the possibility of this comparable frequency counts concluding that, in some cases "the cause of these apparent

contradictions is simply definitional. […] [Being] evident that the relationship between speech and writing is highly complex" (Biber 1986, 386).

4.1. Dimension 1: Information-focused vs. interactive discourse

Dimension 1 is interpreted by Biber regarding to the purpose of the information given. This means that one text should be informational if it has a high proportion of positive loadings, owing to the fact that "all of these features are associated with communicative situations that have an informational focus and provide ample opportunity for careful integration of information and precise lexical choice" (Biber 1989, 490). Word length, nominalisations, or abstracts nouns are examples of features considered in the positive side. On the contrary, negative loadings would represent the sense of involvement, without having the intention to be informational. It represented by means of fragmented information that present a more generalised production (Biber 1995, 145). They represent "direct interaction, focus on the immediate circumstance and personal attitudes or feelings, fragmentation or deduction in form, and a less specific, generalized content" (Biber 1995, 143). Examples of negative loadings would include present tense verbs, first and second person pronouns, or contractions.

Graphic 1. Differences between dimension 1 positive and negative loadings in *Caleb Williams*
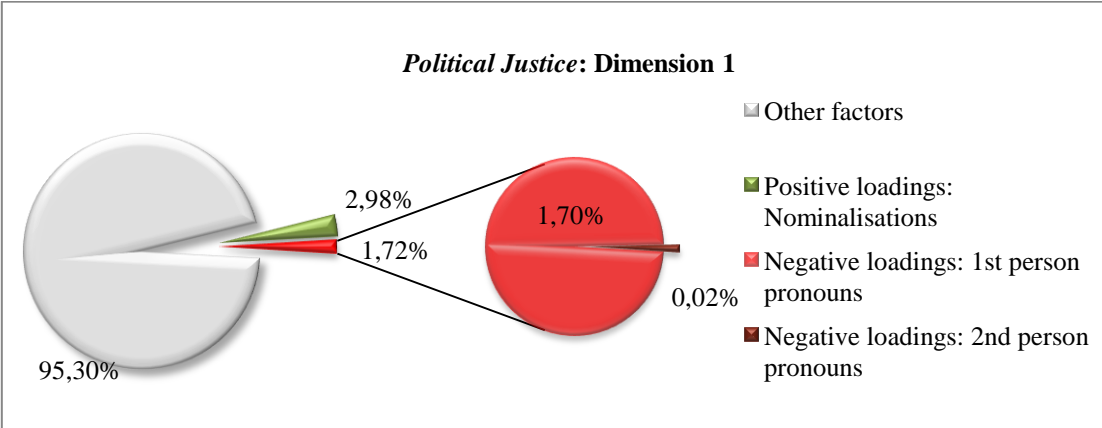
Graphic 2. Differences between dimension 1 positive and negative loadings in *Political Justice*

In this paper, the factor with positive loadings considered was *nominalisations*. They tend to indicate the integration and informational purpose of an explicit discourse (Biber 1995, 156) a feature "mostly associated with elaborated noun phrases and a dense integration of information (Biber 2004, 21). The research was carried out restricting the number of nouns to those that were created with the suffixes *-ion*, *-ation*, and *-ness*. As it seen in graphic 1, *Political Justice* has, with more than one percent of the total amount of words, a higher proportion of these particles, in contrast with graphic 2. The constant repetition of nominalised words and the high frequency in which a word can reoccur in a major proportion than the other text (e.g. *education, institution, happiness*) implies that this book has the nature to be informational rather than interactive. On the contrary, *Caleb Williams* displays less frequency using those types of nouns, being the repetition of them or using them in general (e.g. *situation, sensation*).

Contrastively, the results for the negative loadings were opposed. The first and second person pronouns paradigm appear substituting fuller noun phrases (Biber 1995, 142). They are also considered to be less formal with a "high degree of interpersonal interaction and personal involvement" (Biber 1986, 394) giving a minor sense of objectivity than impersonal constructions, therefore being more frequently associated with face-to-face conversations (Biber 1995, 145). As it has been mentioned earlier, here *CW* has the most extensive and varied use of all the pronouns, specially the first person personal pronoun (*I*), the first person possessive pronoun (*my*), and the second person personal pronoun (*you*) with 197, 97, and 80 counts, respectively. If those results are compared with *PJ*, only 28 words in the whole text are first person personal pronouns and there are only two occurrences, which are not significant, of the second person pronouns paradigm. Text Sample 1 and 2 illustrate these different uses.

| Text Sample 1 |
|---|
| *I* might as well desire *you,* to leave the county, as *you* desire *me. I* came here to *you*, not as to a master, but an equal. In the society of men *we* must have something to bear, as well as to perform. (*CW*, 29) |
| **Text Sample 2** |
| But the *education I* have been describing is the reverse of this. It employs an immense *combination* of powers, and an endless chain of causes for the *production* of a single specimen. (*PJ*, 24) |

Having all this said, it is outstanding the difference of both percentages as is also illustrated in graphic 1 and 2. In this dimension, the assumptions earlier stated that Biber made on the correlation between the factors is confirmed. The analysis notably exposes that one text has the tendency to be more informative (*PJ*) while the other contains a more interactive type of language (*CW*).

4.2. Dimension 2: Stance vs. context-focused discourse

The relation that this dimension has with the original distribution of the dimensions that Biber made (1988) is little. The features that he considered in this case do not correspond with the original arrangement. From the title of the dimension, stance here would refer to "personal attitudes or indications of likelihood" (Biber 2004, 21). In his analysis, Biber already acknowledges the break in the original conception that the positive loadings and the negative loadings will be contrary in this case telling that "a stance-focused discourse is not necessarily highly interactive discourse, and vice versa" (Biber 2004, 21). Bearing this in mind, the positive loadings that indicate likelihood could be of little importance since they can follow another tendency that is not the habitual. Mental verbs, likelihood adverbs, or adverbial clauses are some of the tokens belonging to this factor. The features with negative loadings are only two in this case, nouns and *wh*-questions, and the combination of both "reflect a focus on the larger context" (Biber 2004, 22).
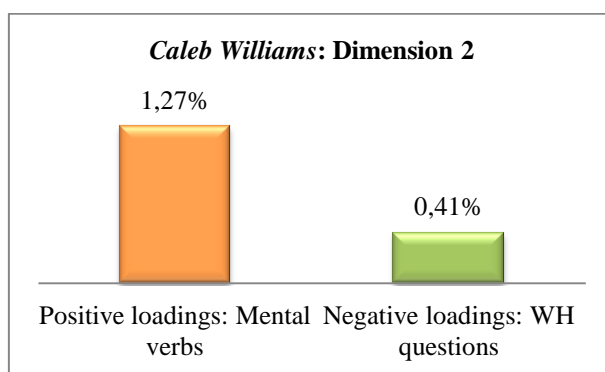
Graphic 3. Differences between dimension 2 positive and negative loadings in *Caleb Williams*
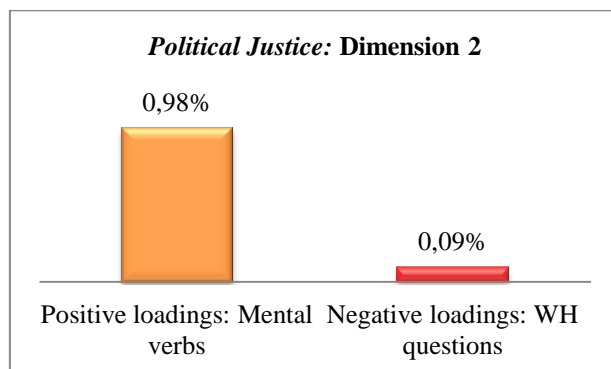
Graphic 4. Differences between dimension 2 positive and negative loadings in *Political Justice*

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In order to investigate the features with positive loadings *mental verbs* were analysed. A list of 54 common mental verbs were selected (e.g. *feel, consider, seem, think, know*) and searched in the text. These verbs "are used for the direct expression of personal attitudes and emotions" (Biber 1995, 143) and show "interactiveness, involvement, and focus on personal attitudes (Biber 1995, 150). As it is seen in graphic 2, and as it has been mentioned before, the results do not correspond with the expected output. However, given the context in which the books were created plus the fact that in his analysis Biber arrived to a similar conclusion, adding that those features can co-occur with an interactive discourse, the result is perfectly understandable. The negative feature analysed in dimension 2 was *wh*-questions (e.g. *who, what, how*). Biber states that this feature "ha[s] co-occurred with stereotypically 'oral' and interactive features" (Biber 2004, 21). *CW*, being a more interactive type of discourse, as it has been pointed earlier, has four times more words from this factor than *PJ*.

Text Sample 3 tries to provide a sample on how the former and the latter characteristic give more emphasis on the involved discourse of *CW*. *Wh*-questions refer to these thoughts that the narrator asking himself for other's behaviours and privative verbs are usual in this type of thoughts bearing in mind that he tries to make people think with this book. Similarly, the high proportion of mental verbs in *PJ* is probably due to the same reason, whereas *wh*-questions are not very relevant, the texts tries to reflect a more detached view, with a more formal style, seen in Text Sample 4. This latter Text Sample includes 4 of the 9 co-occurring features of these negative loadings.

Text Sample 3

Shall we be enemies? *What* benefit will be derived from that? *Who ever* found in gall, malice, suspicion and hatred the materials of happiness? […]

 If we be enemies, *who* shall tell where our enmity shall stop? […]

Damn me, if I *think* this is any thing else but a trick to put a new feather in your cap at your neighbour's expence.

[…] I *know* the infirmity of my temper, but at least upon this occasion I am determined not to take any thing ill.(*CW*, 27)

Text Sample 4

>   *How many* instances may we expect to find, in *which* a plan has been carried into execution, so enlightened, unremitted and ardent, as to produce these extraordinary effects? *Where* must the preceptor himself have been educated, *who* shall thus elevate his pupil above all the errors of mankind? (*PJ*, 23)

4.3. Dimension 3: Narrative-focused discourse

Whether the text is focused in a narrative way or not is seen in the third dimension that Biber (2004) proposes. Forms included in this factor are characterised by being "stereotypically narrative features […] [therefore,] given this grouping of features, the interpretation as 'Narrative-focused discourse' is uncontroversial" (Biber 2004, 22). It is difficult for Biber to state features that can be considered non-narrative, he only proposes the use of present tense words and attributive adjectives (Biber 1995, 152) in a non-conclusive way. The features that he associates with typically narrative texts include past tense verbs, third person pronouns, or *that*-deletions (Biber 2004: 21). It is also remarkable to signal that "the distribution of register along this dimension has no relation to speech and writing […], with the fiction register being extremely narrative, while registers such as academic prose, official documents, and skills and hobbies prose are extremely non-narrative" (Biber 1995, 152-153).
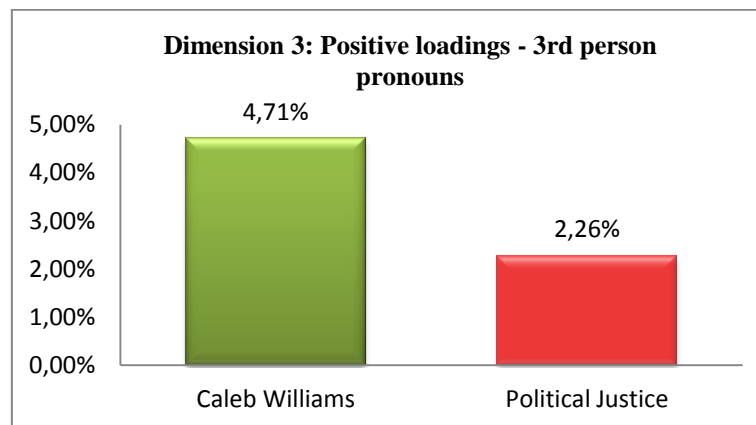
Graphic 5. Differences between dimension 3 positive loadings in *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice*

Third person pronouns were selected in this case to illustrate dimension 3 positive loadings. They were selected because these pronouns "are used to refer to the animate, typically human, participants in the narrative" (Biber 1995, 152). In the investigation, the paradigm of the third person pronoun to designate things (*it*) has been left aside because of the nature of this term. Since the analysis showed a very high proportion of this pronoun in *PJ* it was excluded because this pronoun can also be used in sentences with an extraposed subject, the named dummy *it,* which has no lexical meaning (i.e. it is used in order to cover the grammatical function of the subject). The results of this analysis show that *Caleb Williams* has a clear tendency to higher percentages of this feature. The total amount of these words is doubled in this text in contrast with *Political Justice* as it is seen in graphic 5. Text Sample 5 illustrates the repetition of the pronouns in *CW,* whereas Text Sample 6 shows the low

proportion of them in *PJ*¸ without preferring the use of nouns and also demonstrating the use of the dummy *it*.

Text Sample 5
He from time to time earned money of *his* officers by *his* peculiar excellence in furbishing arms; but *he* declined offers that had been made *him* to become a serjeant or a corporal, saying, that *he* did not want money, and that in a new situation *he* should have less leisure for study. (*CW*, 173)
Text Sample 6
It is worthy of observation that the idea of this superintendence has obtained the idea of this superintendence has obtained the countenance of several of the most zealous advocates of political reform. (*PJ*, 350)

From this text samples another feature common to the narrative texts could be inferred, even though it has not been examined deeply in this essay. It is the use of the present in the non-narrative text and the use of the past in most of the narrative. It is clearly seen in both text samples and books, and it gives more emphasis to their nature.

5. Conclusion

In this article it has been described the differences on register of two texts with a similar topic that were published in consecutive years and written by the same person. The supposition was that they were expressly created so as they could reach a different kind of audience. In this analysis the divergences on register between both texts have been stated. It has been possible to demonstrate that the bases that were previously set forth by Biber (1988) could specify these differences that have lead to confirm the original beliefs. With the computer-based search it has been possible to make a broader search in order to have more reliable results informing about the different registers used, a narrative and an academic work. Even though some dimensions had to be further examined and some changes have been included regarding the original work, everything has turned out well, having into account that the 18th century was a period of experimentation.

So, in this case, Biber's Multi-Dimensional analysis (1988) helped to extract the features that help to characterise the register of both texts. Text samples from *Caleb Williams* and *Political Justice* written by William Godwin were selected depending on topic and length. After the choice of the linguistic parameters in the dimensions signalled by Biber (2004, 21)

that could help to analyse the samples organised the analysis could be done. The union of the different dimensions makes that a quite logical output is obtained from the analysis.

Both books respond with the features extracted from the analysis to the expected register, being the narrative for *Caleb Williams* and the academic prose for *Political Justice*. The former then shows a high sense of involvement showing more feelings in a more generalised production with the use of first and second person pronouns, interaction and the expression of personal attitudes and emotions with mental verbs, orality with *wh*-questions, and finally, stereotypically narrative features with third person pronouns and past tense constructions. On the contrary, the latter presents a more informational text with an accurate lexical choice with nominalisations, a sense of involvement in the way that the writer tries to convey his ideas to people of high education, and without typically narrative features.

Both conclusions can be taken as the expected results of the analysis meaning that Godwin wrote these texts having a perfect idea of what he wanted to express and to whom he wanted to arrive with his writings. Thus, it is reflected the expertise of this writer with one very recent type of analysis, the Multi-Dimensional approach by Biber, showing with the dimensions of variation the distinction between both written registers.

Source of data

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