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## Gender and bilinguals' creativity

WENDY BAKER\*

**ABSTRACT:** Research on the influence of gender on language across different cultures has mostly concentrated on qualitative measures of analysis. These measures demonstrate that there are differences in rhetorical and literary style across world Englishes in both the inner and outer circle. Using Biber's multidimensional analysis (1988) to examine a large corpus of world English literatures written in Indian, West African, Britain, Anglo-American and Mexican American varieties of English, this paper examines whether quantitative analyses can also be insightful and useful in the examination of the influence of gender on language and in expanding our understanding of what "bilingual creativity" entails. The results of this study reveal that computational methods of analyzing texts both confirm former research comparing differences between texts written by men and women in different varieties of English and also shed new light on differences that exist between these varieties.

### INTRODUCTION

In their paper on cultural differences in writing styles, Baker and Eggington (1999) reported that computational quantitative analyses can be a useful and insightful addition to qualitative measures in examining differences in writing styles in different varieties of English. Specifically, they found that quantitative analyses can enhance our growing understanding of world English literatures, "bilingual creativity," and cultural influences on writing, or what it means to be a West African or British or American creative writer. Using these same texts, as a follow-up to that study, this paper examines how gender influences the rhetorical styles of authors who write in different varieties of English. The question proposed in this paper is whether gender exerts the same influence on the writing styles of authors regardless of the variety of English they use, and whether an understanding of the relationship between gender and language in different varieties of English would add to our growing knowledge of what defines "bilingual creativity."

There is a growing body of research indicating that gender differences are manifested across several cultures and communities. Such studies include the study of politeness in the Mayan community (Brown, 1998), the flirting practices of Asian teenagers in California (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1999), the linguistic expressions of boys and girls growing up in middle-class Australia (Eisikovits, 1998), and the use of language in several contexts by both Japanese women (Ide and McGloin, 1990) and aboriginal Australians (Bradley, 1999).

In addition, in literary texts these differences between male and female speech are also manifested. Valentine (1986) investigated the use of speech acts across genders in American and Indian cultures, finding literary discourse provides insight into the relationship between gender and speech. Other authors have found that story-telling differs depending on gender in indigenous New Zealanders (Holmes, 1997), French-speaking Africans (Ormerod, Volet, and Jacomard, 1995), and Chinese male and female authors (Shen, 1992).

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Although these studies increase our understanding of cultural influences on gender and language, several difficulties and limitations of studying gender differences across cultures remain. One limitation is that relatively few studies have examined and compared more than one culture in the same analysis, although the reasons for studying only one language group are obvious. Often the languages are different in both the function of genres and in syntactic constructions, so that cross-linguistic comparisons can be problematic. In addition and perhaps most importantly, most qualitative measures would make large-scale analyses difficult if not impossible.

This study attempts to overcome these limitations due to the genre analyzed and the method of doing so. First of all, in this study only texts written in English are used so that comparisons across languages will not be necessary. Second, all texts studied in this analysis are narratives – a genre that is common across all cultures examined. Finally, computational analyses will be used in order to perform microanalyses of this large corpus of texts.

Although most studies done on the influence of gender on language and rhetorical patterns in both Western and non-Western cultures are qualitative in nature, quantitative analyses of rhetorical and syntactic patterns of texts have been completed on a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Perhaps one of the first of these was conducted by Mary Hiatt in 1977, when she used a computational analysis to determine whether syntactic and stylistic differences existed in texts written by both men and women. She found that men's and women's styles differed in sentence length, use of punctuation marks, parallelism, use of adverbs, similes, and various rhetorical devices. Her research has led to several other studies including a computational analysis that found that the literary works of Octavio Paz and Rosario Castellanos respectively contained typical characteristics of male and female speech (Izarray, 1992). Following this tradition, Rey (1994) provides a historical perspective to male and female discourse by quantitatively analyzing the differences in male and female discourse in a television drama, *Star Trek*, comparing its earliest episodes to those written in the mid-nineties. In addition, Brooks (1992) used Biber's (1988) computational analysis to investigate differences in the discourse of male and female authors of Mexican and Anglo American descent, finding trends in differences in how male and female discourse differed across cultures, even though all texts were written in English. This study attempts to extend Brooks' (1992) study to texts written in several varieties of English with the goal of determining whether gender differences in writing styles occur across several cultures or whether they are culturally specific.

### THE FIVE VARIETIES

To examine the influence of gender on language across cultures, five varieties of English were chosen: Anglo American, British, Indian, Mexican American, and West African. Each of these varieties represents a unique position in the circles of English speakers, as proposed by Kachru (1992). Anglo American and British varieties of English compose the inner circle, those cultures that are monolingual in English, and have long traditions of writing in English. West African and Indian varieties are variations of the British variety and are located in the outer circle of English influence, where English is used as a part of the society, but is used only in certain situations (such as in legal systems, education systems, etc.). Both of these varieties of English are unique

because one comes from a long line of oral tradition (West African) and the other from a long line of literary tradition (Indian) in other languages. Finally, Mexican Americans have the unique position of being part of a group whose two cultures collide in what is called the expanding circle of English use. Few studies have concentrated on specific linguistic and stylistic differences in the writing of men and women in many of these varieties, which makes comparisons to qualitative research difficult. However, a review of studies conducted on gender differences in writing styles in each of the varieties will be summarized below, including a brief history of creative writing by women in each variety. For a brief review of the general speaking and writing styles of the five varieties, see Baker and Egginton (1999).

### *British and Anglo American varieties*

Most research on gender and language in English has focused on Anglo American and British varieties, and, although no known studies have compared differences in the influence of gender on language across the two cultures, the results of the studies done on the two varieties show no marked differences across the two cultures. Therefore, this section will collapse the findings on gender differences in writing styles in these two varieties. The list of studies done in these varieties of English is extensive and beyond the scope of this paper; therefore I will concentrate only on those studies pertinent to this one – on quantitative studies that examine differences in texts written by male and female writers.

Women may have begun writing in English in England as early as 1300 when several poems and plays were circulated among the elite under an “anonymous” or assumed authorship, since women, although educated, were not allowed to write or publish any literary works. That stigma slowly began to change so that by the romantic period, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, writers such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, and the Bronte sisters began publishing acclaimed literary works, although many of these authors continued to publish under masculine pseudonyms. In contrast, women began publishing creative works in the United States almost from the inception of the country. Of note is Anne Bradstreet, who published her poems in England both before and after she immigrated to the United States, as early as 1678. Early female short story writers include Sarah Jewell Ornett and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, both of whom began publishing short stories and novels as early as the 1840s.

Some computational studies that have examined differences in writing styles by men and women in these two societies include studies which found stylistic differences in essays written by male and female college composition students (Risch, 1990). These subtle stylistic differences, as well as differences in topic and presentation of topic, are also noted at least unconsciously by readers. Mulac and Lundell (1994) provided participants with several texts written by male and female writers and asked the participants to rate how they perceived the authors based on several psychological factors (1994). The authors' gender was correlated with their scores on these factors – women writers were rated higher in *Socio-Intellectual Status* and *Aesthetic Quality* and men higher on *Dynamism*. Supporting a finding of stylistic differences in texts written by men and women, a multivariate analysis of these same texts also revealed that men were more succinct, more instrumental, and that women tended to have less “assertiveness” in their writing (p. 307). Similarly, Keros (1990) found that the typical theories that state that men tend to talk about autonomous issues and women about relationships was borne out to some degree in American college

students' writing. In conclusion, these computational studies of gender differences in writing styles of British and American varieties of English focus on diverse aspects of narrative and expository writing, and suggest that at least some differences in the writing styles of the two genders do exist.

### *Indian variety*

Of the three nativized varieties, Indian women began publishing literary works in English the earliest, writing creatively in English at least as early as the 1870s when Toru Dutt translated her French poetry into English (Haldar, 1997). Sarojini continued this tradition, publishing her first volume of poetry in English, *The Golden Threshold*, in 1905 (Haldar, 1997). Since then, the number of Indian women writers has grown considerably, as has the number of those who are choosing to write in English. Even before writing in English, however, Indian women wrote in their native languages and in French, often basing their writings on the traditional fable and the Indian popular tale, which have existed for centuries and have given shape to the modern Indian short story (Venugopal, 1976).

Although several linguists have examined the linguistic aspects of Indian English fiction, few have examined the differences in Indian male and female discourse. An exception is Valentine (1986), who used both natural speech and discourse in novels and short stories in order to examine differences in male and female discourse in both Indian English and Hindi. Valentine found gender differences in the linguistic structures of the texts, including differences in the use of questions, "discoursal flow," organization of discourse, and topic selection, especially in cross-gender discourse. She emphasizes that many of these differences are understood only through understanding both the native language of the speaker (Hindi) and the culture of India (p. 176), especially in the way that women choose topics and present these topics, and how they address their husbands and each other. However, she has also examined story-telling of Indian women, finding that, like Western women, they maintain topics and choose topics that show typical gender differences with a goal towards intimacy (1995). Shukla and Khare (1994) also examined politeness in Indian English fiction and found that female characters used more polite forms than male characters did.

### *Mexican American variety*

Around the same time that women in India began publishing literary works in English, Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton was the first Mexican American woman to publish creative literary works in English, the best known of which are *Who Would Have Thought It?* (1872) and *The Squatter and the Don* (1885) (Goldman, 1996). Burton, a native Spanish speaker and daughter of a wealthy landowner, was a product of the Mexican/American treaty of 1848, when the United States received over half of Mexico's territory, including Texas, California, Arizona, and New Mexico. For nearly a century after Ruiz de Burton's first works, however, little literary discourse was published by Mexican American women, in either Spanish or English. In fact, although Mexican American men began to gain a reputation for writing creatively in English during the 1930s and 1940s, it was not until the 1970s that Mexican American women received national acclaim for their work. However, the first creative work written by a modern Mexican American woman appeared in 1954, Fabiola Cabeza de Vaca's *We Fed Them Cactus*. Since the inception of Chicano literature, Mexican American men have written about the complexities of living in two cultures,

Mexican and American. In contrast, Mexican American women have often been acclaimed as being the ones who write for the voiceless – the underprivileged class – and whose literature often acts as social criticism.

Most of the studies or commentaries on Mexican American women emphasize that Mexican American women are “innovators” in both cultural and educational change in their community (Whiteford, 1980). These changes have also influenced their perspective of Spanish and English. Often, Mexican Americans sense that they are a part of neither one culture nor the other (Gonzales-Velasquez, 1995), and, more and more, they are using English instead of Spanish in order to progress in mainstream American culture, but this often leads to guilt and harsh self-criticism of their language use (Galindo, 1996), topics that are apparent in their literary works.

### *West African variety*

West African women were the last of the three nativized varieties to begin publishing in English. Although men began writing in English in Africa in the early 1900s and writing creatively in the 1930s (King, 1980), African women did not begin to publish literary works until well into the 1960s and 1970s, probably because English education was not prevalent for women until after the Second World War.

Studies written on the differences between male and female writing in West Africa have focused on differences in themes used by male versus female African writers. For example, many scholars emphasize that in African women's writing there has always been an emphasis on change, because of the drastic changes in their society since the end of the Second World War (see, for example, Harrow, 1994). Many scholars also emphasize that West African men and women have created two separate traditions of writing, the men writing about the effects of colonial rule on their countries, and the women writing about the difficulties of being raised in a traditional African environment and confronting Western ideas and ideals about being a woman. For example, Ormerod, Volet, and Jacomard (1995) found that African French-speaking male and female writers differ in how they portray men and women in their novels. Based on their individual research, they have also discovered that African male writers tend to choose themes describing “the plight of people who are victims of political chaos and corruption” whereas women choose themes “about the survival of people in an unfriendly environment” (p. 366).

In Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy*, the narrator talks about creating a “secret language” that draws on both traditional story-telling and on the traditions of Western society in order to create texts that also combine the complexities of being from two worlds, raised in traditional tribal communities, but educated in Western society (Chetin, 1993). Thus, stories written by West African women tend to be autobiographical and narrative in form, but often have elements of Western philosophy (for a discussion of one autobiography, see Birch, 1993). In addition, West African male and female writers are known for using traditional oral characteristics even in their literary texts, drawing on their oral history and combining this with literary stylistics and themes common in traditional English literature.

### **CORPUS FOR THIS STUDY**

As can be seen in the above discussion, each culture's history of literary writing has both similarities and marked differences from the other varieties. To examine whether

these differences can also be noted using computational analyses, 20 short stories, 10 written by male and 10 by female authors, were randomly chosen from each of the five varieties, for a total of 100 short stories altogether.<sup>1</sup> Containing approximately 300,000 words, the corpus is composed of texts originally written in English and published between 1970 and 1994.

### *Methodology*

One way to measure differences across a large body of texts is to use Biber's (1988) multidimensional analysis, which determines whether literary texts written by men and women differ in their use of typical characteristics of oral communication. Other studies have revealed that women's writing tends to be more autobiographical and narrative in nature, containing more characteristics of oral communication (Tannen, 1990).

Biber's method is particularly useful for this type of analysis because one of his main purposes in developing his computational analysis was to determine aspects of spoken and written language (1988). His database is composed of several genres of both written and spoken English and the texts used in this study are compared to the results of different types of genres to determine whether the texts have more characteristics of written or spoken discourse. To do so, the program tags linguistic items in the text, such as first person pronouns, passive constructions, and *wh*-questions, and then determines the frequency of these items, as well as how they interact with each other. For example, Biber's multivariate analysis "tags" or recognizes how often linguistic items such as the first person pronoun and present tense verbs are used within a text. Because these linguistic items are typical of face-to-face, here-and-now discourse, they are often indicative of oral communication, and a text that has a high frequency of these and related linguistic items would score "high" on an aspect or dimension of the text that distinguishes oral from written communication. Several linguistic items are used to determine different aspects or "dimensions" of a text. The frequency of these linguistic items locates each text on a continuum within five dimensions: (1) involved vs. informational discourse; (2) narrative vs. non-narrative concerns; (3) explicit vs. situation-dependent reference; (4) overt expression of persuasion; and (5) abstract vs. non-abstract information. Each text receives a score on each of these dimensions, and its score is compared to the other texts examined.

These dimensions are on a continuum, so that a text is not "narrative" or "non-narrative," but is either less or more narrative in its construction. In addition, each dimension represents a different perspective of the texts. For example, short stories, because they usually contain past tense verbs and third person pronouns (items usually found in telling stories) usually score high on dimension 2 (narrative vs. non-narrative concerns), indicating that these texts are narrative in nature. In contrast, a scientific article, because it usually contains linguistic features such as passives, scores low on this dimension or on the "non-narrative" side of the same axis. However, most narratives contain non-abstract information and therefore score lower on dimension 5 than do scientific articles which often use abstract terms and passive constructions, typical characteristics of texts describing abstract information. A longer discussion of what linguistic items are used to determine the location of a text on each of these dimensions is given below.

## HYPOTHESES

The main hypothesis of this study was that, if male and female writing differ because of inherent differences in the way that men and women think and communicate, then we should expect that any statistically significant differences in the writing of male and female authors should be seen equally across all cultures. Because writing by women has been found to have more characteristics of involved and oral discourse (Tannen, 1990), it is assumed that texts written by women would especially differ from texts written by men on dimensions 1 (involved vs. informational), 3 (explicit vs. situation-dependent), and 5 (abstract vs. non-abstract), or those dimensions that are particularly useful in distinguishing between oral and written texts (Biber, 1988). More specifically, texts written by women, if they contain more characteristics of oral communication, should be more concerned about involving the reader (scoring higher on dimension 1), more based on here-and-now situations (scoring higher on dimension 3), and less abstract in language (scoring lower on dimension 5).

A second possibility is that the influence of gender on writing styles varies across cultures. That is to say, it may be that, in some cultures, texts written by male authors will actually be more involved, more situation-dependent, and less abstract than those written by women. It may also be that the differences between male and female discourse will be more marked in some cultures than in others. In order to determine whether this is the case, a separate analysis, comparing the differences between male and female writing within each variety was also undertaken.

To test these hypotheses, the corpus of 100 short stories (10 written by male and 10 written by female authors in each variety) was scanned into computer readable format and checked for accuracy. Next, linguistic features in the texts were "tagged" (marked as a certain type of linguistic feature, such as a first person pronoun, passive verb, etc.) using Biber's tagging program and once again checked by the author for accuracy in the tagging. Next, a multi-dimensional factor analysis was conducted on these tagging counts, so that it was determined how many of the linguistics features were found in each text. The texts were statistically analyzed with "variety" as an independent variable and individual factors as dependent variables. Each text was given a "score" on each of the five dimensions.

## RESULTS

A more detailed discussion and the predictions for results obtained of each dimension is given below. To test the hypothesis that writing by men would be different than writing by women across dimensions 1, 3, and 5, the mean scores of the 50 texts written by male authors on each dimension were compared to the 50 texts written by female authors. These results are listed at the top of tables 1–5 below. In addition, to test the hypothesis that the extent of differences between how male and female writing would depend on the variety of English used, in each table the mean scores and results for comparing texts written by women and men within each variety are given next in alphabetical order: Anglo American, British, Indian, Mexican American, and West African. T-tests were administered to make these within-group comparisons (comparing differences between male and female writing within each variety). If statistical significance is obtained, the p-value (level of significance) is also listed. The letters *NS* signify there was no statistically significant difference between the scores for the texts written by male and female authors for that dimension.



*Dimension 1: Involved versus informational production*

Dimension 1 is the dimension that most differentiates spoken from written discourse and also is the dimension that compares the most linguistic features (Biber, 1988: 104). "Involved" discourse usually attempts to describe more relational, more immediate ideas and contains characteristics of here-and-now, face-to-face communication, such as present tense verbs and first person pronouns. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo's style in "The Message" (1983) shows characteristics of typical oral discourse (such as first person pronouns and present tense verbs) in her story of a grandmother who, bewildered by modern medical practices, having heard her granddaughter was "opened up" fully expects her to be dead and gets ready to go to the city to bury her:

I am taking one of her own cloths with me, just in case. These people on the coast do not know how to do a thing and I am not going to have anybody mishandling my child's body. I hope they give it to me. Horrible things I have heard done to people's bodies. (p. 25)

On the other hand, texts that score on the negative side of this axis, or on the "informational" side, contain typical characteristics of written prose, such as passive verbs and constructions that convey more information with fewer words. Compare the style of Ama Ata Aidoo with that of Chinua Achebe (both writing in the West African variety of English) in "Civil Peace":

The bicycle had a little history of its own. One day at the height of the war it was commandeered 'for urgent military action.' Hard as its loss would have been to him he would still have let it go without a thought had he not had some doubts about the genuineness of the officer. It wasn't his disreputable rags, nor the toes peeping out of one blue and one brown canvas shoe, nor yet the two stars of his rank done obviously in a hurry in biro that troubled Jonathan; many good and heroic soldiers looked the same or worse. It was rather a certain lack of grip and firmness in his manner. (1985: 29)

Based on popular theories of differences between male and female discourse (see, for example, Tannen, 1990), men communicate more to provide information, while women tend to communicate more to establish community. Thus, although this dimension also differentiates spoken from written discourse, it also may show differences in how male and female authors convey information and involve the reader. It may be that female rhetorical styles would tend to be more involved than informational if they perceive the function of their communication differently than male writers do.

As shown in table 1, the mean score of all the texts written by men (5.2) is statistically significantly different from the mean scores of those written by women (9.8). The results of this dimension, therefore, suggest that universally (across the five varieties) gender influences how much an author uses stylistic measures intended to involve the reader.

In comparing differences within the five varieties, the patterns found on this dimension are typical of those found on the other dimensions as well. First of all, within variety analyses reveal that the scores of texts written by West African male (4.0) and female (17.2) writers and those by Anglo American male (6.0) and female (13.8) writers differ the most of all the varieties, which is typical of their scores on all the dimensions. In fact, statistical significance was reached for these two varieties ( $p < .05$ ). On the other hand, there are relatively little differences between the scores of texts written by males and females for the British, Mexican American, and Indian varieties. One final note of interest is that the Mexican American variety is the only variety where scores of the texts written by men are

Table 1. Mean Scores for dimension 1 for the overall comparison between texts written by male and female authors as well as the mean scores for the texts in each variety of English

	Male	Female	Significance
Overall scores	5.2	9.8	p < .05
Anglo American	6.0	13.8	p < .05
British	3.1	7.2	NS
West African	4.0	17.2	p < .05
Indian	6.9	7.2	NS
Mexican American	5.7	4.2	NS

\*p < .05; NS = non significant

*more involved* than those of the texts written by females. In fact, texts written by Mexican American females score lower than many of those on the other varieties for texts written by males.

### *Dimension 2: Narrative versus non-narrative concerns*

Linguistic features on dimension 2 determine whether the text displays features usually indicative of a narrative. Features that cause a text to be "positive" or "narrative" on this dimension include past tense verbs and third person pronouns, features that are usually associated with telling stories. Other positive features are identified because of their ability to create "vivid images in depicted discourse" (Biber, 1988: 105). Negative or "non-narrative" features are identified by their "immediate time and attributive nominal elaboration" (p. 105). These features include present tense verbs and attributive adjectives. Non-narrative texts tend to describe static events that occur in the present (p. 105).

One example of vivid descriptions, use of past tense and third person pronouns comes from the opening paragraph from Keki N. Daruwala's "Love across the Salt Desert" that tells of a love story from Northern India:

The drought in Kutch had lasted for three successive years. Even when clouds were sighted they passed by, ignoring the stricken country. The monsoons had, so to speak, forgotten to land. The Rann lay like a paralysed monster, its back covered with scab and scar-tissue and dried blister-skin. The earth had cracked and it looked as if chunks of it had been baked in a kiln and then embedded in the soil-crust . . . Then one day the clouds rolled in like wineskins and the lightning crackled and the wineskins burst. Though two years have passed since the drought ended, everyone remembers that it first rained on the day when Fatimah entered the village. This is how she came. (1988: 16)

There has been little research to my knowledge that indicates whether or in what way gender is associated with a narrative style. However, it may be hypothesized that, since female authors may be more concerned with involving the reader, they may also have texts that contain more typical characteristics of narratives.

However, as table 2 indicates, although the overall score of texts written by female authors across the five varieties (5.8) is higher than that for texts written by male authors (4.8), there is no statistically significant difference between these two scores. Of course, since all the texts are narratives, this result was not surprising. Interestingly, in nearly every variety (except the Mexican American variety) texts written by female authors displayed more characteristics of narrative texts than did those written by male authors.

Table 2. Mean Scores for dimension 2 for the overall comparison between texts written by male and female authors as well as the mean scores for the texts in each variety of English

	Male	Female	Significance
Overall scores	4.8	5.8	NS
Anglo American	5.5	6.9	NS
British	4.3	5.0	NS
Indian	4.6	5.1	NS
Mexican American	4.3	3.7	NS
West African	5.5	8.2	NS

A general comparison of differences among the five varieties shows that, as happened on dimension 1, texts written by West African women (8.2) and Anglo American women (6.9) have scores that again are much higher than any other texts written by women (although the standard deviation is also higher). In addition, West African male (5.5) and Anglo American male (5.5) texts' scores are also higher than those of texts written by men in the other three varieties. As happened on dimension 1, the scores of the Mexican American male and female authors are reversed from those of the other four varieties: texts written by men score higher (or more narrative in nature) than those written by women, suggesting that male authors employ more narrative characteristics in their writing than do Mexican American female authors.

### *Dimension 3: Explicit versus situation-dependent reference*

Dimension 3 indicates how much the text contains contextual information. Explicit texts refer to information contained within the text and therefore features that make a text more "explicit" or "informational" include WH-relative clauses on subject and object positions, nominalizations and pied piping construction, or constructions that are often used in scientific articles (Biber, 1988, p. 110). In contrast, "situation-dependent" references use discourse markers that refer to events in the physical and temporal world (p. 147). Thus, negative features associated with this dimension include time, place, and other adverbs because they tend to be used as deictic expressions that require the reader to understand a specific context or location.

An example of using time and place adverbials, as well as other deictic expressions can be seen in the first paragraph of Dagoberto Gilb's "Romero's shirt" which describes the home where Romero lives:

It is a modest house even by El Paso standards. The building, in an abobe style, is made of stone which is painted white, though the paint is gradually chipping off or being absorbed by the rock . . . At the front door side is a garden of cactuses – nopal, ocotillo, and agave – and there are weeds that grow tall with yellow flowers which seed into thorn-hard burrs. The rest is dirt and rocks of various sizes, the loose ones of which have been lined up to form a narrow path out of the graded dirt, a walkway to the front porch – where, under a tile and tongue-and-groove overhang, are a wooden chair and a love seat, covered by an old bed-spread, its frame legless on the red cement slab. (1992: 1)

On this dimension, oral texts usually are more situation-dependent, using more time and place adverbials and describing events and ideas outside the text. According to Biber

Table 3. Mean Scores for dimension 3 for the overall comparison between texts written by male and female authors as well as the mean scores for the texts in each variety of English

	Male	Female	Significance
Overall scores	-2.5	-2.4	NS
Anglo American	-3.9	-4.7	NS
British	-1.3	-2.1	NS
Indian	-1.8	-1.9	NS
Mexican American	-3.0	-1.9	NS
West African	-2.4	-1.7	NS

(1988), narratives in general usually score low on this dimension (around -3) as do conversations (around -5) and broadcasts (around -9). Therefore, since the hypothesis is that texts written by women will contain more characteristics of oral communication, they should score higher on this dimension.

The analysis comparing all of the texts written by men (mean score, -2.5) to all of the texts written by women (mean score, -2.4) shows that there was little difference on this dimension between texts written by men and women. In addition, the scores on this dimension do not follow the typical pattern found on the other dimensions. For example, on this dimension, not all the texts written by men score higher than the texts written by women in their respective variety of English. Texts written by British male authors (-1.3) score lower than texts written by British female authors (-2.1); texts written by Anglo American male authors (-3.9) score lower than those by Anglo American females (-4.7); and texts written by Indian male authors (-1.8) score lower than those by Indian female authors (-1.9). In contrast, texts written by West African (-2.4) and Mexican American (-3.0) male authors score lower than texts written by West African (-1.7) and Mexican American (-1.9) female authors respectively. In effect, of course, since there was no statistically significant difference between male and female discourse in any of the varieties, and especially since the scores between all the groups were so similar, any interpretation of these results would be highly speculative.

#### *Dimension 4: Overt expression of persuasion*

Features on dimension 4 determine how much texts reveal the speaker's attitude and point of view. Modals are the markers of persuasion, as are conditional subordination and suasive verbs, (i.e., "*command, demand, instruct*," Biber, 1988: 111) and a high frequency of these items causes a text to score high on this dimension. Infinitives, however, are weighed heaviest on this dimension because they tend to be used with adjective and verb complements. In turn, these head adjectives and verbs usually describe the author's attitude about the action described in the infinitive (for example "wanted to do right," "sad to have left"). Since there are no negative features found on dimension 4, negative scores are determined by their lack of the linguistic features listed above.

Flora Nwapa's "This is Lagos," tells the story of a young woman ("Soha") from a village learning the rules of the society of Lagos. In this example, modals are used to compare the norms that the young woman was raised with and offer a commentary on them:

Soha was still in front of the mirror admiring herself. She was not in a hurry at all. Her mother had told her that she should never show a man that she was anxious about him. She should rather keep him waiting as long as she wished. She was wearing one of the dresses she sewed herself when she was at home. She suddenly thought of changing it. But she changed her mind, and instead came out. She was looking very shy as she took the outstretched hand of the man who had come to visit her. (1983: 42)

Siegler and Siegler (1976) discovered that females tend to “soften” their language by using modals, especially when using persuasive speech. However, modals can also be used, as shown in the example above, to express an opinion. Indeed, in many of the varieties, female authors see their writing as a way to criticize their society or persuade others to bring about change (see discussion above). Therefore, it was predicted that on this dimension, which is mainly based on the use of modals in texts, female authors’ texts would use more persuasive linguistic expressions in their discourse, or would score higher than texts written by men.

On this dimension, all of the texts written by women (−1.1) score slightly higher than the texts written by men (−4.2) in each variety of English, although there is little difference between the scores of texts written by Mexican American male (−4.6) and female (−4.5); between Anglo American male (−3.6) and female (−3.1); and between British male (−4.4) and female (−3.5) authors, suggesting that, although trends are apparent, overall gender contributes little in determining the use of persuasive speech in rhetorical styles for these varieties of English. Interestingly, all the texts score around −3.8, so that all the texts, except for West African texts written by women, have few overt expressions of persuasion.

West African texts written by women, however, score at 8.8, much higher than West African texts written by men and are, in fact, much different from all other texts’ scores (it is because of their texts’ scores that there is any notable difference in the overall scores of texts written by men and women). However, there is a large standard deviation associated with these scores, so that the minimum score on this dimension for West African female authors was −6.0 and the highest was 109.5! Because of the large difference between texts written in this group, although there is a large difference between the scores based on gender on this dimension, it just failed to reach statistical significance. However, West African texts written by men do score the *lowest* of the ten groups on this dimension while West African texts written by women score the *highest*, suggesting some differences do exist between male and female discourse in their use of persuasive speech.

Table 4. Mean Scores for dimension 4 for the overall comparison between texts written by male and female authors as well as the mean scores for the texts in each variety of English

	Male	Female	Significance
Overall scores	−4.2	−1.1	NS
Anglo American	−3.6	−3.1	NS
British	−4.4	−3.5	NS
Indian	−3.8	−3.4	p < .05
Mexican American	−4.6	−4.5	NS
West African	−4.8	8.8	NS

p < .05; NS = non significant

Surprisingly, what appears by the mean scores to be relatively little difference between texts written by Indian male and female authors actually reached a level of statistical significance. Thus, of the five varieties, only texts written by Indian male and female authors scored statistically differently on their use of persuasive speech.

#### *Dimension 5: Abstract versus non-abstract/information*

Texts on dimension 5 are scored based on how technical, formal, and abstract they are. Positive features include conjunctions, agentless passives, past participial clauses, and by-passives. Only one feature, a high type-token ratio, contributes to negative scores on this dimension. The reason this feature causes negative scores is that abstract writing usually employs only a small, specialized vocabulary in its discourse, whereas non-abstract discourse has more variety in its vocabulary.

This dimension distinguishes academic prose from other genres. Literary texts score low on this dimension. Compare the style of an example of an engineering report (Biber, 1988: 152) with a paragraph from Arun Joshi's "The only American from our village," a story of a man who returns to India after living in the United States for fifteen years:

It follows that the performance of down-draught systems can be improved by the influence of cross draughts only if the thermal currents are blown into exhaust air streams at higher velocities than the cross draughts, so that the resultant direction of all dust bearing air streams is towards the grid . . .

Dr. Khanna was easily the most outstanding immigrant physicist at the University of Wisconsin. Personally, he considered himself to be the finest of all physicists, immigrant or native. He was also among the dozen or so best-dressed men on the campus. (Joshi, 1988: 32)

On this dimension, it was predicted that texts written by men would be more abstract than texts written by women since studies indicate that male language tends more towards abstraction than female language does (Kruse, Weimer, and Wagner, 1988). Cixous and other French feminists also believe that men think more abstractly than women, because women tend to be concerned more with the here and now. These thought processes, Cixous contends, are also apparent in how female and male authors write (1983).

However, as table 5 indicates, the scores on this dimension show the least difference of all five dimensions. The male and female text scores in all the varieties of English are quite similar. In fact, for the British and Mexican American varieties, the scores are exactly the same, (British male and female, 0.0, Mexican American male and female, -0.6).

Table 5. Mean Scores for dimension 5 for the overall comparison between texts written by male and female authors as well as the mean scores for the texts in each variety of English

	Male	Female	Significance
Overall scores	-0.5	-0.7	NS
Anglo American	-1.0	-1.2	NS
British	0.0	0.0	NS
Indian	-0.2	-0.9	p < .05
Mexican American	-0.6	-0.6	NS
West African	-0.5	-1.0	NS

p < .05, NS = non significant

The scores for the texts written by men and women in the Anglo American, West African and Indian varieties scores suggest that male authors use slightly more abstract language than female authors do. However, only the texts written by Indian male and female authors again differed on this dimension, suggesting that Indian male authors tend to write texts that are more abstract than do Indian female authors.

## DISCUSSION

The major goal of this study was to analyze whether the results from Biber's computational analysis in any way support the past findings of gender differences in varieties of English and, if so, whether these findings would shed additional light on stylistic and rhetorical differences used across different cultures. The results of this study provide evidence that computational analyses can be used to examine differences in literary styles across gender in different varieties of English. However, the results of this study show that gender differences are related to the culture of the writer. How these differences are manifest is discussed below.

### *Hypotheses*

The main hypothesis of this paper was that gender manifests itself similarly across all cultures. This did not prove to be the case. When all texts written by women were compared to all texts written by men, only one dimension reached statistical significance. Significance on this one dimension indicates that women prefer more involved means of communication than men do, regardless of culture. Interestingly, perhaps more has been written on this difference in male and female discourse than on any other stylistic difference and has been shown in qualitative and quantitative studies across several varieties of English and in several other languages as well.

A second hypothesis of this study predicted that the influence of gender on writing styles may vary from culture to culture. The results of this study more strongly support this hypothesis. Differences between texts written by men and by women within a certain variety occur on dimensions 1 (Anglo American and West African), 4, (Indian) and 5 (Indian). In addition, texts written by Mexican American men and women differed from the general pattern found for the other varieties of English: Texts written by Mexican American women showed characteristics that were typical of texts written by men in the other four varieties. Each of these differences will be discussed below.

First, texts written by West African men displayed marked differences in literary style from those written by West African women, as evidenced from their mean scores on the first dimension and the trends found on nearly every other dimension. One explanation for these differences between the styles of West African male and female authors may be that West African female authors did not begin publishing in English until much later than West African male writers, and therefore may have developed a style independent of that used by West African male writers. A second possibility may be that the time period when West African women began writing, in the 1960s, influenced their style of writing; this time period represented great change in the colonial nature of their country, and the economic and social upheavals of the middle of the twentieth century. With this change came a literary tradition of writing that reflected and influenced many of these changes. It may be that female rhetorical styles reflect a different purpose in writing. Thus, West African women may have a different perception of the function of creative writing, seeing creative

writing as a way to combat the oppression of women in their society. This would explain why their creative writing would score very high on dimension 4 because this dimension records the amount of persuasive speech used in the text.

Second, similarly, statistically significant differences between male and female writing were also found in the Indian variety in the use of persuasive speech. These differences may suggest that Indian women also see the purpose of writing differently than do Indian male writers. As discussed above, both West African and Indian women have been known to use their literature to speak out against social injustices and call for reforms, which may explain the difference in their use of persuasive speech from Indian male authors.

Texts written by Indian male and female authors were also statistically significantly different on dimension 5, abstract vs. non-abstract information. Since this dimension marks differences between written and spoken discourse, it may be concluded that texts written by Indian women contain more characteristics of oral texts. Reasons for this difference may be that Indian women rely more heavily on traditional story-telling techniques, have had a shorter history of writing (in English and perhaps in other languages as well) or because of a desire to distinguish their writing from that of Indian male writers.

Many critics argue that Indian English writers may be expressing "bilingual orthodoxy" where they adhere to a language standard even more rigidly than those who are writing from the inner circle (Bhatia, 1992). Indeed, in this study there was very little difference between the scores of the texts written in the British variety (by men or women) and those in the Indian variety. Thus, one reason for the similarity between Indian and British texts may be, as Venugopal (1976) explains, that, although India writers took the traditions and form of their stories from ancient Indian fables and popular tales, they borrowed the language and prose style from British counterparts and predecessors, probably because of the influence of English education (p. 14). Indian English fiction writers may not attempt to use new phrases in their works, but prefer to differentiate their writing not so much with syntactic differences as differences in imagery, metaphors and rhetorical structure (Alam, 1994). It may be that this is the case only for Indian male or only Indian female authors. Or it may be that a traditional "male" text has evolved and a traditional "female" text in the Indian variety of English, which is evident in the differences in scores between texts written by males and females in this variety. More study needs to be done explicitly comparing the writing of Indian male and female authors with those of British male and female authors.

Third, perhaps one of the most interesting differences between male and female writing styles is that, unlike in the other varieties, texts written by Mexican American male authors were found to be more involved, more situation-dependent, and more persuasive than texts written by Mexican American female authors. These results suggest that gender differences in the Mexican American variety are reversed from those found in the other four varieties, a finding that confirms the results found by Brooks (1992). This reversing of scores suggests that the influence of gender on writing styles is not universal, not the same in every culture. It is interesting to note, however, that texts written by Mexican American male authors score similarly to texts written by male authors in the other varieties. In contrast, the texts written by Mexican American female authors do not score similarly to the texts written by female authors in the other four varieties – they have scores that are more typical of texts written by men in the other four varieties. In other words, Mexican



American female authors' rhetorical styles are more similar to styles typically noted in texts written by men.

One hypothesis that may explain why these differences occur was proposed by Brooks (1992) who stated that, because Mexican American females are minorities in both the Anglo American main culture and their own Mexican American culture, they have altered their rhetorical styles to combat oppression and to distinguish themselves from others. In other words, just as Dominguez (1983) states that minority writers change their writing to distinguish themselves from the majority, perhaps female writers also change their writing to distinguish themselves from male writers. However, Mexican American women must differentiate their language not only from Mexican American men, but also from Anglo American women. Perhaps for this reason their texts score so much differently than do those of other varieties.

Finally, one surprising result for this study is the dissimilarity between the influence of gender in the Anglo American and British varieties of English. Although there were statistical differences between the texts written by Anglo American men and women on at least dimension 1, there was little difference between the texts written by British male and female authors. In fact, except for the West African texts written by women, Anglo American texts scored much higher than did the other texts written by women. Perhaps linguistic creativity is more emphasized or perhaps the need to differentiate between genders is stronger in American culture. In any case, the fact that there are differences between the two standard varieties of English is apparent. Perhaps because women have been writing in this variety the longest, the British variety displayed the least difference between texts written by male and female authors.

### CONCLUSION

One difficulty in answering the question about the influence of gender on writing styles is that, although many analyses of gender differences in literary discourse have found that women's creative writing differs at least to some extent from men's writing, especially in choice of topic and topic presentation (Izarray, 1992; Hiatt, 1977; Ormerod *et al.*, 1995), other studies have suggested that differences in women's and men's speech may be caused by other factors (Eckert, 1998; O'Barr and Atkins, 1998). In fact, some scholars believe that differences between men and women exist only because of sociological factors, where women's behavior is indicative of any group that is powerless or a minority (Cameron, 1992). Other scholars disagree, claiming that gender is biological and manifests itself even in writing (Cixous, 1988). However, if gender differences were manifested because of biological differences, then we should assume that they would be manifested to the same extent across all cultures. The results of this study suggest that this is not the case.

Instead, three conclusions can be made from the results of this study. First, more emphasis should be paid to understanding how gender and culture combine in order to better define what is meant by "bilingual creativity." If gender differences are manifested differently depending on the linguistic and cultural background of the author, then an understanding of these differences is necessary in order to understand how bilinguals use their two languages to differentiate themselves from others and to creatively express ideas and meaning in their texts. Second, more research needs to be done comparing different varieties of English to each other, especially the way that gender is manifested in texts of all genres. Finally, computational methods help us understand such things as how gender

differences in writing styles are manifested differently depending on the culture of the author. The influence of gender and culture on writing styles may be like the different textures and colors described by Anita Desai (1996), when asked about her linguistic background and the influence it had on her writing styles:

Those purists who speak of the desirability of one language, one tradition, one culture must come from a more secluded, more elevated part of the world than I do. In my experience, Indian life has always been an amalgam of so many languages, cultures, and civilizations that they formed one very compactly woven whole, a fabric of different textures and colors, so inextricably woven together that to pull them apart would be to tear the fabric, to turn a perfectly serviceable garment into a pile of unusable rags and shreds.

## NOTES

1. The anthologies from which the texts were taken are listed in the references section. A complete list of the short stories in this study can be obtained by contacting the author.

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