

Is text length determined by register or by elicitation order?

A study using the RUEG corpus

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One easily noticeable feature of register variation is the use of ellipses, reduced forms and deletions. The aforementioned are more prominent in informal registers (Biber, 1995 p. 4, Biber and Conrad, 2009, p. 79, p. 194). If the same contents were to be produced in different registers, this should lead to shorter texts in informal registers in comparison to more formal ones. Since there seldom is the need to express the same contents in different registers, this topic is not easy to research.

The RUEG corpus (Wiese et al., 2021) contains four texts per participant in two different registers and two different modes: formal written, formal spoken, informal written, and informal spoken. The texts all contain descriptions of a minor car accident previously shown to participants in a short video clip. Therefore, the RUEG corpus provides the opportunity to investigate such topics. There was no minimum or maximum text length requirement to be met by the participants during elicitation. To counterbalance effects stemming from elicitation order of the four texts, the order was randomised. Without such measures, an effect could arise in the form of decreasing text lengths from the first text elicited to the last one. These considerations lead to the research question whether effects of elicitation order or effects of register are stronger when it comes to text length. Do the texts produced by the same participant decrease in length with the order of elicitation possibly because of the repetition of the same contents? Or is the choice of register defining the text length regardless of the elicitation order?

Should register appear to be the driving factor, repetitions of the same contents seem to have less effect on text length than the mere choice of register itself. If elicitation order seems to drive the choice of text length, randomising elicitation order appears as suitable measure to solve unwanted effects.

References

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