The Way We Write is All Wrong:

A Profile of and Prescription for Fixing
The Broken Discourse of Fund Raising

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Abstract

This article summarizes the troubling findings uncovered in a corpus linguistics analysis of 1.5 million words of fund-raising discourse. These findings are troubling because they profile discourse patterns that run diametrically counter to the writing advice experts in the fields of direct response marketing and fund-raising have historically offered practitioners. Most of the organizations whose texts were evaluated raise at least $20 million annually in public support. Four aspects of the doctoral research this article is based on are reported here: 1.) the statistical *procedures* used to analyze texts, 2.) the *profile* of co-occurring linguistic features and rhetorical structures that emerged, 3.) the root *problems* underlying these profiles, and 4.) a *prescription* for improving fund-raising discourse by *writing* what I call the *voice* of *philanthropy*—the *voice* of the *friend of man*.

The style of writing used in this article purposefully strays from the common conventions of academic prose not only to better communicate content, but also to demonstrate the contrasting distribution patterns of linguistic features discussed. For example, to demonstrate the use of linguistic features common to discourse focused on *interpersonal involvement* I use private verbs, instances of that-deletion, contractions, present tense verbs, first person pronouns, causative subordination, discourse particles, amplifiers, and sentence relatives. And to demonstrate the use of linguistic features common to *narrative* discourse, my writing style contains a heavy dose of past tense verbs, third-person pronouns, perfect aspect verbs, synthetic negation and present participial clauses. Thus, as Marshall McLuhan would put it, *the medium becomes the message* (1964, 1967).

Two contrasting notions—the written *word* and the written *voice*—are at the heart of a troubling discovery about the discourse of fund raising. That discovery led to my admittedly provocative conclusion that *the way we write is all wrong*. And while it sounds slightly impolite, my conclusion is based on a profile of the dominant rhetorical and linguistic patterns in the fund-raising texts of America's leading nonprofits.

As the voice of *philanthropy* (the voice of the *friend of man*), anyone who *writes* fund-raising discourse essentially *speaks* for a person in need. Therefore, such discourse at its best should *read* like a conversation *sounds*. It should read like the banter between friends over a cup of coffee—filled with personal views, concerns, stories, and emotion.

This assumption begs the question: "Does the writing of fund raisers *sound* like a concerned, passionate *voice* advocating for a friend . . . or does it *read* like a cold, detached *position paper* arguing a point of theory for a professor who is no longer there?"

I answer this question in a corpus analysis of 2,412 online and direct mail fund-raising documents written by America's elite charities. My study analyzes the distribution patterns of 67 linguistic features that profile a 1.5-million-word corpus (body) of written discourse. I also describe rhetorical structures found in a representative sample of these texts. Documents were evenly divided between paper and online sources: 49.6 percent (748,023 words) came from direct mail letters and 50.4 percent (760,431 words) came from web sites.

This is the first comprehensive study of its kind, focused on reviewing the fund-raising discourse written by America's elite charities. Documents examined came from 880 nonprofits, spanning nine philanthropic sectors—725 U.S. nonprofit organizations that raise at least $20 million annually, 145 that raise less than $20 million, and 10 international charities that raise at least $20 million in the U.S. In aggregate these organizations raised $73.1 billion in direct public support, as reported on line 1a (or 1b) of IRS form 990—a sum excluding government grants, service, and membership fees.

My corpus analysis was prompted by a smaller research project in which Indiana University professors Thomas Upton and Ulla Connor (2003) profiled 316 direct mail letters from 108 nonprofits, spanning five philanthropic sectors. I was stunned by their conclusions. They used computer routines Douglas Biber had developed to profile linguistic features across spoken and written English (1984, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1995, 2004). Summarizing what they discovered about fund-raising letters, they wrote:

> this genre . . . contains some counter-intuitive features. These include the
> fact that these letters are more like academic expository texts than like
> personal letters; they have a strong information focus as opposed to the
> involved, interpersonal features we expected to see; they are mostly
> expository in structure, only sprinkled with narrative tales; and they tend
> to be highly polished, closely edited texts, which is counter to the
> impression they attempt to give as quickly penned, chatty letters. . . .These
> direct mail letters are more informational than even academic prose . . .
> and quite unlike the personal letters that we tend to consider them modeled

after. . . . Direct mail letters are more strongly non-narrative than almost all other genres—spoken or written—including professional letters and academic prose. (2003, pp. 78, 81, 84)

A Girl Scouts fund appeal illustrates the kind of letters Connor and Upton found:

> Young women are growing up in an ever-changing society. As a contributor to the Council in past appeals I know that you are aware of our mission—to prepare girls with ethical values, character, a desire to succeed and a commitment to their community. This letter is our 1997 request for a gift to the Annual Campaign for support of our operating budget. This year's Annual Campaign goal is $65,000. We invite you to consider a contribution. Your gift, along with the many others we receive, will provide vital resources for today's Girl Scouts to become tomorrow's community and business leaders. (Connor & Upton, 2003, p.78)

Discussing the Girl Scouts letter in the larger context of what they found throughout their corpus of texts, the authors observe that such letters tend to be

> written with considerable care, usually going through several drafts, and thus they can show considerable lexical variety and informational density. Letters of this type can be interactive (e.g. using first and second person pronouns), but their primary focus is informational rather than involved . . . this text is clearly not interactional in nature but instead is tightly and carefully written to convey a lot of detailed information in a succinct manner. (Connor & Upton, 2003, p.78)

I considered Connor and Upton's report troubling because direct response copy writing practitioners like John Caples, in the commercial marketplace, and Jerry Huntsinger, in the nonprofit sector, had influenced my own writing style. Thought leaders like Caples (1936, 1938, 1957, 1974, 1983) and Huntsinger (1977, 1989a, 1989b, 1992) had taught generations of writers the importance of making personal connections with readers. They and others like them had championed the power of storytelling as an effective way to sell products or raise funds. Now Connor and Upton's linguistics research clearly indicated the influence of such direct response icons had not just waned, but vanished. To direct response fund raising, the end of such leaders' influence reminds one of the change that occurred in ancient Egypt when there came to power *a Pharaoh who knew not Joseph*. New leaders in fund raising seem to *know not the power of personal connection and storytelling*.

Believing this trend represented a profound problem, and because I was looking for an analytic model for my own research, I called the authors to discuss the design and surprising results of their study. Ulla Connor noted that most of the organizations from which their texts had been gathered were located within a 50-mile radius of Indianapolis.

Hearing this, I immediately sensed a potential problem with their findings. Having graduated from nearby Ohio State University, I knew the area well and wondered

whether Connor and Upton's results could have been skewed by the fact that their corpus of texts had been written by individuals who worked for small- to mid-sized nonprofits. These individuals simply may have lacked the skill and experience of their counterparts at elite national nonprofits. I was sure these constraints accounted for their surprising results.

To test this hypothesis, I focused my research on describing the linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of fund-raising discourse produced by the nation's most successful charities. I wanted to help fill what appeared to be a gap in the training (the how-tos) and education (the theoretical why-tos) of what I call *writing the voice of philanthropy*.

I was confident that by profiling the work of direct response professionals at elite nonprofit organizations, others could improve their own writing by studying their models of excellence. Unlike the Connor and Upton letters, I was sure that the written discourse of professionals at this level would be different. It would be warm, personal and filled with heart-warming human-interest stories—what I call *connecting narrative moments*.

BUT I WAS WRONG.

I discovered that my corpus of texts focused even more than Connor and Upton's Indianapolis-area samples on transferring *information* rather than creating *interpersonal involvement*. And my texts scored no better on *narrative*. They contained virtually no stories about real people. Their scores for linguistic features indicating the presence of narrative were *lower* than those Biber (1988) had measured among samples of *academic prose*. In fact, my texts scored lower still—they ranked in the range of *official documents*.

First the Connor and Upton study. And now my own research. Both had arrived at the same conclusion:

THE DISCOURSE OF FUND RAISING REALLY WAS BROKEN.

While *I* was stunned by Connor and Upton's results, it would be inaccurate to say that *they* shared my view of the data. As outsiders to the field of fund raising, I sensed they viewed their findings as language scholars *from the outside in*—reporting the facts but refraining from commentary on the broader implications of their findings to practice.

But because I had logged 40 years of experience inside the field of fund raising, I looked at the linguistics data *from the inside out*. My immediate response was that the profession had a serious problem which directly affected fund-raising practice. ***I believed someone needed to sound an alarm. So this article is my attempt at alarm sounding.***

Both the Connor and Upton study and my own research were modeled after the work of Douglas Biber, who used factor analysis to evaluate the distribution of 67 linguistic features in 23 genres of spoken and written English. His research yielded seven dimensions or factors that accounted for linguistic variation. As a ruler measures length and a scale calculates weight, Biber's factors measure characteristics of texts on seven dimensions by identifying groups of linguistic features that tend to occur together. Using

analysis of variance, both studies above had compared bodies of fund-raising discourse to Biber's 23 genres. Both had arrived at the same conclusions about that discourse:

- It failed to connect with and involve readers on a personal and emotional level
- It failed to tell stories about real people whom readers might actually care about

If you find this view too severe and hard to believe, join the club. I hadn't believed the Connor and Upton findings myself. And I didn't become a believer until I had confirmed their results in my own study of texts written by larger nonprofit organizations.

In the end I found no correlation between a nonprofit's income and the linguistic profile of their fund-raising discourse. So the weight of the data forced me to conclude that ***the way we ALL write is all wrong***. The problem spanned all sizes and types of nonprofits.

Yes, there are exceptions. Everyone has read a text that involved the reader and presented a strong human-interest story. But such discourse is the exception, not the rule. Often produced by fund-raising agencies, such letters are those all-too-rare *third-standard-deviation* exemplars of best practice, located at the far-end of the curve. Unfortunately, the majority of fund-raising texts hover in the *mediocre middle* of the normal distribution.

The definitive nature of these conclusions is based on the rigorous computer-based methodology of Biber's MD-Analysis. His analytic procedure first *scans* texts if not already in digital format. Then 67 specific linguistic features like nouns, verbs, pronouns, and adjectives are automatically tagged and tallied. Finally, these frequencies are evaluated using the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical procedure to identify significant co-occurrences among groups of salient (prominent) *linguistic features*.

Salient linguistic features identified by MD-Analysis are those which stand out by virtue of 1.) the frequency of their occurrence, 2.) the company they keep, and 3.) the rhetorical aim they work together to achieve. For example a high concentration of *contractions* (e.g. *I'm*, *you're*) and *private verbs* (e.g. I *think*, I *feel*, I *hope*) co-occur to produce interpersonal involvement in genres like conversation and personal letters. Conversely, high counts of *nouns*, *prepositions*, and *attributive adjectives* co-occur to create densely packed information in genres like academic prose and official documents.

As a tape measure profiles someone on the dimension of height as short or tall, or as a scale profiles someone on the dimension of weight as light or heavy, Biber's statistical factors profile texts on seven linguistic dimensions. These dimensional scales provide the equivalent of a linguistic fMRI that helps a writer compare how he or she *thinks* they write against how they *actually do* write. Knowing the difference can help lead to prescriptions for adjusting the *form* of fund-raising discourse to better fit its two-fold *function*: 1.) to *build lifelong donor partnerships* and 2.) to *raise money now*.

In addition to profiling texts, my study surveyed those who wrote them. My purpose was to learn what factors these executives believe make a fund-raising text effective. So I asked them to score the importance of using an argument-centric (expository) writing style on

a 1 to 5 scale (with 5 being high). Only 5.04 percent rated exposition high. I then asked them to score the importance of making personal connections and using a human-interest narrative writing style—the style decades of practitioners like Caples and Huntsinger have advocated. Nine-to-one they rated connecting at an emotional level and using narrative as high. But despite this increase to 45.21 percent, the linguistic evidence indicates a wide disparity between what fund raisers *believe* about writing and how they *actually* write.

The following anecdote suggests the root of this disparity between belief and practice:

> *A man seated next to famous Canadian author Margaret Atwood at a dinner party asks: "What do you do?"*
> *She replies, "I'm a writer."*
> *"Really? When I retire I'm going become a writer."*
> *Margaret asks: "And what do you do?"*
> *"I'm a neurosurgeon."*
> *Margaret responds: "How interesting. I always thought that when I retire, I'd take up brain surgery."*

The root of the disparity is that we all tend to take writing for granted. We all can write. And we all think we can write well. Yet the evidence of linguistics analysis refutes this assumption. The problem is that few of us critically consider the rhetorical and linguistic substructure of what we write. We don't critically consider *the language*.

Stephen King drove this point home in explaining what motivated him to write *On Writing,* his book about composition principles and techniques. King's motivation came from a conversation with author of *The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan. He had asked her "if there was any one question she was *never* asked during the Q-and-A that follows almost every writer's talk . . . . Amy paused, thinking it over carefully, and then said: 'No one ever asks about the language'" (2000, p. 8).

King continued, "Amy was right: nobody ever asks about the language. They ask the DeLillos and the Updikes and the Styrons, but they don't ask popular novelists. Yet many of us proles also care about the language in our humble way, and care passionately about the art and craft of telling stories on paper" (2000, p. 9).

Fund raisers, of all people, should **care passionately about the art and craft of telling stories on paper**. In fund raising, the language is everything. Someone selling a service or product creates an exchange based on the value of what's offered. And before buying, a prospect can kick the tires or thump the melon. But for a fund raiser, the weight of raising money rests squarely on the power of words. Yes, there are those occasions when a person visits a charity, or sees a video about its work. But most potential donors decide to give based on what they *read*. And unfortunately, what they read is usually not that good.

With so much riding on the power of fund-raising discourse, it's ironic that the Practice Analysis Task Force of the Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) included nothing about developing language skills in its 114-page *Knowledge Areas and*

Curriculum Framework (Storey & Cosper, 2008). Few omissions could be more consequential, given that raising money depends on the effective use of language—especially written discourse. It its attempt to be *exhaustive*, the AFP taxonomy buries under a mass of detail, the centrality of written communication to fund-raising success.

While AFP does affirm the need to "articulate the case for support with personal conviction and enthusiasm" (p. 34), it proposes no *education* initiatives in communication theory or *training* in writing best practice to achieve that end. This is unfortunate, since being able to critically analyze the basic linguistic features and rhetorical structure of a text can lead to better writing, better reading, and ultimately better fund raising. Andrew Van de Hen put it well when he wrote: "Nothing is quite so practical as a good theory" (1989).

The theoretical underpinnings of Biber's research are the benchmark profiles he established for 23 text genres on seven dimensions of variation. Like the *linear marks* on a ruler that denote inches, Biber's scores for genres on seven continua denote *linguistic marks* that make it possible to compare genres. These marks were derived from a factor analysis of 67 linguistic features. Biber's analysis identified co-occurring *groups* of features that work together to achieve common *communicative aims*. To compare new texts to Biber's 23 genres, counts of salient linguistic features are normalized to their mean occurrence per 1,000 words to eliminate text-length bias. These normalized means are then converted to units of standard deviation (z-scores). Two of Biber's dimensions are especially relevant here.

Dimension One of Biber's seven factors differentiates between highly involving and highly informational texts. The positive pole on this dimension is defined by linguistic features that occur together to produce interpersonal *involvement* and *connect* with individuals at an *emotional* level in genres like personal letters and face-to-face conversations. Dimension One's negative pole is defined by linguistic features that occur together in texts focused on producing dense *informational content* in genres like academic prose and official documents. Table 1 lists the 28 salient linguistic features that co-occur and work together to define the positive and negative poles of Dimension One.

Table 1.	The Twenty-eight Salient Linguistic Features Whose Co-Occurrence Defines Dimension 1			
Positive Features:	DO as pro-verb	BE as main verb	Sentence relatives	**Negative Features:**
Private verbs	Analytic negation	Causative subordination	WH-questions	Nouns
THAT-deletion	Demonstrative pronouns	Discourse particles	Possibility modals	Word length
Contractions	General emphatics	Indefinite pronouns	Non-phrasal coordination	Prepositions
Present tense verbs	1st person pronouns	General hedges	WH-clauses	Type/token ratio
2nd person pronouns	Pronoun IT	Amplifiers	Final prepositions	Attributive adjectives
Note. Adapted from Biber, (1988).				

Table 2 benchmarks several genres from Biber's study on Dimension One, and shows how Connor and Upton's evaluation of 316 direct mail letters and my own Dickerson IRS 880 corpus analysis of written and online fund-raising texts, produced by elite nonprofit organizations, compare to Biber's benchmarks for 14 common genres.

Dimension 1 – Interpersonal Involvement versus Informational Content			
Sum of *Z*-Scores	**Biber Corpus**	**Connor & Upton 316 Corpus**	**Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus**
INTERPERSONAL INVOLVEMENT FOCUS			
35	Face-to-face conversations		
30			
25			
20	Personal letters		
	Public conversations		
15	Interviews		
10			
5	Romantic Fiction		
	Prepared speeches		
0	General Fiction		
	Professional letters		
-5	Science Fiction		
	Religion		
-10	Popular Lore		
	Academic Prose	**-11.9**	**-12.8**
-15	Press Reportage		
	Official Documents		
-20			
INFORMATIONAL CONTENT FOCUS			

Table 2. ***Scores on Dimension One Positioning Texts on the Continuum Contrasting Those Focused on Interpersonal Involvement with Those Focused on Creating Informational Content.***

Note: Using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), both the Connor & Upton 316 Direct Mail Corpus and the Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus were compared to the scores of 14 of the 23 genres in the Biber Corpus. Dimensional scores represent the summed frequencies of the linguistic features that make up the dimension. Before summing the occurrence of these features, their raw scores were normalized to a per-thousand-word ratio in order to eliminate skewing based on text-length. Then these scores were converted to units of standard deviation (*z*-scores, with means of zero).   Adapted from Biber (1988, 1995)

Based on the linguistic features found in texts, fund-raising discourse reads like the academic prose found in journal articles and doctoral dissertations.

Dimension Two differentiates between narrative and non-narrative texts. Linguistic features that occur together to produce narrative discourse in genres like fiction and biography define the positive pole on this dimension. Dimension Two's negative pole is defined by linguistic features that occur together in non-narrative genres like academic prose, official documents, and broadcasts. Table 3 lists the 10 salient linguistic features that co-occur and work together to define the poles of Dimension Two.

Table 3	The Ten Salient Linguistic Features Whose Co-Occurrence Defines Dimension 2		
Positive Features:	Synthetic negation	**Negative Features:**
Past tense verbs	Present participial clauses	Present tense verbs
Third-person pronouns		Attributive adjectives
Perfect aspect verbs		Past participial WHIZ deletions
Public verbs		Word length
Note. Adapted from Biber, (1988).		

Table 4 benchmarks several genres from Biber's study on Dimension Two and shows how Connor and Upton's evaluation of 316 direct mail letters and my own Dickerson IRS 880 corpus analysis of written and online fund-raising texts, produced by elite nonprofit organizations, compare to Biber's benchmarks for 15 common genres.

Dimension 2 – Narrative Versus Non-Narrative			
Sum of *Z*-Scores	Biber Corpus	Connor & Upton 316 Corpus	Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus
NARRATIVE			
7	Romantic Fiction		
6	General Fiction		
	Adventure Fiction		
5			
4			
3			
2	Biographies		
	Spontaneous Speeches		
1	Prepared Speeches		
	Personal Letters		
0	Popular Lore		
	Face-to-Face Conversation		
-1	Religion		
	Press Editorials		
-2	Telephone Conversations		
	Academic Prose		
-3	Official Documents	**-3.1**	**-3.0**
	Broadcasts		
-4			
NON-NARRATIVE			

Table 4. *Scores on Dimension Two Positioning Texts on the Continuum Contrasting Those Containing Narrative with Those Containing No Narrative.*

Note: Using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), both the Connor & Upton 316 Direct Mail Corpus and the Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus were compared to the scores of 15 of the 23 genres in the Biber Corpus. Dimensional scores represent the summed frequencies of the linguistic features that make up the dimension. Before summing the occurrence of these features, their raw scores were normalized to a per-thousand-word ratio in order to eliminate skewing based on text-length. Then these scores were converted to units of standard deviation (*z*-scores, with means of zero). Adapted from Biber (1988, 1995)

Based on the linguistic features found in texts, fund-raising discourse contains less narrative than official documents like government regulations and legal briefs.

Rather than using simplistic bifurcated categories (like calling a text either formal or informal, oral or literate), Biber's MD-Analysis locates texts on seven continuous scales. This makes it possible to describe a text as more or less informational, more or less interpersonal, more or less narrative, more or less non-narrative. Biber's use of multivariate analysis thus brings to corpus linguistics a new level of analytic precision.

His continuous scales also make reciprocal relationships among co-occurring features apparent (e.g. when one set of linguistic features is found to be present, polar opposite feature sets are usually absent.) Thus, when highly interpersonal genres like

conversation and personal letters have *high* frequencies of private verbs and contractions, they will usually have *low* frequencies of linguistic features found to be common among genres like academic prose and official documents—features located on the opposite end of Dimension One's scale (e.g. nouns, long words, prepositions, and adjectives).

Why, given that marketing and fund-raising experts have long preached the value of emotion and narrative, does fund-raising discourse contain so little of either?

What happened?

One explanation may be the way we're raised to write. Our educational upbringing teaches us to use an abstract impersonal writing style that is diametrically opposed to the expert advice of fund-raising practitioners. The persistence of this kind of fund-raising discourse is consistent with research by Peters and Wolfred (2001), who found that 58 percent of nonprofit executive directors hold Master's degrees or doctorates. They write what I call *discourse de facto* (Latin for *as if,* or *as a matter of practice*).

They write *as if* they were still graduate students. They continue to produce a style of discourse appropriate to a *past-bound setting*, dedicated to a *past-bound task*, created for a *past-bound* audience. Fund raising requires a different style of writing, but they seem to be living in another place, at another time, writing for professor who is no longer there.

In contrast, *discourse de jure* (Latin for *as a matter of law*) follows *writing rules* or *laws of composition* that enable discourse to achieve pre-determined *rhetorical aims*. In the case of fund raising writing that follows the advice of experts, *discourse de jure* would use linguistic features that create *interpersonal involvement* and *narrative discourse*.

Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio offers insights that help to explain the death grip that academic writing seems to have on those who write the discourse of fund raising. Head of the University of Southern California's Brain and Creativity Institute, Damasio's explanation points to René Descartes' separation of cognition from emotion.

Descartes posited a dualism that declared emotion to be inferior to reason and non-corporeal consciousness to be distinct from the physical brain. Consistent with this view, academic writing elevates hard facts and statistics while marginalizing anecdotes. It values intellectual detachment while diminishing emotional attachment. These prejudices continue to influence nonprofit executives, whose fund-raising discourse reads like academic prose.

Damasio (1994) challenged the validity of Cartesian dualism in his *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain.* He rejected the longstanding dichotomy between physical and mental processes, between emotion and reason. He proposed that these factors were, in fact, integrally connected. He supported his argument by citing case histories describing the impact of prefrontal cortex trauma to patients' decision-making abilities. Damasio found that brain-injured patients retained their ability to reason, but no longer had the controlling emotional barometer necessary to filter and weigh the consequences of their thoughts and actions. For example, upon seeing graphic portrayals

of sex or horrific violence, while such patients could describe these scenes with clear, detached logic, they lacked the emotional responses that normal people might exhibit.

Damasio thus rejected Descarte's dualism in the face of clinical evidence that indicated reasoning was directly and profoundly affected by emotion. In its place he posited that emotion stemmed from perceptions sent to the brain, which were sourced in bodily sensations. His theory reintegrated what centuries of Western thought had cleaved. (cf. Gazzaniga, 1998, 2004; LeDoux, 1996, 2002; Oatley, 1994, 1996, 2002, 2003, 2004).

Shortly after the publication of *Descartes' Error*, Damasio's clinical observations were reinforced by a seminal breakthrough in neuroscience. In 1995 a team of researchers at The University of Parma in Italy, led by neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti, identified a special class of neurons that fired in the brains of macaque monkeys during specific grasping activities like picking up a peanut. It was this discovery that would lead to additional confirmation that the mind and body, reason and emotion, are all connected.

This confirmation came when the Parma research team discovered that neurons in an animal subject were activated not only during motor activity, but also when the monkey *saw* another subject or a lab worker engage in the same actions (Jeannerod, Arbib, Rizzolatti & Skata 1995; Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese & Fogassi, 1996; Arbib 2006). In one pivotal instance, "a graduate student entered the lab with an ice cream cone in his hand. The monkey stared at him. Then, something amazing happened: when the student raised the cone to his lips, the monitor sounded—brrrrrip, brrrrrip—even though the monkey had not moved but had simply observed the student grasping the cone and moving it to his mouth" (Blakeslee, 2006).

The link between the activation of a monkey's neurons and processing language is found in the common neurological heritage between motor activity (e.g. reaching for things, grasping and learning) and language acquisition. Rizzolatti and Arbib claim that the human ability to now communicate by transferring information represented symbolically as words was preceded by the ability of humans to recognize the actions of others. "This mechanism" they write, "was the neural prerequisite for the development of inter-individual communication and finally of speech" (1998, p. 190).

Further research has led to the discovery in human subjects of far more sophisticated mirror neural nets. These discoveries collectively suggest that these cells not only allow people to *perceive* action, but also to process the *social meanings* suggested by those actions. Neuroscientists Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti write about the larger implications of their discovery in an article that suggests application to understanding human communication and empathy—a line of argument directly relevant to those who write fund-raising discourse:

> We provide a unifying neural hypothesis on how individuals understand the actions and emotions of others. Our main claim is that the fundamental mechanism at the basis of the experiential understanding of others' actions is the activation of the mirror neuron system. A similar

mechanism, but involving the activation of viscero-motor centers, underlies the experiential understanding of the emotions of others (2004, p. 396).

At the core of the Gallese, Keysers, and Rizzolatti discovery is evidence from fMRI scans of human subjects for what was only sugested in their experiments with monkeys— that the human brain contains ". . . neural mechanisms (mirror mechanisms) that allow us to directly understand the meaning of the actions and emotions of others by internally repilcating ('simulating') them without any explicit reflective mediation" (2004, p. 396).

The researchers acknowledge the ability of humans to reason and thus "understand other people's minds at the conceptual, declarative level" (2004, p. 396). However, they suggest that such propositional language fails to recruit the empathetic mirror neurons they discovered. Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti argue that "the fundamental mechanism that allows us a direct experiential grasp of the mind of others is not conceptual reasoning but direct simulation of the observed events through the mirror mechanism" (2004, p. 396).

"The novelty of our approach;" write Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti; "consists in providing for the first time a neurophysiological account of the experiential dimension of both action and emotion. What makes social interactions so different from our perception of the inanimate world is that we witness the actions and emotions of others, but we also carry out similar actions and we experience similar emotions" (2004, p. 396). While these researchers acknowledge that a cognitive approach can inform one person about the emotional state of another (e.g. that we can document how a person's low income can make life difficult in a city with a high cost of living), they suggest the emotional impact of discourse is greater when an anecdote *shows* rather than *tells* what it's like to be poor.

These discoveries have profound implications for those who write the discourse of fund raising. Neuroscience confirms that people prefer to learn of socially significant content not through propositional language, but through narrative and conversation-like prose that involves the reader at an emotional level. Thus, neuroscience suggests that the current style of writing among fund raisers actually circumvents the way the human brain is hard-wired to process language. The implications: fund raisers should to not shy away from emotion, they should tell stories, and they should not over-edit and formalize texts.

Of course, the space allotted for a fund-raising text to tell a story is small—often just a page. Maybe four on the high end. And now new microblog channels like *Twitter* severely limit message lengths. *Twitter* limits *tweets* to just 140 characters (not words, just letters). This is certainly not enough space to compose a meaningful narrative arc. Other online channels allow more space, but most still try to limit messages to a single screen. However, streaming video channels like YouTube offer discourse modes which, with good scripting, direction, and on-screen talent, can present powerful narratives.

Regardless of channel or space allotted, it is possible to write what I call a *connecting narrative moment*—to forge an emotional human connection in a very brief space. Georgetown linguist Deborah Tannen illustrates how the use of involvement

devices like quoted dialogue can quickly connect and touch a nerve with a reader or hearer. She illustrates how this helped Jesse Jackson create a *connecting narrative moment* at the 1988 Democratic National Convention. Tannen cites an excerpt from his address in which he constructs a short but evocative faux dialogue with the audience. His purpose was to reframe his image—to shift his persona from that of a political "rock star" who runs with "big people," to being "just one of them". His goal was to reinvent himself as someone who *understands* the plight of the ordinary struggling family.

To this end, he repeatedly uses the word *understand* running up to the section of his speech presented below. Then as Jackson enters into his faux dialogue with the delegates, he brings to the foreground their preconceptions—that he is an inaccessible big-time politician who can't really identify with ordinary folks like themselves. He gives voice to this view in the *italicized sections* of his speech. Then he presents a contrapuntal viewpoint in a story designed to convince the delegates that he *really does understand*:

> Why can I challenge you this way?
> *Jesse Jackson, you don't understand my situation.*
> *You be on television.* [laughter]
> *You don't understand*
> *I see you with the big people.*
> *You don't understand my situation.*
> I understand.
> At three o'clock on
> Thanksgiving day,
> we couldn't eat turkey.
> Because Mama was preparing somebody else's turkey
> at three o'clock.
> We had to play football to entertain ourselves.
> And then around six o'clock,
> she would get off the /Aha Vista/ bus,
> and we would bring up the leftovers
> and eat our turkey,
> leftovers:
> the carcass,
> the cranberries,
> around eight o'clock at night.
> I really do understand.
>
> (1989, p. 183)

The notion I labeled with the words *connecting narrative moment* was realized in the 102-word excerpt Tannen cited. Jackson's anecdote about what it was like growing up poor connected with his audience at an emotional level. It contained linguistic features like those listed toward the positive pole of Biber's Dimension One. And it was strongly narrative, containing linguistic features listed on the positive pole of Dimension Two.

Jackson involved the audience in a personal conversation. To address their

skepticism that he *understands*, he shared a painful recollection from his childhood of what it was like on Thanksgiving when "Mama was preparing somebody else's turkey at three o'clock." In fund-raising discourse, the canvas on which word pictures are painted is quite small. But as the Jesse Jackson excerpt illustrates, attention can be captured and a powerful scene can be painted with a relatively short word count on a small canvas. Maybe not with a 140-character *tweet* on *Twitter*. But certainly in a page or two of copy.

Gallese, Keysers and Rizzolatti describe, from a neurological perspective, what happens in such *connecting narrative moments*:

> Information concerning the emotions of others is directly mapped onto the same viscero-motor neural structures that determine the experience of that emotion in the observer. This direct mapping can occur even when the emotion of others can only be imagined. . . . It is likely that the direct viscero-motor mechanism scaffolds the cognitive description, and, when the former mechanism is not present or malfunctioning, the latter provides only a pale, detached account of the emotions of others (2004, p. 401).

Sadly, the vast majority of fund-raising discourse lacks heart. It ***provides only a pale, detached account of the emotions of others***. The most recent neurobiological research that validates the power of emotion and narrative in communication comes from human subject research at the University of Southern California (USC). This line of research suggests that the *channels* by which another's actions are understood and can trigger mirror neuron response are not limited to visual input alone. Just *reading* or *hearing* about an action can produce the same response as *seeing* the action firsthand.

On the USC research team was Giacomo Rizzolatti, lead investigator of the team from Italy's University of Parma, where the existence of mirror neurons in primates had first been established in 1995. The lead researcher at USC was Lisa Aziz-Zadeh from the school's Brain and Creativity Institute. And representing UCLA was Portugese scientist Marco Iacoboni, director of the Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation Lab at the Ahmanson Lovelace Brain Mapping Center in the David Geffen School of Medicine.

Aziz-Zadeh and her team found that among 12 volunteers studied, the premotor cortex of their brain's's indicated *the presence of the same neural activity when they heard words describing an action as when they saw it*. "In sum" Aziz-Zabeh writes, "these results support a key role of premotor areas with mirror neuron properties for embodied semantic representations of actions, whether they are delivered through visual or linguistic modalities" (Aziz-Zadeh, Wilson, Rizzolatti & Iacoboni, 2006, p. 1521).

In other words, this study suggests that *semantic representations* (reading or hearing about another person's circumstances) creates the *same effect* in the brain as if the reader/hearer were in the situation described. Thus hearing or reading is almost like being there. UCLA's Marco Iacoboni describes this as the new science of how we connect with others (2008). ***This and similar research goes to the very heart of***

understanding what makes narrative writing so powerful. (cf. Rizzolatti, Fogassi & Gallese, 2006; Shamay-Tsoory, et al., 2005; Stemmer, 2005, Vignemont & Singer, 2006; Xu, Kemeny, Park, Frattali & Braun, 2005).

In a paragraph of prose, science writer Gordy Slack illustrates the implications of these breakthrough neuroscientific discoveries to language processing. His own writing also shows how linguistic features work together to form a *narrative* (note his past tense report of actions, the time progression) and create *involvement* (note his use of contractions first person pronouns, private verbs, and his conversational style) and produce *empathy*:

A young woman sat on the subway and sobbed. Her mascara-stained cheeks were wet and blotchy. Her eyes were red. Her shoulders shook. She was hopeless, completely forlorn. When I got off the F-train, I stood on the platform, paralyzed by emotions. Hers. I'd taken them with me. I stood there, tears streaming down my cheeks. But I had no death in the family. No breakup. No terminal diagnosis. And I didn't even know her or why she cried. But the emotional pain, her pain, now my pain, was as real as day. (2007, p. 1)

Twenty-first century neuroscience forces we who write the discourse of fund raising to question how we write. Do some writing strategies stand a better chance of evoking empathy in the brain than others? Given that the brain is already hard-wired to interpret empathy-evoking messages, what does this imply for our writing? Does it suggest a conversational style might be more personal and thus evoke more empathy than expository prose? Does it suggest human-interest andecdotes evoke more empathy than carefully-edited factual declarations and arguments? Does it suggest that referring to specific indiduduals by name (like characters in a story) rather than as classes of people (like subjects) evokes more empathy? To all these *loaded* questions the answser is *yes*.

The data in my research suggest that linguistic features in prose, which *involve* readers and which develop *connecting narrative moments*, are missing in the voice of philanthropy. While the computer-driven corpus analysis procedures that identified these trends are new, the findings are not. In fact, they were noted more than a centruy ago by Elias St. Elmo Lewis. In 1898 Lewis had developed the famous AIDA (Atttention, Interest, Desire, Action) framework as a rhetorical structure to help those who sold financial products like insurance, to more effectively communicate their message.

After separate chapters describing elements of his AIDA framework, Lewis then devotes another chapter solely to a discussion of the use of language. In his *Financial Advertising for Commercial and Savings Banks, Trust, Title Insurance, and Safe Deposit Companies, Investment Houses* he writes:

The reason why so much advertising sounds strained and unreal, the kind you read and which leaves your mind passive and indifferent as a cloud passing over the surface of a pond, is because it is written by those who do not understand your relation to the things they are endeavoring to

arouse your interest in. You are conscious of a certain remoteness, as if the writers were discussing matters they had never seen or known, and therefore can not make them seem real to you. We call this lack of "grip," in fact it is a lack of intimate, close, friendly enthusiasm for the subjects discussed; or, the writers lack the power to put real feelings and thoughts into words (Lewis, 1908, p. 126).

Lewis' observation that *writers lack the power to put real feelings and thoughts into words* can be made of fund-raising discourse a centruy later. But now language tools like Biber's MD-Analysis identify rhetorical and linguistic dimensions of the problem. This knowledge now points to solutions for mending fund raising's fractured discourse.

Jerry Huntsinger pointed to these solutions in 1992 as he reflected on his first 29½ years in direct response fund raising. He noted that "technology constantly changes, but human nature constantly remains the same . . . the reader is still going to respond most positively to a good old-fashioned human anecdote" (p. 220). I trust that these findings will sound an alarm across the nonprofit sector and help fund raisers put in *writing*, what is essentially the *human voice* of the needy they serve.

I close with three letters that illustrate the impact of expressing the human voice in fund-raising discourse—a fund-raising letter from antiquity, one from the Dickerson IRS 880 corpus that scored highest on Dimension One for *interpersonal involvement*, and a third letter from my corpus that scored high for *narrative* on Dimension Two.

Letter one is an example of fund-raising discourse illustrating ancient Hellenistic and Roman philanthropy (Hands, 1968). It was composed by Roman historian Pliny the Younger (Book 4, Letter 13) ca. 100 A.D. Although 2000 years old, it reads like a letter that could have been penned today by a parent seeking to raise money for his or her child's school. The text reflects the fact that the writer knew the value of creating reader involvement and the power of anecdote to grab and keep reader attention.

Pliny's letter was written to his friend Cornelius Tacitus. His purpose was to ask Tacitus for assistance in recruiting faculty for a school that he wanted to found for local youth. The mode for making his appeal for help was a narrative recounting of the dialogue that had transpired during a get-together with parents and children at his villa:

Gaius Plinus to his dear Cornelius Tacitus, greeting.

When I was in my native town recently, a young lad, the son of one of my fellow townsmen, came to pay his respects to me. "Do you go to school?" I asked. "Certainly," he replied. "Where?" "At Milan." "Why not here?" "Because," rejoined his father, who was with him and had in fact brought the boy, "we have no teachers here." "Why no teachers?" I asked. "Surely it would be tremendously to the interest of you who are fathers" (and quite opportunely several fathers were listening) "that your sons should by all means have their schooling here. For where could they

live more happily than in their native town, or be kept better under control than under the eyes of their parents, or at less expense than at home? It is no greater task, certainly, to collect money to hire teachers, and you can apply toward their salaries what you now spend for [the boys'] lodgings, travel, and the things that have to be paid for when one is away from home (and away from home everything costs money). Indeed I, who do not yet have children, am ready to give for the benefit of the municipality, as if for a daughter or parent, one third of any sum it will please you to assemble. I would even promise the whole if I were not afraid that such an endowment might one day be tampered with through political corruption, as I see happen in many places where teachers are hired by the municipality. This danger can be met by only one remedy, namely, if the right of hiring is left only to the parents alone and scrupulous care for choosing is instilled in them by the necessity of contributing…. Then agree among yourselves, unite, and draw increased spirit from mine, for I am desirous that what I shall have to contribute shall be as large as possible…."

I thought it necessary to repeat all this in detail and from the very beginning, as it were, so that you might the better understand how glad I should be should you undertake what I request. Now then, I request, and in keeping with the importance of the matter I beg, that you look around among the great number of students who come to you out of admiration of your genius for teachers whom we can solicit—on this condition however, that I do not make a binding contract with anyone, for I leave complete freedom of choice to the parents. They shall judge, they shall select. For myself I claim only the trouble and the expense.

(Lewis and Reinhold, 1966, p. 354)

Pliny's letter contained an appeal to emotion presented in narrative form. The beneficiaries of the charity proposed in Pliny's letter were children, toward whom he knew Cornelius Tacitus would hold an inherent affection and sympathy. Thus he shaped the appeal around the emotionally resonant proposition of educating them that at home, where youth would be better under off under the watchful eyes of their parents.

There were two audiences—the men and children who had encircled Pliny at his home and Tacitus, the recipient of his letter. Although Tacitus had no children who would benefit from the enterprise, Pliny appealed to the value his friend shared with him for education, investing in the lives of young people, and contributing to the community. To the audience gathered at his home, Pliny's appeal included the promise that he would match whatever community members would raise with a gift equal to a third of their aggregate contribution. He recounted this to Tacitus in order to demonstrate his active involvement in promoting the founding of a local school *before* asking his friend to help recruit faculty. And although not mentioned, Pliny doubtless used his letter as a precursor to a later request he would make of his friend for a financial contribution. His letter contains more interpersonal involvement and narrative than many modern-day appeals.

The second letter scored higher than all others in the Dickerson IRS 880 corpus for *interpersonal involvement*. It was written by the Catholic youth ministry, Covenant House:

> She stood on the curb looking scared and lonely in a skimpy halter top and bright red lipstick. It was two in the morning. A chilly breeze whipped up the street and seemed to make her shiver. She was a child . . . just a child.
>
> We pulled our Covenant House van up to the curb and rolled down the window.
>
> "Hi, what's your name?"
>
> "Janice," she said hesitantly, as if she really had to think about her answer.
>
> "Why don't you hop in, Janice? We've got some hot chocolate and sandwiches. We can talk. You hungry?"
>
> "Yeah, kind of. But not really. I mean, like, I really gotta go. I can't talk now. Maybe later. Will you be back around in a couple hours?"
>
> She glanced nervously up and down the street at the passing cars. We could tell she was dying to jump in, but she was scared. Really scared.
>
> "OK," she finally said. "But only for a minute or two then I gotta go. My boyfriend is gonna be really mad if he finds out I'm doin' this." She climbed in and sat down stiffly across from me. "Your boyfriend?"
>
> "Yeah, he told me he doesn't want me talking to you guys. So I can't stay long. Can I have a sandwich, too? I'm really hungry."
>
> "Sure, but why do you call him your boyfriend if he lets you walk the street at night? Do you mean your pimp?"
>
> "Oh, no, he's not a pimp, he's my boyfriend," she insisted with intensity. "He loves me. He really does. He buys me lots of nice things."
>
> After a few weeks on our Crisis Van, you know when a homeless kid is telling you something to convince you . . . or telling you something to convince herself. This year we'll help rescue 28,000 kids from the street, and we know how to spot them when they're in serious trouble. In Janice's case, her fingers gave her away.
>
> "I'm scared, I'm really scared. Do you think you can help me? My boyfriend beats me up sometimes if I don't do what he tells me. I think ... I think I'm pregnant. Oh God, what am I gonna do?"
>
> We sat there for twenty minutes as Janice's story tumbled out in a torrent of confusion and tears . . . I know Janice's story sounds incredible-almost too incredible to be true. But it's only the tip of the iceberg!

As you read this letter, there are 300,000 homeless kids on America's streets . . . kids who are alone, hungry, tired, and scared.

Please. Will you help us rescue another innocent kid tonight?

You see, by donating what you can to Covenant House today, you can give homeless kids like Janice a new life. Thanks to you our Covenant House vans will be able to search America's streets for homeless kids in trouble . . .

Please pray for them. They need it. And if you can send a gift to help them, I'd really appreciate it. It's been tough lately making ends meet. A gift from you right now would be a wonderful answer to our prayers.

Thank you. May God bless you.

In God's Love,
Sister Mary Rose McGeady, President

This text contains features that *involve* the reader—an interpersonal interactive style and affective tone. It has a central *character* around which the story unfolds—Janice, a cold, scared, and hungry young girl, working as a sex slave for a pimp who beats her. Near its end the letter generalizes (e.g. *As you read this letter, there are 300,000 homeless kids on America's streets . . . kids who are alone, hungry, tired, and scared*). But its power comes from a studied avoidance of detours into statistical abstracts on the sex-trafficking industry in favor of talk about Janice. The writer concludes with a gift request that offers readers the chance to cast themself in the role of rescuer, helping save youth like Janice.

The third letter scored high in the Dickerson IRS 880 corpus for *narrative*. It was written by the Jewish relief organization, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC):

Born in a small Ukrainian town, Syla learned to speak German from neighbors. This was rare among Jewish girls—so rare, in fact, it would eventually save her life and those of countless others. In 1941, Hitler's army occupied Ukraine. Einsatzgruppen, the Nazis' mobile killing squads, went from shtetl to shtetl in Ukraine and Belarus and murdered nearly every Jew they found. Speaking German without any trace of an accent, Syla managed to convince the occupiers that she and her three children were German. So the Germans gave her amnesty.

Syla often opened her home to Einsatzgruppen officers passing through. Serving food and beer, she paid close attention as the Nazis boasted about upcoming massacres. Syla created a crude but effective warning system for Jews in neighboring shtetls. Through her two sons— they made regular rounds under the cover of darkness—Syla delivered bags of salt to the doorsteps of Jews targeted for slaughter. Upon seeing the salt, the neighbor knew he and his family had less than 24 hours to flee eastward.

It's impossible to know how many Jews Syla saved. But we do know that this woman does not live like she should. She is widowed. Two of her three children have died, and she does not have contact with the third. Her dilapidated, two-room hovel in the shtetl of Korostishev has neither electricity nor running water. Due to leg ulcerations and arthritis, she is almost completely immobile; she also suffers from asthma.

Through JDC's HesedMobile, which delivers life-sustaining materials and services to elderly Jews in more than 2,200 remote locations throughout the Former Soviet Union, Syla receives homecare, Meals-on-Wheels, holiday food packages, medication and medical consultations, emergency home repairs, blankets and heating fuel for the bitter winter months.

"I want to thank people like you," Syla says "for not forgetting people like me."

How could we?

The JDC letter has a strong narrative focus. It records the courageous *acts* carried out by Syla and her two sons who, under cover of darkness during World War II, left bags of salt at the front doors of Jewish homes in neighboring small towns (shtetls) to warn families that they were next on the Einsatzgruppen hit list of families slated for extermination. The story continues with a current-day act of reciprocity in which the JDC now helps Syla, as she once helped those who were in dire straits (e.g. *Syla receives homecare, Meals-on-Wheels, holiday food packages, medication and medical consultations, emergency home repairs, blankets and heating fuel for the bitter winter months*). In addition to the example of assistance Syla receives, JDC bridges from one individual helped to the larger scope of their charity work (*life-sustaining materials and services to elderly Jews in more than 2,200 remote locations throughout the Former Soviet Union*).

We all write. But effective writing requires skillfully marshaling linguistic resources to achieve a planned rhetorical aim. And doing that is much more difficult than it looks—a reality affirmed by the fact that so few achieve the success of a C.S. Lewis, J.K Rowling, Stephen King, or John Grisham.

Though it is not their goal is to achieve popular commercial success like these legends, the leaders of America's 1.8 million-plus nonprofit organizations *write the voice of philanthropy*. What they write *speaks* for the people and causes their charities serve. As they *raise money with words*, they change lives.

Few of us will get to the point that we constantly monitor dozens of linguistic features as we write. However, it is possible to be much more aware and improve our

prose by understanding the proverbial twenty percent of the linguistic variables that account for eighty percent of the effects that truly shape the tone of our writing.

A useful shortcut approach is to focus on *rhetorical aim*. The relationship between *linguistics* (writing structure) and *rhetorical aim* (purpose in writing) is similar to that in the building industry between the trades (plumbers, carpenters, and electricians) and architects (those who create the plans that trades people follow). On one occasion, an architect may draw plans for a sterile cleanroom to accommodate the demands of a high-tech computer assembly plant. On another occasion he or she may design a warm, cozy house that a family can call home. The plans developed in each case would differ significantly. Although both buildings might use the same basic resources of wood, wire and pipe; the widely divergent demands of each structure would dictate far different uses of those raw materials to achieve the architect's very different vision for each building.

Similarly, in writing the voice of philanthropy, the goal is to *speak for a person*, not *write for a professor*. A shortcut to ensuring your discourse achieves this rhetorical aim would be to simply sit down with a friend over a cup of coffee and share stories that motivate you in your work. A practical way to achieve this end is embarrassingly simple:

Tape record what you say, replay it, and write it down like you said it.

The images that come to mind as you recount events to a friend will produce the raw material from which *the written voice of philanthropy* can be mined. C.S. Lewis described this *imaging* process as the key to his own writing. "I see pictures, . . . I have no idea whether this is the usual way of writing stories, still less whether it is the best. It is the only one I know: images always come first" (1985, p.p. 5,6).

Another ancient text illustrates translating images to narrative. This text reports an interchange between Jesus and a Jewish lawyer. The dialogue could have easily remained a high-minded expository exchange of ideas. But in discussing the commandment of Leviticus 19:18 to "love your neighbor as yourself," it soon rose to the level of narrative discourse.

The lawyer asked: "and who is my neighbor teacher?" Knowing the disdain of his people for their Samaritan cousins to the north, Jesus answered in what has become an enduring narrative definition of philanthropy (the *friend of man*). He answered the lawyer with a parable about a Good Samaritan:

In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, he too passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care

of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 30-37)

At the risk of being accused of re-writing Holy Scripture, I offer an expansion on verse 35, describing the Samaritan's interaction with the innkeeper. The paragraph uses the *rhetorical structure of narrative* and linguistic features that focus on *interpersonal involvement* to depict a scene that creates a *connecting narrative moment*:

> The next morning before continuing his journey, the Samaritan stood in the lobby of a roadside lodge in Jericho. Supporting the stranger he'd rescued on his shoulder, he told the innkeeper how bandits had robbed, stripped and left him for dead. The proprietor listened with wide-eyed, slack-jawed amazement as the Samaritan spun the tale of the stranger's brush with death. Finally, he asked, "Please won't you tend to him while I take care of business in Jerusalem? I promise—I'll return and repay anything beyond the 2-denari I'm leaving for expenses. Can you help?"

This rewrite adds the dialogue implied in verse 35 and tells a dramatic story in the space of 94 words, then asks the proprietor for help. It reduces the dramatic elements of scene, actors, plot, tension, and resolution to words, creating a *connecting narrative moment* and then ends with a specific appeal. The narrative grabs and keeps the reader's attention, thus achieving the goals St. Elmo Lewis (1908) described with his AIDA rhetorical structure. Emotional impact is created with action, description, and dialogue. Then a call to action is made. The Samaritan becomes the *voice of philanthropy* as he . . .

1. drags the badly beaten man from bed,
2. hoists him on his shoulder in the lobby as a dramatic visual prop,
3. recounts the story of the poor fellow's brush with death in graphic detail,
4. creates the desired effect of producing wide-eyed slack-jawed amazement,
5. makes a further gift to help the victim by offering two silver coins for his care,
6. and then asks the proprietor to become a fellow philanthropist (*friend of man*).

People give to people. They're persuaded to give when they see that their giving can touch the lives of real people in tangible ways. And the best medium for letting donors and potential donors how their gifts can change lives is to be the *voice* of those they seek to help. That *voice* is best communicated through the rhetorical architecture of the *story*, built with the linguistic wood, wire, and pipe that creates a flow of *narrative discourse* and creates empathetic *interpersonal involvement*. Since it's impossible to sit down and have a cup of coffee with everyone who needs to hear your organization's stories, I recommend the next best thing to being there—telling those stories by *writing the voice of philanthropy*. This advice is nothing new. Aristotle gave it in his *Rhetoric*:

There are, then, these three means of effecting persuasion. The man who is to be in command of them must, it is clear, be able (1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions—that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited.

It is a general rule that a written composition should be easy to read and therefore easy to deliver. This cannot be so where there are many connecting words or clauses, or where punctuation is hard, as in the writings of Heracleitus. To punctuate Heracleitus is no easy task, because we often cannot tell whether a particular word belongs to what precedes or what follows it.

It should be observed that each kind of rhetoric has its own appropriate style.…The written style is the more finished: the spoken better admits of dramatic delivery—like the kind of oratory that reflects character and the kind that reflects emotion. Again, you must make use of the emotions. Relate the familiar manifestations of them.

Fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but they may also result from the inner structure of the piece, which is the better way, and indicates a superior poet. For the plot ought to be so constructed that, even without the aid of the eye, he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place.

(Rhetoric, 1954a)

Aristotle's comments in *Rhetoric* confirm that the challenge of imbuing the *written word* with the same emotional range and impact of the *spoken voice* transcends the ages. While we all write, it is clear that effective writing in the genre of fund raising is far more difficult than it looks. It requires writing that *speaks* as the *voice* of those a nonprofit helps. And that requires marshaling linguistic resources to create speech-like interpersonal involvement and to cut narrative windows in texts. Through connecting narrative moments, readers will not only *understand*, but also *feel* how gifts change lives.

Now that the dominant rhetorical structures and linguistic patterns of fund-raising discourse have been profiled, the prescription for improving that discourse is clear. Nonprofits must analyze their writing. Organizations like Association for Healthcare Philanthropy (AHP), Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP), and Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) must not only train their members in the how-tos of writing practice, but also educate them in the underlying why-tos of language theory, *since nothing is quite so practical as good theory*.

Apart from such deliberate attention to language, those who produce in-print and online fund-raising texts will continue to write *discourse de facto*—discourse written *as if* they are living in another place, at another time, writing for professor who is no longer there. Until leaders in philanthropy value language, ***the way we ALL write will remain all wrong***.

Appendices

Three items are being appended to provide technical background on the statistical methods and linguistic features that were central to the Connor and Upton and Dickerson studies of fund-raising texts. Together these appendices illustrate how quantitative research tools were marshaled to produce valuable data on the make-up of fund-raising discourse.

Table 1: Sixty-Seven Linguistic Features Used in the Analysis of English in 16 Categories

The seminal contribution of Biber's MD-Analysis protocols is its use of the multivariate statistical procedure of factor analysis to identify in 23 genres of texts, bundles of linguistic features that occurred together to achieve specific communicative aims. The 67 linguistic features MD-Analysis measures are listed in Table 5, along with examples of each.

Figure 1: How Dimension (Factor) Scores Are Derived

Subsequent studies like Connor and Upton's and mine do not require a new factor analysis. Rather, using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), dimensional scores are obtained for new texts so that they can be compared to the benchmark scores Biber established for 23 genres of spoken and written English. The procedure for obtaining dimensional scores and the statistical formula used is described in Figure 1.

Figure 2: How Raw Mean Scores for Linguistic Features are Transformed to Standardized z-Scores and Plotted on the Normal Curve

The comparison of fund-raising discourse as a genre to the 23 genres of spoken and written English that were examined in Biber's original research is made possible by standardizing the raw mean scores for bundles of salient linguistic features to units of standard deviation (z-scores). Figure 2 illustrates the calculation of a text's z-score and its placement on the normal distribution.

Table 1	**Sixty-Seven Linguistic Features Used in the Analysis of English in 16 Categories**	

A. Tense and aspect markers

21. *that* verb complements (e.g., *I said that he went.*)

46. Downtoners (e.g., *almost, barely, hardly kind of, merely, nearly, only, slightly, somewhat*)

1. Past tense (e.g., *I parked the car*—past tense is narrative's main surface marker (Schiffrin, 1981))

22. that adjective complements (e.g., *I'm glad that you like it*)

47. Hedges (e.g., *at about, something like*—(Hyland, 1996, 1998, a & b, c, 2000; Lakoff ,1972))

2. Perfect aspect (past action with continuing effect [Quirk et al. 1985, 189ff.], e.g., *I have parked it*)

23. WH-clauses (e.g., *I believed what he told me.*)

48. Amplifiers (e.g., *absolutely, completely extremely, perfectly*—(Lorenz, 1999))

3. Present tense (immediate e.g., *I think it stinks*)

24. Infinitives (to + verb e.g. *to fight*)

49. Emphatics (e.g., *a lot, for sure, really*)

B. Place and time adverbials

25. Present participial adverbial clauses (e.g., *Stuffing his mouth with cookies, Joe ran out the door*)

50. Discourse particles (e.g., *sentence-initial forms: well, now,* and *anyway; so, but now, then, I mean, y'know*) --(Abraham, 1991; Aijmer, 2002; Schiffrin, 1987; Schourup, 1985))

4. Place adverbials (situated as opposed to abstract content e.g., *above, beside, outdoors*; *in* and *on* mark relationships and are omitted).

26. Past participial adverbial clauses (e.g., *Built in a single week, the house would stand for fifty years*)

51. Demonstratives: *prn* & *adj* * (from Greek δείζω to point out or show (Arndt & Gingrich, 1957, p. 171); e.g. *this, that, these,* and *those*; * see O'Dwyer (2005, p. 230) on *prn* & *adj* differences))

5. Time adverbials (e.g., *early, instantly, soon momentarily, today,* but words like *last* and *next* that mark logical relations are omitted)

27. Past participial postnominal WHIZ deletion relatives clauses (e.g., *the solution* [0] *created by this process* deleting [0 = *which*])

L. Modals

C. Pronouns and pro-verbs (Including contracted forms)

28. Present participial postnominal (reduced relative clauses (e.g., *The event causing this decline was. . .*)

52. Possibility modals (used to make subjective statements about possible realities—(Lyons (1977, p. 799); Palmer (1979, 2003)) e.g. *can, may, might, could*)

6. First-person pronouns (e.g., *I, me, myself, my, mine, we, us, ourselves, our,* and *ours*)

29. *that* relative clauses on subject position (e.g., *the dog that bit me*)

53. Necessity modals (from Greek δει [necessity]— Lyons, (1977, p. 823); e.g. *ought, should, must, have to, have got to, has to, need to*)

7. Second-person pronouns (e.g. *you, your, yourself, yourselves*)

30. *that* relative clauses on object position (e.g., *the dog that I saw*)

54. Predictive modals (used to express futurity— (Dancygier, 1998, p. 44); e.g. *will, would, shall*)

8. Third-person personal pronouns, except *it* (e.g., *she, he, they, her, him, them, his, himself, herself*)

31. WH relatives on subject position (e.g., *the man who likes popcorn*)

M. Specialized verb classes

9. Pronoun *it* (treated as separate entity since it is a key marker of time-constrained conversation.

32. WH relatives on object position (e.g., *the man who Sally likes*)

55. Public verbs (e.g., *assert, declare, mention* (Goosens, 1987))

10. Demonstrative pronouns (*that, this, these, those* for exophoric or endophoric references)

33. Pied-piping relative clauses (e.g., *the manner in which he was told*)

56. Private verbs (e.g., *assume, believe, doubt, know*—(Palmer , 1974; Leech & Svartvik , 1978))

11. Indefinite pronouns (e.g., *anybody, anyone, anything, everything, everybody, nobody, no one, nothing, somebody, someone, something*)

34. Sentence relatives (e.g., *Bob likes fried mangoes, which is the most disgusting thing I've ever heard of.*)

57. Suasive verbs (e.g*., agree, allow, command, concede, decide, determine, ensure, insist, intend, prefer, pronounce*— (Mischke, 2005))

12. Pro-verb *do* (e.g., *I did it*, reduces density)

35. Causative adverbial subordinator (*because*)

58. *seem* and *appear*

D. Questions

36. Concessive adverbial subordinators (*although, though*)

N. Reduced dispreferred forms

13. Direct WH questions (e.g. questions using *who, what, when, where, which, how*)

37. Conditional adverbial subordinators (*if, unless*)

59. Contractions (e.g., *I'm, you're, he's, she's*)

E. Nominal forms

38. Other adverbial subordinators (e.g., *since, while, whereas*)

60. Subordinator *that* deletion (e.g., *I think* [0] *he went* [0=*that*])

14. Nominalizations (turning verbs and adjectives into nouns with *-tion, -ment, -ness, -ity* endings, eg. *describe* becomes *description*)

I. Prepositional phrases, adjectives, and adverbs

61. Stranded prepositions (e.g., *provide the help which several of our girls were hoping for*)

15. Gerunds (participial forms functioning as nouns, e.g. *rafting is fun*)

39. Total prepositional phrases (e.g. *at night, under the clouds, along the crowded road*)

62. Split infinitives (e.g., *He wants to convincingly prove that*)

16. Total other nouns (all words that name things people, places, things, and abstract notions)

40. Attributive adjectives (e.g., *the big horse*)

63. Split auxiliaries (e.g., *They were apparently shown to . . .*)

F. Passives

41. Predicative adjectives (e.g., *The need is great*)

O. Coordination

17. Agentless passives (the *by-phrase* is absent and the agent that instigates an action is not represented, e.g. *the report was doctored*)

42. Total adverbs (words that clarify the meaning of verbs, adjective, clauses and other adverbs, e.g. *he walked quietly*, ends often with *ly*)

64. Phrasal coordination (NOUN *and* NOUN; ADJ *and* ADJ; VERB *and* VERB; ADV *and* ADV—e.g., the dog jumped and the cat ran)

18. *by*-passives (e.g. *the car was stolen by the valet, the data was received by the staff*)

J. Lexical specificity

65. Independent clause coordination (clause-initial *and*, e.g. He hit me and she fell down)

G. Stative (State of Being) forms

43. Type-token ratio ratios (ratio of different lexical items [types] to total of words [tokens])

P. Negation

19. *be* as main verb (e.g. *I am convinced, I am confused, the house is big*)

44. Mean word length (orthographic letters divided by total words in text [cf. Flesch, 1960])

66. Synthetic negation (e.g., *No dog is good*—is considered more literary; (Tottie, 1983, 1991))

20. Existential *there* (e.g. *there are several explanations for this, there's something else*)

K. Lexical classes

67. Analytic negation (e.g., *That's not likely*—is considered colloquial and more fragmented)

H. Subordination features

45. Conjuncts (e.g., *as a result, consequently, for example, furthermore, however, instead, moreover, rather, similarly*)

Note. Adapted from Biber (1988, pp. 221-245; 1995, pp. 95-96). I have supplemented examples of some linguistic features for clarification.

Figure 1 — **How Dimension (Factor) Scores Are Derived**

The following illustrates how **one** mean frequency count for **one** feature (which has been normalized to reflect its occurrence per 1,000 words of text) in **one** document is **standardized** to a mean of 0.0 by using the **z-score** formula to determine the **standardized** value for the feature's **normalized** mean.

Six linguistic features on Dimension 2, which mark the presence of narrative focus. (Only *salient* features are listed.)	Measures in *this text* of each linguistic feature's normalized frequency of occurrence per 1,000 words of text (χ)	Measures in *whole corpus* of each linguistic feature's normalized mean frequency of occurrence per 1,000 words of text (μ)	Measures in *whole corpus* of each Linguistic feature's standard deviation (σ)	*This text's* standardized mean frequency counts, expressed in terms of variance as *z-scores* (*z*) $\left(z = \dfrac{\chi - \mu}{\sigma} \right)$
1. Past Tense Verbs	113	40.1	30.4	2.4
2. 3rd Person Personal Pronouns	124	29.9	22.5	4.2
3. Perfect Aspect Verbs	30	8.6	5.2	4.1
4. Public Verbs	14	7.7	5.4	1.5
5. Present Participial Clauses	5	1.0	1.7	2.3
6. Synthetic Negation	3	1.7	1.6	1.4

This Text's **Factor** or **Dimension** Score (the sum of all its **standardized per-thousand mean frequency counts' z-** scores): **+15.9**

For the **first** linguistic feature listed above (past tense verbs), the normalized mean frequency count of its occurrence per 1,000 words of text (113) is **standardized** by transforming it into a unit of standard deviation, called a **z**-score. This process is illustrated below:

Definition of Terms In the *z*-Score Formula

In the adjacent formula, **z** refers to the standardized **z**- score being sought; **χ** refers to the normalized frequency (mean-count-per-1,000 words) for the linguistic feature being considered (113 past tense verbs); **μ** refers to the mean occurrence of past tense verbs in the corpus as **a whole**; and **σ** is the standard deviation score for past tense verbs in the corpus **as a whole**. The **standardized** mean frequenciy for past tense verbs in this text is found by computing their **z**-score. This process makes possible inter- and intra-corpus comparisons without the skewing long or short texts might create, by translating raw means to units of standard deviation, using the **z**-scores formula.

The formula used below to calculate the **standardized** *mean count-per-thousand-word* occurrence for just **one** linguistic feature (past tense verbs) is also applied above to the **other five** remaining features for the text. This sum for **six linguistic features** (+15.9) is this text's **Factor or Dimension Score**.

$$z = \frac{\chi - \mu}{\sigma} \quad z = \frac{113\text{-}40.1}{30.4} \quad z = \frac{72.9}{30.4} \quad z = 2.4$$

The standardized score of 2.4 for past tense verbs means that this text has a much higher occurrence of past tense verbs relative to the rest of the corpus: almost 2-1/2 times the mean occurrence of 40.1 per thousand words of text. Biber notes: "This standardized value, reflecting the magnitude of a frequency with respect to the range of possible variation, is a more adequate representation for the purposes of the present study" (1988, p. 95). Summing all of a text's standardized means for all salient linguistic features in any given dimension of variation yields a Factor or Dimension Score for that text on that dimension.

How to apply the *z*-score formula to an *Entire Genre of Texts*, so that the sum of *all* its texts' standardized per-1,000-word mean scores on all salient features yields for each Factor or Dimension, a *Genre-Wide* Score

The procedure above first derives **just one z**-score for **just one** salient linguistic feature in **just one** dimension of linguistic variation. This procedure is then applied to the **remaining five** salient linguistic features in this text.

Then the second major step in the procedure involves summing **all** the *standardized scores* for **all six** linguistic features in the text to provide a **Dimension or Factor Score** for **this one text** (e.g. **2.4** + **4.2** + **4.1** + **1.5** + **2.3** + **1.4** = **15.9**).

So after standardizing all the count-per-thousand means for **each** salient feature by converting them into **z-scores**, this **Single Text Factor or Dimension Score** is derived by summing those **z**-scores. Here the result is a score that characterizes the degree to which this text is **narrative or non-narrative** (the label for Dimension 2).

Computerized analysis of IRS Dickerson IRS 880 Corpus does this for **54** salient linguistic features among **2,412** texts across **five** dimensions of variation, requiring some **130,248 z**-score computations. Then additional multivariate analyses examine statistical significance. Biber's original research similarly summed *mean scores* for **67** salient linguistic features among **481** texts across **23** genres of written and spoken English. At the heart of the process is the two-step procedure described above (1. standardize to **z**-scores, all per-thousand means for salient features, then 2. sum all those standardized **z**-scores for a text). This process of standardizing mean-per-thousand frequencies to derive a Factor or Dimension Score for **One Text** can be used to produce standardized Factor or Dimension scores for **Entire Genres of Texts**: 1.) First, sum **all Factor or Dimension Scores** for **all the texts** of an **Entire Genre**. Then 2.) divide this total by the **number of texts** in the genre to get a **Genre-Wide Score**. "For example," Biber illustrates, "if there were only three fiction texts, having factor scores for Factor 2 of 16.6, 12.0, and 10.4, the mean score for fiction on Dimension 2 (Factor Score 2) would be: **16.6** + **12.0** + **10.4** ÷ **3** = **13.0**"

(Adapted from Biber, 1988, p. 95).

Figure 2 **How Dimension Z Scores Are Plotted on the Normal Curve**

Procedure for Locating Text 60-e-15-b, Which Scores Lowest on Factor 1 for Informational Content, on the Normal Curve:

To Compare the Standardized and Raw Scores:

Using the formula to the right, the raw score of **- 41.13** for text 60-3-15-b, yielded a standardized z-score of **- 2.92173 units of standard deviation**. This has essentially re-set to zero, the text's score for its mean count-per-thousand-words of occurrence, for all 28 of the linguistic features deemed salient in defining Dimension 1. (This score was derived by summing the positive and negative occurrences per-thousand in the text for all 28 features). The recalibration of this sum of means-per-thousand to standardized units of **9.71**, now makes it possible to compare texts and genres on **an even footing**.
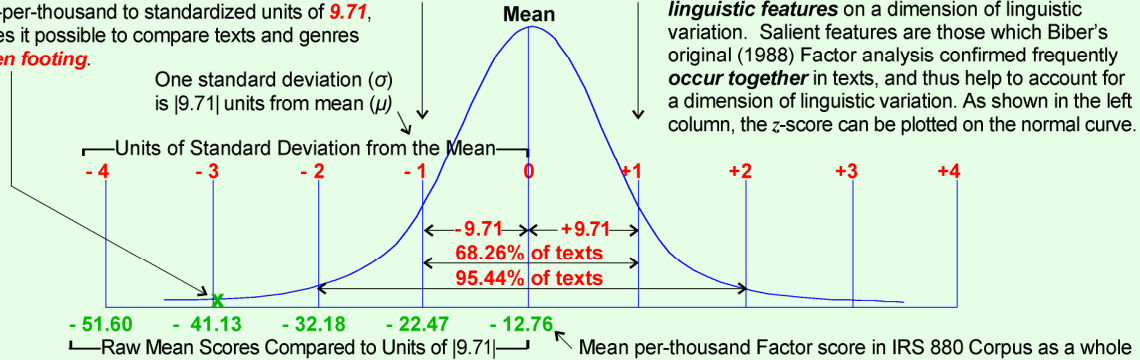
The Normal Distribution:

68% of all salient mean Factor scores fall between -1 and + 1 standard deviations of the normalized mean (normalized to an occurrence-per-thousand-words basis); and 95% of all texts' Factor scores fall between - 2 and + 2 standard deviations of the mean.

To Convert the Raw Mean Factor Score to Z-Score:

$$z = \frac{X - \mu}{\sigma} \quad z = \frac{- 41.13 - - 12.76}{9.71} \quad z = \frac{-28.37}{9.71} \quad z = \text{- 2.92173}$$

What The Raw Mean Factor Score Summarizes:

The formula above transforms a raw mean Factor score into units of standard deviation. This text's (or any genre's) raw mean Factor score is the **sum of the mean frequencies** (that were normalized to an occurrence-per-thousand-words basis) of all **salient linguistic features** on a dimension of linguistic variation. Salient features are those which Biber's original (1988) Factor analysis confirmed frequently **occur together** in texts, and thus help to account for a dimension of linguistic variation. As shown in the left column, the z-score can be plotted on the normal curve.

One standard deviation (σ) is |9.71| units from mean (μ)

Units of Standard Deviation from the Mean

- 4   - 3   - 2   - 1   0   +1   +2   +3   +4

Mean

-9.71 — **+9.71**
68.26% of texts
95.44% of texts

- 51.60   - 41.13   - 32.18   - 22.47   - 12.76

Raw Mean Scores Compared to Units of |9.71| Mean per-thousand Factor score in IRS 880 Corpus as a whole

This example makes it possible to visualize on the normal curve, how the Factor 1 score for text 60-e-15-b is positioned (in units of standard deviation) in relationship to all other texts from this or any other corpus on Dimension 1. Although subsequent text excerpts are not plotted on a curve like this, I report for each, its raw score for the salient linguistic features associated with the dimension that is reported, as well as its standardized score and standard deviation. By using the formula above, it is thus possible to visualize how any text compares to others in the IRS 880 Corpus, the ICIC corpus, and the 23 genres of Biber's Corpus on each dimension of linguistic variation examined in this study.

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