



UNDERSTANDING LINGUISTIC COMPLEXITY OF WORLD BANK ANNUAL REPORTS

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MOTIVATION

Communication is key

Every year, the World Bank publishes an Annual Report detailing their work and the progress of development.

These reports, however, are criticized for their impenetrable language, making them inaccessible to the audience they are intended to serve.

Our research seeks to understand whether this complex language exists in the World Bank Reports and if it is a systemic issue in the publications of development agencies.

METHODOLOGY

Text readability indexes

Six readability metrics are combined to measure text complexity, using objective attributes of word lengths, sentence lengths, syllable counts:

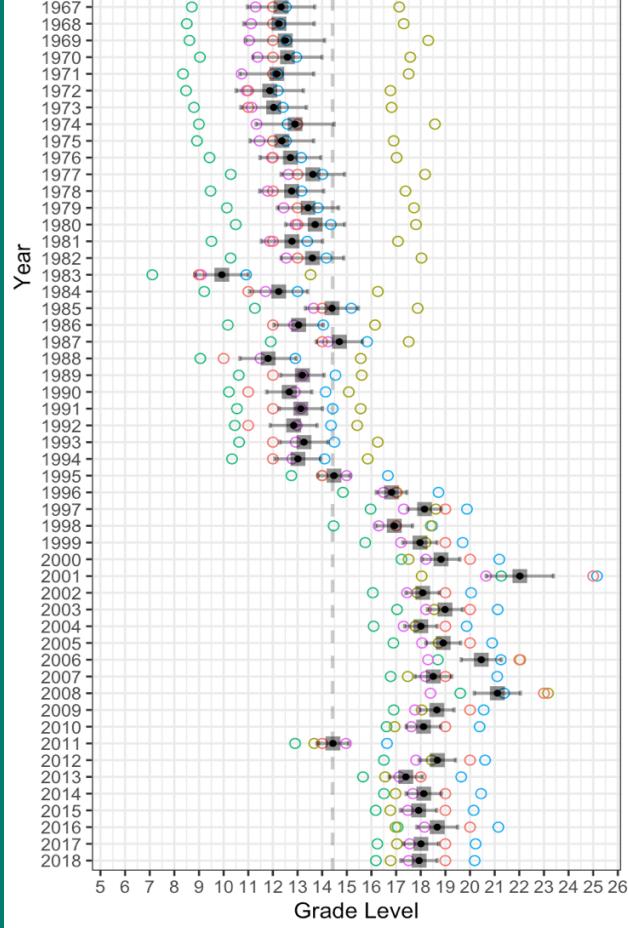
- Flesch Reading Ease Readability
- Flesch-Kincaid Readability Score
- Automated Readability Index
- Coleman-Liau Index
- Gunning's Fog Index
- Simple Measure of Gobbledygook

Analyzing the development of these metrics over the years helps to uncover tendency and time trend to strengthen the internal validity of our results.

RESULTS & CONCLUSION

The complex language of development reports

- A downward tendency for language complexity in the early 1950s, which soon reversed from the 1960s and continued steadily with its upward climb until today, stabilizing around 1995 at a high level of sophistication;
- African and Asian Development Banks share relatively the same and even higher level of linguistic complexity in their reports in the recent decade;
- The problem of difficult language is pervasive and should be addressed at large in the world of development.



Readability of World Bank Annual Reports 1947-2018



Readability of Asian Development Bank Annual Reports 1967-2018