



TEXT ANALYSIS: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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Agenda

- 1) Critical discourse analysis
- 2) Content analysis

Recall: discourse

- Michael Foucault – discourse denotes the way in which a particular set of linguistic categories relating to an object and the ways of depicting it frame the way we comprehend that object
 - The version of an object comes to constitute it
 - A discourse is constitutive of the social world that is a focus of interest or concern

Language shapes the way we think

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

- Emphasizes the role of language as a power resource
- Discourses should be examined in relation to social structures, including the power relationships that are responsible for them
- Aims:
 - Understand how meaning is created in context
 - How language is used to exercise power (reveal power relationships)
 - challenge the use of power

Critical discourse analysis: how to?

- Seeks to reveal the meaning of a phenomenon by exploring how:
 - the discourse came to have a particular meaning today;
 - the discourse draws on and influences other discourses;
 - the discourse is constructed through texts;
 - the discourse gives meaning to social life and makes certain activities possible, desirable or inevitable;
 - particular actors draw in the discourse to legitimate their positions and actions

CDA: steps

- Analysis of a discursive event in three steps:
 - 1) examination of actual content, structure and meaning of the text under scrutiny,
 - 2) examination of the form of discursive interaction used to communicate meaning and beliefs,
 - 3) consideration of the social context in which the discursive event is taking place

Qualitative content analysis

- Two general strategies: analytic induction and grounded theory
 - Analytic induction: a rough research question, a hypothetical explanation, collection of data
 - Grounded theory: development of theory out of data
 - iterative approach – data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other

Qualitative data analysis: basic operations

- *Coding* as a starting point
 - Of what general category is this item of data an instance?
 - What does this item of data represent?
 - What is this item of data about?
 - What question about a topic does this item of data suggest?
- Results in fragmentation of data; data taken out of context

Quantitative content analysis

- Approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner
- Not a means of generating data
- Objective and systematic
 - Rules clearly specified in advance for the documents/text to categorize
 - Transparency in procedures
 - Application of rules done in a consistent manner to minimize bias

Content analysis: examples of research

- Visual images of women's and men's magazines (Malkin et al. 1999);
- Politicians' speeches (Proksch and Slapin 2010)
- Obituaries (Fowler and Bielsa 2007)
- Alcohol brand references in the lyrics of popular songs (Siegel et al. 2013)
- Social media posts and comments (Beullens and Schepers 2013)
- The content of websites and blogs (Davis et al. 2015)

Step 1: choose your research questions

- Clearly formulate your research questions
- Questions of: **who** (gets reported), **what** (gets reported), **where** (does the issue get reported), **location** (of coverage within the items analyzed), **how much** (gets reported), and **why** (does the issue get reported)
- Notice: What is *not* important to reporters? How much does the coverage change over time?

Step 2: select your sample

- What type of media to sample? How many pieces?
- What time period(s) to focus on?
 - But could have an ongoing general phenomenon – random sampling

Step 3: decide on what to count

- Consider different units of analysis
 - **Significant actors:** Who has produced the item? Who is the main focus of the item? Who provides alternative voices?
 - **Words:** counting of frequency with which certain words appear, the use of some words rather than others
 - Can use computer-assisted content analysis (e.g., dictionaries)
 - **Subjects and themes:** search for both manifest and deeper, hidden content
 - **Dispositions:** are journalists favourable or hostile towards a topic?
Reporting slant, tone

Step 4: coding

- Two main elements: design a coding schedule and design a coding manual
- **Coding schedule:** a form onto which all the data relating to an item being coded will be entered
- **Coding manual:** a statement of instructions to coders
 - Must do it even if only coding yourself

Step 5: intercoder reliability

- “The extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion” (Lombard et al. 2002)
- Critical component of content analysis – without it the data and interpretations of the data cannot be considered valid
- Need at least two coders
- Many different techniques but only a few regularly used
 - Percent agreement - percentage of all coding decisions made by coders on which the coders agree
 - Krippendorff’s alpha - designed to be used for variables at different levels of measurement; accounts for chance agreements

Content analysis: advantages

- Very transparent research method; objective method of analysis
- Can allow tracking changes over time
- Unobtrusive method – does not entail participants in a study having to take the researcher into account
- Flexible – can be applied to wide variety of unstructured information

Content analysis: disadvantages

- Can only be as good as the documents on which the researcher works (authenticity, credibility, representability, meaning)
- Impossible to devise coding manuals that won't require some interpretation on the part of coders
- Sometimes difficult to accurately capture latent content
- Can't answer the "why" questions