TEXT ANALYSIS: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Miriam Matejova, PhD

November 14, 2023

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 <u>reveal the meaning of a phenomenon</u> 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 <u>predetermined categories</u> and in a <u>systematic</u> and <u>replicable</u> manner

◦ 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)

◦ 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