Discourses in big data – can we get them out?

Abstract: This contribution focuses on the (problematic) synergy between Discourse Analysis as a set of theories interested in meaning-making, and digital tools for text analysis. Various types of Discourse Analysis have developed a strong theoretical apparatus to understand how wordings, phrasings, denotations, practices, and framings inform the way we make sense of the social world around us, but simultaneously, Discourse Analysis is always looking for methods to improve how it teases these crucial signifying features out of larger data units such as texts and conversations. As such, combining DA with various digital tools for text analysis is a potentially interesting path to go down from a methodological point of view, but it hasn't been explored very far as of yet. Only simple tools analysing individual entries and keywords are used frequently for Discourse Analysis, whereas 'model tools' such as topic modelling and semantic network analysis remain neglected. To facilitate further cross-pollination between both traditions, it is necessary to explore under what theoretical and epistemological conditions digital text analysis tools can be used for discourse analysis, and what their added value could be to specific research designs.

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