

Text-based Analysis: a brief introduction

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Assumptions of a text-based analysis techniques

- the text stands alone
 - ◆ the words and idiomatic expressions convey the meaning
 - ◆ meanings are relatively invariant
- larger context must be considered
 - ◆ the author and her environment
 - ◆ conditions of power and domination
- the reader is part of the process
 - ◆ the author is less important
 - ◆ meaning unfolds in the 'reading' of the text

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Content Analysis

- searches for structures and patterned regularities in the text
- the existence of these regularities allow researchers to make inferences from the text
- intention and meaning are discoverable in the frequency in which words, phrases, idioms appear in the text
- meanings are inherent in the word or idiom and may be defined in a limited set of definitions
- meanings may be assigned to content variables or
 - ◆ meta-meanings
- Unit of analysis is generally quite small
 - ◆ word or idiom

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Content Analysis Defined

- “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication.”[Berleson, 1954 quoted in Carney, 1972]
- “a systematic technique for analyzing message content and message handling...the analyst is concerned not with the message per se, but with the larger questions of the process of effects and communication.” [Budd, Thorp and Donohew, 1967 in Carney, 1972]
- “Content Analysis is any research technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characters within text.” [Stone et al, 1966]
- “Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their contexts.”[Krippendorff, 1980]
- “Content analysis is a research technique that utilizes a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender(s) of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message. The rules of the inferential process vary with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher.”[Weber, 1990]

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Conversation Analysis

- means to study verbally conducted interactions
- grounded in philosophical hermeneutics
- where meanings are shaped in the context of the exchange [Wynn, 1979]
 - ◆ meanings assumed to be embedded in layers of contexts, negotiated interpretation and lifeworld knowledge
- does not presume existence of fixed meanings
- researcher must immerse herself in the context, work and life of the speakers to 'peel back' layers of meaning

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Discourse Analysis

[Truex, 1993; Klein and Truex 1995]

- builds on both Content Analysis and Conversation Analysis
- assumes iterative hermeneutic circles of meaning discovery
- retains Krippendorff's notion of an initial content variable with recording units segmented into classes of meaning
- differs from Content Analysis in that:
 - ◆ content variable are not predetermined and fixed but evolve in iterative readings of the text
 - ◆ the unit of analysis is of variant length spanning sentences, paragraphs, pages even whole texts
- differs from Conversation Analysis in that:
 - ◆ assumes patterns of meaning may be traceable as 'language games' thus serving as exemplars in further analysis to trace meaning evolution
 - ◆ allows for inter-coder cross validation

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What Constitutes a 'text'?

- Commonly understood as:
 - ◆ a formal, written and structured document conveying something from a shared social realm
 - ◆ having a clear notion of authorship, purpose, historicity and audience
 - ◆ conventions of style, form and grammar
- extended to any social behavior may include the organization itself

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Discourse

- Refers to the exchange of meanings in face-to-face types of settings.
 - ◆ Allows for a richness of verbal and non-verbal cues which resolve and create ambiguities.
- Free flowing with sudden shifts leaving traces of incomplete ideas which may be rejoined or may disappear altogether
- Has a life of its own, may be informal inconclusive and semi-structured
- Never follows rules of conventional written grammatical structures
- Is a shared, social event
- May have many layers of meaning
- It is meaning creation itself

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Interpretive Validity

- Three modernist criteria of a ‘good’ interpretation of organizational texts [Lee, 1991]
 - ◆ the explicanda provided in the interpretation would be consonant and reasonable given the text and data given
 - ◆ new observations would not surprise the observer/analyst
 - ◆ an observer would be able to enter the world of the observed human subjects and be able to ‘fit in’ and communicate reasonably well

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From a Postmodern Perspective

- organizations may be seen as a series of interconnected, concurrent and sequential local narratives—stories or conversations—or discourse.
- organizational discourse is the process of organizational (re)making

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Interpretive Validity

- Postmodernist notions of validity in a text
 - ◆ all events and phenomena are considered texts
 - ◆ there is no single meaning of a text
 - ◆ an infinite number of possible valid 'readings' is possible [Roseneau, 1992]
 - ◆ internal consistency and strength of interpretation become warrants to the validity of the 'reading' of the text
 - ◆ one interpretation may be challenged (in a dialectical process) by other readings

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The Stories Provide

- A kind of organizational logic
- Organizational continuity
- A kind of order
- A reference which cannot be un-told
- A process which is irreversible

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Information Technology and Stories

- Information Technology changes:
 - ◆ the stories, they may now incorporate the new environment and vocabulary into the running story, *and*
 - ◆ the means of discourse conveyance, i.e. its venue
 - ◆ the language itself (i.e. in offering new metaphors and referents)

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The Circular Relationship Between Information Technology and Stories

- The process of organizational self-reconsideration and evolution may be accelerated by IT which encourages introspective communications processes.
- Organizational meanings, work processes and outputs—including the stories and discourse about them—are altered.
 - ◆ But the changes are so gradual, subtle, endemic and persistent, and because they are a 'natural' and 'normal' part of our frame of reference, they easily elude our recognition.
- The differences become apparent when the IS developed to capture past organizational reality cease to fit the current view of organizational reality. And the process begins anew.....

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Ethnography and Organizational Lies

“A central postulate of the ethnographic method is that people lie about the things that matter most to them. Penetrating fronts...then becomes one of the more important goals of the competent field worker. If the ethnographer can uncover the lie, much is revealed about what is deemed crucial by the individual, group, or organization.” [Van Maanen, 1979]