does not mean that they are not fixed through power arrangements institutionalized in various ways at various historical junctures, such that it is possible to theorize about replicable patterns of social conduct over time. We need to weigh equally DA’s political theory of language and subjectivity and its theory of discursive power embodied in normally constrained subjects.

I wonder as well about HHP’s validity measures of DA and CA. I would have said that CA has behavioral implications: these beliefs imply these actions. And I would go on to try to get DA to make similar predictions based on its analysis of the politics and institutions of discursive reproduction in the domain of interest.

In sum, I think that DA can maintain its fundamental differences with CA while simultaneously being far more methodologically rigorous, and so participate far more vigorously and equally with putatively more scientific methods of analysis in fashioning accounts of the social world.

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Content Analysis: A Contrast and Complement to Discourse Analysis

According to experts on discourse analysis, texts are not individually meaningful (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p. 4). This notion strikes at the heart of a primary commonality between discourse analysis (DA) and content analysis (CA). Both are concerned with drawing conclusions about some aspect of human communication from a carefully selected set of messages. How they do so is rather different, but ultimately their findings can fit together quite nicely, providing a good example of triangulation of methods, a highly desirable situation.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that relies on the scientific method, including an observance of the standards of objectivity/inter-subjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability (with probability sampling from a defined population of messages), replicability, and hypothesis testing (Neuendorf, 2002). It belongs to the “family” of qualitative methods to which survey research also belongs—indeed, some researchers hold that CA is in fact a subset of survey research (Neuendorf, 2002). Both surveys and CAs measure variables as they “naturally” occur (as opposed to the manipulation of independent variables in the true experiment); their sole difference is CA’s focus on a message component as the unit of data collection or analysis. CA is not limited as to the type of message-centric variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented. Moreover, contrary to some popular misconceptions, CA is not limited to a mechanical counting of manifest characteristics. Such counting is indeed often the “bread and butter” of CA, but there’s much more to the meal.

CA is often quite rich, and offers the possibility of tapping complex, latent constructs. Rogan and Hammar’s (1995) study of authentic crisis negotiations is a great example of how deep meaning may be extracted via CA. In their study, “message affect” was measured via five adjuncts of language intensity derived from qualitative and experimental work—obscure words, general metaphors, profanity and sex, death statements, and expanded qualifiers.

Their sample was too small and non-random to achieve generalizability, but their findings were striking—the profiles for negotiator/perpetrator message affect were different for
negotiation processes with successful vs. unsuccessful outcomes. The analysis technique and findings might prove useful not only in a practical, predictive sense for negotiation practitioners, but also in providing a baseline for further analysis of deep meanings of negotiation profiles. The “markers” of significant shifts in the relational roles of negotiators and perpetrators located via CA might be used in further study by CA analysts. Thus, CA may provide identification of the “pragmatic” contextual cues of crisis communication, while DA provides a more nuanced interpretation of their meaning.

CA is not limited to an analysis of words. As far back as the seminal Payne Fund Studies on the content and effects of movies on American youth (Charters, 1933; Dale, 1935), the stylistics, images, and behaviors of characters in moving image content have been systematically analyzed via CA. Concern over the effects of violent television in the 1960s and 1970s brought renewed commitment to such CA studies, spurring the development of CA schemes to measure such nonverbals as anti-social, pro-social, gender-typed, family role, and occupational role behaviors (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Greenberg, 1980). The analysis of written or transcribed spoken words, a subset of content analysis, is called text analysis. Its computer-aided form (now supported by more than 20 soft-ware) is called CATA (computer-aided text analysis), a fast-growing segment of the CA literature.

CA is limited to a focus on messages. A simple inference from such messages to source motivations or receiver effects is, some have argued, not warranted. But to take full advantage of its findings, CA may be linked with source and/or receiver data, providing core evidence for a full model of the communication process (in what has been called the “integrative model of content analysis”; Neuendorf, 2002). For example, Naccarato and Neuendorf (1998) analyzed a wide variety of textual and graphical characteristics of business-to-business print ads, and then statistically linked those characteristics with four measures of readership and recall for the ads, derived from a commercial magazine readership survey. And Hertog and Fan (1995) paired their CA of news stories about AIDS transmission in major newspapers and news magazines with findings from independent public opinion polls. They found news coverage to predict public opinion at a later point in time; public opinion did not predict subsequent news content. In both cases, the bigger picture of message effects was generated by a combining of systematic CAs and quantitative data from “external” studies. And, both examples show the potential of CA procedures—particularly when linked with other data sources—to discover particular patterns of control, both in terms of information flow and message impact on receivers. Such dynamics seem central to the fundamental concern of DA with power and hierarchy.

DA and CA Compared

The range of substantive topics appropriate to DA is also generally appropriate to CA. Moreover, the various “sources of data” (types of messages/texts) can also serve as the foci of CA analyses. Both methodologies have embraced the use of computers for particular tasks, although in both cases, their application generally seems to be a case of old wine in newer, faster bottles. In considering both DA and CA, there is a common bottom line—“There are no unmediated data” (Phillips & Hardy, p. 83). Those using DA attempt to fully disclose their mediation (through rich discussion of all “backgroundings”—assumptions, epistemologies, etc.), while those using CA attempt to minimize their mediation (through adherence to the scientific method, including an aim toward intersubjectivity, if not objectivity).

The overriding importance for DA of validity, and the relative lack of concern with reliability (Phillips & Hardy, pp. 79-80), is a core dissimilarity between the two methodologies. For CA, reliability is paramount—in fact, measures that do not achieve an acceptable level of reliability ought to be dropped from further analysis. Further, replicability is clearly not a focus of DA, while it remains an additional important standard for CA.

Thus, in CA, measurement is via a coding scheme that is written out in great detail, with an accompanying coding form (or a set of dictionaries (word/concept lists) if the analysis is strictly of written text). In all cases the coding instrumentation is established a priori, and the goal is to create a coding plan that is so carefully defined that virtually anyone, with sufficient training, can serve as a reliable coder. This contrasts sharply with DA, for which the researcher serves as the measurement instrument. Hence, the measures and analysis are highly dependent on the expertise and orientations of the researcher(s). Fittingly, DA has been characterized as “techniques plus perspective/assumptions” (i.e., method plus epistemology). With CA, the epistemology is a given—an endorsement of the scientific method.

DA and CA Used Together

As noted above, triangulation of methods—i.e., approaching a research question from multiple methodological stances—is the ideal. When the findings agree, the conclusions of the researchers are strengthened multi-fold (Gray & Densten, 1998). Unfortunately, few studies have combined CA and qualitative message analysis. One example is Miller, Wiley, Fung, and Liang’s study (1997) of storytelling in Taiwanese and European American families, which combined in-home ethnographic fieldwork with content-analytic coding of audio and video recordings of naturally occurring talk in the home. They concluded (1) that personal storytelling operates as an important socializing practice for children ages 2-6 in widely different cultures, (2) with Chinese families more likely to use storytelling to convey moral and social standards, and European American families more likely to employ stories for entertainment and affirmation. The former (1) was a conclusion that could be drawn from the in-home observations, while the latter (2) was a finding derived from the systematic CA coding of the recordings.

DA and CA seem a good fit for such triangulation, although not for precise replication. DA provides a rich source of contextual data, and provides a “big picture” of a realm of communication activity, ostensibly leaving no stone unturned in a consideration of all critical messages. Such a diverse
collection is not generally conducted in CA. DA is therefore more likely to allow the discovery of the variety and texture of communication. From the standpoint of a content analyst, DA gives a multitude of “clues” that go beyond the typical preparation (via literature review and “immersion” in a message pool) for a CA.

For example, Hardy and Phillips’ (1999) study of the discourse concerning the Canadian refugee system uses the full power of DA to establish a network of meaning. They examined legislation and the statements of government officials and NGO leaders and others to analyze the institutional field of the refugee. Plus, they used editorial cartoons to explore the societal-level discourse. Their analysis of cartoons uncovered prototypical portrayals of refugees and of the refugee system itself that would most likely go undiscovered via CA. But a future CA could make use of the findings to effect a more broad-based study of cartoons, creating a realistic, summary picture of the “message pool” available to various publics at various periods in time. Additionally, a CA adds the pedigree of reliability—an assurance that the findings are not entirely the product of one analyst’s opinion.

Conversely, a CA may serve as a stimulant to the conduct of a DA. For example, one unexpected finding of Smith’s (1999) study of women’s portrayals in U.S. commercial film was that films with more females in creative control (i.e., writing, directing, producing) presented more gender-typed portrayals of women. This cries for a follow-up, and DA seems uniquely suited. A DA could assemble a fuller investigation of the network of discourse surrounding this trend, in order to begin to answer questions of how and why this phenomenon occurs. A variety of framings are probable within the institutional curve—e.g., it’s possible that the female film executives do not even perceive the portrayals as gender-typed. Here, CA provides the “clue” as to a critical pattern in message content that deserves a more in-depth look.

More generally, qualitative and quantitative investigations should routinely be used together. It is wrongheaded to proceed on any quantitative study without considering various conceptual definitions derived from the reflexive processes of qualitative research; it is equally wrongheaded to draw generalized conclusions about one’s qualitative findings without adding quantitative evidence on the prevalence and patterns of message occurrence.

A Final Observation

Perhaps the most compelling—and startling—macro-level observation one can make from an examination and comparison of the two methods is in fact a social constructivist one. The discourse concerning DA reveals the approach to be one of inspection, introspection, and primacy of cognitive activity, with emphasis on reflection, discussion, and debate, while the discourse of CA is one of a more “industrial” milieu, with emphasis on production, output, and broad-based generalization. These framings correspond to views of DA as constructivist (with evident concern for the precision and validity of description and identification by the observer) and of CA as intersubjective (with evident concern for the shared understanding of the research assumptions, process, and findings). It would be interesting to trace the roots of those creating such discourses; to situate the contexts of their training and identify the assumptions of their pedagogical origins. More importantly, it seems that a dialogue among DA and CA researchers might be well served to consider such discursive contrasts, and to consider how the approaches and advantages of the two techniques are complementary.

Notes

1 This distinction between objectivity and intersubjectivity is an intriguing and important one. Some researchers (e.g., Babbie, 1986) have acknowledged the unattainable nature of true objectivity in measurement, and have opted instead for a goal of intersubjectivity—i.e., such clear and publicly proclaimed assumptions and methods as to assure fully shared meaning among researchers.

2 The operationalizations of gender-typing were derived primarily from a host of qualitative investigations, most of them critical-cultural.

References


World or Worlds?
The Analysis of Content and Discourse
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There are many approaches to discourse analysis and I would be reluctant to try to capture its essence. Perhaps the most familiar use in International Relations has emphasised the construction of identity and difference. However, scholars such as Crawford have focused on argument analysis, Duffy, Frederking and Tucker on language games, as have I in a somewhat different way; Miliken on the sequencing of moves in foreign policy interactions, Sylvan and Majeski on the construction of foreign policy choices. Alker on an ethnomethodological/dramaturgical approach to studying how people play iterated Prisoner's Dilemma games and Weldes on the discursive construction of the Cuban Missile Crisis, problematising its status as a 'crisis'. Not all of these scholars would refer to themselves as discourse analysts, but they are all in different ways dealing with the analysis of texts. As Miliken rightly points out, there is a stream of thinking among discourse analysts in international relations that rigor and systematic method should be avoided given their association with positivist method. That discourse analysis, in contrast to the rigorous and formal methods of content analysis, is relativistic, interpretive and a bit woolly minded is an assumption that is often shared by advocates and critics alike. This difference is often implied in the distinction between formal and informal.

I would like to argue that this dichotomy should be drawn into question. The difference between discourse analysis and content analysis has less to do with the degree of formality in the method per se than the methodological foundations on which the methods rest. I thus begin with a distinction between methodology and method. Methodology refers to those basic assumptions about the world we study, which are prior to the specific techniques adopted by the scholar undertaking research. Methodology includes both ontology and epistemology; the question of whether they can be separated is at the heart of the methodological difference. My analysis revolves around a contrast of two ideal types, which are oversimplified to amplify the difference, recognizing that both traditions involve a diversity of approaches and assumptions. I will focus on four issues: the relationship between language and world; the question of stability vs. change: coding vs. interpretation; and the meaning of formality.

Alternative Approaches

Both content analysis and discourse analysis revolve around the analysis of texts. However, they each assume a different understanding of the relationship between word and world. Do we assume that language functions as a label for discrete objects or subjects in the world or that it is constitutive of the world? In the former case, the nature of being (ontology) is separate from the way of knowing (epistemology). The existence of objects or subjects is distinct from the labels we attach to them. On a very basic level, the ability to treat words as discrete categories is a necessary point of departure for their quantification. Arguably counting individual words requires their isolation from a context. More sophisticated forms of content analysis do attempt to cluster categories, to explore further entailments of a word, and overcome context-related deficiencies. However, for the sake of contrast, we can say that the emphasis on quantification goes hand in hand with an assumption, building on the tradition of logical positivism, that language mirrors objects in the world.

By contrast, discourse analysis is more geared to an examination of the embeddedness of words in patterns of relationship. From this angle, the nature of being (ontology) cannot be separated from ways of knowing (epistemology). This is not to deny the obvious point that the material world exists independent of or prior to human society. It does, however presuppose that this material world has been dramatically altered by human interaction with it. A tree branch, aside from being part of a tree, may be used as a weapon or formed into any number of human artifacts from chairs, to baseball bats, to totem poles to a beam in the structure of a house. Once the material object, that is, the tree branch, is shaped into a specific form, it has a place within a particular type of social context, where it has meaning in relation to other objects (e.g. chairs and types of rooms or totem poles and religious rites), particular uses (e.g. to sit on or dance around, respectively), and is part of a language or grammar (e.g. of homes or religion). Humans not only interact with nature, thereby transforming it, but with each other, forming, in the process, different types of culturally and historically specific practices and institutions that are also rule governed. The point is that if, in the first case, treating words as labels serves their quantification, in the second, treating them as systems of relationships requires an analysis of the grammars which constitute particular worlds. While in the first case, the world is assumed to exist as an objective place, populated by discrete objects, in the second, we are dealing with worlds plural. The subjects, objects and practices constituting the world of 16th century witchhunts, 18th century slave trading or 21st century terrorism are historically and culturally specific. The assumption of multiple possible worlds, rather than a single world to be discovered, is linked to other assumptions.

Discovering Content vs. Mapping Change
Other contributions to this issue have made a distinction between the assumption of a stable world and meaning on the
Content analysis is the study of documents and communication artifacts, which might be texts of various formats, pictures, audio or video. Social scientists use content analysis to examine patterns in communication in a replicable and systematic manner. One of the key advantages of using content analysis to analyse social phenomena is its non-invasive nature, in contrast to simulating social experiences or collecting survey answers. Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part. 

Texts in a single study may also represent a variety of different types of occurrences, such as Palmquist's 1990 study of two composition classes, in which he analyzed student and teacher interviews, writing journals, classroom discussions and lectures, and out-of-class interaction sheets. The field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) involves taking a deeper, qualitative look at different types of texts, whether in advertising, literature, or journalism. Analysts try to understand ways in which language connects to social lives. Contrast similar texts to find differences between the social cultures. When you're doing a CDA analysis, it's productive to compare similar texts—for example, 2 advertisements or 2 screenplays—with one another. This can lead to new understandings of the texts themselves. Comparing 2 texts can also help analysts understand differences between the social values held by different communities and cultures. 

Content Analysis is a research method used to determine a specific pattern of words and concepts given within the text or set of documents. While doing Conceptual Content analysis, a concept is chosen for examination, and the study implicates quantifying and tallying its presence. 

4. Conceptual Content Analysis Example. For example, say that you have the impression that your favorite author often writes about love.