J. Schilling, R. Fuchs "Media portrayals of COVID-19 in British newspapers: A comparative sentiment analysis"

Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic has upended life around the globe, leading to intense public debate. Linguists quickly started to document and analyze COVID-19 discourse (Baines et al. 2021; Saraff et al. 2021), but there is as yet no systematic analysis of the lexical items and discourse patterns that characterize British COVID-19 discourse. We address this research gap through a systematic comparative analysis of public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a big data approach, (1) we identify distinct keywords linked to the pandemic and (2) track the sentiment of these keywords over time and across the political spectrum.

As news can offer an insight into and simultaneously influence the public's perception of the COVID-19 pandemic, our analysis focuses on discourse in regional and national English newspapers. The starting point of the analysis is a data-driven approach to identify COVID-19 related n-grams keywords for each month of the pandemic based on log likelihood and log ratio, comparing pandemic with pre-pandemic discourse, while filtering out seasonal effects (e.g. discussion of snow in January). Our data comprises 10% of all articles from 51 national and regional English newspapers published between January 2019 and October 2021, producing a corpus of 386,118 articles and 229,347,771 tokens. We then assign these keywords to semantic fields such as COVID-19 NAMES (e.g. Covid-19, SARS-CoV-2), PUBLIC HEALTH INSTRUCTIONS (e.g. self-isolation, quarantine), and VACCINATION (e.g. Covid-19 vaccine, booster) and conduct a sentiment analysis of these semantic fields over time and through a supervised machine learning approach.

Baines, Annalise; Ittefaq, Muhammad & Mauryne Abwao (2021) "#Scamdemic, #Plandemic, or #Scaredemic: What Parler Social Media Platform Tells Us About COVID-19 Vaccine". Vaccines 9 (421), pp. 1-16.

Saraff, Sweta; Singh, Tushar & Ramakrishna Biswal (2021) "Coronavirus Disease 2019: Exploring Media Portrayals of Public Sentiment on Funerals Using Linguistic Dimensions". Frontiers in Psychology 12:626638.