Discourses of Distressed Communities: Geographical Text Analysis and Poverty

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Discourses of poverty

• 18-month ESRC-funded project
  – Ian Gregory, Tony McEnery, Laura Paterson (and Andrew Hardie)

• Corpus linguistics + CDA + GIS/GTA

• Source material:
  – 2010-2015 Guardian & Daily Mail articles
  – News, society, politics, (comment/editorial)
  – NOT sport, femail, holidays, promotions, etc.

• Focus: *discourses of poverty in the UK media*

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Project aims

• To use Geographical Text Analysis (GTA) to investigate which place names in the UK are associated with poverty by the national press.

• To produce maps of the UK to visually represent the locations used by the press within discourses of poverty.

• To compare mass media coverage of locations associated with poverty, unemployment, and welfare receipt to official statistics taken from the UK Census.

• To use Critical Discourse Analysis to interrogate the similarities and differences between the statistical data and the corpus data.

• To demonstrate the viability of combining these different methodological approaches to facilitate the study of UK poverty (and social groups more widely).

• To provide an exemplar analysis in which GTA is used to shed new light on the way poverty is represented in the UK.

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Key initial questions

• Which places are mentioned in newspaper texts?
  – How frequently do such mentions occur?
  – Which locations are seldom, if ever, mentioned in the corpus?

• The size of places mentioned can be monitored and problematized:
  – Are cities referred to more than counties or towns?
  – Do place mentions correlate with population density?

• How are places referred to?
  – Are they homogenised?
  – Are they associated with particular topics of interest/news value and/or semantic fields?
  – Do representations of place change over time?

• How do media representations of place compare to official statistics?

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Geographical Text Analysis

- Geoparser:
  - Extracts all place names within +/- X words from the node (usually X = 10)
  - Assigns coordinates to each place name mentioned
- Geoparsed data is read into GIS (Geographical Information Systems) – database software that facilitates cartography
- Maps of the place name mentions are produced

all, much of it is not voluntary but forced by extreme poverty, natural disasters and wars. It would be a better world
them. There was scant material reparation for their sacrifices and so poverty, deep psychological stress and social displacement imprisoned their communities
sure work was always worthwhile. Recent cuts knock people back into poverty, with 4,000 cut from families on 17,000, unless they can
widespread support for the idea of looking more broadly at what causes poverty, but warned against trying to compress social factors, such as
not let us down, and will be a beacon of Franciscan poverty and simplicity in a Vatican that still operates like a medieval court
people now forced to rely on food banks for sustenance, key poverty, charities have warned in a report. Welfare changes and mistakes by
The answer, she said, "is partly to do with poverty in an absolute sense, although all the research shows ... black
government on child poverty and author of the report Delivering on child poverty: what would it take? Clare Allan I've taken up
Nottingham because of a book I had found in the library: Poverty: The Forgotten Englishman, by Ken Coates and Bill Silburn -
million people on zero-hours contracts; record numbers of people living in poverty; and another 60bn in cuts still to be found before 2020

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Defining poverty

• ‘What poverty is taken to mean depends on who asks the question, how it is understood, and who responds’ (Chambers 2006:3)

• Implications for research:
  – one must understand how the selection of a particular definitions of poverty will act as a lens
  – one must survey a range of definitions of poverty and make a subjective decision about which to accept
  – one must question the social structures that facilitate non-poor people’s definitions of poverty and restrict the voices of those in poverty

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Measuring poverty

• Quantitative measurements:
  – Carstairs scores
  – Indices of Multiple Deprivation
  – Index of Local Conditions
• Proxy measurements
  – Unemployment
  – Social class
• Qualitative measurements
  – Standards of living
  – Emotional impacts

Poverty ‘is (re)produced through discourse practices, most of which are enacted by groups with direct access to social, cultural and political power’ (Lorenzo-Dus and Marsh 2012:275)
Discourse and Place

- Discourse: language that encodes powerful, social, ideological structures and norms
  - ‘discourse is key to the reproduction and transformation of social identities, social relationships and systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1992: 64)’ (Jones et al. to appear)

- Discourses can be conceptually linked and draw upon each other: Race – Religion – Immigration – Poverty

- But they can also be proximally linked in geographical space

- Repeated discourses can be linked to real-world social/political change (e.g. policy changes)

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Discourse and Place II

• The location of (the production of) texts and the places they refer to can index powerful strategies

• Naming draws ‘attention to places’ whilst locating that place ‘in wider cultural narratives’ (Cresswell 2004:98)

• Places can be used to create us vs. them dichotomies

‘Scotland votes no: the union has survived, but the questions for the left are profound’ (Kettle 2014)
Generating poverty keywords

- 7 *Daily Mail* articles + their (100+) BTL comments

- Original articles discuss UK poverty in terms of *benefits, income, children, pensioners, family*

- BTL comments included keywords such as *afford, pay, rent, wages, bankers, expensive, mortgage, dole, scrounger, council, MPs, feckless, children, cigarettes, TVs, smoke, mothers, JSA, redundant, Blair, vouchers, wealthy*

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The Next Steps

- Poverty in the Guardian (news 2010-15)

- Heat spots around Milton Keynes include references to ‘England’

- The ‘UK’ also causes interference

- Heat spots around Liverpool (incl. Liverpool, Birkenhead, Anfield) and Oxford (incl. Oxford, Oxfordshire, Whitney) seem to be ‘real’

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References


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References


Jones, Lucy, Sara Mills, Laura L. Paterson, Georgina Turner and Laura Coffey-Glover. To appear. Identity and naming practices in marriage and civil partnerships.


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