

Arguing Brexit on Twitter

a corpus-linguistic study

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Argument mining

- relatively new field in NLP and CSS
- goal: automatic extraction and representation of arguments from texts
 - ▶ find argumentative parts of the text
 - ▶ identify premises and conclusions
 - ▶ map text snippets to argumentation schemes
- challenges when looking at real texts:
 - ▶ premises – or even conclusion – are often left implicit (Bosc et al., 2016)
 - ▶ “non-canonical” forms of argumentation (Walton et al., 2008)
 - ▶ persuasion through rhetoric strategies such as selection, arrangement, phrasing of argumentative units (Wachsmuth et al., 2018)

Challenges when looking at social media

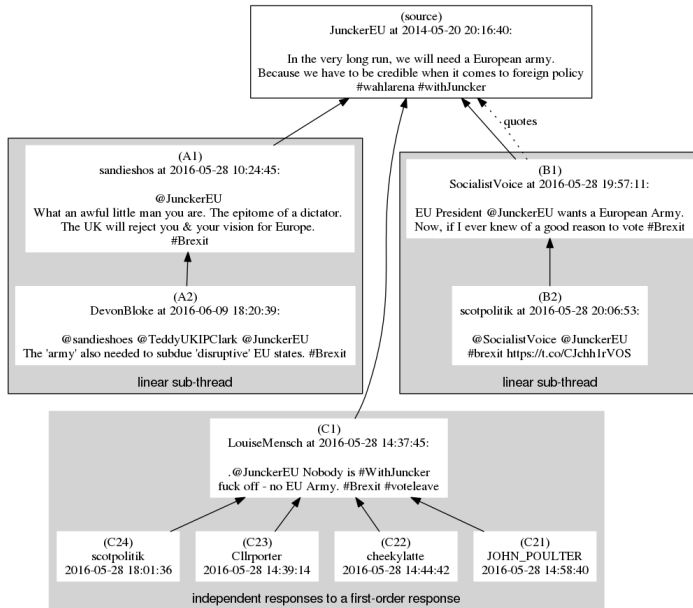
- peculiarities:
 - ▶ defeasible arguments – especially *ad hominem* in various creative flavours
 - ▶ implicitness (on Twitter: 140 characters)
 - ▶ unmediated environment (no structure or guidelines, multimodality)
 - ▶ non-standard language (CMC)
- automatically finding and classifying arguments in social media is really difficult (Goudas et al., 2014):
 - ▶ detection of argumentative sentences: $F_1 \approx 77\%$
 - ▶ splitting claims and premises: $F_1 \approx 40\%$

Related work

- Degano (2007) explores indicators for presuppositions and dissociations; starts from a predefined list of explicit markers (cf. Levinson, 1983: 181–184):
 - ▶ clause types
 - ▶ comparisons
 - ▶ descriptions
 - ▶ particular verbs
- O'Halloran (2011) analyses argumentation in transcripts of oral conversations
 - ▶ manual coding of utterances as claims and challenges
 - ▶ quantitative part uses statistical keywords, key POS tags and key semantic domains (Rayson, 2008) to explore the realisation patterns of arguments
- more content-centred approaches based on keyness explore argumentation as one of the various contexts prominent words are used in (Al-Hejin, 2015; Baker, 2004; Partington, 2003)

Corpus

- basis: tweets containing “Brexit” (16/05/05–16/08/24) + reply threads
 - ▶ \approx 6 million tweets
- pre-referendum originals (higher consistency in argumentation)
 - ▶ \approx 2.5 million tweets
- deduplication (Schäfer et al., 2017)
 - ▶ \approx 1.8 million tweets, 32 million tokens
- linguistic annotation (several pipelines):
 - ▶ tokenization
 - ▶ part-of-speech tagging
 - ▶ lemmatization
 - ▶ phrase-chunking and NER
- indexing with the IMS Open Corpus Workbench (CWB)



Some examples

- @DPJHodges @NickCohen4 I'll be voting Brexit because it's what the establishment AND the left don't want.
- @Rachael_Swindon @mcpeake_liam and Dyson's for BREXIT because he'd like to replace British & EU engineers with cheaper Chinese ones
- Then again people say they will vote but when it comes to the day they are too lazy to vote #Brexit #VoteLeave
- So if donald trump is backing the brexit campaign id say thats good sign we should all be backing the stay campaign
- @PauleastHull @iVoteStay whatever brexit voters are stupid, racist, brainwashed and gullible, which of those 4 are you
- @JMoneyMC brexit is really just the gateway towards european nationalism so yea lol, it's fucking racist

Patterns and schemes

$\forall x \{x : \text{entity}\} \in \{y : \text{entity}\} : \{z : \text{property}\}(x)$

\iff “all entities in entity 1 have property 2, e.g. being an idiot”

- Common Folks *ad populum*:

- ▶ premise: I (the speaker) am an ordinary person, that is, I share a common background with you (the audience).
- ▶ conclusion: Therefore, you ought to take what I say as being more credible or acceptable.

- Position to Know *ad populum*:

- ▶ premise 1: Everybody in group G accepts A .
- ▶ premise 2: Group G is in a special position to know that A is true.
- ▶ Conclusion: Therefore, A is (plausibly) true.

Schemes and instances

- Common Folks *ad populum*:
 - ▶ @paulmasonnews @Medium Amen brother , voting to stay , because **the average person doesn't** need to be left in the hands of the brexit leaders !!
 - ▶ @DrAlanGreene I'm as against #Brexit as **the next man** but this is nonsense . Why go via Ireland rather than Calais ? Ppl reach Calais by train .
- Position to Know *ad populum*:
 - ▶ @vincentemery95 You're wrong , yet again . Any excuse to be anti European . Fortunately most **business people like myself** know better .
 - ▶ @OffencePolice @MarcherLord1 @OHStillHere **as an expat** (and a Scot) i'm pulling for #Brexit . Screw the Remainiacs ...

Corpus linguistics for ArgMining

- schemes have different linguistic representations
- linguistic patterns, but not directly tied to word level
- corpus-linguistic approach via CQP query language (Evert and Hardie, 2011)
 - ▶ specification of phrase chunks
 - ▶ word lists representing lexico-grammatical categories
 - ▶ iterative development informed by regular analysis of concordance lines, e. g.:
 - ★ #EURef @connor_p_obrien I have read the news recently and **as a result I have mourned** . What should I be scared of , then ?
 - ▶ goal: high precision (low recall)

Corpus queries

as an $X \mid Y$

```
[lemma = "as"] <np>[*
@0[
    lemma = $person_common | lemma = $person_profession |
    lemma = $person_origin | lemma = $person_support
] [* </np> [lemma = "i"] <vp>[*
@1[pos_simple="V"]
@2[*</vp> (
    <vp> [* </vp> | <np>[* [pos_simple="N|Z"] [*</np> |
    /be_ap[* | <pp>[* [pos_simple = "N|Z"] [*</pp> |
    [pos_simple="R"] | [word != "."])*
)+
@3::] within tweet;
```

Word lists: nouns_person_negative

[a-z]*ass	cheater	elite	gutter	lot	prick	stunt
asshole	child	expert	guy	maniac	puppet	swine
bandit	clown	extremist	hater	[a-z]*migrant	pussy	thug
bastard	contempt	fag	hipster	millenial	pygmy	toad
bat	crap	faggot	hysteric	monkey	racist	toddler
bean	cretin	fart	idiot	moron	rapist	tory
bitch	criminal	fascist	incompetent	muppet	rat	traitor
bigot	crowd	fathead	infiltrator	murderer	redneck	tranny
bint	cult	folk	joke	neanderthal	remainer	trash
boy	cunt	fool	kid	nigger	#?remaniac	troll
brexiter	denier	[a-z]*fucker	knobhead	numpty	retard	twat
brigade	dick[a-z]*	fucknut	leaver	nut	scaremongering	voter
bugger	dictator	fuckup	leftist	nutter	scoundrel	wank
bully	dinosaur	gambler	lefty	peasant	scum	wanker
bunch	disdain	garbage	liar	[a-z]+phile	scumbag	weirdo
butthole	disgrace	gimp	lib	piece	sheep	wreck
bureaucrat	dodo	girl	liberal	pig	[a-z]*shit	whore
camp	douche	globalist	load	politician	shite	xenophobe
campaigner	douchebag	gobshite	loon	populist	sod	yank
caveman	dummy	goof[a-z]*	loser	pretender	soul	zombie

Case Study: Self-identification in the Brexit discourse

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\iff “all entities in entity 1 have property 2, e.g. being an idiot”

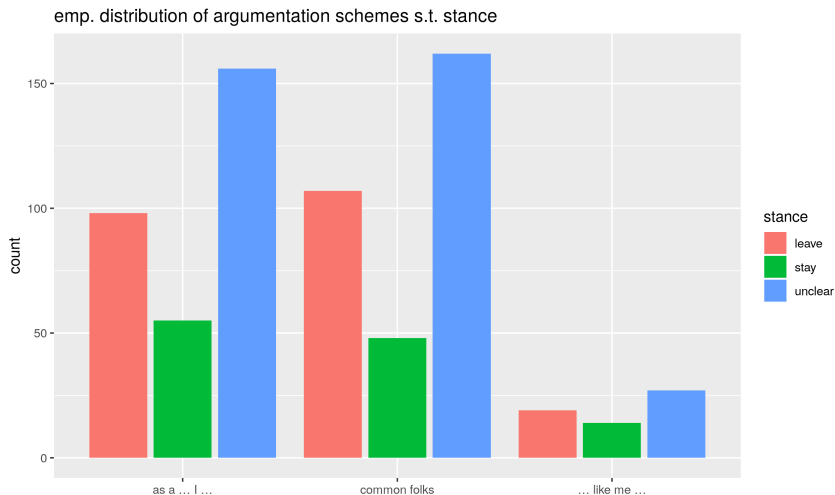
- three query types:

- ▶ as an X I Y
- ▶ X like me Y
- ▶ {ordinary/normal/common} {people} Y

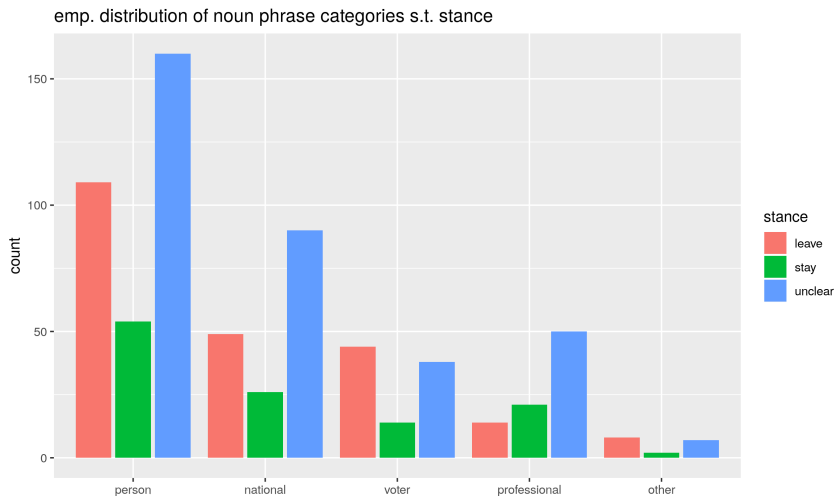
- manual categorization:

- ▶ leave – stay – unclear
- ▶ group identity statements categorised by domains
 - ★ majority: no clear stance
 - ★ stance may differ within group membership

Case Study: Self-identification in the Brexit discourse



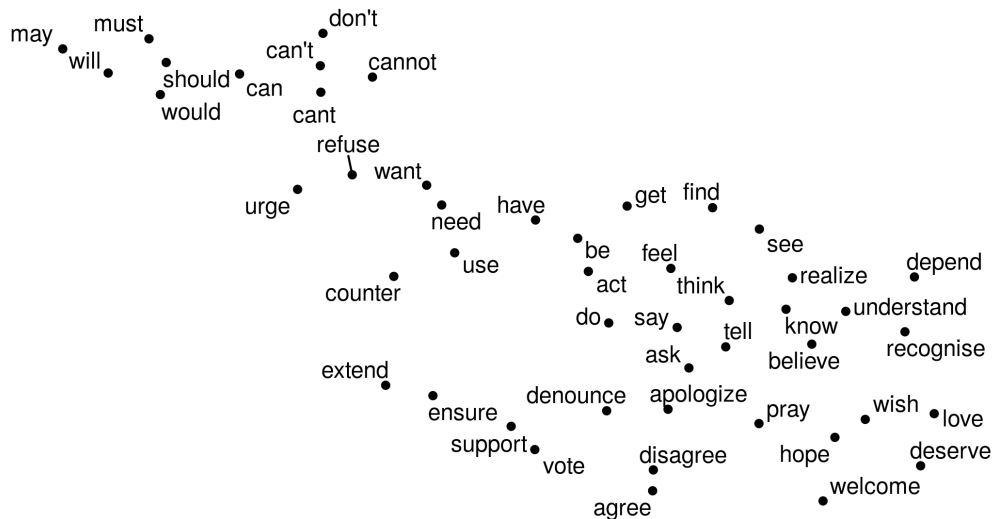
Case Study: Self-identification in the Brexit discourse



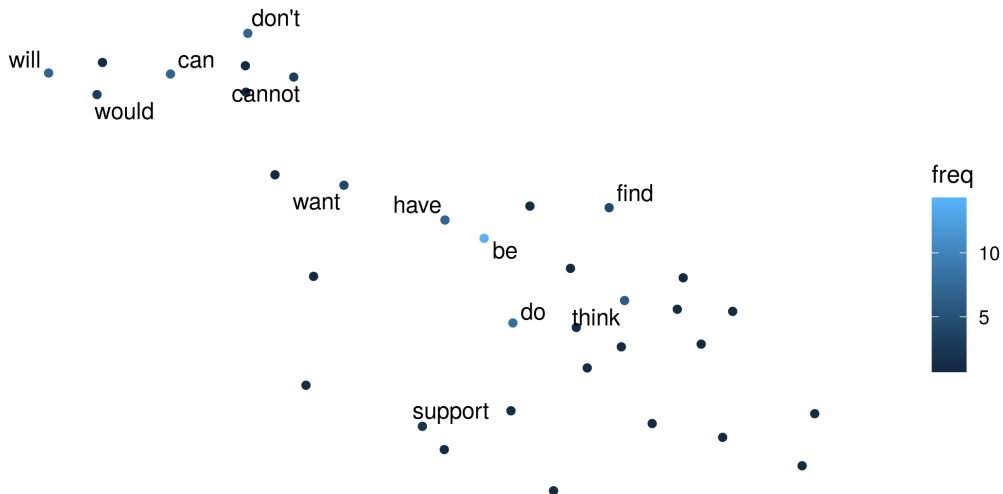
Query: as an $X \mid Y$

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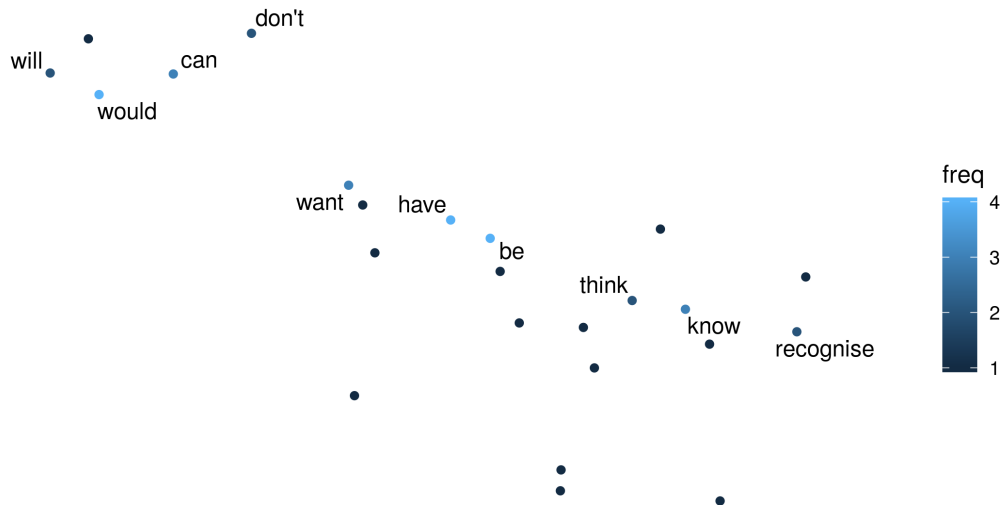

query: 'as_x_i_y', verbs in the Y-slot



group: support (94 instances)



group: profession (43 instances)



group: common (35 instances)



Some concordance lines

- EU is a social experiment on the redistribution of wealth **as a socialist I support** the theory but its not working so I'm voting out #Brexit
- @JohnDowson3 @nickeardleybbc @theSNP She 's not wrong regarding the fishing , **as a former fisherman i know** the UK government failed us .
- @StrongerInPress That 's why **as a young person I am voting to leave** you utter cockwombles . #Brexit #VoteLeave #Votin

Conclusion and Future Work

Conclusion

- queries balance grammatical and semantic flexibility in patterns
- each query: one linguistic instantiation of a given argumentation scheme
- qualitatively informed approach to handle noisy data

Future work

- interactive toolkit
- mapping of schemes to logical formulae (theoretical CS)

Presenters like us would like to thank you for listening.

As FAU researchers we are looking forward to your questions.



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