

Analyzing the Prevalence of Freedom in Literature Before and After the World Wars

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Length: 2-3 pages

Abstract

This project examines the prevalence of freedom-related subjects in literature before and after the World Wars. One book from each period was analyzed to see if the focus on freedom changed due to these major global events. The aim was to determine whether freedom became a more written-about theme in post-war literature compared to pre-war literature.

1 Introduction

Freedom has always been an important theme in the world, the arts, and also in literature. Literature often reflects the state of the world and what is deemed important. Before World War I, the word freedom was often associated with the end of colonialism and the freedom of slaves. After the world wars, the freedom-related terms were more about freedom from war and political oppression. This research investigates how frequently freedom-related words appear in two books: one written before the World Wars and one after the World Wars.

The research question is:

How has the prevalence of freedom-related themes in literature changed from before the World Wars to after the World Wars?

The hypothesis is that freedom-related themes were less common before the world wars and became more prominent after the world wars.

2 Related Work

A lot of studies have investigated the effect war has on people and the world. There have also been a lot of studies about literature during and after the war, but not a lot of studies have covered the change that literature underwent from before to after the wars.

The study *Before and After 1914: Suffrage and Feminism in The Writings of Cicely Hamilton* by (Sanders, 2018), is very relevant to my study. It researches the changes in Cicely Hamilton's writing as a result of the changes brought about by World War 1. This parallels our research and how war has a major impact on society.

Another study is *Post-War British Women Writers and their Cultural Impact: A Quantitative Approach* by (Berensmeyer and Trurnit, 2022). This study examines how the representation of female writers changed as a result of World War II. The scope of this study is at the core still very similar, in the way that war had a major effect on literature. There is one major difference, in the case of (Berensmeyer and Trurnit, 2022)'s study, it focuses on the writers instead of the writing.

The last study is *The American Literature of War: The Civil War, World War I, and World War II* by (Lundberg, 1984). The focus of this study is how war is perceived in literature. This study is great because it researches the distinction between war literature and peacetime literature. The study talks about how the distinction between those two times is small because of the impact of war. All studies show how war had a major impact on literature and this study fits into that theme and hopes to be a meaningful addition.

3 Data

Two books were analyzed:

- **Pre-War Book:** Kim by Rudyard Kipling.
- **Post-War Book:** The Trial by Franz Kafka.

Both books are sourced from Project Gutenberg. We made a list of freedom-related terms that we deemed fundamental and unambiguous: *liberty, independence, freedom, autonomy, oppression, and justice*. The frequency of these terms

was calculated as occurrences per 1,000 words to ensure a fair comparison.

Pre-processing The text is cleaned and tokenized in the code. Keywords are stemmed (e.g., *liberty* and *liberties*) to capture all variations.

Book	Theme
Kim by Rudyard Kipling	Colonial oppression
The Trial by Franz Kafka	Political oppression

Table 1: Overview of the dataset.

3.1 Code

The full (python) code can be found on my GitHub page (Username: 'ValerioSmit', Repository: 'Freedom-prevalence-Introduction-to-research-methods', File: 'freedom_analyzer.py' or if online, [click this link](#)), but I will give a brief overview of the working of the code here. First, the text is tokenized and then converted to lower-case, so as not to count 'freedom' and 'Freedom' as two different words. The text is then stripped of non-alphabetic characters to avoid the difference between 'freedom?' and 'freedom'. The text is then split into words (instead of lines). Then the words are cross-referenced with the list of freedom-related terms and each time a term is present, a counter will be upped by 1. Then the average is calculated by dividing the count of keywords found by the amount of total words, times a thousand. This will be done for both books/text and then the results are printed.

4 Predicted Results

It is expected that the post-war book would contain more freedom-related terms than the pre-war book. This supports the hypothesis that the World Wars influenced a shift in the literary focus on freedom. (The expected results were concluded by running the actual code on these two books) The independent variable is the book, and the dependent variable is the relative keyword frequency

Table 2: Predicted keyword frequency (per 1000 words).

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Book	Rel. keyword frequency
Kim (Pre-war)	0.24
The Trial (Post-war)	0.31

Discussion From the results we can see that the book that was released post-war has a higher relative frequency of freedom-related words than the pre-war book. This could mean a lot of different things. It could mean people were more interested in freedom post-war than pre-war. But it could also just be a coincidence because of the limited reach of this study. In the conclusion, we will also shed light on how future research could improve on this study.

5 Conclusion

By comparing texts from before and after the wars, the research sought to understand if war had a (significant) effect on the use of freedom-related terms in literature. In conclusion, to answer our research question (How has the prevalence of freedom-related themes in literature changed from before the World Wars to after the World Wars?), the wars affected freedom-related themes in literature somewhat according to our (expected) results, however, the study could be more concise and meaningful with future research.

5.1 Future research

The scale of this research was very small, you could even say minuscule. This study was only able to analyze two books, and those books were hand-picked because the topics were about freedom. Future research could analyze more books, from multiple genres. This would give far more accurate results and could be representable for the culture in the pre-and post-war world. Future researchers could also expand the amount of freedom-related terms that were used. It could also be interesting to analyze news articles, diaries or letters instead of only books as these give a diverse and possibly a more lifelike representation of the world at that point in time.

References

- Berensmeyer, I. and S. Trurnit (2022). Post-war british women writers and their cultural impact: A quantitative approach. *Journal of Cultural Analytics* 7(1), 81–107. Rationale: This study was used as a comparison to my study. This study focuses more on the writer than the writing.
- Lundberg, D. (1984). The american literature of war: The civil war, world war i, and world war

ii. *American Quarterly* 36(3), 373–388. Rationale: This study is the most comparable study to mine as it examines the effect of war on American literature. It helped me set the scope for this study.

Sanders, L. S. (2018). Before and after 1914: Suffrage and feminism in the writings of Cicely Hamilton. *The Journal of Modern Periodical Studies* 9(2), 177–199. Rationale: I also used this research as a comparison for my research, This research really delves deep into one author.