A Voice of a Generation: Analyzing the Evolution of Bob Dylan's Lyrics

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Project Description

In the winter of 1961 Bob Dylan packed his bags for New York City to be on the music scene. He was enamoured with folk musicians such as Woody Guthrie and Johnny Cash, and went about his days bouncing around different clubs trying to play at and sleeping on different couches of people he met. Little did he know then that he'd later be widely regarded as one of the best musical lyricists of all time, the "voice of a generation" in many people's eyes, and a Nobel Prize winner for his poetic expression in his work. This project aims to examine the evolution of Bob Dylan's lyrics over the course of his career as a musician, which was not smooth sailing by any means. There were many ups and downs throughout his career, and there were times where people expected so much out of him being the so-called voice of a generation, and this project will explore how these events changed his lyrical style.
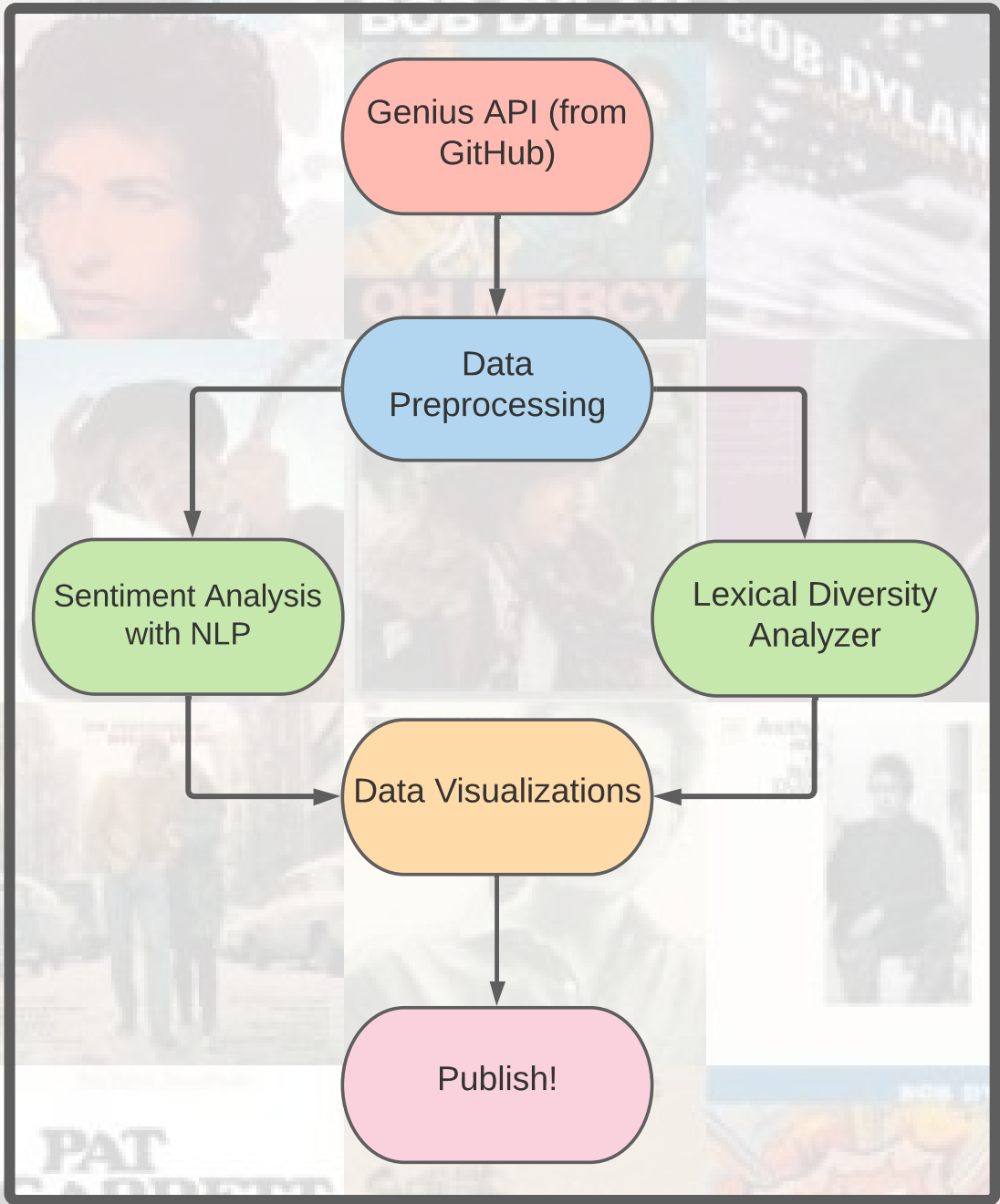
The Data

The data that I'm going to use is based off of the Genius API called "lyricsgenius", where there is access to most of Bob Dylan's albums and their respective lyrics. This package was created by John Miller, and its information is on GitHub (check works cited tab). I plan on collecting lyrics from as many albums as possible specifically in different decades and points in his career, in which I can preprocess and analyze the progression of his lyrics over time.

Questions for Analysis

• How has the sentiment of Bob Dylan's lyrics changed over the course of his career (1960s–2010s)?

• Bob Dylan was known to be an artist who would write about anything that he felt strongly about, much of which tended to be events going on in his life and his thoughts on events going on around the world. How have these events influenced the sentiment of his lyrics? Some examples that come to mind are his big motorcycle accident, his marriage, the Vietnam War, and 9/11.

• How have the diversity and vocabulary of his lyrics changed over the course of his career? .

Project Workflow

Interpretation of Results

Works Cited

https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/the-evolution-of-bob-dylan-12348/born-again-1979-1981-30603/
https://github.com/johnwmillr/LyricsGenius/blob/master/README.md