Blog Post: Lecture Reflection

Master Class Social Research

Week 4: Natural Language Processing

Title: The Language of Data.

In this lecture Dr. Laszlo Horvath teaches how text at scale can be used to answer research questions. The lecture also provides an overview of different techniques used in natural language processing. Processing big data through systems such as R studio and Python can provide a more robust overview of large data samples. Dr. Horvath gives insight on how following online bootcamps, and written literature can help develop necessary skills for using systems such as Python. Python is a well-documented system with a plethora of information available to potential users.

Downloading digitized content is typically done in the beginning stages of any research project. My understanding of processing big data prior to Dr. Horvath’s lecture did not include an understanding of language models. I found the information given in the lecture on language model conclusions particularly useful as it offers another means of being able to extract language data in proper context. Using language models will add to the internal validity of research projects using foreign language data to produce relevant outputs. My future research will also include discourse analysis. Dr. Horvath’s teachings on language model processing through systems such as SpaCY will assist me in developing effective and efficient research outputs when comparing documents as data.

Dr. Horvath’s lecture offered insight into the natural language processing discipline of social research. The information given introduced a useful method to completing research projects.

Week 10: History and Archives: Data and Quantification

Title: Quantifying History

In this engaging lecture, Dr. Brodie Waddell walks us through the importance of Archives and quantifying history. The lecture answers three specific questions as it relates to History and Archives; What are primary sources? Where can you find and access historical primary sources? How can you quantify primary sources? Dr. Waddell provides several examples on how history can be quantified and used to develop research projecks. Archived texts such as sermon notes, publishing records and magistrate documents can be used to create a greater understanding of social issues in times past. Dr. Waddell uses an example of sermon notes taken by Joseph Bufton (1680-87) as an example of how we can gain insight into the importance of societal issues during the time period in question by considering the content being taught in the sermon. The sermon notes also offer clarity to how servants were to be treated as it relates to religion. This is important as servants are common during this time. Dr. Waddell also gives an example of publishing records (The English short catalogue) that have now been digitised. The titles of different books offer insight into the important social issues of the time. For example, multiple books with the words ‘tax’ or ‘taxation’ in its title may indicate the social importance of tax issues of the time period in question. Perhaps many citizens are concerned about the rises of taxes during war time or inflation in general. Another example given is the annual disbursements for poor relief from 184 parishes, 1600-1834?. This archived record provides a more robust picture into the economic situation of particular parishes during a specific time period. These records can be used to compare parishes and the economic status of individuals living in each parish. These records can also be used to gain insight into the overall economic effects of war time.

Quantifying History offers a new perspective and use for archived records and data. The lecture by Dr. Waddell carefully identifies several ways in which researchers can quantify history and develop significant outputs.