

Unveiling the subtle art of blame deflection using computational methods: r/AITA through the lens of word embeddings and topic modeling.

The widespread computer usage has revolutionized mediated communication, presenting a diverse array of phenomena that serve as valuable resources for social analyses and studies of different nature. With the proliferation of online interactions, linguists have now access to vast amounts of data ripe for investigation. Among social network-based virtual communities, Reddit stands out as a relatively recent platform that boasts a substantial number of active users, generating thousands of texts on a daily basis, and showcasing diverse genres and forms of online expression. This paper, through a computational approach to text analysis, intends to explore these deflecting strategies providing fresh insights into how individuals represent themselves, perceive their own behavior, and construct all of that in a meaningful way via language use. Stories revolving around these conflicts provide a chance to delve into the ways people rhetorically construct justifications for their behaviors. This paper focuses on utilizing data from Reddit's "Am I The Asshole" community to shed light on how individuals logically structure their arguments with causal and adversative markers molding the representation of the conflict among various actors in a particular way. The dataset of our analysis consists of the r/AITA (2019) cleaned and annotated corpus, containing more than 100,000 posts stored as a nested JSON file. The presented study, descriptive in its nature, adopts topic modeling and word2vec methods to unveil underlying patterns of causality and oppositionality within different parts of documents present in our corpus and reflect real human stands. By segmenting texts into sections before and after logical connectors, we argue that it is possible to gain more significant insights into a more granular study of the logical-argumentative structures of how people represent conflicts, assessing how individuals perceive their role and that of the individuals surrounding them in these situations. In general, what we have preliminarily observed is a tendency toward the systematic establishment of an 'other' as opposed to the 'narrative self' and the construction of the polarized self-representation as a justification strategy. This research may contribute to a deeper understanding of online communication dynamics, and the functioning of logical-argumentation strategies, as well as shedding light on the socio-psychological dimension of the sharing persona.

Keywords: content analysis, discourse linguistics, digital humanities, reddit

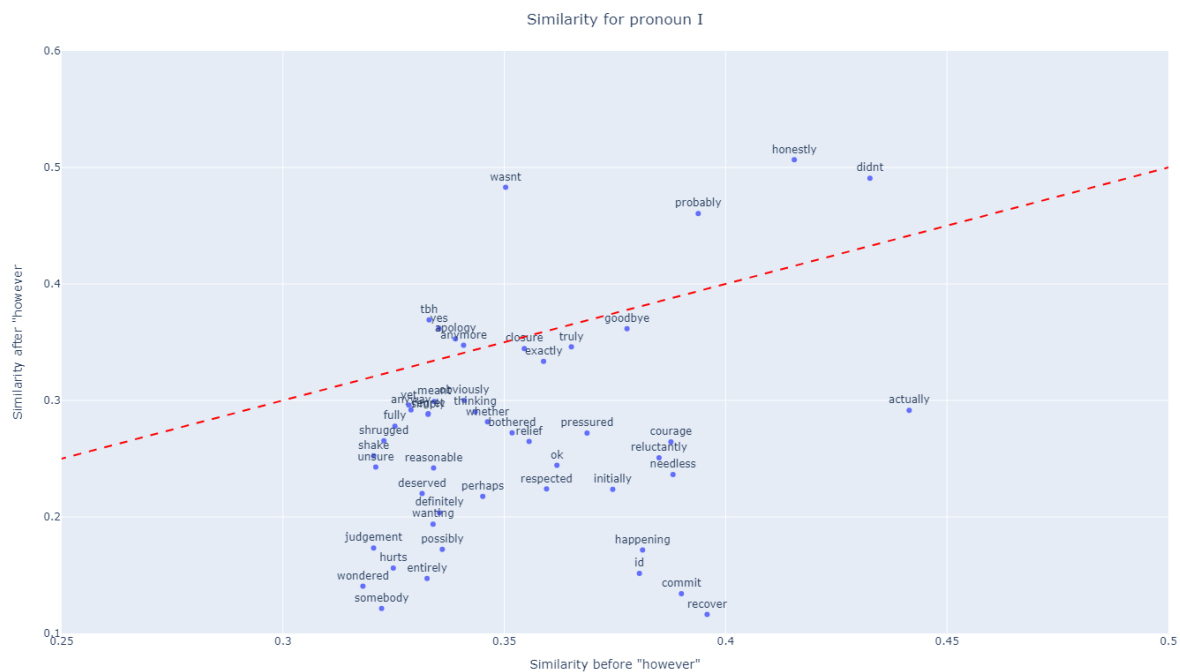


Figure 1 demonstrates the words' similarity to the “I” pronoun before and after the logical connector “However”.