

Research Notebook

Weekly Entry:

Group's topic is "Analyzing Text Formation in Communities," a highly relevant paper is "**From I to We: Group Formation and Linguistic Adaption in an Online Xenophobic Forum.**"

1. Title and Citation

Title: From I to We: Group Formation and Linguistic Adaption in an Online Xenophobic Forum

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2. Summary of the Paper

The paper analyzes identity formation and linguistic adaptation in a xenophobic online forum. The researchers compared over 60 million words in a Swedish online forum (Flashback) to assess how new users adapt to a group's linguistic norms and to what extent their language shows group identity formation and inter-group differentiation.

Key Findings:

- *Pronoun Shift:* The new users shifted their use of "I" (individual identity) to "we" (group identity) and "they" (out-group differentiation) over time. This is a shift towards collective identity over individual identity.
- *Linguistic Adaptation:* The new users' language style adapted to that of the entire forum over time, suggesting social influence and conformity to groups.
- *Emotional Content:* The use of negative emotions (e.g., anger) diminished over time, suggesting that users adapted to the forum's norms or regulated their emotions after initial explosions.
- *Cognitive Complexity:* There was no enhancement in cognitive complexity, possibly because the forum was a place to reaffirm existing beliefs rather than to pursue complex discussions.

3. Relevance to Our Topic

The paper is highly relevant to our group's topic of "Analyzing Text Formation in Communities" because

The trend towards "we" reveals how language patterns in online groups develop over time, that is, in polarized or extremist groups. The trend towards "we" reveals how identities in online groups get established collectively, something that plays a crucial role in determining how groups impact behavior in individuals. The analysis reveals how new participants adapt their language to fit in to a group, a fundamental process in group text formation. The trend towards more use of "they" reveals how groups define in-group and out-group, a trend that is common in many online groups.

4. Key Concepts and Methods

The LIWC computer software was used to count use of pronouns, emotional content, and cognitive complexity in threads in a forum. Pronouns as Identity Markers: The analysis reveals how pronouns (e.g., "I," "we," "they") mark group identity and intergroup differentiation. The article also measured negative emotions (swear words, anger) and cognitive complexity (prepositions, conjunctions) to ascertain users' language over time.

5. Strengths and Limitations

Strengths:

The analysis was based on a massive dataset (60 million words), providing strong evidence of language patterns. Longitudinal Analysis: By observing participants over time, analysis was able to detect dynamic patterns in use of language, a key to group formation. Relevance to Online Groups: The results transfer strongly to other online groups, that is, those that consist of strong group identities or polarized beliefs.

Limitations:

The analysis omitted short threads, a potential source of bias towards more complex or lengthy threads. The analysis did not link linguistic change to explicit attitudes, something that would have been more informative regarding beliefs in language. The **use of a particular xenophobic forum** restricts generalizability to other types of communities.

6. Implications for Our Project

The article reports on a set of results that can be applied in our group's work in text formation in communities:

We can use pronoun analysis (e.g., "I," "we," "they") to investigate ways in which groups cohere in online communities. The theory of linguistic adaptation can be applied to our work in new member adaptation to community norms, a basic process in text formation. We can use emotional content analysis and cognitive complexity to investigate emotional content and cognitive structure in various types of communities, such as polarized or echo-chambered communities. The focus of the analysis on intergroup differentiation (e.g., "they") can be applied to our analysis of how communities define their boundary in terms of outgroups.

7. Questions and Future Directions

1. How do these results apply to non-polar or non-extremist groups? The analysis is of a xenophobic forum, but to what extent do these patterns repeat in more neutral or friendly groups?
2. Are these results replicable in other languages or in other cultures? The work was conducted in Swedish; would one obtain analogous patterns in English or in other languages?
3. How do we synthesize attitudinal data in our analysis? Synthesizing linguistic analysis with surveys or interviews would provide a richer picture of community processes.
4. What is the role of moderators or influencers in linguistic norms? The work does not account for how community leaders impact language use, something that would be a promising line of inquiry in follow-up work.

8. Conclusion

This paper is a great place to begin learning about group text formation, specifically in language adaptation and identity formation. The use of LIWC is of interest in that it is possible to use it in large-scale linguistic behavior analysis. The use of a xenophobic forum is of concern in that it is not immediately clear to what extent results would be transferable to other groups of communities. This paper has, however, provided a great appreciation of how to approach group text formation, and I am looking forward to applying some of these methods to our group project.