WW1 and WW2 on a Specialist E-forum. Applying Corpus Tools to the Study of Evaluative Language

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The 70th anniversary of WW2 generated a new discussions about Poles' attitudes to the country's important historical events. The general aim of my present study is to investigate how contemporary Poles' attitudes to the two world wars are expressed in electronic discourse, using the example of a specialist Internet forum. The research data comes from an active Polish forum devoted to the history of the two world wars: *Your Forum About the World Wars* retrieved from `www.dws.org.pl`. The quantitative-qualitative analysis of the compiled corpus is conducted by means of the UAM Corpus Tool, a multiple-level environment for annotation and analysis of text corpora (`http://www.wagsoft.com/CorpusTool/`).

The forum under study provides a challenging research context for the study of evaluative language in the electronic medium by means of corpus tools. The forum gathers both professionals and amateurs interested in an academic debate on the issues related to their interests in the history of the two world wars. Interaction on the forum follows the rules of scholarly exchange, where careful use of language and factual expression are encouraged, whereas emotionality is rather disfavoured. This makes textual realizations of evaluation less overt: thus, how attitudinal language is transmitted through the text can be studied effectively by means of corpus tools.

The theoretical basis of my study is a functional approach to the analysis of evaluative language, where evaluation encompasses both attitudinal and affective aspects of language use (e.g. Hunston and Thompson, 1999). For the corpus-based study of evaluative language, I adopt Martin and White's Appraisal Framework (Martin and White, 2005), selecting their systems of Attitude and Engagement. More specifically, I analyse linguistic realisations of affect (within the system of Attitude) and modality and evidentiality (within the system of Engagement) as elements of interactional aspects of language use. In this way I aim to investigate evaluation as 1) expression of both individual and communal value systems of language users, and 2) expression of the speaker-audience relations (especially with the focus on the rhetorical effects of evaluation and its role in the social construction of knowledge). With the present study I also hope to contribute to the previous research that shows how text analyses within the framework of systemic-functional linguistics can profit from the use of corpus-linguistic methods (Bednarek, 2008; Thompson and Hunston, 2006), at the same time attempting to investigate how the combination of SFL and CL works for the Polish language.

The preliminary results of the study in progress prove the presence of evaluative language across the corpus, with the prevalence of engagement over attitude. This demonstrates that the members of the forum under study are primarily involved in objective and to-the-point discussions on the issues related to their interests. Evaluative language is mainly used as a persuasive tool to enhance the power of knowledge claims, and to manage interpersonal relations. As regards the general attitudes of the forum members, the study proves that they are actively engaged in constructing and preserving the collective memory of the two world wars. The wars are discussed with professional commitment and without overly sentimental pathos, which makes the forum and history of the two world wars attractive also for young people.

The application of the UAM Corpus Tool in the analyses of evaluative language proves advantageous first of all thanks to the tool's possibility of multi-level annotation and cross-classification of features. These features allow me to study the distribution of evaluative language relative to the sub-generic status of postings (i.e. whether a posting is identified as a voice in a discussion, initiation of a discussion, request, query, etc.). In addition, the tool allows to manage the problem of evaluation "hidden"

behind stretches of discourse, as well as to analyse the distribution patterns of evaluative lexis. Finally, as the UAM Corpus Tool allows annotation of both text and images, it can be used for the analysis of multimodal genres, an example of which is an e-forum. The UAM Corpus Tool can be useful and flexible in corpus-based analyses of evaluative language, however its application invariably demonstrates the importance of human choice in working with corpora in discourse analysis (cf. also Baker, 2006).

References

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