

Abs-99

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Electronic Deconstruction of an argument through its 'supplement': Derrida and corpus linguistic method

A by-product of new social media is an abundant textual record of engagements - billions of words across the world-wide-web in, for example, discussion forums, blogs and wiki discussion tabs. Many such engagements consist of commentary on a particular text and can thus be regarded as electronic supplements to these texts. The purpose of this presentation is to flag the utility value of this electronic supplementarity for corpus-based, critical reading by highlighting the following: how an electronic supplement can reveal particular meanings that the text being responded to can reasonably be said to marginalize and / or repress. In turn, this can show where the text's rhetorical structure can be said to be unstable, in a state of deconstruction. Given the often large size of these supplements, knowing how to mine them with corpus linguistic software is essential. I refer to this new type of corpus-based analysis as Electronic Deconstruction.

Electronic Deconstruction takes part of its theoretical stimulus from the philosopher, Jacques Derrida, and, in particular, his idea of the supplement. We normally understand a supplement as something which is an add-on and thus outside that which is being supplemented. In contrast, for Derrida (1976), any supplement has an undecidable 'inside-outside' relation, e.g., vitamin supplements are both outside the diet in providing additional vitamins and inside the diet in replacing a lack of vitamins.

I report on recent, Derrida-inspired research (O'Halloran, 2010) where I apply the logic of the supplement to an online discussion forum appended to an argument. By employing statistical keyword analysis of this discussion forum supplement via WMatrix software (Rayson, 2008), using the BNC Sampler written corpus as a reference corpus, I reveal that keywords in the forum absent from the argument can be perspectivised as 'lacking' in it. Furthermore, since keywords are generated non-arbitrarily, we have in turn a non-arbitrary basis for intervening in the argument; we can use these keywords to 'add to replace' what can be perspectivised as deficiency in normal discussion of the argument's topic, intervening to replace an absence *inside* the argument with keywords *outside* the argument. Via the logic of the supplement, the border between an argument and its discussion forum supplement is porous.

The next stage is to trace the extent to which this intervention in the argument 'to add to replace' leads to instability in its cohesion. An argument's rhetorical structure is dependent on effective cohesion. If cohesion is disturbed by this intervention, then the rhetorical structure of the argument is unstable. If the rhetorical structure deconstructs in this way, this can offer insights into repression or marginalisation in the argument *relative* to the particular supplement.

References

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