

Annotating APPRAISAL in text and corpora: challenges and strategies

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APPRAISAL theory has gained increasing recognition as a useful framework for analyzing evaluative phenomena in discourse. Within this framework, manual text annotation has become a popular method for examining and comparing the use of evaluative language resources across texts and corpora. Manual annotation facilitates comprehensive and detailed analyses of evaluation that would not be possible with purely automatic techniques. But manual annotation can also be seen as an important part of the process of theory building. By applying the set of categories included in the APPRAISAL framework to the annotation of concrete instances of text, we obtain information that can be used to progressively develop and refine the model.

However, annotating APPRAISAL poses a number of challenges. Evaluative meanings may be conveyed both explicitly and implicitly through an open-ended range of diverse linguistic forms. The genre and the communicative context in which a text is produced and consumed have a major impact on our interpretation of the meanings expressed and, as a result, on the annotation process. Further, classifying evaluative expressions into the categories provided by the model is not always straightforward. In many cases, multiple interpretations for textual items are possible and the boundaries between the categories are not always clear-cut. Finally, the practicalities of annotating APPRAISAL have not been sufficiently discussed in the literature and, to date, there is no well-established, standardized annotation protocol. The lack of a well-defined and widely accepted methodology represents an obstacle for both novice practitioners and experienced analysts, and poses a challenge to achieving transparent and replicable analyses.

In this talk, I will illustrate and discuss some of the main challenges involved in annotating APPRAISAL, and propose some strategies to overcome them. I will describe a step-wise method for the manual annotation of APPRAISAL in text and corpora that is designed to optimize reliability, replicability and transparency (Fuoli, *forthcoming*, Fuoli and Hommerberg, 2015). The procedure spans all stages from the creation of a context-specific annotation manual to the statistical analysis of the quantitative data derived from the manually performed annotations. While the method was originally developed to assist in the task of annotating APPRAISAL, it has broader potential applications. Given that the issues with which analysts are often confronted when annotating APPRAISAL are common to most types of semantically oriented analysis, it may be adapted to a wide range of semantic/functional annotation tasks.

References

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