Quantitative Narrative Analysis and What You Can Do With It: An Application to the Rise of Italian Fascism (1919-1922)

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Thursday, 3 June 2010
12:30pm Room N14 Piazza Sraffa 13, Milano

Abstract

The talk illustates a methodological approach to narrative developed by the author (Quantitative Narrative Analysis) for socio-historical research. The approach exploits invariant structural linguistic properties of narrative, namely, a simple clause structure based on the 5 Ws (who, what, when, where, why, and … how; also known as story grammar) and the sequential organization of these clauses. When implemented in a computer environment, QNA delivers data with highly desirable properties: 1. it preserves much of the original narrative text; 2. it preserves the relations between the various elements of the grammar (e.g., actors related to actions, actions to objects, time and space to action); 3. it delivers far richer and more reliable narrative data; 4. it allows a range of statistical analyses of what are essentially words: from network models to Geographic Information System models, along more traditional regression-based models. The talk will illustrate the power of QNA by presenting the results of GIS and network analyses of a large body of data collected by the author from some 50,000 articles from three different newspapers (Il Lavoro, Avanti!, Popolo d'Italia) on the rise of Italian fascism (1919-22).

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