“Text Analysis, Social Behavior, and Online Education"

ABSTRACT

The words people use in everyday life reflect their personality, emotions, thinking styles, and social behaviors. Through the analysis of pronouns, articles, and other small (and forgettable) function words, we can determine people’s honesty, social status, and emotional connections with others. Studies in our lab suggest that we can provide real-time natural language feedback to small groups of people in ways that can influence how the group members interact with one another. Harnessing a new generation of text analysis tools, our team is addressing how small groups may (or may not) influence online learning. More broadly, I discuss how this early language work has evolved into a novel approach to online education that is synchronous, engaging, and ultimately far more effective than traditional classroom classes.

Bio

James W. Pennebaker is the Regents Professor of Psychology and the Executive Director of Project 2021, an educational innovation project at the University of Texas at Austin. Whereas Pennebaker’s earlier work examined how writing about traumatic experience improved physical health and immune function, more recent studies have explored natural language. He finds that low-level word use is related to personality, deception, status, group dynamics, and emotional states. He is now working with his university’s senior administration to rethink 21st century education models. Author or editor of 10 books and over 300 scientific articles, Pennebaker is among the most cited scientists in psychology and psychiatry. His current work is funded by NSF, the Templeton Foundation, and the Army Research Institute.


* LTI colloquium: http://colloquium.lti.cs.cmu.edu
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