IAS Invited Lecture Series on Challenges and Affordances of Qualitative Methodologies

Paul Baker is a Professor of English Language in the Department of Linguistics and English Language and Lancaster University. He is a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. His research involves using methods for corpus linguistics to carry out discourse analysis and he has carried out studies looking at language use in a range of contexts including violent jihadist propaganda, patient feedback and newspaper representations of Muslims, refugees and gay men. In 2019 his book Fabulosa, based on the secret gay language, Polari, was a Times Higher Education book of the year. He has published more than 20 books and is editor of the journal Corpora.

CORPUS ANALYSIS OR CLOSE READING? A CASE STUDY ON PRESS REPRESENTATIONS OF OBESITY

Paul Baker
Lancaster University

Lecture to be held online

on February 18, 2022 at 11:30 (CET)

Everyone can attend, but you need to register.
Registration link:
https://forms.office.com/r/tNf77K73FN

Corpus linguistics involves using computer software to identify patterns in large bodies of naturally occurring texts. In this talk I outline how such methods can be used in conjunction with qualitative methods in order to carry out discourse analysis. I use examples based on a study I have carried out on a newspaper corpus relating to the topic of obesity. Media reporting of obesity has been criticised in academic research as alarmist and uncritical (Holland et al 2011) and is perceived by obese people as portraying them as freaks and enemies of society who are rarely given a voice unless successfully losing weight, which Couch et al (2015) argue is a form of 'synoptical' social control.

Taking five years of newspaper data from the Daily Mail, I examine representations but also consider methods of analysis, comparing a traditional 'close reading' method with one associated with corpus assisted discourse studies. Having carried out the analyses, a meta-analysis compared the findings elicited by different techniques in order to identify the extent that they overlap or give dissonant results. Rather than attempting to judge which approach was the most successful, the paper ends with a more reflective discussion of their strengths and weaknesses and makes suggestions for how they can be combined in order to complement one another following Baker and Levon (2015).