Market Basket Analysis: What do Russian media say about Svalbard?

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Keywords: Russian, discourse, media, Market Basket Analysis, Svalbard

Market Basket Analysis (MBA) is a data-mining technique that can be used to facilitate corpus-assisted discourse analysis. Analysis of keywords (KWs) – prominent words typical for a text that are considered as indicators of the content and style of a text (Scott & Tribble 2006: 55), is a starting point in many corpus-based discourse analyses (Cvrček & Fidler 2022). However, interpretation of isolated KWs is often an issue for large data analysis. MBA helps to overcome this issue by providing a wider context for KWs within the discourse by revealing associative links between KWs occurring in different texts of a corpus (Cvrček & Fidler 2022). This principle may be consistent with Langacker's (2008: 464) point that linguistic meaning is not limited by "what is overtly expressed" but instead it is "largely supplied by context". Associative links revealed by MBA can also be interpreted as patterns of associations between concepts in the discourse (Cvrček & Fidler 2022).

MBA is used in the present study which investigates how the Svalbard archipelago (Spitsbergen) has been covered in Russian media. Svalbard is an Arctic Archipelago with a unique legal status, provided by the Svalbard Treaty of 1920, which recognizes the sovereignty of Norway over Svalbard and gives equal rights to other countries, including Russia, to conduct economic activity there.

The present study covers a number of Russian mainstream media outlets and investigates articles published between 2010 and 2021. Within the present study, MBA is seen as a tool to investigate the array of associations for the keyword *Spitsbergen* and to understand what the data is about in terms of discourse themes.

One of the revealed prominent themes is the Russian economic presence in Svalbard. In this context, Svalbard is often portrayed as a place where the Russian activities are seriously restricted. The restrictions are seen as a breach by Norway of the Svalbard Treaty. This context is framed as a conflict and even as a war in which Russia is trying to restore justice. The beginning of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 leads to additional misunderstandings in the interpretation of the Svalbard Treaty. Now these disagreements also concern visiting Svalbard. After 2018, Svalbard has been reported in the context of the growing militarization of the region, which causes concern on the Russian side.

Within analysis of "instances of language in all their complexity and specifity" referred to by Langacker (2008: 457) as usage events that comprise a discourse, MBA is proving to be an effective method, specifically in the context of political and media discourses. MBA restricts extensive textual data to those containing associative networks of discourse concepts and thus helps to explore the salient features of discourse in a relatively short time.

References

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