POLES APART? EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF SIMILARITY BETWEEN EXTREME AND NON-EXTREME MESSAGE CONTENT

Dr Sheryl Prentice
Prof. Paul J. Taylor, Dr Paul Rayson
“You don’t want to be caught red-handed... smash her on a park bench. That used to be my trick”

“You know girls in general are all right. But some of them are bitches...The bitches are the type that...need to have it stuffed to them hard and heavy”
PERSPECTIVE 1: EXTREME VS. NON-EXTREME

• Grounded in the assumption that extremists possess unusual ways of thinking, or a differing psycho-logic (Merari)

• Language use reflects this (Pennebaker)

• Authors may actively seek to differentiate their rhetoric from that of the ‘enemy’ (Chowdhury & Krebs, 2010; Awan, 2007)
PERSPECTIVE 1: EXTREME VS. NON-EXTREME

- Smith, Suedfeld, Conway, and Winter (2008)
  - Compared 2 terrorist and 2 non-terrorist groups
- Angie et al. (2011)
  - Compared 29 violent and non-violent message boards
- Payne (2009)
  - Compared Al-Qa’ida and Western Government narratives
PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OVERLAP

• Extremists have been found to demonstrate rationality, which is reflected in their rhetoric (Sprinzak 2000; Stout 2009)

• Mainstream and extreme sources have been found to speak to the same concerns (see Awan, 2007)

• Political and extreme – similar strategies to win over supporters (cf. unifying terms)
PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OverlAP

May not be strategic or overt...

• Sociolinguistic theory (Joseph, 2004)
• Social identity theory (Tajfel)

Hopkins & Kahani-Hopkins (2009) argue against extreme vs. non-extreme classification
PERSPECTIVE 2: EXTREME & NON-EXTREME OVERLAP

- Gutmann (2007): extreme literature demeans the out-group and narrows understanding
- Studies of press discourse
  - Discourses of xenophobia, sexism & homophobia; legitimate & remediate extremism
- Studies of political discourse
  - In/out group features; social and moral argumentation; warfare justification
CURRENT STUDY

• Aim: to establish whether there is significant overlap in content between an exemplar set of extreme and non-extreme online messages
MATERIALS

- Extreme corpus: 250 messages, 425,516 words, written by members of known extremist groups
- Counter-extreme corpus: 250 messages, 208,932 words, from Muslim clerics and British Officials
- Mainstream corpus: 250 messages, 107,018 words, drawn from four ME news outlets
PROCEDURE

• Texts analysed via Wmatrix – subject to CLAWS and USAS tagging
• Semantic category lists retrieved for each of the three corpora
• Transferred to log-likelihood spreadsheet
• Used an adaption to keyness to look at both similarities and differences
PRO CEDURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tag</th>
<th>observed frequencies</th>
<th>Totals</th>
<th>expected frequencies</th>
<th>LL</th>
<th>Ext O/U</th>
<th>Coun O/U</th>
<th>main O/U</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>corpus1</td>
<td>corpus2</td>
<td>corpus3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1.1.1</td>
<td>4799  2829  1175</td>
<td>8803</td>
<td>5110.57</td>
<td>2407.11</td>
<td>1285.32</td>
<td>99.11 U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1.1.1-</td>
<td>4  0  0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>4.35 O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1.1.2</td>
<td>1010  454  204</td>
<td>1668</td>
<td>968.36</td>
<td>456.10</td>
<td>243.54</td>
<td>8.57 O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1.1.2-</td>
<td>0  1  1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>3.67 U</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A1.2</td>
<td>4  0  3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>6.33 U</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A1.2+</td>
<td>89  57  18</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>95.21</td>
<td>44.84</td>
<td>23.95</td>
<td>5.06 U</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three comparisons:
A1: Extreme, Mainstream and Counter
A2a: Extreme, Mainstream and Muslim Counter
A2b: Extreme, Mainstream and British Official Counter

All use: LL = 3.84; p < 0.05
## RESULTS: ANALYSIS 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category distinction</th>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Counter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significantly overused (LL =&gt; 3.84; p &lt; 0.05)</strong></td>
<td>142</td>
<td>&lt; 1</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significantly underused (LL =&gt; 3.84; p &lt; 0.05)</strong></td>
<td>200</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No significant difference across corpora (LL = &lt; 3.84; f &gt; 10)</strong></td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, counter and mainstream messages*
RESULTS: ANALYSIS 2A

\[ \mu = 1.02, p < .5 \]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category distinction</th>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>Muslim Counter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significantly overused (LL =&gt; 3.84; p &lt; 0.05)</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( \mu = 6.77, p &lt; .01 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significantly underused (LL =&gt; 3.84; p &lt; 0.05)</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>( \mu = 13.01, p &lt; .001 )</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, mainstream, and Muslim authored counter-extreme messages
### RESULTS: ANALYSIS 2B

\[
\underline{\mu} = 1.35, \ p < .5
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category distinction</th>
<th>Extreme</th>
<th>Mainstream</th>
<th>British Official Counter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significantly overused</strong> ( (\underline{\mu} = 3.84; \ p &lt; 0.05) )</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>152</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Significantly underused</strong> ( (\underline{\mu} = 3.84; \ p &lt; 0.05) )</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of semantic categories significantly over and underused, and semantic categories showing no significant difference between the extreme, mainstream and British Official authored counter-extreme messages.
SUMMARY

• Analysis 1: extreme and mainstream - close alignment, counter - opposing profile
• Analysis 2a: Muslim counter - opposing
• Analysis 2b: British Official aligns with mainstream & extreme
• Links to work on terrorist pathology
  • Silke, 1998
  • Merari, 1999
What could explain the relationships observed?

- Verbal aggression models from linguistics and psychology
LEVINE ET AL. (2004): MULTIDIMENSIONAL VAS

- Developmental Interactionist Theory and NS
  - two emotional circuits: self protection and social behaviours
- self protection - negative/competitive/aggressive;
  social behaviours - positive/cooperative
- High cooperativeness + low competitiveness or aggressiveness = low relational negativity
- Low cooperativeness + high competitiveness or aggressiveness = high relational negativity
ARCHER (2014): VERBAL AGGRESSION

- Assigns a particular set of USAS categories to verbal aggression

- Addition of Warfare category
ARCHER (2014): APPLICATION

- Evaluation: Good/Bad, Damaging and Destroying, (Lack of) Respect, Impoliteness overused by the ext. messages
- Shared overuse of Evaluation: True/False between ext. and B/O counter messages
- Shared overuse of Violent/Angry between m/s and B/O counter messages
- Overuse of Warfare in the m/s messages
ARCHER (2014): APPLICATION

- overuse of Speech: Communicative and Speech Acts in the mainstream messages

- overuse of Calm (an opposition category to Violent/Angry), Anti-War and Speech Acts in the Muslim counter messages

• Speech: Communicative/Uncommunicative, and Speech Acts: Speaking/Not Speaking taken as ‘verbal (un)cooperativeness’

• Warfare, Violent/Angry, Damaging and Destroying, Im/politeness, Evaluation: True/False, Evaluation: Good/Bad, and (Lack of) Respect are taken as ‘verbal (non)aggressiveness’
Figure 2: Multidimensional scale of verbal aggression and cooperativeness, adapted from Levine et al. (2004). The asterisk (*) indicates author’s addition.
• Belief Systems Theory
  • one’s self concept acts as an “antecedent to generalized beliefs about others such as hostility and anxiety or attachment and caring” (Levine et al. 2004, 264; citing research by Hamilton and Mineo 1999)
LEVINE ET AL. (2004): CAUSAL CHAIN

- egocentric standpoint > hostile beliefs > verbally aggressive predisposition > aggressive message selection
- personally empathetic > attachment/care > verbally cooperative predisposition > cooperative message selection

- Originally developed for individuals
Figure 3: Causal chain model, adapted from Levine et al. (2004, p. 264).
CONCLUSION & FUTURE DIRECTIONS

• Further work needed
• Key finding
• Implications for counter-terrorism research and policy
• Method may be underestimating similarities
• Effects of differing content coding system or comparison statistic
Thank you!

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