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Authors

Kapron-King, Anna
Xu, Yang

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Euphemism and Gender: A Computational Inquiry

Anna Kapron-King
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Yang Xu
University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Abstract

Euphemisms are a part of language which enable the discussion of taboo topics, without directly naming those taboos. Previous work suggests that women use euphemisms more than men do. However, there has been no quantitative attempt to test this proposal. We develop a simple computational method to investigate whether men and women use euphemism differently in the Canadian Hansard and US Congressional datasets. For a set of taboo-euphemism pairs (e.g. died-passed away), we computed the relative frequency of the euphemism in speech from female and male speakers. Preliminary evidence from these two political datasets show that women do use the euphemistic expressions more than men do, but they also use the taboo expressions more. Future work should investigate whether the same pattern holds in data from different domains.