

Annamária Fábián/Igor Trost (eds.)

Impulses and Approaches to Computer-Mediated Communication

**Proceedings of the
12th International Conference on
Computer Mediated Communication and
Social Media Corpora for the Humanities**

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A Case Study on Annotating and Analysing Situation Entity Types in Reddit Discussions on Democracy

Hanna Schmück*, Michael Reder†, Katrin Paula‡, Annemarie Friedrich*

*University of Augsburg

{firstname.lastname}@uni-a.de

†Munich School of Philosophy

{firstname.lastname}@hfph.de

‡Technical University Munich

{firstname.lastname}@hfp.tum.de

Abstract

Since anti-democratic movements increasingly use social media for political communication, studies examining democracy discourses in these spaces are critically needed. This paper introduces situation entity (SE) type (Smith, 2005) annotation as a promising framework for analysing political discourse in computer-mediated communication, focusing on rhetorical strategies used by writers with different political orientations. Our case study comprises 824 manually annotated situation segments (roughly clauses) from Reddit’s `r/PoliticalDebate` with six SE types: STATES, EVENTS, GENERIC SENTENCES, GENERALIZING SENTENCES, QUESTIONS, and IMPERATIVES. Our analysis reveals systematic differences across self-identified political orientations. The findings suggest SE type analysis effectively distinguishes argumentation patterns through specific versus generic content distinctions. Overall, the demonstrated framework offers promising applications for large-scale analysis of how members of different political movements construct their worldviews in digital environments. We emphasise that this case study merely attempts to propose a new method for analysing political discourse. Due to the small sample size, we cannot make any statements about political orientations and all of our analyses are intended to be exemplary.

Keywords: linguistic annotation, discourse mode, situation entity types, reddit discussion, democracy

1. Introduction

New social movements have emerged that are developing a self-image that is sometimes explicitly anti-democratic (Schedler, 2016), which in some cases implies an overthrow or at least a radical change of the political order with authoritarian tendencies. Direct communication within the movements and with the outside world in real time, made possible by digital transformation, follows the logic of social media algorithms and is often a central element in the self-image of anti-democratic movements (Karell et al., 2023). Their current growing importance poses an enormous challenge for democracies. However, the anti-democratic orientation of many populist or nationalist movements is not always easy to recognise in political rhetoric on social media platforms.

As an initial step in exploring how people argue about various perspectives and beliefs regarding democracy, we perform a case study on annotating and analysing *situation entity (SE) types* (Smith, 2005) as exemplified in Table 1 in Reddit discussions on democracy. SE types are a crucial component for distinguishing different *modes of discourse* (Smith, 2003) such as Narrative, Information, or Argumentative. Discourse modes differ in their distributions of *situation entity types* (Palmer and Friedrich, 2014). Framing information in one of these modes clearly has an impact on the reader’s perception, but SE types and discourse modes have to date not been studied in the context of computer-mediated communication.

The data for this study has been collected from Reddit via Communalytic (Gruzd and Mai, 2025), manually split into SE segments, i.e., roughly clauses, and annotated by

four expert and trained human annotators. Our findings show that STATES dominate overall discourse (52.4%), followed by GENERIC SENTENCES (22.2%). In our non-generalisable case study, Marxists stand out since they employ more EVENT-based reporting styles, Libertarians demonstrate more balanced distributions with higher QUESTION and IMPERATIVE usage, and Minarchists show a greater tendency to use GENERALIZING SENTENCES than the other groups.

2. Linguistic Background

SE types characterise the aspectual eventuality types of the situations invoked by the clauses of the text (Smith, 2003). In this case study, we follow the annotation scheme developed by Friedrich and Palmer (2014) and Friedrich et al. (2016). Besides the original types proposed by (2003) (including EVENTS, STATES, GENERIC SENTENCES, and GENERALIZING SENTENCES), the inventory was expanded by Palmer et al. (2007) to include the additional types QUESTION and IMPERATIVE to enable exhaustive text annotation.

Two key elements of a clause help determine its SE type: the *main verb* and the *main referent*. The main referent, loosely defined as the entity the segment is primarily about, is typically the subject in English. For instance, a GENERIC SENTENCE usually refers to general kinds or classes (e.g., “Rights only exist in three ways”). In the context of this annotation study, references to political parties (“AfD,” “Democrats”) and references to countries (“Germany”) were annotated as specific individuals.

By contrast, EVENTS, STATES and GENERALIZING SENTENCES focus on specific individuals (e.g., “The party I

SE Type	Examples
EVENT	<p>Minarchist The NSDAP, won with 1rd of the vote in Germany back in 1933</p> <p>Libertarian since obesity killed over 300,000 people in the US last year.</p> <p>Marxist and the Democrats failed to turn out the same numbers in the places they needed.</p> <p>Marxist Trump in 2016 and Biden both used it to do whatever</p>
STATE	<p>Libertarian They would never do the same for us.</p> <p>Libertarian My own ideology is leaving people alone</p> <p>Federalist Kind of like how Germany has banned the Nazi party, and holocaust denial.</p> <p>Federalist That should be an illegal position to have.</p> <p>Conservative But it is a significant move against AfD.</p>
GENERALIZING SENT.	<p>Socialist I've always felt [...]</p> <p>NONE I also don't take example of bad behavior</p> <p>Minarchist Also, Israel is fighting a defensive war against a terrorist organization</p> <p>Minarchist that uses its own people as meat shields,</p> <p>Minarchist and violates the laws of war.</p>
GENERIC SENT.	<p>Libertarian Everyone seems to have a different idea of what democracy is.</p> <p>Libertarian Children will always be a problem in this context</p> <p>NONE Rights don't f*** exist outside of plots of land</p> <p>Federalist A gay child has no choice in the community they wish to live in.</p> <p>Conservative Democracy is quite paradoxical.</p>
QUEST.	<p>Libertarian Who decides what kind of democracy we have?</p> <p>Marxist Don't you want the people to be able to keep their leader. . . ?</p> <p>Conservative How do you feel about Germany labeling AfD as Extremist?</p>
IMP.	<p>Voluntarist Define human rights and how they would be enshrined.</p> <p>Libertarian Just don't use my money for that!</p> <p>Federalist ACT LIKE IT.</p>

Table 1: Examples of situation entity type annotation in Reddit discussions on democracy

voted for”). The main verb is the highest-ranked non-auxiliary verb in the dependency parse, e.g., “be” in “We shouldn’t be afraid.” STATES and EVENTS are distinguished by the lexical aspectual class of their main verbs (Siegel and McKeown, 2001): dynamic verbs indicate EVENTS (e.g., “reply”), while stative verbs signal STATES (e.g., “I own land”). Aspectual class is a property of the verb’s word sense. Moreover, habituality is a clause-level feature that also informs SE type classification. For example, EVENTS are episodic (“another libertarian replied”), whereas GENERALIZING SENTENCES are habitual (“I am always suspicious”). The annotation scheme also features the explicit annotation of the lexical aspectual class and the habituality of the main verb, and the genericity of the main referent. Operators like the perfect tense, negation, or modal verbs coerce EVENTS to STATES (this is not true for GENERIC SENTENCES and GENERALIZING SENTENCES).

3. Method

In this section, we explain the data collection and annotation process of our case study.

Data collection and preprocessing. The data was collected from Reddit using Commualytic (Gruzd and Mai, 2025) which made it possible to download a batch of 2022 user entries from [r/PoliticalDebate](#) created between September 2024 and July 2025. These consist of two batches of top 50 most recent submissions containing the term ‘democracy’ that were filtered by the criterion ‘Hot’ via Reddit’s API client - one collected in May 2025 and one in July 2025 - as well as the associated comments and replies. A subsample

of 824 situation segments was used for SE type classification. A situation segment is the foundational unit of SE annotation and contains a coherent span of text that describes a single, unified situational context or event; situation segments often coincide with clauses. The benefit of using an online space such as [r/PoliticalDebate](#) is that it, in contrast to other CMC spaces, contains self-labels, so called *user flairs* which contributors use to self-ascribe a political label. As part of the preprocessing, we normalised user flairs such as [Minarchism - The Texan Minarchist \(Texanism\)](#) to [Minarchist](#) for all annotated examples.

Annotation. The entire sample for our case study has been annotated by two of the authors with experience in SE type annotation as well as two additional trained annotators who are undergraduate students of linguistics. We did not measure inter-annotator agreement (IAA) on the Reddit data, but Cohen’s κ scores for SE type annotation typically range around 0.66-0.69, with higher agreement (>0.9) for IMPERATIVE and QUESTION, and somewhat lower agreement for identifying GENERALIZING SENTENCE (0.43) as reported by Friedrich et al. (2016). Becker et al. (2016) find κ to be around 0.52 when annotating argumentative microtexts, yet with a slightly larger set of SE types, including the types FACT, PROPOSITION, and RESEMBLANCE. They reflect embedded information (“I think SOME would, probably not all.”) and are generally hard to identify. The underlined PROPOSITION additionally receives the label STATE, so in this work, we focus on the more easily distinguishable basic set of SE types.

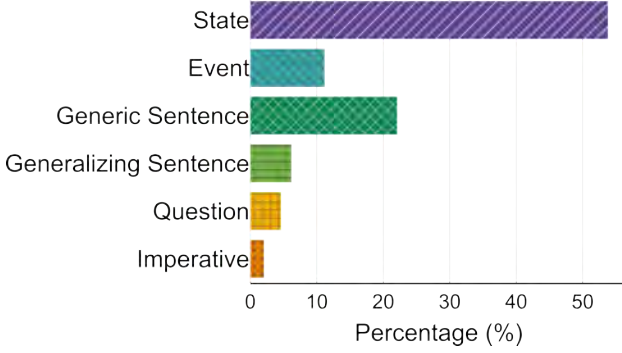


Figure 1: Overall distribution of SE types in sample of Reddit discussions on democracy (824 situation segments).

4. Analysis

The overall distribution of SE types (see Figure 1) in the full annotated dataset reflects the predominantly argumentative nature of the discussions. It shows that STATES are most common, comprising half of all instances, followed by GENERIC SENTENCES at around 22%. EVENTS, GENERALIZING SENTENCES, QUESTIONS, and IMPERATIVES are significantly less frequent at 11%, 7%, 5%, and 2% respectively. These general findings match those of Becker et al. (2016), who also found a high percentage of generics in argumentative text.

Our case study further demonstrates that at the level of SE types, for the purpose of illustrating the method, interesting differences can be found in the texts written by contributors that self-assign to different political opinions. The five most frequent political user orientations present in our sample SE segments are Conservatives, Federalists, Libertarians, Marxists, and Minarchists. Figure 2 provides the SE type distributions by self-assigned political orientation. The SE type distributions in the texts written by Conservative and Federalist users follow the overall distribution in the dataset, with these contributors using predominantly STATES and GENERIC SENTENCES, which indicates that they generally use stative descriptions of their world view.

The data from the remaining political flavors follow notably distinguishable distributions. The Marxists contributing to our dataset use a distinct more reporting-like style which still predominantly relies on STATES but EVENTS notably comprise about 27% of their SE types - over twice the mean EVENT use in the overall dataset. They predominantly use EVENTS to back their arguments with specific examples, especially regarding statistics of past elections (see Table 1).

The widest variance in their use of SE types is exhibited by the Libertarians contributing to the Reddit excerpt. They also pose more QUESTIONS and utter more IMPERATIVES compared to the other political flavors. As illustrated by the examples in Table 1, their argumentation strategy seems to be more into the direction of influencing their readers by making them re-think their own positions.

The distribution of SE types for Minarchists shows that they use roughly twice the average percentage of GENERALIZING SENTENCE compared to the other flairs. As shown in Table 1, they contribute several sentences reporting on patterns of individual agents such as the state of Israel.

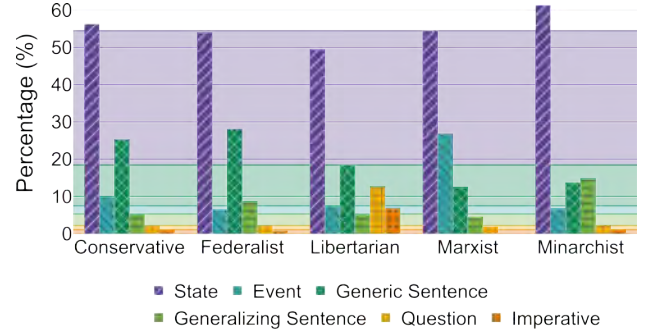


Figure 2: SE type distributions by political self-assigned user orientation (computed from 726 situation segments for top-5 user-assigned political orientation “flairs”. The background shows an area plot displaying the average values for the respective SE type amongst these five groups.

Flair	# of Users	# of SEs
Conservative	12	192
Federalist	6	138
Libertarian	10	183
Marxist	11	119
Minarchist	10	94
Total	49	726

Table 2: Distribution of users and SEs represented in the dataset by self-assigned political orientation “flair”.

5. Discussion

It is important to acknowledge that our case study only draws from a limited sample of 49 unique users across five political orientations (see Table 2), which may not adequately represent the broader population or capture the full spectrum of political perspectives. Large-scale studies are necessary to study this development on a more comprehensive scale, as well as across time and following the development of individual users. Nevertheless, we argue that we have demonstrated that the methodology of analysing argumentative text in the computer-mediated communication domain can benefit from the linguistically motivated analyses of SE types.

Our case study illustrates the value of aspectual linguistic analysis for understanding the political discourse on democracy in computer-mediated communication. At the interface of computational linguistics, linguistics, and sociology, our proposed method facilitates the comparative examination of argumentation patterns of differently oriented social movements in large corpora. In particular by distinguishing specific from generic content, the digital linguistic analysis is closely linked to philosophical questions.

In future work, we will scale our method by enabling larger-scale text annotation supported by computational methods. A particular focus of the analysis is on generalising and generic statements (Friedrich and Pinkal, 2015; Friedrich et al., 2015) such as “The attack on free speech is, in fact, a problem in almost all EU countries [...]”¹ and their function in the performative constitution of the political self-

¹Telegram channel “Freie Sachsen”, April 22, 2025

image of social movements. By studying both official documents and websites of the social movements as well as their publicly accessible chat channels, both the official self-image of the movements and the communication of the members themselves can be analysed. This allows for the investigation of different levels of the movements and different digital forms of communication. Our case study has demonstrated that the linguistic level of SE types, despite being motivated purely by linguistic aspectual distinctions, can provide valuable insights into argumentation structure.

6. Related Work

Similarly to our work, working towards the long-term goal of understanding what makes a message persuasive, Wei et al. (2016) study discussions on Reddits. They take a different approach, though, by training a supervised classifier and analysing the importance of linguistically motivated features. On the same data, Hidey et al. (2017) conduct an annotation study on argumentative text, though with more content-focused categories. They mark premises with Aristotle’s three types of persuasive modes: *ethos* (appealing to credibility), *logos* (appealing to reason), *pathos* (appealing to emotions), while claims are labeled as *interpretation*, *evaluation*, *agreement*, or *disagreement*.

Becker et al. (2016) annotate the argumentative microtext corpus (Peldszus and Stede, 2015), 112 German texts comprising a total of 668 situation segments, with SE types following the annotation scheme of Mavridou et al. (2015). They identify tendencies in the correlations between argument components (such as premises and conclusions) and SE types, as well as between argumentative functions (such as support and rebuttal) and SE types.

We are also aware of work studying the aspectual forms of clauses, in particular genericity, in other genres, e.g., in literary text (Dönicke et al., 2021), encyclopedic text (Friedrich et al., 2015; Friedrich and Pinkal, 2015) (Govindarajan et al., 2019), or English web text (Govindarajan et al., 2019).

7. Conclusion

This case study proposes situation entity (SE) type annotation as a novel framework for analysing political discourse in computer-mediated communication. Our analysis of 824 situation segments extracted from `r/PoliticalDebate` posts mentioning “democracy” shows that SE type distributions vary systematically across different self-identified political orientations, revealing distinct argumentation patterns.

Our study represents a first step towards identifying differences in argumentation patterns about democracy across political groups, which is essential for understanding how these discussions function and where potential threats to democratic discourse may emerge. The framework’s ability to distinguish specific from generic content proves valuable for examining how political movements construct ideological worldviews online. Generic and generalising statements appear particularly significant in performative political identity construction within CMC contexts.

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