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Capturing Discourse through the Digital Lens: Towards a Framework for the Analysis of Pro-democratic Discourse in the Weimar Republic

Abstract: Scalable reading has become a pathbreaking approach for discourse studies in Digital History. While large-scale analysis broadens the examination of primary sources and explores discourse features independent from the historian's experience, close inspection evaluates findings in light of the historical context. However, if we want to bring the best of both worlds together fruitfully, methods must be geared to the material, the discourses under scrutiny, their historical contexts and our epistemic interests. This paper proposes a methodological framework of scalable reading, specifically for pro-democratic discourses in the Weimar Republic. Accessing democratic thinking in Weimar Germany's fragmented political culture has been a significant concern of historical research. This includes examining newspapers, as they represent opinion-shaping mass media. However, historians have not exhausted this potential, and they have hardly engaged with scalable reading. This paper aims to close this gap by outlining the primarily heuristic benefits of scalable reading for studying democratic discourses in Weimar's press.

Keywords: scalable reading, discourse analysis, heuristics, Weimar Republic, democracy

1 Zooming in, zooming out: Extending the toolset for examining the political culture of Weimar Germany

1.1 Research on discourses as scalable reading

The digital humanities have invented an array of large-scale text analysis techniques, which make it possible to access extensive document collections that scholars could only partially read manually. While these quantitative techniques have successfully been applied in various research domains, such as historical discourse analysis, many scholars rightfully warn that analysis results still need contextuali-

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zation and interpretation. As Silke Schwandt put it in a nutshell, quantification results are not per se meaningful, numbers are not the same as representativity, and analysis visualization, too, requires interpretation (Schwandt 2016). What is needed are approaches to fruitfully combine the computer's potential of gathering statistical information on the material's contents and the scholar's experience to contextualize and interpret that information. This challenge has been addressed for some time with respect to concepts of "scalable reading"[1] or "blended reading" (Stulpe and Lemke 2016). These umbrella terms stress the metaphor of zooming in and out on document collections. However, only concrete methodologies aligned to specific research questions and objects clarify how the zooming movements may and should work. In research on the History of Concepts, for instance, we might want to detect all the occurrences of a specific term and have a closer look at them. Discourse studies, in contrast, typically depend less on word occurrences. Zooming into text passages of a particular discourse does not (solely) require finding keywords but also identifying discourse contents independent from specific terms (Oberbichler and Pfanzelter 2022: 136–137). What we need is to achieve a solid understanding of scalable reading methods as defined areas of application that demonstrate the potential and limits of those instrumental means.

In this chapter, I draw from existing projects of digitally-asissted discourse analysis and extend its methods in order to substantiate scalable reading for historical discourse analysis. In my view, scalable reading approaches are of great value for studying discourse because they substantially support the common challenge to examine complex networks of semiotic practices while working with many primary sources. Regardless of any specific theoretical and methodological underpinning or definition of discourse, the quest is, broadly speaking, to identify *meaning*. Meaning is expressed by historical actors and attributed to different (social, political, cultural) phenomena. Historians impose epistemic questions and perspectives on these phenomena, thus also inscribing meaning into their research objects. Therefore, discourse is a complex phenomenon that often requires looking over a vast number of primary sources, which underscores the importance of heuristics – the historian's traditional task of identifying, selecting and gathering material relevant to a specific epistemic interest.

Sarah Oberbichler and Eva Pfanzelter (2022) reasoned about the potential and challenges of digitally assisted discourse analysis with a focus on heuristics. To do so, they discussed remigration discourses in modern and contemporary Austrian history, traced by historical newspaper analyses. Oberbichler and Pfanzelter argue

1 Martin Mueller, "Scalable Reading," Scalable Reading (Weblog), accessed May 2, 2022, https://scalablereading.northwestern.edu/?page_id=22.

that searching digital newspaper archives, compiling a corpus of relevant texts, and exploring and interpreting these texts comes with extra challenges. For instance, simple keyword searches and frequency analyses cannot trace the discourses of interest sufficiently because discourses tend to be independent from concrete wording, as mentioned above. In promoting digital source criticism and methodological reflection, both authors propose combining different means like absolute and relative frequency analyses and text mining techniques. The latter can find new keywords and statements that the historian might not have thought of before. In total, Oberbichler and Pfanzelter provide valuable methodological insights into how to (1) compile a corpus of relevant primary sources, (2) enhance the overview and orientation for exploring the corpus, and (3) "dig deeper into the historical-critical method in the digital age" (2022: 127). This innovative understanding of digitally assisted heuristics expands the toolset for discourse research because it complements the historian's experience-based searches with techniques "making the search less influenced by the researcher's prior knowledge" (2022: 147).[2] In doing so, Oberbichler and Pfanzelter are aware that any specific design of heuristic methodology depends on the contents and nature of discourses at hand, the discourse arena, and, ultimately, the research interest. When dealing with predominantly emotionalized language, for instance, sentiment analysis techniques become more relevant than for discourses of a rather pragmatic and rational language use.

My attempt at scalable reading follows a similar approach to Oberbichler's and Pfanzelter's, geared to the specific case study of the Weimar Republic. Germany's first democracy was highly contested in many respects (Büttner 2008: 729). In a fragmented and polarized landscape of political discourse between the two World Wars, much uncertainty existed about fundamental concepts of German society. For instance, stakeholders of different political orientations battled over the definition of "democracy." Drawing from the existing research on Weimar's political culture[3] and its engagement in discourse studies, I consider this case highly relevant to approach a methodology of scalable reading: Weimar's intricate discursive landscape has forced many historians to downsize their research scope to specific groups, local contexts, discourse topics, or smaller collections of primary sources. I intend to show that scalable reading promises to broaden the scope and include more discourse contributions to deepen our understanding of political thinking. I focus on pro-democratic statements in newspapers, especially by defenders of the

2 Here, the authors specifically refer to text mining methods.

3 Historical research on political culture focuses on modes and contents of perception and the constitution of meaning by historical actors in political contexts (Hardtwig 2005a).

republic reacting to far-right attacks on Weimar's democratic system and democracy as such. By tracking these statements, their connections, and proliferation, scalable reading techniques, as I discuss them in this chapter substantially support historical heuristics. This potential is even enhanced when scholars visualize their heuristic findings in a well-structured overview for subsequent interpretation. Consequently, these methods must be chosen and geared to the underlying research context. Instead of reasoning about scalable reading "as such," I try to demonstrate its benefits for a defined area of historical discourse studies that, at the same time, can serve as a springboard for similar research endeavors.

Therefore, I aim at contributing to a genuine digital history methodology. Simultaneously, this chapter contributes to the research on the Weimar Republic, which has hardly seen studies that employ a scalable reading approach on discourses. In conducting pilot studies, I intend to get insights into Weimar's democracy discourses, on the one hand. I also aim for receiving feedback for adjusting the methodological framework. Ultimately, my approach is primarily thought to enhance the toolset for examining political discourses to understand better the ideas and opinions on democracy during an essential period of Germany's history of democracy.

1.2 Getting a grip on the complexity of discourse

Discourse is a phenomenon frequently described by spatial and pattern-based metaphors: People have ideas and perceptions of reality, and they utter them in a discursive *space*, a specific cultural, social, political, etc. arena of sense-making. Fueled by such contributions, discourses often *overlap*, for instance, when criticism of governmental decisions goes hand in hand with general demands for more public participation in politics. Discourse participants affirm or object to each other, forming a *network* of discursive negotiations. Some comments have a larger impact than others or might even be hegemonial. Following statements then replicate or build on the original message – a discursive *line* emerges.

To be sure, there is much more to say about discourse, its competing definitions, or analytical approaches. What the metaphors above already reveal, however, is that discourse analysis deals with a complex phenomenon consisting of many constituents. Researchers must detect and interrelate them to gain knowledge from their investigation. And that is, above all, learning about the discursive creation of meaning – meaning that shapes reality, in the Foucauldian sense: It makes a difference to call an anti-governmental uprising a "freedom movement" or "insurrection." If one of these topoi becomes dominant for large parts of society, it is not just a difference of personal opinion. Instead, it is a difference in perceived reality – a reality that influences subsequent political judgments, power relations and actions.

Getting a grip on such a complex research object often demands access or selection from large collections of primary sources, regardless of any analog or digital methodology. In detective work, one must identify essential stakeholders, prominent discursive subjects, and the proliferation of topoi in society. While quantitative research answers this challenge by accessing material masses, qualitative studies carefully find cross-sections for downsampling. It might seem that digital humanities methods facilitate mainly quantitative approaches, given that enough machine-readable material is available. This is because distant reading techniques allow the inspection of massive amounts of text. For example, topic modeling traces potentially meaningful clusters of words as they occur in large corpora. These corpora are meaningful because they comprise documents selected by relevance for specific research interests. On this basis, topic modeling statistically captures terms with patterns of co-occurring words hinting at candidates for relevant subject matters. This can give insights that are not possible to achieve without the computer. However, DH scholars regularly warn that the term "topic modeling" is misleading because the computer does not model topics in a narrow sense, but instead statistically identifies word groupings that *might* signalize topics. Scholars still must interpret the analysis results. As Amelie Kutter (2017) pointed out more generally, large-scale analyses have their limits and their promises can be all too tempting. She argues that corpus analysis does not help us much to reveal the (social, political, etc.) context that is decisive for the meaning of a statement. The occurrence of specific terms or concrete phrasing often does not reflect the underlying discourse, which is the real object of scrutiny. Dodging formulations, indirect references, coded language, neologisms, irony, etc. are to be mentioned here. These challenges add up to obstacles like misspellings, idioms or abbreviations, which affect the word level of keyword searches and can be tackled by the use of controlled vocabulary (Blair and Carlson 2008). Moreover, discourse analysis is usually interested in what has *not* been uttered at all and why this is the case (Kutter 2017: 172). The absence of a particular phrasing or the neglect of a specific topic might point to different things, for instance, censorship. Additionally, the political climate could be heated to a degree so that political stakeholders strategically refrain from stating claims that are, in fact, part of their convictions. In her study on the normalization of contemporary far-right discourse, Ruth Wodak points out that anti-immigrant statements operate on the verge of the sayable: Ambivalent messages "require great efforts in terms of argumentation and legitimation strategies, which always have to accommodate the routinely sayable and unsayable in a specific context" (Wodak 2021: 58). Identifying what was sayable and unsayable in a given context bears important information on the nature of particular discourses, political and social developments, also in historical research (Steinmetz 1993).

To be sure, topic modeling, word embeddings or other digital approaches and tools do address these challenges. Textometry[4] and SCoT,[5] for instance, are specialized in comparing texts and corpora to trace the (changing) meaning of terms. They also spot absent or underrepresented words and phrases. This can be utilized to compare discourse contents and style. As another example, DiaCollo targets diachronic collocation analysis:[6] Users may explore the surrounding wording of a defined signal word and compare such findings between corpora to identify word meaning shifts over time. The collocations may point to different thematic contexts in which a signal word was treated. They may reveal that the word under scrutiny was consistently uttered in statements of emotional language. Another finding could be that the focused term received changing meaning, observable for specific periods. Word embeddings have been utilized similarly (Hengchen 2021). Such techniques bear great potential, especially for discourses circling around particular names.

In her study on Irish collective identity construction and nationalism Maëlle Le Roux examined the Irish periodical Capuchin Annual from 1930 to 1977, with a case study focusing on representations of 17th-century English statesman Oliver Cromwell as an object of projection for anti-English and pro-Irish sentiment. To do so, Le Roux analyzed articulated references to Cromwell but also their absence, "as an absence is a representation in itself" (Le Roux 2021: 49). Irish identity construction is thus traced by occurrences of the name Cromwell and other signal words, by co-occurrences of neighboring terms, and concordances that reveal characterizations of Cromwell. Complementarily, Le Roux spotted missing occurrences and descriptions in articles of different issues, years and authors. The statistical results were inspected in close reading and interpreted with regard to the historical context, combining approaches of history of representations, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and corpus linguistics. In doing so, Le Roux gained a better understanding of the construction of collective Irish identity because the research design successfully revealed the contexts and connotations of (missing) Cromwell representations. However, her example also points to the limits of analyses that focus on specific words and phrases. This is because scholars often do not know (yet) what particular phrasing to look for, or the wording is not at all consistent for a given discourse. Topic models and co-occurring adjectives may lead to some patterns of how historical actors are characterized in nationalist statements. These adjectives might be tested on their co-occurrence with further

4 "Textométrie," TXM, accessed October 5, 2022, https://txm.gitpages.huma-num.fr/textometrie/.

5 "SCoT: Sense Clustering over Time: a tool for the analysis of lexical change," ACL Anthology, accessed October 5, 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.18653/v1/2021.eacl-demos.23.

6 "DiaCollo: Kollokationsanalyse in diachroner Perspektive," *CLARIN-D*, accessed October 5, 2022, https://www.clarin-d.net/de/kollokationsanalyse-in-diachroner-perspektive.

words for exploring more nationalist formulations. But what if we do not have enough of such initial stepstones and miss key signal words? In this context, Le Roux herself underscores the challenges of identifying paraphrases used in the examined texts (Le Roux 2021: 36).

Analyzing and clarifying ambivalent language use, as I address in this section, still requires a great deal of close reading in the initial stages of analysis. This begs the question of the role of qualitative and quantitative approaches in a discourse research design. Should the investigation be primarily qualitative, with large-scale analyses complementarily exploring terms and phrases that a historian has not thought of? Are quantitative approaches, in that sense, of auxiliary use in methodological triangulation? Or do they build the fundament of the analyses? The answer surely depends on the applied definition of discourse and the concrete research interest. As I want to substantiate in the following sections, I follow the first option. Keyword or phrase searches can, in my opinion, only provide a rough entry point for spotting, collecting and interrelating primary sources for assessing prodemocratic discourses in the Weimar Republic. At its core, the heuristic methodology must respect the discourses' pronounced independence from specific word use. Therefore, scholars may manually choose cross-sections of material, for instance, newspaper issues published right after political events that impacted political discourse. This way, the scholar's experience and intuition compensate for what word-based or phrase-based analyses miss. This observation is in sync with Kutter when she argues that corpus analysis is no appropriate replacement for thorough interpretation "[p]recisely because of its selective focus on the distributional properties of words" (Kutter 2017: 184). Instead, corpus analysis is understood as an "explorative technique for heuristic and reflexive purposes" (Kutter 2017: 170).

1.3 Discourse analysis and scalable reading

Following such warnings, the purpose of large-scale analyses should be conceptualized to identify conspicuous spots and patterns that are worth being consulted for closer inspection. This makes nuanced concepts of scalable reading salient. Martin Mueller emphasizes the notion of "digitally assisted text analysis", while the operative word is "assisted."[7] In that sense, literary studies profit from searching and identifying textual features like grammatical patterns (zooming out) as a

7 Martin Mueller, "Morgenstern's Spectacles or the Importance of Not-Reading," *Scalable Reading* (Weblog), accessed May 2, 2022, https://scalablereading.northwestern.edu/2013/01/21/morgensterns-spectacles-or-the-importance-of-not-reading/.

basis for close inspection and interpretation (zooming in). Similarly, Alexander Stulpe and Matthias Lemke understand "blended reading" as a framework to access social reality. The two authors consider the large-scale perspective of text-mining congruent to sociology of knowledge approaches (Stulpe and Lemke 2016: 28–30). This is because both create a distance to the research objects. Therefore, the distant reading part would not just provide a pre-structuring of data for heuristics, but it would also bring fourth analytical insights. Stulpe and Lemke see this potential for analyzing semantics and discourses alike. They regard close reading as a means of quality check, looking for any contradictions between the results of distant reading and hermeneutic examination (Stulpe and Lemke 2016: 55).

From a theory/philosophy of science point of view, such contributions offer innovative perspectives on methodology for the digital humanities in general and discourse analysis in particular. They do so by converging different traditions and cultures of research for a genuine methodology of digital humanities research – beyond any mere adaptation of methods that have been developed in the computer or data sciences. Such contributions foster self-reflection and methodological depth in DH research, but they are largely absent, particularly regarding quantitative digital methods.[8] Taking this aspiration and the mentioned notions of scalable/blended reading seriously, distant reading does not add to or 'enrich' close reading. Instead, it is about a genuinely complementary relationship of epistemic importance that accommodates the need for an "update of hermeneutics" that Andreas Fickers demands for digital history: Historians must face the task of critical reflection of search algorithms, digitized sources, digital tools and interfaces. Without "thinking in algorithms" [my translation], research would be in danger of losing evidence and transparency when engaged with digital sources (Fickers 2020b: 167). This is because data and tool literacy should be considered necessary and logical extensions of traditional core components of historical research. These are, in particular:

1) Heuristics

In the sense of Johann Gustav Droysen: "Heuristics gather all the material we need for historical examination; heuristics resembles the art of mining, to find and to bring to light" (Droysen 1977: 400) [my translation]. This fundamental task for every historical research has always been laborious. Historians must often probe into vast amounts of primary sources, scattered in various archives to find

8 Cf. Michael Piotrowski and Fafinski Mateusz, "Nothing New Under the Sun? Computational Humanities and the Methodology of History" 173–177 (paper presented at CHR 2020: Workshop on Computational Humanities Research, Amsterdam, November 18–20, 2020), accessed October 6, 2022, http://ceur-ws.org/Vol–2723/short16.pdf.

anything relevant to their specific inquiry. The critical challenge is to gain an overview, orientate and collect significant material. As for digitized or born-digital sources, information retrieval and text mining techniques analyze massive amounts of data under predefined parameters. These techniques assist manual and qualitative searches when metadata provide well-structured information on the sources; this may be information on the document's creator, time and location of creation. A summary of the contents makes document filtering highly flexible and fast. Whatever the details of such digitally assisted heuristics may look like, the task still requires a great deal of attention, for the search parameters must be aligned to the sought material (which full-text keywords can be expected in a personal file, a progress report on a building construction, or in parliamentary protocols?). The parameters must also harmonize with the type of metadata provided by the repository. Beyond that, different tools enable different searches, for instance, by employing a specific query language. All this demands consideration to prevent poor or biased results. Digitally-assisted heuristics is intense work. However, flexible and well-structured searches through vast amounts of material help battle the traditionally challenging demands of heuristics.

A subsequent task of heuristics is organizing the collected sources in a way that supports their systematic interpretation. Historians must store the material alongside commentary notes in a structured fashion, best according to a data management plan and in a database. This enables them to keep track of the material's relevance for different aspects of a research project. Why has it been collected, in the first place? Why is it interesting? Often, a document must be reconsulted to discuss it in a new context that has arisen while analyzing other material. Here, we deal with challenges for orientation again, for which metadata of the above-mentioned kind provide structured information.

As I will argue in the next sections, manual annotations expand the potential of digitally assisted heuristics. When investigating intricate objects like discourses, historians annotate the topics and contents of the collected source material. In doing so, they enrich the metadata that can be retrieved in later searches. In doing so, they create semantic relations between the primary sources when these sources share a subject matter or discursive topoi. Linking sources in this way is powerful because it grants easy and quick access whenever historians must orientate and (re)consult documents.

2) Source criticism

Outer source criticism inspects how, why, and under which circumstances source material has been created and passed on to the present. For digitized or born-digital material, there are extra challenges to be considered. For instance, histor-

ians must be aware of file formats because they precondition which analytic tools to select and how to utilize them. Additionally, not every existent source has been digitized, so the work on digital resources may become too selective.

Inner source criticism traditionally deals with the contents of source material and questions on what information can be gained. For digital sources, there are also metadata and its schemata to be considered. They predefine how historians may employ software tools for analysis, and they impact the results of such examination. Aspects like these have raised the awareness of specified digital source criticism (Föhr 2019; Fridlund 2020; Hering 2014; Pfanzelter 2015).[9]

3) Interpretation

The quest to find in-depth insights brings us back to the critical role of context, as Kutter addressed it. As contextualization is paramount already for source criticism, its importance increases in interpretation. For historical scholarship (beyond editing or any sort of basic research), identifying linguistic properties, patterns or even trends of word use represents valuable 'raw material' for scrutiny. However, it does not represent any significant gain in knowledge. It is the interpretation of such results – what they mean when we make sense of the past. For historians, interpreting events in the light of preceding and succeeding events (diachronic contextualization) is as much important for this task as respecting synchronous political, social or cultural contexts. Zooming into the results of corpus analysis for interpretation might subsequently be the departure for new digital analyses. This is because thorough reading and insights might raise new questions on the horizon of the given research project. Further search terms become relevant and new resources must enter the corpus. Therefore, the macro-perspective of zooming out and the micro-perspective of zooming in are not to be applied in a strict consecutive order. Instead, it is a repetitive process until no further loop seems worthwhile. In a sense, this is a digitally enriched version of the hermeneutic circle – the iterative and deepening attempt of approaching a work's meaning through thorough perception, accumulated context information and interpretation.

All these issues of heuristics, source criticism and interpretation demonstrate that digital techniques contribute to the "array of methods and the toolbox historians have at their disposal" (Lässig 2021: 6), to perform nothing less than the discipline's core tasks. Digital methods open up new possibilities of mastering these tasks, but they also impose new challenges in terms of technological skills, on the one hand, and critical reflection of the expanded methodology, on the other hand. James E. Dobson addressed challenges like these and criticized that DH re-

9 "Living Handbook 'Digital Source Criticism'" ATLAS.ti, accessed May 10, 2022, https://atlasti.com.

search does not sufficiently reflect on the epistemic dimensions of digital methods. Dobson particularly emphasized diachronic contexts that researchers would seldomly consider when analyzing data. He also urges digital humanists to better understand technical steps when applying digital techniques. Dobson's focus may be narrowed by his emphasis on quantitative methods, his critique of alleged structuralist and formalist assumptions in the DH, and his far-reaching disregard for research outside North America.[10] He is, however, right in reminding us that the "incorporation of digital methods into humanities research requires more methodological awareness and self-critique" (Dobson 2019: 6).

I would like to argue that one way to tackle this task is to develop methodological frameworks for specific research domains, for instance, analysis of the Weimar Republic's political discourses. Such frameworks outline epistemic interests, theoretical implications, the material to be analyzed and analytic procedures. They then reflect on how digital – in conjunction with analog – methods accommodate this kind of research. Methodological frameworks are broader than concrete workflows, for which they serve as a fundament. They need adaptation for specific research projects and unique research questions. Thus, despite their conceptual elaboration, methodological frameworks are, to a certain extent, eclectic models and work-in-progress. On the other hand, such frameworks are more concrete than generic reflections on distant or scalable reading per se or on techniques like topic modeling. This is because they stress the instrumental function of digital methods for a *defined* research area, tailoring these methods to the needs of that research area. At the same time, they make purposeful application easier.

1.4 Capturing political discourse in the Weimar Republic – towards a heuristic framework

This paper outlines first thoughts on a methodological framework based on the considerations above. As a conceptual proposal, I intend to reflect on primarily qualitative analyses of political discourse in the Weimar Republic. To be more precise, the framework aims at identifying statements that countered anti-liberal and anti-republican discourse by Germany's far-right. It focuses on keyword searches performed on newspaper repositories and manual selections of newspaper articles. This combinatory approach is meant to crystalize a selection of rele-

10 Cf. Evelyn Gius, "Digital Humanities as a Critical Project: The Importance and Some Problems of a Literary Criticism Perspective on Computational Approaches," review of *Critical Digital Humanities: The Search for a Methodology*, by James E. Dobson, *JLTonline*, January 24, 2020, 11–12, accessed June 28, 2023, urn:nbn:de:0222-004298.

vant text material for the analysis of democracy discourses – a selection to build a digital and structured text corpus. Manual annotations enrich the corpus with information on discourses, structuring and relating the texts for qualitative analysis. All this aims at making pro-democratic attitudes articulated in the vast and complex landscape of Weimar Germany's newspapers more accessible than before for historical interpretation.

Research on Weimar's political discourses has shown that right-wing rhetoric vilified the political system as "western" and deeply "non-German," thus employing a culture-based language. Criticizing Germany's first democracy was part of an identity agenda, advocating for the strict rule of a leader and a strictly hierarchical order as political and social alternatives to the status quo. While several historical studies have addressed such anti-republican and anti-liberal statements, the defenders of Weimar Germany have received less attention in discourse history. Therefore, I focus on discourses that pick up or criticize the far-right rhetoric to get a clearer picture of one strand of pro-democratic discourses in the Weimar Republic. The material base for that are newspapers as integral parts of a highly polarized and fragmented landscape of harsh political discourse. Weimar's newspapers formed an important arena for expressing and consuming political ideas.

While newspapers of the Weimar era have already been examined primarily in regional discourse studies, my proposal for a methodological framework has a broader scope. The approach does not favor or exclude any newspapers. However, it must be considered that gazettes of the Weimar era have only partially been preserved and much less digitized. The digitized papers mostly have huge gaps between the years and issues. One could argue that de facto we must limit the scope to regional or other contexts to make justifiable selections of papers apt to answer relevant research questions. I agree from the perspective of empirical research. Notwithstanding, I would object that methodological proposals of a broader scope still are worthwhile in terms of what Fickers calls "thinkering:" the combination of experimenting with methods ("tinkering") with theoretical reflection ("thinking") on this practice (Fickers 2020a). I would argue that "thinkering" methodological frameworks are even more justified in the face of ongoing digitization of historic press media, as it is happening in many countries with great effort. In the German context, the recently founded *Deutsches Zeitungsportal*[11] stands out. As a central portal for historic German newspapers, it brings together digitized collections of myriad archives and libraries. On the one hand, the ever-

11 "Deutsches Zeitungsportal," Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek, accessed October 10, 2022, https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/newspaper.

growing availability of digitized newspapers and increasing interest in digital press analysis justifies the development of frameworks in good time to make use of the available resources.[12] On the other hand, timely developed frameworks can directly be applied to analyze new resources as they become digitized.

Having said this, any methodological framework should, indeed, be tested on relevant digital resources and appropriate use cases. Their analysis delivers empiric insights that should always go hand in hand with theoretical reflection. A promising and feasible example is the analysis of social democrat discourse. Social democrats stood at the forefront of Weimar's democracy and its defense. They used its Berlin-based party organ *Vorwärts* as a mass medium of political discourse. The *Friedrich Ebert Foundation* has digitized every issue from 1876 to 1933.[13] The resources are available with OCR in *Deutsches Zeitungsportal*. Due to its completeness, *Vorwärts* is a good material base for identifying and tracking social democratic discourse over time. From the discourse research point of view, one might object that this focus is one-sided and material-driven. Indeed, *Vorwärts* is just an individual newspaper, and social democratic debates also happened elsewhere. Narrowing the analysis in that way cuts connections to the broader discursive space and blurs overlapping discourses. Furthermore, projects that concentrate on "the digitally available" may give the impression of comfortable enterprises, ignoring too many not (yet) digitized resources. However, since I make a methodological proposal sketching a conceptual framework of how to conduct discourse analysis with digital techniques, this objection does not apply. The framework is flexible enough to cover other newspapers, and even other types of writing. It also suggests how to manually digitize and integrate newspaper articles as qualitative selections from archival records.

I agree with Kutter's understanding cited above that large-scale analysis is of explorative and heuristic value. Zooming out provides us with a rough overview, and it hints at promising constituents of discourse, not necessarily expected there but awaiting close inspection by zooming in. I intend to sketch how applying digital techniques can reach that goal. In doing so, I broadly adopt the methodological framework that Sarah Oberbichler (2020) developed to analyze anti-migrant discourse in South Tyrol's contemporary history. Oberbichler convincingly demonstrated how to grasp discourse in newspaper corpus analysis, mainly using the tool *Atlas.ti*[14] for investigation. The framework I propose orients broadly at Oberbichler's research design but makes adjustments to take Weimar's complex and

12 As the most recent contribution to this research vein see Bunout et al. 2022.

13 "Digitalisierungsprojekt 'Vorwärts bis 1933,'" Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, accessed October 7, 2022, https://www.fes.de/bibliothek/vorwaerts-blog/vorwaerts-digitalisierung.

14 "ATLAS.ti," ATLAS.ti, accessed May 10, 2022, https://atlasti.com.

polarized discursive landscape into due consideration. In contrast to Oberbichler, I take *CATMA*[15] as the central tool of choice. Like *Atlas.ti CATMA* is primarily designed for qualitative text annotation and analysis, though the functionalities of both tools also support quantitative research. They facilitate collaborative workflows of text annotation or individual annotation to categorize text parts in primary sources and attribute information to them. This enriches the material semantically, and it creates relations between text passages. Scholars may explore the annotations by customized search parameters and analyze the results with a set of built-in visualization features. *CATMA* has the benefit of being a free-to-use tool that brings all the features needed to qualitatively analyze and visualize discourse data. Furthermore, it provides extended means to evaluate annotations by the programming language Python: *GitMA*[16] is a Python package utilizing the distributed version control *Git* to flexibly access, process, analyze and manipulate annotations. As another contrast to Oberbichler, I reference *Critical Discourse Studies* (*CDS*) to develop my discourse analytic perspective. This socio-linguistic field focuses on social relations of power and is well suited to analyze the use of language of culture. More precisely, I follow the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (*DHA*), for it focuses, among other things, on qualitative analyses complemented by quantitative methods such as text linguistic techniques in methodological triangulation. It also takes longer time spans under scrutiny, (Reisigl and Wodak 2016) which fits well to trace the evolution of democracy discourses along the course of Weimar's eventful history. Oberbichler instead chose another branch of discourse analysis that focuses on argumentation strategies and patterns, namely the Düsseldorf School of discourse analysis as it developed from the work of Martin Wengeler (2003). The theoretical perspective of the DHA steers the "digital lens" to parts of the corpus that are to be examined. It plays, therefore, a fundamental role in the scalable reading framework.

Taking up the metaphors of "zooming" and the "digital lens", I borrow from the vocabulary of movie production to make the conceptual implications of the framework clearer: The first section of my paper outlines a "screenplay" that serves as a fundament for the heuristic framework. It engages with the state of research and, on this basis, formulates an epistemic interest that any (discourse) study, ultimately, must formulate. Here is also the place to give remarks on the intended "camera perspective," meaning the DHA viewpoint that is to be applied to the investigation of the digital resources. Using the language of movie produc-

15 "CATMA," CATMA, accessed May 10, 2022, https://catma.de/.

16 "GitMA," CATMA, accessed October 6, 2022, https://catma.de/documentation/access-your-project-data/git-access/gitma/.

tion in this way simply underscores that my framework employs perspectivity. Weimar's political discourses form a specific research domain and the DHA imposes concrete concepts and epistemic interests. All this necessarily affects the methods I outline. I do not present a "generic" or "neutral" framework for general discourse analysis, because digital and analogue methods always have an instrumental purpose in the context of a specific research interest and, therefore, are set up by choices and adjustments. Against this background, I consider the "camera" the better metaphor to describe the perspectivity of digitally assisted methods than the popular "microscope" or "telescope." Discourse in the Weimar Republic is not observed, it is instead "captured."

The second section is dedicated to the basic structuring of data (Stulpe and Lemke 2016: 43–45; Oberbirchler 2020: 471, 474–476), which is necessary for corpus-building: In a first step, we would have to meet data management as an organizational affordance for later data analysis and documentation. Next, we need to spot relevant source material, which ultimately depends on the imposed theoretical perspective. This searching for material I metaphorically refer to as "location scouting." To fulfill this task, I propose manual selections as well as defining keywords that would presumably, but not necessarily, occur in the discourses of interest. Frequency analyses of such search terms yield a rough idea of where to find relevant text passages, beyond the manually selected material. The manual and analogous searches build the fundament at this heuristic stage, firstly because the relevant newspapers and newspaper issues are just partially available as digital resources. Second, the phrasing in the newspaper articles might deviate from the keywords. In this context, not only does the term occurrences necessitate a closer look, but also the absence of occurrences might be interesting when we would expect a specific word used in a given context. Additionally, we should consider "negative keywords", meaning terms that we would hardly expect regarding the convictions of pro-democrats because their political opponents usually utter them. Hits in frequency analysis might surprise us or simply indicate where pro-democratic statements picked up the phrasing of political rivals for counter-statements. Both cases are informative for discourse analysis, and they are worthwhile to have a closer look.

After that, the corpus can be compiled. To build thematic sub-corpora, dedicated to specific topoi of discourse (e.g., "western democracy") or thematic emphasis (anti-republicanism in conjunction with antisemitism), the digital resources need qualitative annotation. This "pre-processing" is the procedural basis for deeper inquiry. Language use, both against the Weimar Republic and in defense of it, are to be visited, as the third section outlines. It is also *re*visited because the findings of prior research become questioned for identifying new discursive connections. Or those findings are extended by analyzing newspaper articles that have

remained out of scope of traditional discourse analyses. During this heuristic framework step, historians must still find original gazettes in archives. In qualitative search, they may define cross-sections oriented at specific dates of political importance. The so retrieved material may then be digitized and processed using tools like *Nopaque*.[17]

The versatile "digital lens" makes it possible to quickly "pan" from one individual text passage to another or to thematically related material. This can be helpful for source criticism and interpretation whenever we "have a tilt" at a specific text segment by close reading, and when we find new articles of other newspaper issues worthwhile consulting. This is the case, for instance, when we examine the treatment of a political event in politically different oriented newspapers or if we make diachronic comparisons. The latter is the case when comparing pro-republican statements of *Vorwärts* shortly after Weimar's constitution came into effect with statements of the same paper on the annual constitution's commemoration (*Verfassungstag*, "Day of the Constitution," August 11, 1921 to 1932). Complementarily, visualization of the distribution and semantic relations between the annotated material provides orientation for "panning" and for finding new interesting discursive connections. An interactive visualization opens up a "bird's-eye-view" for that and, at the same time, makes it possible to "zoom" into the "worm's-eye-view".

All these steps are to support thorough discourse analysis according to CDS and the DHA, with the historian bringing in contextual considerations and critical interpretation, thus capturing discourse through the digital lens.

2 Screenplay: Countering anti-democratic attacks

2.1 Epistemic interest: Defining and defending democracy in the Weimar Republic

The era of the Weimar Republic counts as one of the best-examined periods of German history, with early research focusing on the demise and failure of Germany's first democracy. National Socialism served as the vanishing point for historiography, and this tendency developed at times when the Federal Republic of Germany engaged in democratic self-assurance after 1945. Weimar served largely as a negative contrast for Germany's second parliamentary democracy (Ullrich

17 "nopaque," Bielefeld University, SFB 1288: Practices of Comparing, accessed May 10, 2022, https://nopaque.uni-bielefeld.de/.

2009: 616). Fritz René Allemann's (1956) famous words "Bonn ist nicht Weimar" ("Bonn is not Weimar") represent the belief of many political observers in the old Federal Republic, following Dirk Schumann (2017: 102). At the same time, Allemann's quote was a central reference for many subsequent studies on the history of the Weimar Republic. As Ursula Büttner argues, *Zeitgeist* and the development of Weimar research have always had a strong and clearly visible interdependency (Büttner 2018: 19).

After the First World War, Germany's economic, political and social life was burdened by tremendous structural and event-driven problems, despite intermediate tendencies of stabilization. Against this background, early historiography nourished the narrative of "crisis" for the young republic (Peukert 1987: 282). On the one hand, this does not surprise, given the radicalizing political and social development and the republic's dramatic end. On the other hand, more recent positions have increasingly criticized the one-sidedness of that narrative (cf. esp. Föllmer and Graf 2005). Around the new millennium, the Weimar era's image has become one of an era of its own right, with historians emphasizing chances of consolidation and progress. When "anti-democratic thinking in the Weimar Republic" (Sontheimer 1962) had been of pronounced interest before, now democratic forces, "democratic thinking" (Guys 2000), and the multi-faceted "understanding of democracy" (Braune et al 2022) gained more attention. This change began when Germany represented a grown-up and firm democracy, after the Cold War, and in a globalized world. Back then, the turbulent years between the World Wars seemed less fitting for political references (Schumann 2017: 102). Subsequently, recent research has taken up underexposed aspects of Weimar's history, such as rural society, religious life, mass culture, youth culture or international aspects of Weimar's interpretation of modernity (Rossol and Ziemann 2021).[18] Political culture with respect to democracy's chances has as much become a significant concern as the contingency of Weimar's fate (e.g. Canning et al. 2013; Hacke 2018; Hacke 2021; Hardtwig 2005b; Lehnert and Megerle 1990; Schumann et al. 2021).

Despite such reorientation, the "crisis" has not entirely vanished. If anything, we find the image of a contested democracy with chances and failure often close to each other, as Franka Maubach summarized it (Maubach 2018: 5). This opinion has become pertinent against the backdrop of contemporary political and social developments: Western democracies are facing massive attacks on their values and institutions. Those attacks primarily come from the far-right and challenge democratic culture, urging the respective societies to engage in self-defense and

18 For an overview of former and recent tendencies in Weimar research see Kolb and Schumann 2022.

self-assurance. To do so, debates have frequently referred to warning examples of failed and fallen democracies of Europe's 20th century. The Weimar Republic plays a particularly important role for that in Germany, catalyzed by its current centennial jubilee. As seismographic feedback on the relevance of these debates in society, historians have questioned if we really can observe "Weimarer Verhältnisse?" ("Conditions like in Weimar?") (Wirsching et al. 2018) and stated that "Berlin ist nicht Weimar" ("Berlin is not Weimar") (Schuhmann 2017). In such publications, often directed toward a larger audience, historians bring in their expert knowledge and often warn that comparisons have their limits. On the one hand, they acknowledge certain structural similarities with, for example, aggressive right-wing attacks exploiting mass media to spread anti-governmental discourse. On the other hand, they criticize anachronisms that disregard distinctive differences between Weimar's and present Germany's social conditions, democratic systems and political cultures.

This brief characterization of major research strands brings us back to the relevance of analyzing discourse on democracy in Weimar's mass media. Bernhard Fulda enriched the debate with his study on Berlin and its surroundings, while focusing on political newspapers, tabloids, and the local press of Berlin's surrounding area (Fulda 2009). In doing so, Fulda showed that the major newspapers generally had little impact on voting decisions by the masses but noticeable impact on politicians as professional readers, political and parliamentary debates. Karl Christian Führer addressed similar questions for Hamburg, investigating political effects of the press and anti-republican discourse on readers (Führer 2008). Local newspaper studies like these have significantly enriched our knowledge of Weimar's political culture, as have other discourse analyses of specific topics and topoi such as "Volksgemeinschaft" (Wildt 2009) ('people's community,' 'folk community,' or 'racial community'),[19] or antisemitism in the Reichstag (Wein 2014). Further studies apply a selective focus on the early period of the Weimar Republic (Kämpfer et al. 2014; Lobenstein-Reichmann 2014), or they concentrate on a political camp such as leftist parties (Seidenglanz 2014).

The framework I propose here is meant to be a methodological contribution to this area of research, not limited to any local or temporal context. It has, however,

19 Proper translation depends on the speaker's political standpoint and contextual use of the term. It was prominently – but not exclusively – used by Germany's far-right. The idea of German unity in a "Volksgemeinschaft" had become popular since the First World War. For an introduction to the extensive research and academic debate on this term see Mergel 2005; Bajohr and Wildt 2009; Wildt 2012; Michael Wildt, ""Volksgemeinschaft": Version 1.0," *Docupedia-Zeitgeschichte*, 2014, accessed October 13, 2022, https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok.2.569.v1; Kershaw 2011; Schmiechen-Ackermann 2012; Uhl 2021.

a specific focus on discourse contents because any discourse analysis approach must live up to guiding epistemic interests and perspectivity. The proposed framework addresses the defenders and supporters of liberal representative democracy as it was institutionalized in Weimar's political system. Other concepts, such as the council republic favored by the far-left, are excluded. It is the supporters of the Weimar Republic who I have in mind and who deserve more attention by historians. More precisely, I would like to promote a concept of discourse analysis that focuses on how defenders of liberal and representative democracy reacted to far-right rhetoric of "non-German" liberal democracy and culture-based anti-republican discourse. This approach could also focus on how far-left attacks were countered. For Weimar's discourse history this would make a lot of sense, since the political factions did not just attack opponents on the other side of the political spectrum. On the contrary, prior research revealed that groups on the same side of the spectrum were seen as competitors, and they harshly attacked each other. However, I exclusively address pro-republican and far-right discourse in this paper, for this represents a clear dichotomy in terms of basic political convictions. Reactions and democratic counteroffers to right-wing discourse, therefore, stand at the center of the framework. Case studies with a specific regional or national scope may make use of it and adapt it. Such projects would shed light on the republic-friendly discourse contributors' concrete understanding of democracy. What "democracy" meant and how it should be institutionalized was highly controversial across the political camps and even within social *milieux* of Weimar Germany. Thus, discourse analysis promises to enhance research on political culture by providing a sharper picture of political ideas in the Weimar Republic.

In this context, Thorsten Eitz and Isabelle Engelhardt present a rich linguistic analysis of discourses (Eitz and Engelhardt 2015), including a chapter by Eitz on the disputed form of government (Eitz 2015). Here, Eitz presents detailed results from his extensive newspapers inquiry, with particular regard to the political press. He carved out the polysemic use of the terms "democracy" and "republic." In doing so, Eitz identified significant "flag words," which the political camps used for their agendas, not least for the republic's defense or attacks on it. The results, however, rather represent a linguistic account of discourse properties, lacking extensive historical interpretation. This might not have been Eitz's goal. However, according to historical discourse analysis, one would expect to learn more about contextualization of the examined utterances, discursive relations between them, and pronounced historical interpretation of the overall results. Thomas Mergel demonstrated that for the terms "Führer," "Volksgemeinschaft," and "Maschine" (Mergel 2005). Mergel convincingly argued for this selection by pointing out that the three terms counted as important for various political camps. While intensive use of the terms does not imply the same meaning for all

discourse participants of the political spectrum, their use nevertheless reveals a set of political expectations and hopes behind the utterances. Mergel interpreted the (different) usages as signifiers for shared topics, ways of speaking and a shared perception of political reality. Against this backdrop, "Volksgemeinschaft," for instance, cannot count as a right-wing term per se. Instead, it was a projection surface. The political right utilized it to sell their strictly hierarchical and racial interpretation of the term. As another interpretation, pro-democratic political discourse accentuated the ideal for the parliamentary system to represent the "Volksgemeinschaft" with all its social diversity – an ideal that had not yet been fulfilled in the eyes of many discourse participants.

To conclude, the framework I present in this paper is a first methodological approach sketching heuristic means to render detailed discourse analysis possible. It focuses on defenders of liberal democracy against the far-right. In this way, I intend to contribute to the methodology of a prolific research strand that faces much uncharted terrain. Digital analysis techniques, on the other side, have hardly been utilized for the discourse history or the history of newspaper discourses of the Weimar Republic.[20] Therefore, I argue that scalable reading has a lot to offer for the heuristic exploration and innovative inquiry of political discourses in Weimar Germany.

2.2 Camera perspective: A theoretical viewpoint from Critical Discourse Studies (CDS)

CDS or Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a research area that Kieran O'Halloran defined as "a branch of linguistics that is concerned, broadly speaking, with highlighting the traces of cultural and ideological meaning in spoken and written texts" (2003: 1). CDS falls into a multitude of approaches with different methods and research programs. Eclectically drawing on a range of theoretical traditions (cf. Forchtner and Wodak 2017), the underlying goal of all approaches is "to understand the complex workings of language within society, a concern for how socio-

20 Giulia De Paduanis' Master thesis on the *Aachener Anzeiger* is an exception. De Paduanis focuses on language changes over time, and how to interpret them in the context of political and societal discourses. The epistemic interest of the study is to deliver historical insights in the face of contemporary challenges for democracies. De Paduanis analyses a sample of one newspaper issue per month for the Weimar era by applying a scalable reading approach with *Voyant Tools*. Giulia de Paduanis, "Learning from the Past: The Case of the Weimar Republic: A Proposal for Historical Analysis, Revision and Digitization" (Master thesis, Department of Cultural Sciences, Linnaeus University, 22.01.2023).

cultural structures influence and, at the same time, are influenced by, language use" (Forchtner and Wodak 2017: 135; cf. Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258). Wodak specified that "CDA highlights the substantively linguistic and discursive nature of social relations of *power* in contemporary societies. This is partly the matter of how power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse" (Wodak 1996: 18 [emphasis in the original text]). Against this background, the relationship between discourse and power is situated on several "levels," as Bernhard Forchtner and Wodak pointed out: "Yet, approaches generally view power as being present 'in discourse' (some positions will hold greater potential to influence others), 'over discourse' (for example, the question of access and agenda setting), 'and of discourse' (an understanding of power which points to latent conflicts [. . .]" (Forchtner and Wodak 2017: 135).[21] The emphasis on culture-based language use and power makes CDS instructive for analyzing discourse in political culture. While CDS has broadly been applied to the analysis of contemporary discourses, it can also be used for historical discourse analysis (e.g., Richardson 2017).

More precisely, I follow a definition of discourse that Martin Reisigl and Wodak formulated for the *Discourse-Historical Approach* (DHA) of CDS. The two authors regard "discourse" as:

- "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action;
- socially constituted and socially constitutive;
- related to a macro-topic;
- linked to argumentation about validity claims, such as truth and normative validity involving several social actors with different points of view." (Reisigl and Wodak 2016: 27)

This definition is fitting for the examination of Weimar's political discourse landscape. While Reisigl and Wodak highlight argumentation in the last step, it is noteworthy that hereby also different modes of language use are addressed. For instance, one might find arguments that have an ideological tone, trying to justify why democracy would be "non-German." Or the tone is more pragmatic, emphasizing that the democratic state brings political participation to the people.

For the heuristic framework as presented in this paper, pro-democratic statements are understood as a means to (re)gain power within the polarized discursive landscape of Weimar's contested democracy. The tone of this landscape was more than controversial; it was oftentimes harsh. Hateful and defaming attacks

21 Forchtner and Wodak draw from Steven Lukes's "three-dimensional view of power" (Lukes 2005: 25–29).

were the usual. The far-right employed a language of culture and identity to discredit the republic as "foreign," "western" or "French." In racial terms, it was frequently characterized as "Jewish." The goal was to stigmatize the political system, to move the limits of the sayable in the political culture of the Weimar Republic. This shift of the sayable should allow for new radical political changes and acts that would, ultimately, get rid of the hated liberal democracy, which describes the power dimension in far-right discourse. Having said this, pro-democratic opponents should not be considered entirely defensive in their efforts to expose, counter and substitute anti-democratic discourse. They took an active part in shaping Germany's democratic culture – in coining what "democracy" should mean for postwar Germany. In that sense, pro-democratic statements, too, are to be regarded as a means of power within the discursive battles of Weimar's political culture.

3 Setting up the digital lens: Heuristics and data pre-structuring

3.1 Data management plan

Digital discourse analysis becomes more accessible and more structured when data and metadata are stored and documented in an organized way, best utilizing versioning means such as *Git*. At the same time, data management lays the fundament for transparent data publishing, thus facilitating reuse and critical assessment by other scholars. Finding an appropriate repository is another key component of data management and reuse. All in all, this stage of the methodological framework must accommodate to the fundamental *FAIR* principles: Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse of digital (meta-)data.[22] According to the serial character of newspapers and their local, regional, or national distribution, the primary data naming parameter should be date, accompanied by location.

3.2 Identifying far-right discourse and keywords

Research on Weimar's political culture has produced much knowledge about far-right discourse. The well-examined account of anti-republican topics and topoi re-

22 "The FAIR Data Principles," FORCE11, accessed May 19, 2022, https://force11.org/info/the-fair-data-principles/.

veals a culture-based language use that features distinct keywords: "Führer" ('leader,' as a political title), "Volksgemeinschaft," "System," "Organismus," "Liberalismus," "Parlamantarismus," "Demokratie," "neue Freiheit" ('new freedom'), "neue Politik" ('new politics'), "Judenrepublik" ('republic of the Jews,' 'Jewish republic'), to mention just a few. These keywords serve the identification and analysis of discourses that pick up and counter far-right attacks. At the same time, the list should include terms that previous research has emphasized for genuine pro-republican and democratic language use, such as Eitz's "flag words." Such terms do not just mark concepts of democracy and the republic, but they function as counter-concepts to the political opponents' thinking. This relation must always be considered for the overall discourse on contested democracy. Relevant are, among others: "Demokratisierung" ('democratization'), "Sozialismus" or the dichotomic figure "Demokratie oder Diktatur" ('democracy or dictatorship').

Later frequency analysis will utilize these terms and their grammatical variations, enabling a first glance into the discourses of interest. They will have to be followed by close reading of manually selected articles, as outlined in the following sections. This is because paying attention to the utterance of the keywords alone ignores text passages of altering phrasing that nevertheless are relevant in terms of their discursive contents. Still, frequency analysis provides a first rough overview and, simultaneously, gives an idea of where else to look.

The keywords defined in this heuristic step should be organized in a database. They represent an existing vocabulary, carved out by prior research, and utilized for newspaper analysis. Christian Schneijderberg, Oliver Wieczorek, and Isabel Steinhardt referred to such course of action as deductive approaches (both quantitative and qualitative), whereas inductive approaches try to find the analytical categories in the material (Schneijderberg et al. 2022). The goal of my framework is to combine the deductive and inductive. The latter is the case when exploration and close analysis reveal new topics and keywords. They must enter the database and new frequency analyses, which renders possible new insights into the nature of political discourses. Ultimately, this step marks the beginning of an iterative looping through the texts until no further loop appears necessary. This exploratory approach checks for more keywords, more discursive topoi and topics than previous research has addressed to this day. Moreover, it is an attempt to gain a more detailed image of the discourses, given the enhanced capacities of the computer to (1) quickly search through myriad texts, (2) let historians flexibly jump from one passage to another, and (3) rapidly revisit text that becomes interesting again in the light of later examined further text passages. These are, fundamentally, heuristic benefits of the digital.

3.3 Corpus compilation

A corpus comprises relevant material for in-depth discourse analysis, compiled after the findings from the prior step. Therefore, corpus compilation is a critical stage of filtering and gathering source material, thus fulfilling core demands of heuristics, as I have characterized them above.

The corpus should be coherent and fitting to the project's research question. Suppose we want to analyze pro-republican discourse over time by the social democratic organ *Vorwärts*. In that case, we might integrate the complete collection of issues for the Weimar era, since the paper is wholly digitized. This would allow for identifying significant articles and statements, even for dates and contexts that one might not have anticipated.

However, most other newspapers have only fragmentarily been digitized. This makes it challenging to conduct cross-newspaper analyses solely on digital collections. Historians still must confront newspaper articles in archives and manually digitize them when engaging in scalable reading. While this would be nearly impossible for quantitative analysis, given the vast amounts of relevant issues scattered over various archives, the task is more feasible for qualitative selections. Historians would have to create cross-sections, choosing material from specific dates and focusing on influential newspapers. These selections might concentrate on critical political events, such as the assassinations of Germany's former secretary of the treasury, Matthias Erzberger, and foreign minister Walther Rathenau. Qualitative selections could also focus on the passing of essential acts, international treaties or the *Verfassungstag* ('Day of the Constitution'), Germany's national holiday from 1921 to 1932. On these occasions, the political discourse lived up, often flamed up, contesting Weimar's political system in fundamental debates. On the one hand, manual article digitization demands considerable extra effort. On the other hand, this challenge is outweighed, to a certain extent, by gaining flexible searchability within the collected material for later analysis. Scholars benefit from this structured accessibility by receiving more orientation when comparing different text parts and relating them to each other. They thus increase the heuristic value of the corpus.

Tools for manual digitization have become user-friendly, even for those who are not tech-savvy. *Nopaque*, for instance, combines file setup, OCR (even HTR by the *Transkribus*[23] pipeline), NLP, and corpus analysis in an easy-to-use toolchain.

23 "Transkribus," READ COOP, accessed May 10, 2022, https://readcoop.eu/transkribus/?sc=Transkribus.

This makes the, still laborious, task of manual digitization and data processing better manageable.

3.4 Keyword frequency analysis

CATMA counts frequencies of the keywords and represents them in a distribution chart. Additionally, the tool counts all the newspapers that contain the keywords. These first statistical results provide a rough overview of occurrences and temporal distribution of utterances. They are anchors for zooming into the search hits for close reading.

3.5 Identifying discourse topics by close reading

After frequency analysis, the found text passages need thorough inspection to evaluate the hits on keywords that have been defined in step 3.2. This procedure determines which text parts really address the topics and topoi of interest and which are false hits. Complementarily, new relevant discourse topics and contents might become apparent. They must be documented and enter another iteration of frequency analysis and close reading.

Other digital methods enrich the so far conducted heuristic and prestructuring steps. For instance, co-occurrence analysis and topic modeling identify anti-democratic terms that pro-democrats have picked up to counter them. For example, the Social Democrat Hermann Wendel reacted to the far-right topoi of "Judenstaat" ('Jewish state') and "Judenkanzler" ('chancellor of the Jews') in an article of the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts* in 1929 (Wendel 1929). Here, Wendel exposes such rhetoric as arbitrary and contradictive by showing that even national heroes like the old empire's chancellor Otto von Bismarck had been defamed in that way. We find co-occurrences in the Article hinting at citations that associate "Bismarck" as an "Abkömmling von Juden und Krämern" ('Descendent from Jews and grocers'. Here, 'grocer' is an anti-capitalist pejorative). This way, Wendel employs a strategy of mocking and delegitimizing far-right attacks on the Weimar Republic that operate with the same antisemitic rhetoric. Digital techniques that analyze the surrounding phrasing of a term or expression can help identify such patterns. They may also track down synonymic usages of different words, revealing semantic networks in far-right and pro-democratic vocabularies. They also help identify distinctive connotations of a single term, as used in specific contexts.

3.6 Compilation of sub-corpora

The information gained in the prior steps serves the definition of more specified keywords for the explored discourse topics and topoi. These keywords help compile thematic sub-corpora for specific discourse topoi or strands that refer to, for example, antisemitic attacks on liberal democracy. Another sub-corpus might collect sources that defend parliamentarism. Defining such specified sub-corpora increases the visibility and findability for the texts, in order to facilitate later qualitative analyses. This is because sub-corpora support contextualization of statements.

The specified keywords are used in searching the whole corpus. Every text passage that returns a hit receives a respective annotation in *CATMA*. While doing so, the passages should be read carefully to define new relevant keywords. They enter search runs on the whole corpus to replenish the annotations. The process loops until no more keywords are identified, and no new hits appear for the source texts.

4 Zooming and panning: (Re)visiting text passages for new insights

4.1 Discourse analysis: Examining and annotating the resources

The above steps of heuristic assessment and pre-structuring are followed by hermeneutic analysis of the annotated text passages. With the DHA as the guiding perspective for that, the focus lies on conceptions of democracy that oppose culture-based attacks on the republic (i.e., “the system of Weimar is a non-German institution”). These statements should be examined with regard to their temporal, local, political, and socio-cultural context. All matching passages of the whole corpus should get an annotation for the corresponding democracy concept. Project teams profit from *CATMA*’s undogmatic capacities of collaborative annotation to find “gold standard” annotations.

Whether by teamwork or individual efforts – all annotations should not depend on the exact wording of the statements. Instead, the DHA aims at identifying relevant semantic contents. This is the primary task of hermeneutic interpretation at this stage of analysis. And this means that manual choices of text passages complement the keyword-based approach. As outlined above, qualitative cross-sections help identify significant articles that do not feature any anticipated phrasing, which keyword searches necessarily miss.

Annotation of the resources' formal aspects is also relevant. These are, for instance, date of publishing, type of text (e.g., article, reader's letters), etc. Annotating and thereby documenting these features helps differentiate between the source types in further interpretations or when revisiting text passages becomes necessary.

4.2 Structuring the annotated text passages

The next step connects the instances of pro-democratic topoi by utilizing *CATMA*'s query feature. It picks out every relevant text passage and displays the different topoi and their semantic relationships (e.g., when pro-democrats pick up the far-right statements "liberal democracy is alien" and "Jews control the republic"). *CATMA* visualizes the results as a word cloud or a distribution chart combined with Keyword-In-Context, thus providing a structured overview. Users can click on its elements and explore the annotated text passages in their original contexts. Users might also test different parameters for the display, such as specific subcorpora or types of text, to have a more precise view. In total, the outlined features are genuinely powerful in structuring the representation of the corpus and, ultimately, heuristically supporting text interpretation.

4.3 Source criticism and interpretation

After annotating and structuring the texts, they are ready for thorough source criticism and interpretation. The visualizations help quickly zoom out from an individual statement to the context of the whole source text. It also helps to jump to other semantically related newspaper articles for criticism and interpretation, keeping track of the manifold facets and contributors of pro-democratic discourse and contexts. One statement can be interpreted in the light of another, and differently dated utterances can quickly be compared in diachronic inquiry. Regional specifics, too, may be considered by selecting only respectively annotated newspapers. Revisiting text resources becomes relatively easy when new insights require repeated examination. The digitally implemented heuristics of this framework thus support context sensitivity and in-depth insight.

5 Conclusion

Scale and zooming are metaphors that scholars of digital humanities and history use for diverse parts of research: Data processing, analysis, knowledge representation, methodological documentation, and more. In terms of text analysis, "scalable reading" or "blended reading" stands for innovative approaches to combining large-scale examination and in-depth inquiry. As much as this general theoretical concept might sound convincing, the actual potential of scalable methods still manifests itself in research with a defined theoretical and methodological orientation and epistemic interest. Only instrumental use of scalable reading techniques can prove the benefits of "zooming in and out." This is to say that scaling techniques – as any technique – are not per se productive but can only be fruitful for what they are employed for.

This chapter attempted to bridge the level of general reflections on scale and the level of specific research projects that apply scale. On a mesosphere, I outlined a methodological framework that is not intended as a blueprint to be strictly followed. Instead, it sketches the heuristic fundament for explorative analyses of pro-democratic discourse in the Weimar Republic. This framework surely needs refinement once empirical analyses address demands for applied methods. However, it is my conviction that frameworks are productive tools when they are based on epistemic objects (here: historical discourses), address epistemic interests (how did pro-democrats counter anti-democrats?), and put theoretical and methodological programs (the DHA) into practice. If digital analytic tools provide a "lens" for research, this lens must be set up and directed at objects of interest. The framework I outlined in this chapter is a proposal to do so.

It is largely based on the instructive approaches that Oberbichler and Pfanzelter developed to analyze anti-migrant discourses in contemporary history, but it has several modifications. I agree with those commentators on close and distant reading that see in large-scale techniques a primarily heuristic value. This starts with finding relevant primary sources and ends with flexible possibilities to visit and revisit text passages of a corpus, supporting not just quantitative analysis but also qualitative inquiry. This is because we often become interested in repeated reading of texts when new insights bring up new aspects of the examined topic. Or even further research questions may arise. For the analysis of pro-democratic discourse, this might mean that statements of older newspapers become more important when diachronic comparisons to later articles reveal that the early texts anticipated topics and topoi that are particularly relevant years later. One might say that this is perfectly possible with pure close reading. But given the intricate nature of discourse and the complex interconnections between many discourses, we profit a lot from the digital heuristic support, not least for applying the herme-

neutic circle. As a result, the heuristic framework outlined in this chapter is meant to gain a clearer and deeper picture of pro-democratic discourse in Weimar Germany. Beyond that, the results provide transparent demonstration when highlighting the scaling steps, providing an overview by visualization, and publishing research data. This may take shape as a multimodal publication for enhanced transparency and reproducibility.[24]

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