QUANTIFYING LITERARY WORKS: IS IT POSSIBLE?

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Abstract

The traditional study of literature has predominantly relied on qualitative methods, such as close reading and interpretive analysis. However, with the advent of digital humanities and advanced computational techniques, scholars are increasingly exploring quantitative approaches to literary analysis. This research delves into the feasibility of quantifying literary works, examining both the potential and the limitations of such methods. Through a comprehensive review of existing literature and methodologies, this study aims to provide a balanced perspective on the intersection of quantitative and qualitative literary analysis.

Keywords: quantitative approaches, quantitative and qualitative literary analysis, reading and interpretive analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Welcoming the era of the Asean Economic Community (AEC) 2015, it is hoped that university graduates can compete at regional or even international level. Therefore, to meet the demands of this era, lecturers are expected to be able to produce graduates who have a minimum standard ability in English determined by the university to meet the expectations.

However, the facts at the university level show that at the beginning lectures, lecturers are only given a syllabus from which they can then determine the material themselves. As a result, one lecturer and another will have different material, including Quantitative Research Methodology course material. This will influence learning outcomes, if different learning experiences are given, abilities will be different. Because English is a foreign language, it is a

challenge for Quantitative Research Methodology course lecturers to get comprehensive material where students can get a lot of exposure and practice. Most of the materials on the market are about language learning. Meanwhile, major of English literature tries to combine literary or linguistic materials into research quantitative methodology. The weakness, the materials on the market do not provide example of quantitative research that is appropriate for the English literature department at UIN Maulana Malik Malang Ibrahim. Meanwhile, referring to research results in international journals, there is a lot of quantitative research of which research design is attached to literature and linguistics. The only way is by browsing the internet, of course the results vary from one lecturer to another which of course makes the abilities of each student have different abilities because of different learning experiences. Therefore, it is necessary to think of a way so that it can achieve the goal,

namely student abilities in accordance with minimum standards university, namely in accordance with the syllabus determined by the level of difficulty.

In connection with the importance of material or teaching materials in providing the same learning experience between lecturers so as to produce graduates who are able to answer

the demands of the times, it is necessary to create standard Quantitative Research Methodology materials so that it can be used by all lecturers in providing exposure or learning experience which is not much different from student to another. Therefore, this research will provide an example of using Quantitative Research Methodology as comprehensive learning tool and can provide a unique learning experience the same for university level English language learners in responding to the challenges of the AEC era recently.

Literature, as an artistic expression, encompasses a wide range of human experiences, emotions, and cultural contexts. Historically, the analysis of literary texts has been a qualitative endeavor, focusing on interpretation, thematic exploration, and critical theory. However, the digital age has introduced new possibilities for examining literature through quantitative means. This shift raises fundamental questions: Can the essence of literature be captured through numbers and data? What are the potential benefits and drawbacks of quantifying literary works?

This research seeks to address these questions by investigating various quantitative methodologies applied to literature, evaluating their effectiveness, and discussing the challenges inherent in such approaches. By doing so, it aims to bridge the gap between traditional literary scholarship and contemporary computational methods.

RELATED LITERATURE

Ary (2012) divides quantitative research into 3 types, namely: experimental research, survey, and correlation. Experimental research basically looks at the effectiveness of a treatment. on a certain variable. Are there any significant differences that occur? Survey research see existing phenomena by looking at the interactions between one variable and another. Meanwhile, correlation research looks at the relationship between existing variables.

Literature includes literary works in the form of poetry, prose, novels, drama. Linguistics includes phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse, semantics. In general scientific literary and linguistic research is in the form of qualitative research. Approach used are usually:

a. An objective approach is an approach that focuses on the work alone. This approach views literary works as independent worlds, still separate and continuous, not at all needing anything else outside of itself focuses on aspects of intrinsic elements.
b. An expressive approach is an approach that focuses on the writer. Here, writers are seen as creative creators. The soul of the creator takes primary interest in assessing and discussing literary works.
c. The mimetic approach is an approach that focuses on the universe
d. The pragmatic approach is an approach that focuses on the reader.

The approach used in this research is the expression approach emphasizes the author.

There were some previous studies involving numbers and numerical data in literary studies. But none of the employed one of the types of quantitative research methodologies proposed by Ary (2012). Those previous studies employed simple counting on percentation of the use of certain words or expression to see the author tendencies on certain attitudes or certain theme. So far, the types of quantitative research methodologies are those three kinds. This research tries to seek which of them can be employed in literature study.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed library research which tried to find some examples on the application of the method on specific literary works online, after that interview to a lecturer especially in literature concentration whether the numerical way could be applied for certain literary works. The researcher tried to seek the acceptability of the method for appropriate study they did as well as the challenges they face. Then, the discussion will be done on the exploration of the possible method used for literary works in general. After that, the validity of the result study is done by the lecturer of literature subject to see whether it is acceptable for then it becomes the conclusion that can be applied by the students of literature department to apply in their study. Then, integrative approaches is formulated. After that, some examples of tasks given to students are made. The complete steps is shown in Chart 1.
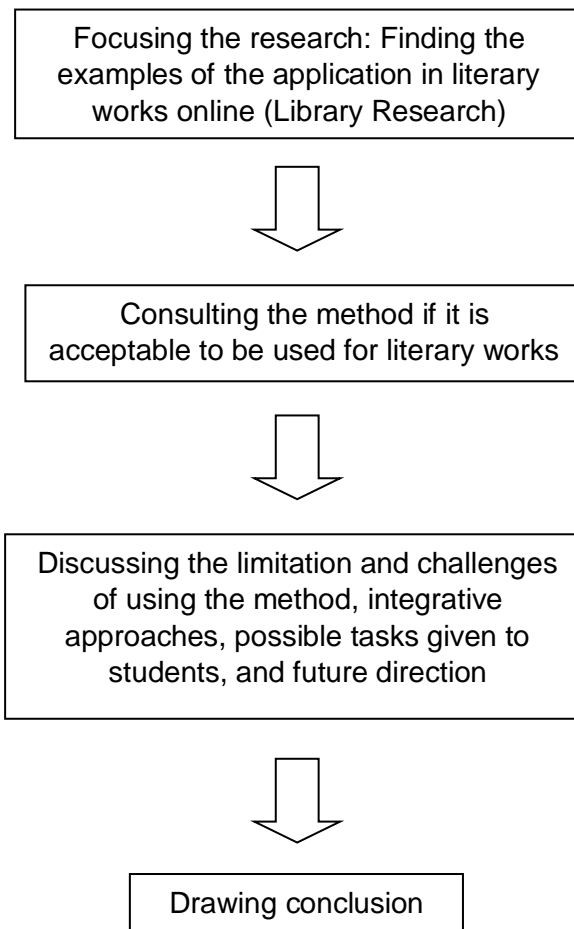
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│ examples of the application in       │
│ literary works online (Library       │
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│ Discussing the limitation and        │
│ challenges of using the method,      │
│ integrative approaches, possible     │
│ tasks given to students, and future  │
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│ Drawing conclusion                   │
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Chart 1: The Steps of Doing the Research

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study cover the aspects of literature that can be measured and analyzed numerically. Then they are explored on the possible application and challenges. After that the limitations and challenges they meet in the process of analysis.

Quantifiable Aspects of Literature

To understand the potential of quantifying literary works, it is essential to identify the specific aspects of literature that can be measured and analyzed numerically. The following sections explore key areas where quantitative methods have been successfully applied.

1. Word Frequency and Lexical Analysis

One of the most straightforward applications of quantitative analysis in literature is the examination of word frequency. By counting the occurrence of specific words or phrases, researchers can identify patterns and themes within a text. Lexical analysis goes beyond simple word counts to include the study of word usage, distribution, and relationships within a text.

Applications

- Theme Identification: High-frequency words can indicate central themes or motifs in a literary work. For example, frequent references to "time" and "memory" in Marcel Proust's "In Search of Lost Time" highlight the novel's preoccupation with these concepts. Other examples of themes can be national values, tourism and women identity, reader response, patriarchy chains, gender oppression and et cetera (Apriyani & Nalurita, 2023; Budhi, 2023; Gopal & Lee, 2023; Marlina et al., 2022; Riobelle M. et al., 2023).

-Authorial Style: Lexical analysis can distinguish between different authors or identify unique stylistic traits of a particular writer. For instance, the use of archaic language in William Shakespeare's plays contrasts with the modern diction of contemporary authors. Other example of authorial style can be the use of ideological discourse, the use of words containing war, computational stylistic, the use of artistic device or an ego words, or the use of sentence or compound sentence (Alli & Ademola, 2019; Dinsman & Robinson, 2023; Evans & Hogarth, 2021; Misini et al., 2024; Sapchenko, 2023; Schacherl, 2021)

Challenges

- Context Dependency: The meaning of words often depends on their context. Homonyms and polysemous words (words with multiple meanings) pose a significant challenge for purely quantitative approaches.

- Literary Devices: Metaphors, similes, and other literary devices can obscure straightforward word frequency analysis, requiring more sophisticated techniques to interpret accurately.

2. Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis, a technique commonly used in natural language processing (NLP), involves determining the emotional tone of a text. By categorizing portions of a literary work as positive, negative, or neutral, researchers can gain insights into the emotional landscape of the narrative.

Applications

- Emotional Arc: Mapping the sentiment across a novel can reveal the emotional trajectory of the story, highlighting moments of tension, climax, and resolution

- Character Analysis: Sentiment analysis can be applied to the dialogue or thoughts of individual characters, providing a quantitative measure of their emotional states and development. Other examples of sentiment analysis can be emotional tone in stories, emotional discourse, the politics of emotion in postwar, the problem of defining author's status (C. W. Anderson & McMaster, 1986; Quinault & Jean Pierre, 2022; Schouten, 2018; Stockwell, 2015; Syagina, 2022)

Challenges

- Subtlety of Emotion: Literature often conveys complex and subtle emotions that can be difficult for sentiment analysis algorithms to detect accurately.

- Irony and Sarcasm: These rhetorical devices can skew sentiment analysis results, as the intended sentiment may be opposite to the literal interpretation.

3. Stylometric Analysis

Stylometry involves the quantitative study of an author's style, focusing on measurable features such as sentence length, vocabulary richness, and punctuation usage. Stylometric analysis can be used to attribute authorship, detect plagiarism, or study an author's evolution over time.

Applications

- Authorship Attribution: By comparing stylistic features, researchers can attribute anonymous or disputed texts to specific authors. This method has been used to confirm the authorship of works by William Shakespeare and other historical figures. Other applications can be found in the study on novel machine learning-based approach, style over substance, stylistic feature in the arguments of two person, stylistic features in the translation of George Elliot, stylistic features of Chinese and American diplomatic discourse, and the influence of stylistic features on the translation process and eye-tracking technology, and et cetera (Fkih et al., 2023; Holmes et al., 2023; Hudieb, 2021; Kotenko et al., 2023; Mudaghmesh & Allawzi, 2023; C. Zhang et al., 2023; S. Zhang, 2023)

- Literary Evolution: Analyzing changes in an author's style across different works or periods can provide insights into their creative development and influences. Other applications of literary evolution can be seen in the studies of modeling emotional tone, a style for every age, satire: its nature and methods, author's being and death: from ancient times to

postmodernism (J. A. Anderson, 2011; Haverals et al., 2022; Ikromovna Murodova, 2022; Khikhlushko, 2023)

Challenges

- Variability in Style: An author's style may vary significantly across different genres, works, or even within a single work, complicating stylometric analysis.

- Intertextuality: Literary works often draw on or respond to other texts, making it challenging to isolate an author's unique stylistic features.

4. Network Analysis

Network analysis involves mapping and studying the relationships between entities within a text, such as characters, places, or themes. By visualizing these relationships as networks, researchers can uncover structural and thematic complexities in literary works.

Applications

- Character Networks: Analyzing the interactions between characters can reveal social structures, power dynamics, and central figures within a narrative. For example, network analysis of "War and Peace" by Leo Tolstoy highlights the intricate relationships among the novel's many characters. (Chen & Wang, 2016; Cinthya & Wati, 2020; Fan & Li, 2022; Hernández-Lorenzo, 2023; Y. Zhang, 2024)

- Thematic Networks: Mapping thematic connections can uncover the underlying structure of a text, illustrating how different themes intersect and interact. The example of the application is like Online literary creativity of digital natives and Female literary maps in Margo Glantz (Algavi et al., 2021; van Hecke, 2024)

Challenges

- Dynamic Relationships: Relationships in literature are often dynamic and evolve over time, making static network representations insufficient.

- Subjectivity in Coding: Identifying and coding relationships requires interpretive judgment, which can introduce subjectivity into the analysis.

Limitations and Challenges of Quantitative Literary Analysis

While the applications of quantitative methods in literary analysis are promising, several significant limitations and challenges must be addressed. These are some of them:

1. Contextual Nuance

Literary language is rich in contextual nuance, often relying on cultural, historical, and biographical contexts to convey meaning. Quantitative methods, which typically analyze text at a surface level, may miss these deeper layers of meaning.

- Example: The word "rose" in literature can symbolize love, beauty, or transience, depending on the context. A purely quantitative analysis might fail to capture these symbolic meanings.

2. Interpretive Depth

Qualitative literary analysis excels in providing interpretive depth, considering multiple perspectives and drawing on a wide range of critical theories. Quantitative analysis, by contrast, may oversimplify complex literary phenomena.

- Example: A thematic analysis of Herman Melville's "Moby-Dick" involves understanding the novel's philosophical, religious, and existential dimensions. Quantitative methods may identify recurring themes but struggle to capture their full significance.

3. Complexity of Narrative Structure

Literary works often employ complex narrative structures, such as nonlinear timelines, unreliable narrators, and multiple perspectives. These elements pose significant challenges for quantitative analysis.

- Example: The fragmented and nonlinear narrative of James Joyce's "Ulysses" presents difficulties for quantitative methods, which may find it hard to account for the text's intricate structure.

4. Subjectivity in Interpretation

Literature is inherently subjective, with different readers interpreting the same text in various ways. Quantitative analysis, which seeks objective measures, may not adequately capture this interpretive diversity.

- Example: Interpretations of Franz Kafka's "The Metamorphosis" vary widely, with some viewing it as a commentary on alienation, while others see it as a critique of capitalism. Quantitative analysis may struggle to encompass these divergent readings.

Integrative Approaches

Given the limitations of purely quantitative methods, an integrative approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis holds the most promise for literary studies. Such an approach leverages the strengths of both methodologies to provide a more comprehensive understanding of literary works.

1. Digital Humanities Projects

Digital humanities projects represent a convergence of literary scholarship and computational techniques. These projects use digital tools to analyze large corpora of texts, uncovering patterns and insights that might be missed through traditional methods.

- Example: The "Mining the Dispatch" project analyzed articles from the Richmond Daily Dispatch during the American Civil War, using text mining techniques to uncover trends in public sentiment and rhetoric.

2. Collaborative Analysis

Interdisciplinary collaboration between literary scholars and data scientists can lead to more nuanced and robust findings. By combining expertise in literature with advanced computational skills, researchers can address the limitations of both approaches.

- Example: A study combining literary analysis and network science might involve literary scholars identifying key themes and relationships, while data scientists develop algorithms to analyze and visualize these elements.

3. Enhanced Tools and Techniques

Ongoing advancements in natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning offer the potential to improve the accuracy and depth of quantitative literary analysis. More sophisticated algorithms can better handle the complexities of literary language and structure.

- Example: Transformer-based models like BERT and GPT-3 have demonstrated improved capabilities in understanding context and generating coherent text, which can enhance sentiment analysis, thematic detection, and other quantitative methods.

Example of Tasks for Students

To illustrate the application and benefits of an integrative approach, the students could be given tasks in the form of case studies as follows.

1. Jane Austen's Novels

A study of Jane Austen's novels might combine quantitative methods, such as word frequency analysis and sentiment analysis, with qualitative literary criticism. Quantitative analysis could identify recurring themes and emotional arcs, while qualitative analysis would provide deeper insights into Austen's commentary on social norms and gender relations.

- Quantitative Findings: High frequency of words related to marriage, social class, and morality.

- Qualitative Insights: Exploration of Austen's critique of societal expectations and the limited roles available to women.

2. Shakespeare's Plays

Shakespeare's plays offer a rich field for integrative analysis. Stylometric analysis can distinguish between different periods of Shakespeare's writing, while network analysis can map the complex relationships between characters. Qualitative analysis adds depth by examining the plays' historical context and thematic richness.

- Quantitative Findings: Changes in stylistic features over time, central characters in character networks.

- Qualitative Insights: The evolution of Shakespeare's themes, such as the interplay between power and ambition in "Macbeth" and "Julius Caesar."

3. Contemporary Novels

Modern novels, with their diverse styles and themes, benefit from an integrative approach. For example, a study of Haruki Murakami's works might use sentiment analysis to map the emotional tone and stylometric analysis to identify unique stylistic traits. Qualitative analysis would explore Murakami's blending of magical realism with contemporary issues.

- Quantitative Findings: Sentiment shifts reflecting the blending of reality and fantasy, distinctive narrative style.

- Qualitative Insights: Examination of Murakami's themes of loneliness, existentialism, and the search for meaning.

Future Directions

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in literary analysis is an evolving field, with several promising directions for future research.

1. Improved Algorithms

Advancements in machine learning and NLP algorithms will continue to enhance the capabilities of quantitative literary analysis. More accurate sentiment analysis, better handling of context, and improved stylometric tools will contribute to richer insights.

2. Larger and More Diverse Corpora

As digital archives expand, researchers will have access to larger and more diverse corpora of literary texts. This will enable more comprehensive studies that consider a broader range of authors, genres, and historical periods.

3. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Greater collaboration between literary scholars, data scientists, and other disciplines will foster innovative approaches to literary analysis. Projects that combine expertise in literature, computer science, linguistics, and history will yield more nuanced and robust findings.

4. Ethical Considerations

As quantitative methods become more prevalent, it is essential to consider ethical implications, such as data privacy, authorship rights, and the potential for algorithmic bias. Developing ethical guidelines and best practices will be crucial for the responsible use of these methods.

CONCLUSION

The research "Quantifying Literary Works: Is It Possible?" demonstrates that while quantitative methods offer valuable tools for literary analysis, they cannot replace the interpretive richness of qualitative approaches. Instead, the future of literary studies lies in an integrative approach that combines the strengths of both methodologies. By leveraging the precision and scalability of quantitative analysis with the depth and nuance of qualitative interpretation, scholars can gain a more comprehensive understanding of literary works.

As digital humanities continue to evolve, interdisciplinary collaboration and technological advancements will play a critical role in shaping the field. By embracing both quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers can uncover new insights, address complex literary questions, and enrich our appreciation of literature's multifaceted nature.

This expanded discussion provides a thorough examination of the possibilities and challenges of quantifying literary works, offering a balanced perspective on the integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches in literary studies.

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