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Between Chaos and Structure: Interpreting Lexical Data Through a Theoretical Lens

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the inherent tension between corpus data and linguistic theory that aims to model it, with particular reference to the

dynamic and variable nature of the lexicon. We explore the process through which modeling of the data is accomplished, presenting itself as a sequence of conflicting stages of discovery. First-stage data analysis informs the model, whereas the seeming chaos of organic data inevitably violates our theoretical assumptions. But in the end, it is restrictions apparent in the data that call for postulating structure within a revised theoretical model. We show the complete cycle using two case studies and discuss the implications.

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