



FACULTY OF ARTS
Charles University

Department of English and ELT Methodology

A Review of a Final Thesis
submitted to the Department of English and ELT Methodology,
Faculty of Arts, Charles University

Name and titles of the reviewer: Dr. Eva Maria Luef

Reviewed as: a supervisor an opponent

Author of the thesis: Kateřina Půlkrabová

Title of the thesis: Terminology of disability: A historical perspective

Year of submission: 2023

Submitted as: a bachelor's thesis a master's thesis

Level of expertise:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Factual errors:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis frequent less serious serious

Chosen methodology:

original and appropriate appropriate barely adequate inadequate

Results:

original original and derivative non-trivial compilation cited from sources copied

Scope of the thesis:

too large appropriate to the topic adequate inadequate

Bibliography (number and selection of titles):

above average (scope or rigor) average below average inadequate

Typographical and formal level:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Language:

excellent very good average below average inadequate

Typos:

almost none appropriate to the scope of the thesis numerous



Brief description of the thesis (by the supervisor, ca. 100-200 words):

The thesis investigates the use of certain terms referring to disabilities and mental illnesses in three large American newspapers and over a recent period of time (1990-2019). Guidelines for journalists were studied and it was analyzed how the newspapers incorporate the recommendations posed for proper use of disability-related terminology. Results show a decrease in disfavored terms over time and an increase in certain other terms. The theoretical background is not very focussed on the core issue that is being studied but digresses to a lot of peripheral topics. The methods are generally good, but Ms Pulkrabova did not go into enough detail on how she made certain decisions regarding the corpus data. The Discussion section rehashes the Results section to a large part. The Conclusion fails to put the findings into the larger context of politically correct language.

Review, comments and notes (ca. 100-200 words)

Strong points of the thesis:

Data analysis was good. Graphs and figures are nicely done. The Appendix contains relevant information.

Weak points of the thesis:

Poor framing of the study, lack of focus in the Theoretical Background.

Questions to answer during the Defence and suggested points of discussion:

1. Consider the word “retarded” and its varied uses from a historical perspective. What do you think drove the increases and decreases that you observed in your data?
2. What can you say about the ‘semantic evolution’ of the terms addict/ addiction, and how may it have influenced the frequency of the terms in the most recent time span investigated by your study?

Other comments:

Ad Theoretical Background)

A lot of information is presented without adequate referencing of sources. See page 15, for instance. In addition, missing citations make your text difficult to follow at times, for instance p. 23: “This was supported by another study done between the years 2004-2005 and 2010-2011 which however focused on disability terminology and not specifically only mental health issues.”

→ what study are you referring to?

Section 2.2.5. lists sources without discussing them in any detail. We only learn that there was a “decline in terms that have offensive meanings”. No further details are offered. Since newspapers are the focus of your study, readers would have expected a more thorough review of disability-related language in newspapers. What did the cited sources actually study and what are their findings?

Section 2.2.3. mentions “people-first/ identity-first language” but the concepts are only introduced later in section 2.2.4.



Section 2.3. should be the beginning of the Methods section, but it is a part of the Theoretical Background. This is a serious flaw in the structure of the thesis.

In general, the theoretical background lacks focus on the actual topic of the thesis – the use of disability-related terms in newspapers. In fact, only section 2.2.5. discusses the topic but only in a very superficial manner. The historical overview – as promised in the title of the thesis – is severely underdeveloped.

Ad Methods)

The justification for including/ excluding words is not transparent. For instance, p. 33 *“Instances of the word “psycho” used to describe a movie or music band were not counted”* but there are other non-disability-related instances of the term (“he’s a psycho”, for example). Similarly, p. 33/34 *“Various types of addiction were mentioned, but data was only collected for those recognized as mental health disorders, while instances where “addiction” was used more casually without the medical connotation were not included.”* → I wonder how you discriminated between medical and non-medical types of addiction. For instance, how did you treat a phrase like “addicted to video games”.

You write on p. 36 *“The majority of research conducted in the realm of mental health issues is built upon the foundational studies outlined in the theoretical part of this thesis, which were primarily undertaken in Canada and Britain.”* → It is a pity that readers never became familiar with these studies. Thus, it is difficult to understand the foundation of your study.

Ad Results)

The first paragraph is not needed.

The description of the results is good. The graphs are informative, the trendline is interesting. It is quite interesting to see which words fell out of use over time.

Readers were not given an explanation for why Figure 8, 9, and 10 only focussed on those three terms that are shown. When you state in the General Discussion that *“The primary emphasis of the analysis lies in examining the average frequency of the selected 26 terms across different years and newspapers”*, it seems an exaggeration as the core of the thesis is essentially a comparison of three terms.

The General Discussion consists of many repetitions of the Results section.

The Conclusion should put the present findings into a larger context. Statements like *“Subsequent research could delve deeper into different years to explain these variations, which were beyond the scope of this thesis due to limited existing research on this topic”* should not serve as an excuse for failing to do a thorough literature review.

The Appendix is well done.



Minor:

- The language is difficult and turgid at times, e.g., p. 16:
 - o *After the period of people burning anyone publicly suspicious eventually, institutions were established to house individuals with mental health issues if families were unwilling or unable to care for them, with the aim of protecting society*
- Citation issues: newspapers, for instance p. 17 "leading to debates on its correctness ("What Is in a Word? The Evolution of Disability Language,"2005)"
 - o *was active from 2007 to 2021 (Time to Change | Mind, n.d.).* → I am not sure what this reference means
 - o similarly, p. 30: "like "mentally deranged" or "mentally retarded" (Disability Language Style Guide | National Center on Disability and Journalism, n.d.)." → I don't understand the pipe symbols in some of the citations.
 - o p. 25: "Another study by Thornicroft et al. reported an increase in" → year is missing
- References: inconsistent capitalization of titles, newspaper articles are not cited correctly (e.g., *What is in a word? The evolution of disability language. (2005). Amssa.*), missing information (e.g., Ellis, K., & Goggin, G.)... Ms Pulkrabova should have used a citation program.

Proposed grade:

excellent very good good fail

Place, date and signature of the reviewer:
Prague, 26.8.2023