

Annual report 2016

Energy Discourses in Switzerland

Prerequisites for change





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Project goals

The project focuses on the communicative prerequisites for energy-relevant transition processes and innovations in Switzerland. Texts from a broad spectrum of participants, collected in a large multilingual corpus, will be analysed with a view to identifying interlinked discourse processes. The principle interest lies on thematic structures and communicative routines (such as evaluative positioning) in the democratic dialogue about energy.

Summary

Issues surrounding the production, supply, and use of energy will be of concern to Switzerland in the next few years and the decades to come. In the project “Energy discourses in Switzerland”, researchers in the ZHAW School of Applied Linguistics are investigating the communicative prerequisites for the anticipated changes. The objective of the project is to identify how patterns of language use about energy issues in the three official Swiss languages (German, French, and Italian) develop across institutions, media, and societal sectors. The research is based on a large multilingual corpus of texts relevant to Swiss discourses on energy since before 2011. The findings will be actively conveyed to various actors involved in the transition to sustainable energy systems and in the democratic dialogue about energy. This report covers the start-up period of the project before external financing was obtained until the end of 2016, during which time the modelling for analysis has been refined and the corpus expanded and annotated.

Work undertaken and findings obtained

1. Background

Energy policy and markets are currently in a state of upheaval and transition. In Switzerland, the federal council’s “Energy strategy 2050” provides an important basis to develop an institutional framework for future energy supply and consumption (Bundesrat 2013). It will take years and possibly decades before the discussions and debates concerning situation assessments, action programmes, implementation of policies, and evaluations result in a shared understanding of the issues involved. For example, initial analyses suggest that *Energiewende* is conceptualised as a turn, transition, revolution, turnaround, or system restructuring depending on the discourse positions of the agents concerned (see also Bale et al. 2016/forthcoming). Energy strategy can be best understood as an area of public policy in which various agents explore, produce, and revise decisions about and solutions to social problems through continual interaction. To describe societally important issues as complex as energy supply and consumption (‘wicked problems’), modelling must adequately account for the interactions within and between policy networks that include mutually interdependent discourse participation on the part of government, business, society, and academe as well as the journalistic, organisational, and social media that decisively frame the interactions through ongoing, location-independent interventions (Stücheli-Herlach 2013; Stücheli-Herlach et al. 2016/forthcoming). In multilingual Switzerland, the situation is even more interesting because discourse takes place in three different languages that enjoy equal official status. The development of a model that can do justice to the complexity of the energy discourses in Switzerland has been the focus of the initial year of the present project, as described in the next section.

2. Discourse modelling

The project uses the so-called DIMEAN model of discourse linguistics as the starting point for its methodological approach (Warnke & Spitzmüller 2008; Spitzmüller & Warnke 2011a, b). This model distinguishes three levels or layers of analysis: texts, knowledge, and actors (see Figure 1). These have been further refined and extended to reflect the various text genres, sub-discourses, and agents involved in Swiss energy discourses (Stücheli-Herlach et al., 2016/forthcoming). This type of modelling in combination with our corpus analytical and discourse linguistic methods will allow us to compare individual, clearly definable subsets of particular discourses (e.g. key texts and catchwords about hot topics in the field of energy policy). The model will be applied for the three official Swiss languages (i.e. German, French, and Italian) as well as English and refined further as the project develops.

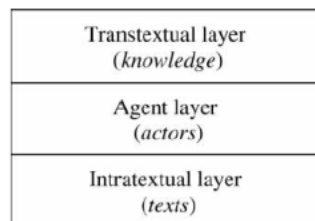


Figure 1. Starting point of theoretical modelling (reproduced from Spitzmüller & Warnke 2011a: 82)

3. Description of current corpus

The ZHAW corpus of energy discourse has been systematically extended since the submission of the project proposal: it currently comprises approximately 480 million tokens and 30,000 texts on energy topics. As a comparison, most other German-language corpora have between 500,000 and 6 million tokens (cf. Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister 2015), are not topic-specific, and are sentence- rather than text-based. During the reporting period, the ZHAW corpus has been systematically enlarged with media sources as well as being supplemented with additional energy-specific sources in German, French, and Italian in order to achieve an appropriate model of the Swiss energy discourses. The focus of corpus work during the reporting period has been on building a suitable sub-corpus from the larger, more general ZHAW corpus for the analysis of Swiss energy discourses as defined by our preliminary modelling (Figure 2). This is being done by filtering out any texts from the sources that are not energy-specific: the current size of the project sub-corpus is approximately 100 million tokens and is foreseen to increase substantially in the coming months.

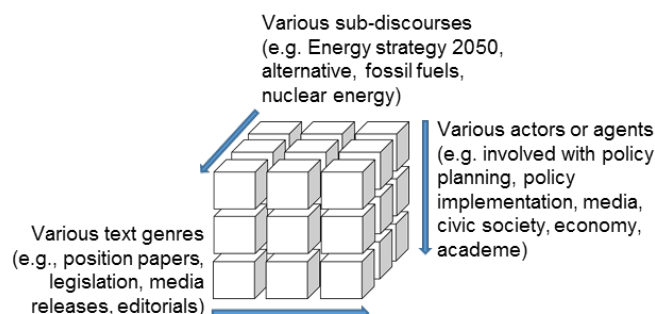


Figure 2. Model of project sub-corpus (adapted from Wengeler & Jung 1999: 148)



4. Progress to date

The kick-off meeting with the representatives from SFOE resulted in slight adjustments and clarifications of the project plan (see Appendix) and governance (e.g. project advisory committee). Furthermore, the criteria for the project sub-corpus have been established, the project team has been consolidated, and measures have been initiated to ensure that project findings are appropriately disseminated within the transfer network and academic communities.

National and international cooperation

Existing contacts and collaborations within the international communities of discourse and corpus analysis will be deepened and extended in the course of the project.

Evaluation 2016 and outlook for 2017

During the short time of the reporting period in 2016, all of the goals outlined in the project plan were met. In addition, an international peer evaluation of the ZHAW energy discourse project praised our corpus-based discourse linguistic approach as highly innovative, with the potential of contributing to informed democratic decision-making and to developing a new type of context-sensitive model of discourse analysis.

The outlook for 2017 is to continue with the expansion and annotation of the project sub-corpus. The layers of the refined discourse model will be operationalised, and the quantitative corpus analyses that are already possible with the existing ZHAW corpus workbench will be adapted accordingly and supplemented as necessary. In addition, appropriate tools will be developed for the reporting and visualisations of the project findings in time for the first public reporting and workshop with interested discourse participants, which will be scheduled in the last quarter of the next reporting period to allow for transfer and dialogue.

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Appendix

Appendix A. Updated project plan 2016-2019 (adjusted during kick-off meeting with SFOE, 14 November 2016)

Work package	SFOE-funded project															
	2016				2017				2018				2019			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Corpus development																
Corpus analysis (CA)																
Discourse analysis (DA)																
In-depth studies																
Transfer																
Evaluation/milestones																
Reporting																



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