Excessive language in "diagonalism": A comparison of the German and French discourse of Covid denialists and anti-vaccinationists

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The Covid-19 pandemic has given rise to extremist movements that share a number of core ideas, especially their rejection of face masks, vaccines, as well as most anti-pandemic measures. Callison & Slobodian (2021) call this set of ideologies "diagonalism", a term borrowed from the name of the German protest movement "Querdenken" (lit. 'diagonal thinking'). Think tanks, such as IRIS (Huyghe ed. 2021) or FRS (Zbienen 2020) in France, emphasise the geopolitical danger of these movements, but so far do not provide any substantial analyses of the symbolic means that contribute to their emergence and spread. In this paper, we analyze "diagonalist" discourse in a large set of German and French twitter data that was crawled using relevant hashtags (e.g. #WirHabenKeinePandemie 'We don't have a pandemic' for German or #nonaupassedelahonte 'No to the pass of shame' for French). We combine an inductive topic-modelling strategy with qualitative analyses in order to carve out the linguistic patterns and rhetoric strategies that are used in those tweets, particularly focussing on the use of excessive language. Comparing data from Germany and France (tweets from other German- and French-speaking countries are disregarded in our study) can give important insights from the perspective of cultural linguistics and discourse analysis as the two countries have different administrative cultures and have also differed in their response to the pandemic (Kuhlmann et al. 2021). Our study can help us understand to what extent this is also reflected in the populist and extremist reactions to Covid-19 countermeasures represented in our dataset.

References

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