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Discourse Network Analysis

Franz Eder

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Introduction

Most work on foreign policy is (still) concerned with the role of (powerful) individuals, small-groups, governments, and bureaucracies, and of structural forces on the international level (Brummer et al. 2019b, 3). From a methodological point of view, these approaches apply only a limited number of well-established instruments from the social sciences' toolbox, such as archival research, classical content analysis, interviews, or focus groups (Potter 2017, 1). Kaarbo (2019, 220), therefore, criticizes that although there has been quite a lot of innovation within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), the discipline as such has not evolved much since the 1980s.

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), the approach outlined in this chapter, builds upon recent theoretical developments in FPA (Kaarbo 1996; Kaarbo and Beasley 2008; Kaarbo 2015; Oppermann, Kaarbo, and Brummer 2017; Brummer et al. 2019a), caused by the trends of globalization and internationalization (Lifitin 2000; Ansell and Torfing 2019). It profits from the insights of the *domestic turn* (Kaarbo 2015, 189; Lake 2013, 571; Brummer et al. 2019b, 2) in IR and the methodological innovations of the discipline ever since (Zeitsoff, Kelly, and Lotan 2015; de Graaf and van Apeldoorn 2019; Ingenhoff, Calamai, and Sevin 2021). As I will argue, DNA has the potential to considerably contribute to the theoretical and methodological advancement of FPA. From a theoretical perspective, the approach rests on four basic assumptions. First, foreign policy is a policy field as contested as any other public policy. Second, actors are "communicative agents" (Checkel 2008, 76; Kaarbo 2015, 201) that discursively seek to promote their ideas and beliefs in this policy arena. Third, every individual or organization that participates in this debate with a speech act in the form of a statement/claim is conceived as an actor. Finally, actors seek to form coalitions of like-minded to either uphold or change the current status quo.

Hence, DNA focuses on both the *content* (i.e., the discursive dimension of a political discourse) and the *process* (the coordinative dimension) of a political debate (Schmidt 2008, 303). DNA links FPA to the discursive turn in political science by referring to concepts such as Political Claims Theory (PCT) (Koopmans and Statham 1999), Discourse Coalition Theory (DCT) (Hajer 1993, 2005), and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier 1988, 1998; Sabatier and Weible 2007). Methodologically, DNA proceeds in two stages: first,

determining the individual preferences of actors by applying qualitative content analysis to their speech acts (from sources such as speeches, interviews, position papers, or newspaper articles) to detect statements/claims toward a certain policy problem; second, aggregating these statements into a network using social network analysis and observing the evolution of this network over time.

Overall, adopting DNA to the study of foreign policy brings four benefits with it. First, theoretically, DNA links FPA to public/domestic politics by conceiving the realm of foreign policy as a policy field like any other. In this field, not only individual characteristics, group-dynamics, or systematic factors influence a state's foreign policy, but also domestic political processes and a variety of actors on different levels of analysis seek to influence policy outcomes. DNA integrates all these factors into a single and coherent framework of analysis. Second, methodologically, the approach brings together second- and third-generation FPA methods by combining qualitative content analysis and social network analysis (Potter 2017). Scholars can apply DNA to both classical FPA puzzles (i.e., approaches where multiple actors seek to influence policy outcomes in a complex interplay, like group decision-making or bureaucratic politics) and to contemporary approaches that conceive of FPA as a special form of public policy.

Third, DNA contributes to the discussion of continuity and change in foreign policy (Haesebrouck and Joly 2020) by considering foreign policy decision-making as a dynamic discourse that proceeds in sequences of statements. Finally, DNA contributes to the discussion of agency and structure in FPA (Carlsnaes 1992), that is the discussion of actors' abilities to shape and shove structural forces (in this case discourses) and how these forces influence actors in return. Overall, DNA allows us to answer research questions such as "How did the domestic political contestation of policy X in country Y contribute to the overall change of X?" (focus on the process of policy change); "Which actors and what coalitions were the driving forces in (not) changing policy X in country Y"? (focus on foreign policy actors and their interactions); or "What were the central arguments for changing policy X in country Y and how have these arguments changed and reinforced each other over time?" (focus on the content and dynamics of a debate).

To outline the approach, and to demonstrate its applicability and usefulness for the study of foreign policy, this chapter proceeds in four steps. First, I will review the literature and trace the development of DNA from an approach in public policy to its recent application in FPA. In the second step, I will discuss the theoretical and methodological basics of DNA. In the third step, I will illustrate the application of DNA by outlining a series of parliamentary debates in the British House of Commons in the run-up to the Iraq War of 2003. The data for the analysis, the final coding of statements, and the code for reproducing the results of this investigation are freely available on Github (<https://github.com/franzeder/dna-example>). In the fourth and final step, I will conclude the chapter and make suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

DNA originated in the late 2000s with the works of Schneider, Janning, Leifeld, and Malang, who investigated the role of political networks in public policy (Janning et al. 2009). The overall goal of this research programme was to evaluate the benefits of social network analysis for the study of political processes, especially in the realm of public policy, and to determine its applicability to this policy field. Philip Leifeld then advanced and formalized the approach in his PhD thesis on German pension politics (Leifeld 2016, 2013), laying the foundations for DNA's development into a promising tool for grasping the content and dynamics of policy debates.

Ever since, scholars have applied DNA in a variety of cases and have thereby contributed to a vivid research community and the emergence of four interdependent streams of research. Studies in the *first stream* apply DNA to cases from the field of public policy, and they further develop and refine the approach. The DNA provides the framework for analysing public policies in different geographical regions and diverse political systems, such as energy policies (Rinscheid 2015), software patents, and property rights in Europe (Leifeld and Haunss 2012), agricultural policies in Brazil (Ghinoi, Wesz Junior, and Piras 2018), or health policies in the UK (Buckton et al. 2019; Hilton et al. 2020). All these studies underline the usefulness of the approach for both displaying the content of a policy debate and visualizing the attempt of policy actors to influence the policy process in their favour by building coalitions of like-minded.

In contrast to these contributions, studies in the *second stream* seek to methodologically advance DNA. On the one hand, they move forward from sole description to inference (Leifeld 2018). The goal of these contributions is to identify “the generative mechanisms behind policy debates” (Leifeld 2020, 181), and to uncover the structural causes of continuity and change in such debates (see also van Meegdenburg in this volume). On the other hand, these studies move beyond the qualitative analysis of political claims and apply natural language processing, such as machine learning, for a supervised classification of statements (Haunss et al. 2020; Lapesa et al. 2020).

A steadily increasing number of studies in the *third stream* apply DNA to policies that are transnational in character. These studies bridge the divide between domestic public policies and the international arena. Most of these studies investigate the dynamics of political debates in the field of climate change and the regulation of carbon dioxide in the United States (Fisher, Leifeld, and Iwaki 2013; Fisher, Waggle, and Leifeld 2013; Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017; Fisher and Leifeld 2019) or Italy (Ghinoi and Steiner 2020). Others investigate international financial politics (Haunss 2017) or migration (Wallaschek 2020). The contributions in this stream have demonstrated how to successfully integrate actors from different levels of analysis into a single and coherent framework for analysing political processes. Furthermore, they have underlined that policy debates are increasingly becoming transnational and *pluricentric*, with a variety of actors seeking to participate.

The *fourth and final stream* is the most recent one and seeks to apply DNA to the realm of foreign and security policy. Eder (2019) refers to DNA for analysing instances of group decision-making in the Bush cabinet in course of the run-up to the Iraq War of 2003. He applies the approach to public speeches and interviews of key decision-makers. Instead of indirectly inferring hasty concurrence-seeking from the presence of antecedent conditions or from final symptoms of groupthink, he is able to visualize non-public decision-making in group settings. Thereby, he unveils concurrence-seeking mechanisms and contributes to the methodological advancement of groupthink (see also Barr and Mintz in this volume). Troy (2019) also refers to DNA, displaying 80 years of papal human rights discourse against the backdrop of global developments. He determines the central figure in this discourse (i.e., Pope John Paul II) and characterizes Pope Francis I as a crucial transformer of the debate. The influence of different feminist perspectives on Canada’s foreign policy is in the focus of interest in the study of Morton, Muchiri, and Swiss (2020). They seek to understand how and which feminist perspectives impact Canadian foreign policy and its implementation in various fields. Finally, Eder, Libiseller, and Schneider (2021) discuss how domestic politics, especially government-opposition dynamics and the perception of political opportunities, determine a country’s foreign and security policy in the case of counter-terrorism. Applying DNA, they conclude that this policy field “is highly politicised and contested and resembles any other ‘normal’ policy field in democratic societies” (Eder, Libiseller, and Schneider 2021, 172).

This last and most recent stream of research has demonstrated the potential of applying DNA to the study of foreign and security policy. On the following pages, I will outline the basic foundations of the approach and elaborate why scholars should consider this method more seriously when investigating the foreign policy decision-making of states. As I will demonstrate, DNA allows scholars to investigate the content and the dynamics of a debate, and display the actors and coalitions as the carriers of these political debates that either cause foreign policy to change or to remain in the status quo.

Key Terms and Concepts, Methodology

DNA is a promising approach for the analysis of foreign policy because it enables researchers to tackle the analytical challenges of contemporary developments in global affairs: first, the blurring line between domestic and international politics; and second, the increasing trend of the contestation of (foreign) policies in this globalized world (Zürn 2014; Wagner et al. 2018; Haesebrouck and Mello 2020). First, as Liftin (2000, 239) observes, the “increased economic, social, and ecological interdependence means that domestic . . . politics are less insulated than ever from the international system”. But it is not only the dynamics and the actors on the international level that interfere in domestic politics. Also, the international arena becomes a place where domestic political actors articulate and defend their preferences. Especially when it comes to the change of the status quo on the international level, the causes for this change are often to be found on the domestic, not the international level (Haesebrouck and July 2020, 6). A state’s external affairs, hence, is not the sole realm of unilateral government action (Ansell and Torfing 2019, 141) anymore, but has become a playground for a plethora of actors and a number of coalitions with transnational character. Fisher and Leifeld (2019, 470) describe this phenomenon as “polycentric governance” in the sense that “multiple actors from different parts of a system interact to produce decentralised outcomes”. This development is not only true for *soft* foreign policy issues like social, environmental, or maybe even financial policies, but also for classical *hard* foreign policy issues and security affairs.

Second, these policy decisions increasingly become contested. Executive decision-makers or government coalitions, for example, can disagree about a foreign policy because they respond differently to the domestic and international environment (Oppermann, Kaarbo, and Brummer 2017, 458). Also, representatives from civil society and other actors (e.g., interest groups or media) become part of the political debates that influence foreign policy decision-making. It is this domestic contestation and the derived political realignments of power and interests from it that cause change on the international level (Haesebrouck and July 2020, 6–7). Hence, Brummer et al. (2019b, 2) conclude that foreign policy becomes “more similar to (and intertwined with) ‘ordinary’ public policies”.

Political debates are the *visible* manifestation of this contestation. DNA conceives of actors as “communicative agents” (Kaarbo 2015, 201) and as the central drivers in these debates. Actors make political claims or issue statements, understood as the verbal expression for or against a certain (aspect of a) policy (Leifeld 2018, 301). Actors do so, to learn about each other’s positions, to reduce uncertainty (Leifeld 2014, 2), and to collectively mobilize support for their policy preferences (Koopmans and Statham 1999, 204). This debate, understood as a political discourse, is characterized by two elements: first, it is dynamic because actors repeatedly participate in the debate by issuing statements; second, it is relational, because actors refer to others in their statements (Leifeld 2014, 1). The debate, hence, is the “interactive process of conveying ideas” (Schmidt 2008, 303) via statements. These statements are instrumental and have a signalling function that is directed toward a certain target audience

(Leifeld 2018, 301–302). Furthermore, the debate’s discourse comprises two elements: its content, and the interactive process – it is about what people say to each other, and how they say it. The process itself is characterized by a coordinative and a communicative function. The former is directed toward other policy actors with the aim of allying with or differentiating from them. The latter is directed toward an interested public that can join the debate and become actors by supporting or opposing other actors’ statements (Schmidt 2008, 303–305).

This conception of political debates as instrumental discourses goes along with Hajer’s concept of discourse coalitions (Hajer 1993, 2005). According to DCT, two or more discourse coalitions (i.e., alliances of communicative agents that share a high number of statements) group around common storylines (i.e., collections of statements that make up a certain discourse) and thereby seek to influence policies (Leifeld and Haunss 2012, 384).

From here, it is only a small step to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) (Sabatier 1988, 1998; Sabatier and Weible 2007). ACF is a theoretical framework for the analysis of public policy that is the theoretical backbone of DNA and that can also be utilized for the analysis of FP. Similar to PCT and comparable to DCT, ACF argues that actors issue statements and group themselves into “coalitions of competing policy beliefs” (Leifeld 2013, 170) to further their preferences and to enforce their policy conceptions. These coalitions are centred around actors’ normative beliefs and policy core beliefs (Kukkonen, Ylä-Anttila, and Broadbent 2017, 715), which explains why these coalitions are quite stable and often polarized over time, and why policies only change when external shocks or new information through processes of learning disturb this equilibrium (Leifeld 2013, 170–171).

Although the ACF and DNA were originally conceptualized for the study of public policy, they are also applicable to the realm of foreign policy and bring several benefits with it. With the conception of actors’ statements as materializations of individual beliefs and as the source of their policy preferences, these concepts directly fit into FPA’s tradition of focusing on individuals and their belief systems. However, ACF and DNA extend the conception of who is an actor in foreign policy. Any person, group, or organization that participates in a debate, and that gets referred to by others in their statements, becomes a discursive agent (Pierce and Hicks 2019, 68–69). Hence, it is not up to the observer to decide who is an actor or not. Only by analysing debate contributions (i.e., statements), individuals, groups, and organizations that speak and get heard become actors, no matter whether they are government officials or ordinary citizens. Besides this integration of often overlooked actors into FPA, these approaches also contribute to a better understanding of continuity and change in foreign policies. They allow us to trace the dynamics of a debate and show, who is able to initiate change at which point in time (Kaarbo 2019, 226).

Methodologically, DNA proceeds in two stages and uses a combination of qualitative content analysis and social network analysis for grasping the statements of actors and relating them to each other (Leifeld 2013, 169). The data basis for this analysis are texts from various sources that are openly available. In the first stage, researchers look for actors’ statements in these texts and annotate them using a coding-scheme (Leifeld 2018, 304). Statements must be made public by actors to be instrumental in a discourse (Leifeld 2018, 301). Hence, we can refer to a variety of textual data, such as newspaper articles, parliamentary speeches or testimonies, interviews, or position papers, to search for statements. The final decision as to which text formats are the most suitable for determining political claims depends on the discursive arena we seek to investigate.

These texts are then annotated using a category-based coding-scheme. We can either deductively or inductively (Bauer 2000; Schreier 2014) develop these codes or combine both approaches. Deductively generated codes are developed top-down, inspired by theoretical

assumptions researchers seek to verify. In contrast to that, inductively generated codes are developed during the process of coding itself. Combining both approaches is a common and promising procedure because it allows scholars to both test their theoretical assumptions and ensure at the same time that no categories are overlooked.

This coding-scheme is then used to code statements that are the basic units of analysis in DNA. Statements comprise four variables (Leifeld 2018, 304–305): actors, concepts, agreement, and time stamps. An actor is any person or organization that speaks in a debate. Concepts are political claims (henceforth claims) that either support or oppose policies, policy instruments, or certain actions in a policy process (see also Lapesa et al. 2020, 144). Agreement refers to the extent of agreement or opposition of an actor toward a claim. This variable can either be dichotomous (i.e., agree – 1 or disagree – 0) or lie within a certain range (e.g., from –5 to +5). Time stamp is a temporal variable that specifies the date and time of a statement and allows the construction of dynamic networks. So, for example, the statement of Prime Minister Tony Blair “if Saddam [Hussein, FE] continues to fail to co-operate, force should be used” is coded as follows: “T Blair” (= actor), “Cabinet” (= organization), “22 – war” (= claim), “yes” (= agreement), “18 March 2002” (= time stamp).

Unlike Foucauldian discourse analysis that ultimately seeks to unveil power relations, the overall aim of the second stage of DNA is to transform the generated data (i.e., the sum of coded statements) into a two-mode network (a bipartite graph), also known as an affiliation network of actors (or organizations) and claims (for the mathematical details of this transformation, see Leifeld, Gruber, and Bossner 2019) that allows us to display the content, dynamics, and drivers of political debates. In this affiliation network (see Figure 32.1), every actor referring to a certain claim is displayed as an actor-node with an edge, linking the actor to the specific claim-node. This graph then allows us to gain insights into the content of the debate (the sum of claim-nodes) and who carries these claims (the actor nodes) (Leifeld 2018, 306).

In the next step, we are able to transform this two-mode affiliation network into a one-mode congruence (or conflict) network of actors or claims (see Figure 32.2). This transformation assumes that networks are “belief similarity networks of actors” (Leifeld 2013, 170) in the sense that “the more concepts [(i.e., claims), FE] two actors agree (or both disagree) on, the more similar they are in terms of preferences on concepts in the discourse” (Leifeld 2013, 174). Hence, actor congruence networks are networks that link actors to each other by edges,

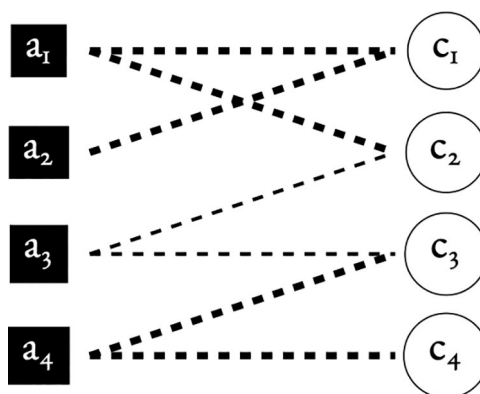


Figure 32.1 Affiliation network with actors (a) agreeing to certain claims (c). The edgeweights (displayed by the line width) provide information about the extent of agreement towards claims.

whenever these actors share the same claim by either both agreeing or both disagreeing to it. Claim congruence networks, on the other hand, are networks that display the edges between claims, whenever actors refer to the same claim in the same direction (i.e., both agreeing or both disagreeing). The same logic applies to conflict networks that display actors or claims, where actors have different attitudes toward claims (e.g., one actor agrees to a claim, the other one disagrees). One can, of course, also combine both, concurrence and conflict networks, with the subtraction mode, where agreements and disagreements are added up. So, for example, when two actors agree to a claim two times, and one time they disagree to the same claim, the overall value of agreement is +1.

So consequently, the more often actors refer to the same claim, the larger the edge-weight between these actors becomes. Hence, the edge-weight becomes a measurement of similarity in the discourse (Leifeld 2013, 175). To cope with the fact that some actors in a debate are supposed to speak more often than others (e.g., government officials receive more space in newspaper articles than ordinary citizens), we apply normalization (Leifeld 2013, 176; 2018, 310–313; Fisher and Leifeld 2019, 476) to control for this phenomenon by setting the mentioning of claims by actors in relation to their overall possibilities to mention claims in the first place.

The time stamp variable of statements is useful to display dynamic networks (see Figure 32.3). In this case, networks are drawn by grouping statements into certain time periods (e.g., statements of the same day, the same month, or the same year). “[M]odelling the development of political debates as dynamic networks may enable us to identify recurring mechanisms that drive the development of political debates” (Haunss et al. 2020, 326). Hence, dynamic networks are essential tools to understand the continuity and change of policies.

Finally, we can refer to various network measurements to better describe the characteristics of the overall discourse network and the discourse coalitions within it. Three of these measurements are especially helpful in the context of DNA: density, centrality, and various community detection algorithms. First, density describes the fraction of the maximum number of possible edges between nodes that is present in a network. By doing so, density gives an impression how connected nodes in a network really are (Newman 2010, 134–135).

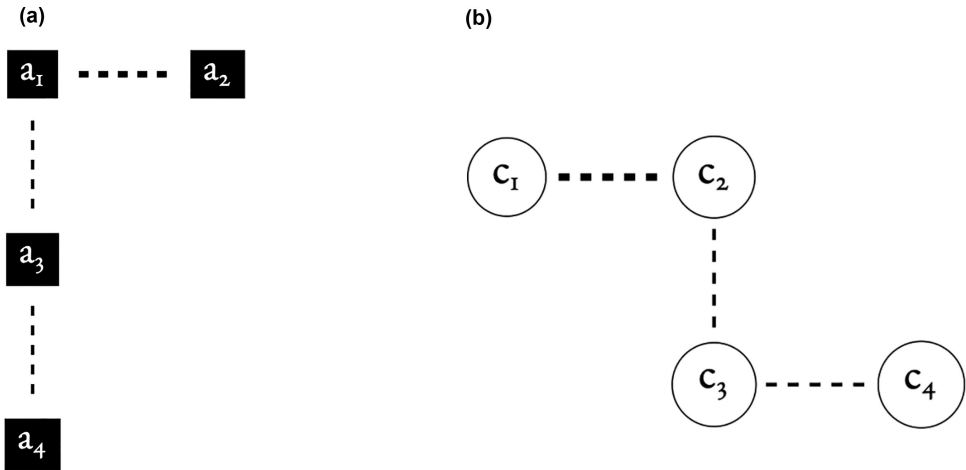


Figure 32.2 Congruence networks. (a) Actor-congruence network. (b) Claim-congruence network

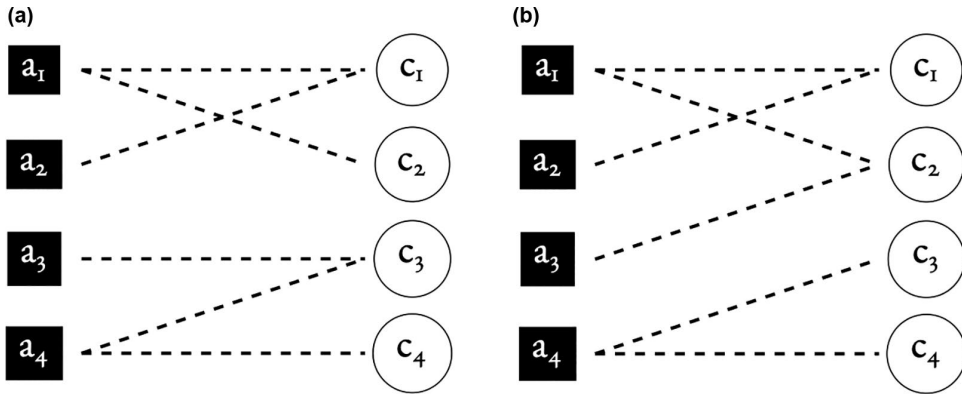


Figure 32.3 Dynamic affiliation network. (a) Network at t_0 . (b) Network at t_1

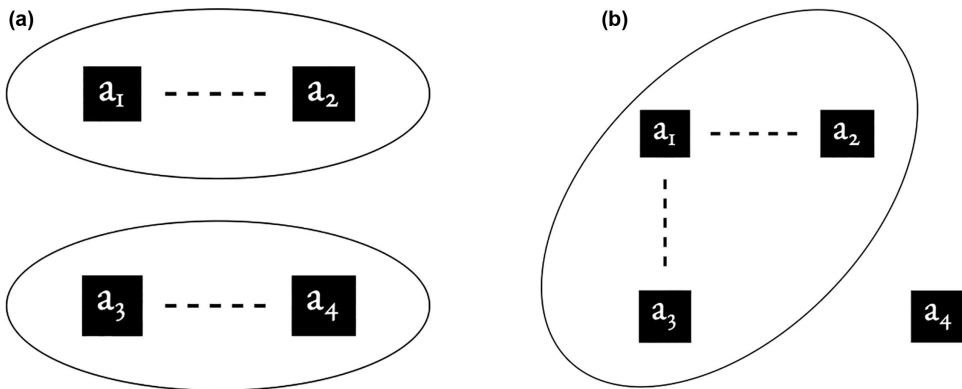


Figure 32.4 Dynamic actor congruence network.

The value for density ranges between 0 (there are no edges in a network, so that not a single node is linked to at least one other node) and 1 (the maximum number of edges is present because every node is connected to every other node). Thereby, density gives us information about the degree of interaction in a network. The higher the number of nodes and edges between these nodes in a network is, the more likely it is that a variety of claims and a greater number of actors support these claims in a debate.

Second, centrality measures give answers to the question as to which nodes are the most important in a network, either because they have the most links to other nodes (degree centrality), are connected to other important nodes (eigenvector centrality), are closely linked to other nodes in terms of distance (closeness centrality), or because they are strategically situated between other nodes (betweenness centrality) and thereby have a high social capital and hence power (Newman 2010, 168–193). These measurements allow us to detect the central carriers of a debate. These are the nodes that link different groups to each other and contribute to the establishment of a solid majority for the continuity or the change of an existing policy.

Third, community detection algorithms like modularity-maximization, hierarchical clustering, or betweenness-approaches are concepts that group nodes into clusters or

communities of like-minded nodes, because they share a higher number of similarities than other nodes (Newman 2010, 357–358 and 371–391). These approaches, therefore, are the preferred measurements to group actors into discourse coalitions and to make them visible (see, for example, Figure 32.4).

To summarize this section, DNA proceeds in two steps. First, the statements of actors are coded using qualitative content analysis and a deductively and/or inductively developed coding-scheme. Second, these statements are then used to build affiliation- and congruence-networks that allow us to gain more insights into the content, dynamics, and structure of the debate over time. By applying different sorts of network measurements, we are able to describe the characteristics of, and to detect powerful nodes in the network.

Empirical Illustration

To illustrate the application of DNA, I will investigate the debates in the House of Commons on the UK's participation in the Iraq War in 2003. As this analysis will show, three central elements influenced the UK's decision to invade Iraq. First, the cabinet of Prime Minister (PM) Blair successfully implemented a discursive strategy in early 2003 that lay the focus of the threat storyline on humanitarian issues, and thereby diverted opponents of the war to publicly more difficult to comprehend claims such as questions of international law. Second, the path-dependency of the discourse in late 2002 (i.e., the extensive reference to the threat of force) narrowed the decision corridor in early 2003, and almost forced the PM and his cabinet to take the war route, if they did not want to lose their credibility. Finally, the support of the Conservative party, and especially of its leadership, was essential for PM Blair to balance the opposition from within his own Cabinet (Robin Cook, Leader of the House of Commons and Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development resigned from the Cabinet over this question) and especially from backbenchers of his own party, and to secure a solid majority for the war resolution. The data for the analysis, the final coding of statements, and the code for reproducing the results of this investigation are freely available at <https://github.com/franzeder/dna-example>. There, readers will also find a more detailed discussion of the coding-scheme and additional graphs that are not used in this chapter due to page-limitation.

Why is the case of the UK's debate on its participation in the Iraq War in 2003 a good example for demonstrating the use of DNA? This debate, that dominated much of the House of Commons's debates in late 2002 and early 2003, was one of the most controversial foreign policy debates in the UK since 1945 (Bluth 2004, 871) and “a defining moment in UK foreign policy” (Hoggett 2005, 418). Also in the UK, domestic politics increasingly interferes in foreign policy and requires a greater say in this policy area (Strong 2015, 605). Although PM Blair refused to hold a debate on this issue in the first half of 2002, he was finally forced by serious opposition within his own party (Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 206) to debate the matter publicly, preventing to lose his party's support and reducing the risk of being overthrown (Strong 2015, 608–610). This debate was a turning point in the political history of the UK because it started a process that finally took away the royal prerogative from the PM to deploy military assets as s/he likes, and established a new parliamentary prerogative that military deployments need domestic legitimacy and a parliamentary resolution (Strong 2015, 604–605; Mello 2017). Prime ministers, therefore, are in need of a solid majority in parliament to legitimize the use of force in foreign policy domestically. Thus, this process of coalition-building in the parliamentary setting is a perfect example for illustrating the application of DNA.

I collected the statements of Members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons from 12 debates on ten different days in the period from 16 April 2002 through 18 March 2003. To extract these statements and to display the various storylines and the overall discourse coalitions, I developed a coding-scheme as a mix of mainly deductively derived claims (from the secondary literature), complemented by inductively generated claims during coding. In total, 22 claims were used to code 1,166 statements of 161 persons (i.e., MPs), from nine organizations (i.e., parties in the House of Commons and the Cabinet).¹

Following the secondary literature and a close reading of these debates, three strands (i.e., different storylines) dominated the overall discourse; that is, (1) the nature of the Iraqi threat, (2) the policies to address these threats, and (3) the overall goals of the UK's policy toward Iraq and the Middle East. First, decision-makers feverishly argued in the threat storyline whether Iraq and the regime of Saddam Hussein posed an imminent threat to the UK (Bluth 2004, 871), an overall threat to the world (Hoggett 2005, 423), or only a threat to the Middle East. Furthermore, the actors disagreed whether this threat emanated from the possible possession and use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Iraq's supposed link to international terrorism, or its ballistic missile programme (Bluth 2004, 884; Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 211). Another claim that MPs raised in their contributions was the humanitarian issue (Hoggett 2005, 418; Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 211) and the threat of Saddam Hussein to his own people (Bluth 2004, 884). Finally, speakers warned of the threat to the international order if Iraq did not obey the United Nations (UN) Security Council resolutions (Bluth 2004, 871), and feared the consequence of unilateralism, should the United States decide to go alone (Bluth 2004, 875).

Based on this threat storyline, MPs introduced a second policy-means storyline, presenting their policy preference to tackle these threats. In this storyline they either proposed regime change, the use of force (i.e., war), containment and deterrence, arms inspections, disarmament, sanctions, the threat of force (i.e., all options are on the table), diplomacy or the involvement of the UN Security Council, or a combination of these claims, to address the challenges.

Finally, decision-makers presented in the policy-goals storyline the overall aims the UK sought to achieve. That is to uphold a close alliance with the United States (Doig and Phythian 2005, 369; Kennedy-Pipe and Vickers 2007, 209), to reintegrate Iraq into the international community, to democratize the country, and to stabilize the whole region.

I divided the data into two phases: Phase one, starting from 16 April 2002, when PM Blair accepted to discuss the matter in Parliament until the end of 2002; Phase two, the remaining debates in 2003, until the final debate on 18 March 2003. Figures 32.5 and 32.6 display the overall agreement and disagreement of actors toward the claims in the whole debate, and thus allow us to gain insight into the discursive content of the debate. As these figures demonstrate, there was a solid consensus in 2002 that the alleged Iraqi WMD-programme (04 – WMD) posed a threat, that Saddam Hussein was a threat to his own people (07 – humanitarian), and that disarmament was the preferred measure to tackle this threat (25 – disarmament) by enforcing inspections (24 – inspections) via the United Nations (29 – United Nations). Actors also agreed that there was no imminent threat (01 – imminent), and hence war (22 – war) was mostly conceived not an option. However, actors unanimously agreed that the threat of force (27 – all options) should be applied to increase the pressure on the Iraqi regime to comply with the demands of the international community.

This discourse radically changed in 2003. War (22 – war) became the dominant claim used by actors in the debate. This measure was fiercely debated, and the discourse was polarized along it. There was, however, a dominant use and solid consensus of the moral argument

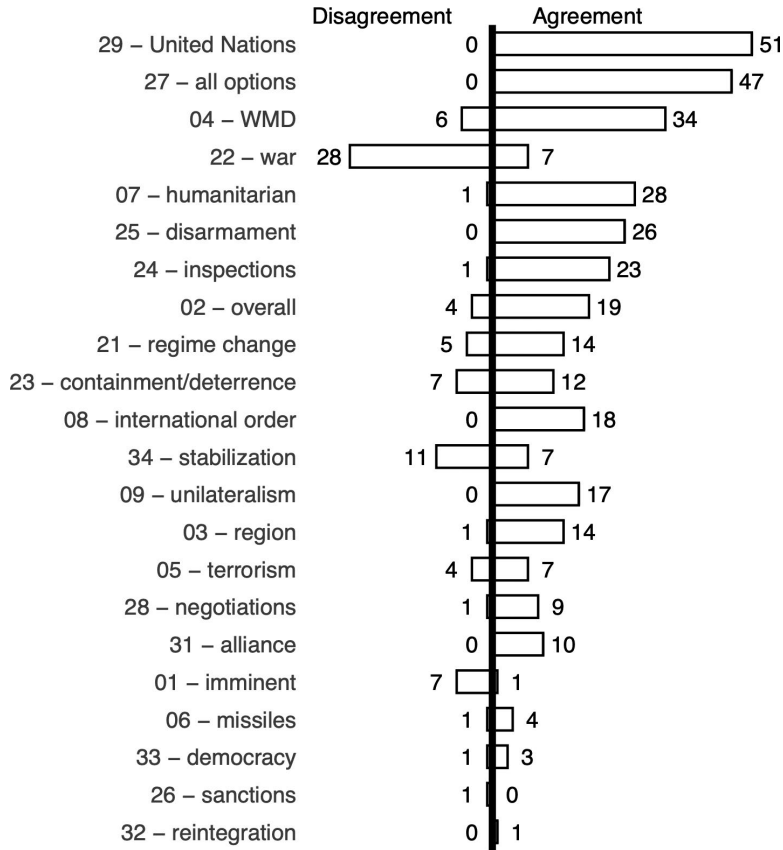


Figure 32.5 Overall agreement/disagreement toward claims in 2002.

that Iraq and Hussein posed a humanitarian threat (07 – humanitarian) that was supported by both proponents and opponents of war. The usefulness of inspections (24 – inspections) and of containment/deterrence (23 – containment/deterrence) was as contested as the conception of Iraq as an imminent threat (01 – imminent). However, actors agreed that there was a serious danger for the international community (08 – international order) if the threat of force (27 – all options) was toothless, and if Iraq would not be punished if it did not comply with the Security Council’s resolutions. This result underlines the argumentation of Strong (2015, 884–885) that by focusing on moral issues (i.e., Iraq as a threat to humanity), proponents of the war gained the upper-hand in the debate. Furthermore, the extensive use of the claim “27 – all options” in 2002 created some kind of a path-dependency for the proponents of war. By referring to this claim, they lured themselves into a *rhetorical trap* and were finally “forced to honor ... [their, FE] commitments in order to protect their credibility and reputation” (Schimmelfennig 2001, 77).

Figure 32.7 displays the affiliation network of the most active speakers (i.e., those with ten or more statements in the debate) and their positions (agreement = black edges, rejection = grey edges) toward four central claims, that is “01 – imminent”, “22 – war”, “23 – containment/deterrence”, and “24 – inspections”. This graph shows a clear discursive strategy of the cabinet (especially PM Tony Blair and Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary Jack Straw) to

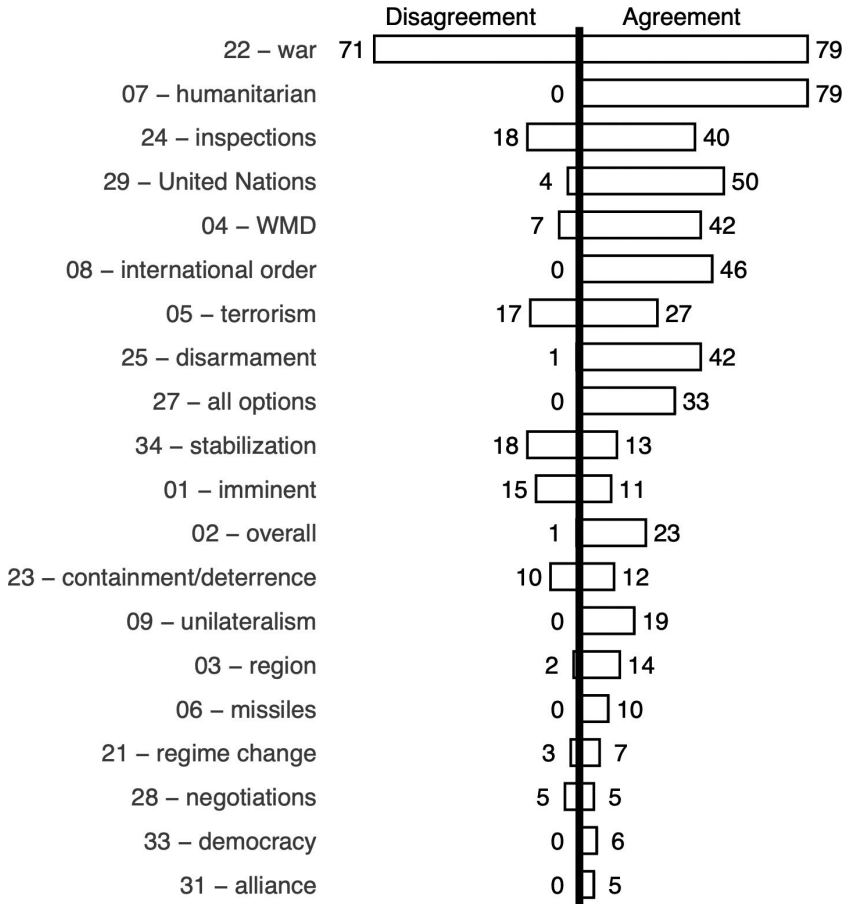


Figure 32.6 Overall agreement/disagreement toward claims in 2003.

warn of an imminent threat emanating from Iraq, calls for war as the final measure to tackle this threat, and questions the effectiveness of containment, deterrence, and inspections to cope with these challenges (see also Strong 2015, 878). The cabinet received support by influential frontbenchers of both the Labour and the Conservative parties, first and foremost Iain Duncan Smith (Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the Conservative Party) and Michael Ancram (Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Conservative Party). Opposition came mostly from the Liberal Democrats and Labour backbenchers (see also Bluth 2004, 887, 880).

Figures 32.8 and 32.9, showing the respective congruence networks of both periods, underline this observation. In 2002, the majority of actors stuck together very closely, by referring to similar claims and united in opposition to war as a policy option. As Figure 32.8 also demonstrates, already in 2002, PM Blair (accompanied by another cabinet member and Tory MPs) deviated from this anti-war discourse. Figure 32.9 finally shows that the PM and his cabinet (high edge betweenness of PM Blair and Foreign Secretary Straw) were successful in convincing a majority of MPs that war is a necessary evil. Hence, the discourse in 2003 is characterized by two opposing discourse coalitions – one coalition in favour and one against war as viable option.

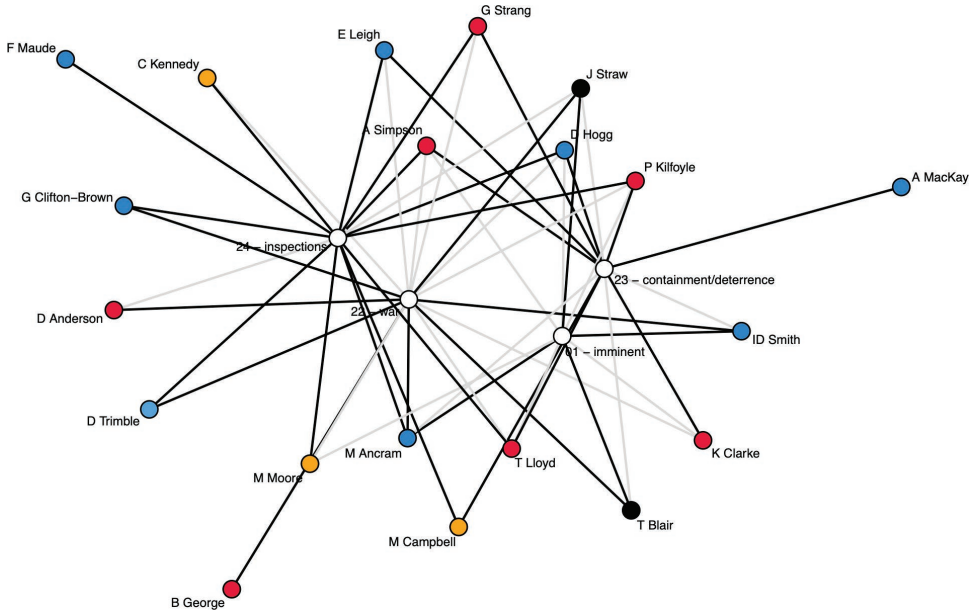


Figure 32.7 Affiliation network of most active speakers and central claims. Black edges indicate agreement with, grey edges indicate rejection of a claim.

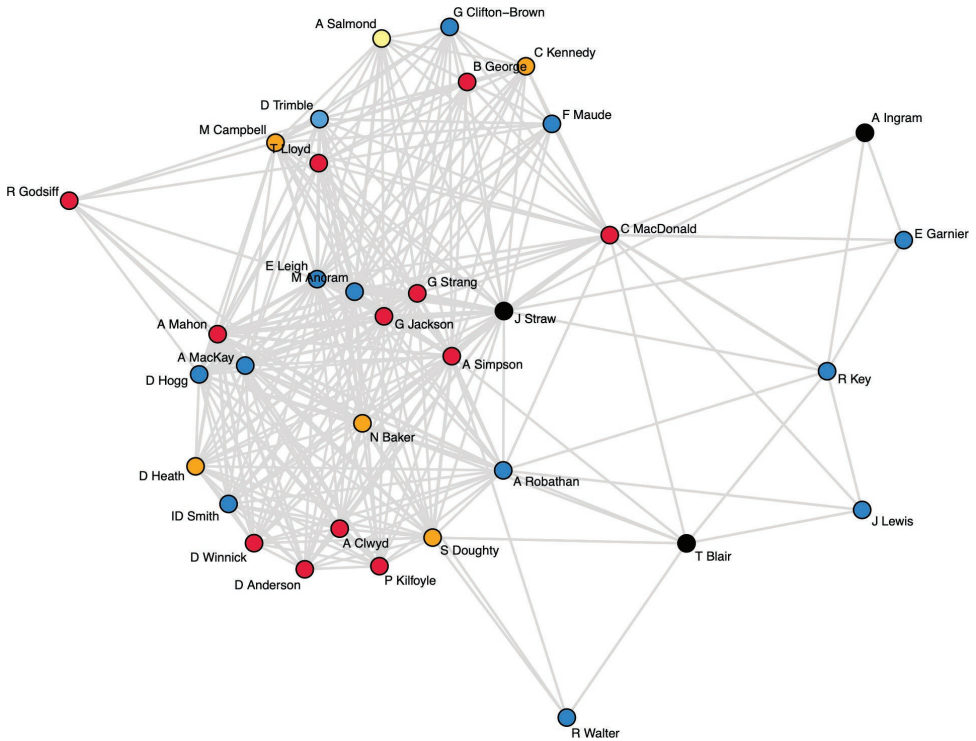


Figure 32.8 Congruence network between most active speakers via shared claims in 2002.

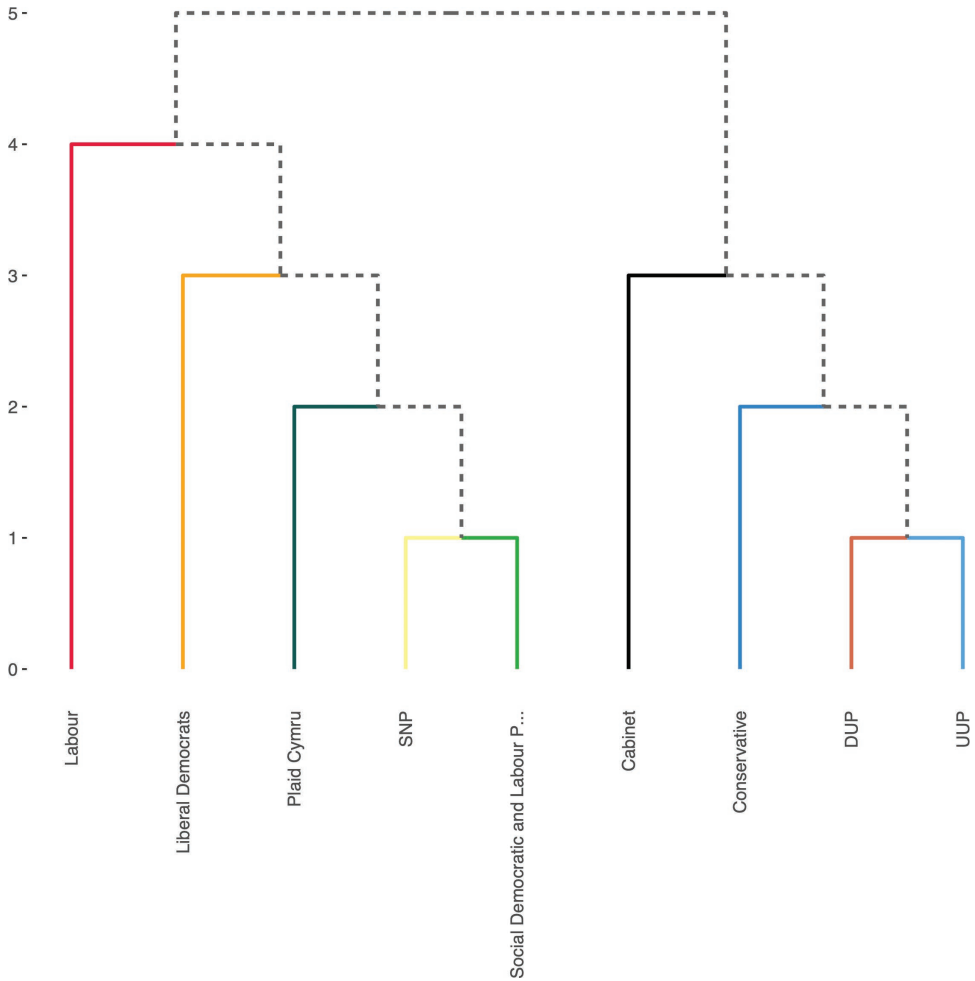


Figure 32.10 Dendrogram of organizations and their distance to each other via shared claims in 2003.

This observation underlines the fact that although the PM was able to secure a solid majority in the House of Commons for a war resolution, backbenchers from his own party opposed this resolution, whereas the Conservative Party and its leadership mainly supported the Cabinet’s approach. As a close reading of the debate contributions shows, it was the Conservative’s general attitude to support military measures in external affairs and to give the executive the leap of faith in such decisions that guaranteed PM Blair and his cabinet a solid majority for radically changing its policies toward Iraq and allowing the UK to enter the war in 2003.

As this empirical illustration exemplifies, DNA allows us to uncover the discursive strategies of actors to gain the upper-hand in the discursive battle. Furthermore, it gives insights into the dynamics of these debates and shows at which points in time, crucial changes of the status quo happened that finally contributed to the introduction of new policies.

Conclusion

With this chapter, I introduced DNA as a promising method for the analysis of foreign policy decision-making. I first traced the evolution of DNA from an instrument in the analysis of public policy to its recent application in transnational politics and finally in FPA. I then argued that DNA is so promising because it enables researchers to tackle the analytical challenges of contemporary developments in global affairs, such as the blurring of line between domestic and international politics, and the trend of contesting foreign policy in the domestic political arena, as well as in the global public sphere. DNA helps us to make these debates of contestation visible, and it thus allows us to better understand the content and the dynamics of discourses that influence foreign policy decision-making in one way or the other. I then showed how DNA proceeds in two stages: first, gathering statements of actors by applying qualitative content analysis; second, by linking these statements in networks using social network analysis. Finally, I demonstrated the applicability of DNA by analysing the debates in the House of Commons on UK's participation in the Iraq War in 2003.

As this chapter demonstrated, the strength of DNA lies in its capacity to make political debates – understood as central elements in foreign policy decision-making – visible. Hence, it allows scholars to integrate political processes on the domestic level of analysis into the study of foreign policy, and to link FPA as a discipline more closely to other fields, first and foremost public policy.

However, there are also limitations to this approach that researchers should be aware of. First, DNA is only able to grasp and display the content and dynamics of political contestation that are openly visible. Decision-making behind closed doors, or in isolated political systems with hardly any public discourse, is difficult to analyse with this approach due to the lack of openly available data. Second, explanations of foreign policy decision-making are multifactorial (Hudson 2005, 2). Hence, the analysis of the political contestation of foreign policy by applying DNA can only contribute to a better understanding of the discursive strategies and the dynamics that result in policies.

In addition, first-time users should focus on three aspects that are crucial for the successful application of DNA. First, they should thoroughly think which discursive arena and what textual data are appropriate to satisfy their specific research interests. Second, first-time users should develop and test the coding-scheme on a small sample of the data, to ensure that the scheme is both appropriate for the analysis of the texts, and that the coders apply it consistently. Third and finally, first-time users should comprehend the basics of social network analysis – that is, understanding what the concept of nodes and edges mean, what centrality measurements are and what they tell us about a network, and how to detect communities in a social network – for applying its techniques adequately and for being able to use the whole potential of the various measures for their analyses.

Concluding, further research should focus on two elements. First, scholars should increasingly apply DNA in combination with different approaches from FPA, especially for the analysis of small-group decision-making, bureaucratic politics, or international diplomacy. Second, quantitative text analysis should investigate the possibilities of (semi) automatically coding and classifying statements. This would address one of the main obstacles for researchers to apply DNA – the time and cost-intensive first stage of coding.

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Note

- 1 For more information on the coding, please have a look at <https://github.com/franzeder/dna-example>.

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