Flood Alert: Using Corpus tools to investigate Professional Flood Risk Discourse.

The increasing severity and frequency of flood events in the UK has focused attention on the need to provide clear flood risk advice to residents. The Flood Risk Communications Public Dialogue Project (2014) brought together the professional bodies involved in providing flood advice and members of the public in order to determine the type of communications which would improve public understanding of flood risk and encourage people to take action. The project identified public concerns that flood risk advice was often framed in a technical or mathematical language and recommended that the language of flood communication should be clarified. This is no surprise; it is already well established in the literature that ‘experts’ and ‘lay people’ understand and talk about risk differently and indeed that ‘risk’ itself lacks clear definition. As empirical research on flood risk communication is limited, this study sets out to further examine professional flood risk discourse in order to provide practical recommendations on improving flood advice. The study adopts a corpus-assisted discourse approach to identify how professional flood risk advice is achieved linguistically and, in particular, seeks to establish linguistic evidence that flood risk is communicated in a register that is not fully compatible with the context.

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