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Word Frequency Analysis as a means to improve writing quality

By John Tello

In the old times of Windows 1.0 back in the 1980's there was a tool called Word Frequency that came with the MS Word distribution package. As someone who uses English as a second language I used it heavily, because it helped me to improve my vocabulary and to correct misspellings beyond the capacity of the available spelling checkers.

That MS Word add-on created a list of all the words in a document, ordered by frequency. It made it easy to detect overuse and/or abuse of a certain word or expression. The little used words were also of help, because sometimes I wrote Thomson instead of Thompson, car instead of cart, or similar errors that the spelling checker does not detect.

Frequency analysis can also be used as a means to establish the "signature" of a certain author, the cultural level of the writer, its use of slang or technical jargon, and other writing features. It is possible to extrapolate the number of words used in a certain text to the total vocabulary of a person. Frequency analysis can accuse some writers to have the vocabulary of a 10-year-old. Or the word-richness of a Chinese-born 2nd year English student.

Frequency analysis combined with a synonym dictionary, as provided in currently available "synonymizer" software, can help writers to enrich its lexicon and avoid abuse of certain expressions.

It is also a means to avoid producing identical text for those who need to make its text different from a source. For instance, a web content writer that needs to fill many similar but not identical pages, and students who want to avoid plagiarism detection and accusation. Rightly or wrongly.

Plagiarism detection also makes use of frequency analysis, because comparison of a given text with the whole Web contents is a major task, and the detection system does not know where to look and where to start. Thus, analysing the word frequency can give some clue on the writing style and the authorship of a given text, without indexing the whole thing.

Search engines use word frequency to establish the subject of web pages. They developed complex linguistic analysis in order to classify pages by subject without human intervention. In turn, webmasters

do the same, to try to fool search engines into assigning high keyword relevance to the pages they create. For instance, using a word with a 3% frequency gives a text good relevance on that word (or keyword, in a search engine context). A 10% frequency is still OK, but it is close to "keyword stuffing", a technique used by webmasters who try to force their websites into the top places of the search engines. Keyword stuffing is penalized by the search engines, and needs to be prevented by smart use of synonyms. Either with synonymizer software or good writing skills.

This article, for instance, has the following Word Frequency :

word : 9, frequency : 7, used : 6, not : 6, search : 6, text: 6, engines: 6, analysis: 5, can: 5, use: 5

I could have edited the text after the analysis, to avoid intensive use of "word" and "frequency" for linguistic purposes. However, it is OK for Search Engine Optimization purposes (attempting to make this article more findable by Google and Yahoo).

Are there any serious writers that still avoid the use of a wired computer? Probably not many can avoid using the Web and the search engines to find the correct word, the most used expression, to perform spelling or grammar checking. Checking word usage in Google is faster and more efficient than using a dictionary, either in paper, disc or the Web. The search engines list every word ever written, not only the well-written words as dictionaries do.

Be prepared to have your texts analysed for word frequency, educational level, plagiarism, technicality, jargon usage and other parameters, in addition to old-fashioned spelling.

According to these tendencies, the ultimate challenge for a job candidate would be to write an essay with paper and pen. Most of us are not prepared to pass such a test.

I expect not to see synonymized versions of this article...

Are You Getting The Most From Your Meta Tags?

By Francisco Aloy

Are You Getting The Most From Your Meta Tags? by Francisco Aloy

As any Web Business startup knows, creating a Website is a bunch of work! You have to bother with content, layout, graphics and HTML links, just to name a few. What about your Meta Tags?

Meta Tags are words that are placed in your web page to provide a title, description and keywords to the Search Engine spiders or crawlers. They are not visible to visitors. To see a sample, open any website and click

"View" on the menubar, and choose "Source." You'll see the Meta Tags up top, within the Head section of the web page.

Most Search Engines will rank your site on how well your Meta Tags provide a description of the content of your web pages. Google is the exception; it also take's into account the number and quality of backward links to your website. Here lately, there's been differing opinions on the relevancy of Google's Page Rank system. Some experts don't consider it accurate or necessary.

Yet and still, there are many other Search Engines and a further study of Meta Tags is in order. We are going to base our Meta Tags revision on a tool known as a word Frequency Counter. It counts and separates the words in a web page or document, giving you an idea of what words are used most.

Here are some Web based Frequency Counters:

<http://www.mytranslate.com/wordfrequency.htm>

http://rainbow.arch.scriptmania.com/tools/word_counter.html

http://www.writewords.org.uk/word_count.asp

http://www.writewords.org.uk/phrase_count.asp

<http://web4future.com/free/wordcount.htm>

<http://www.keywordcount.com/>

Each one of the Frequency Counters above has different uses

and qualifications. The Writewords counter has two flavors: word and phrase count. The Web4Future counter is Web based or a standalone download.

How to use them:

Copy and paste the content of the web page in question and see what the top word frequencies are. You can eliminate most articles and modifiers and concentrate on pure words. As an example: If your web page is about red and blue widgets, the words "red/blue/widgets" should have the highest frequency.

Word Frequency Analysis as a means to improve writing quality

Use the Frequency Counters AFTER you write the web page content. Don't allow word frequency to get in the way of your natural writing style. Do NOT attempt to hit a certain frequency percentage; you'll be penalized by many Search Engines for too much keyword usage.

In Closing

Though the word Frequency Counters are good tools for a quick check, nothing compares to laser-focused writing for good Meta Tags information. Let your writing flow naturally and stay concentrated on your subject keywords. If you do that, you'll find it easy to weave your keywords into your content and Meta Tags.

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by Francisco Aloy

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Agreement reminder, not part of the article:
Please include my working hyperlink in the
resource box. Remove paragraph before posting.

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