

A Corpus-Based Analysis of "MeToo" Discourse in South Korea: Coverage Representation in Korean Newspapers

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Abstract : The "MeToo" movement is a social movement against sexual abuse and harassment. Though the hashtag went viral in 2017 following different cultural flashpoints in different countries, the initial response was quiet in South Korea. This radically changed in January 2018, when a high-ranking senior prosecutor, Seo Ji-hyun, gave a televised interview discussing being sexually assaulted by a colleague. Acknowledging public anger, particularly among women, on the long-existing problems of sexual harassment and abuse, the South Korean media have focused on several high-profile cases. Analyzing the media representation of these cases is a window into the evolving South Korean discourse around "MeToo." This study presents a linguistic analysis of "MeToo" discourse in South Korea by utilizing a corpus-based approach. The term corpus (pl. corpora) is used to refer to electronic language data, that is, any collection of recorded instances of spoken or written language. A "MeToo" corpus has been collected by extracting newspaper articles containing the keyword "MeToo" from BIGKinds, big data analysis, and service and Nexis Uni, an online academic database search engine, to conduct this language analysis. The corpus analysis explores how Korean media represent accusers and the accused, victims and perpetrators. The extracted data includes 5,885 articles from four broadsheet newspapers (Chosun, JoongAng, Hangyore, and Kyunghyang) and 88 articles from two Korea-based English newspapers (Korea Times and Korea Herald) between January 2017 and November 2020. The information includes basic data analysis with respect to keyword frequency and network analysis and adds refined examinations of select corpus samples through naming strategies, semantic relations, and pragmatic properties. Along with the exponential increase of the number of articles containing the keyword "MeToo" from 104 articles in 2017 to 3,546 articles in 2018, the network and keyword analysis highlights 'US,' 'Harvey Weinstein', and 'Hollywood,' as keywords for 2017, with articles in 2018 highlighting 'Seo Ji-Hyun,' 'politics,' 'President Moon,' 'An Ui-Jeong,' 'Lee Yoon-taek' (the names of perpetrators), and '(Korean) society.' This outcome demonstrates the shift of media focus from international affairs to domestic cases. Another crucial finding is that word 'defamation' is widely distributed in the "MeToo" corpus. This relates to the South Korean legal system, in which a person who defames another by publicly alleging information detrimental to their reputation—factual or fabricated—is punishable by law (Article 307 of the Criminal Act of Korea). If the defamation occurs on the internet, it is subject to aggravated punishment under the Act on Promotion of Information and Communications Network Utilization and Information Protection. These laws, in particular, have been used against accusers who have publicly come forward in the wake of "MeToo" in South Korea, adding an extra dimension of risk. This corpus analysis of "MeToo" newspaper articles contributes to the analysis of the media representation of the "MeToo" movement and sheds light on the shifting landscape of gender relations in the public sphere in South Korea.

Keywords : corpus linguistics, MeToo, newspapers, South Korea

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