

The Women-In-Mining Discourse: A Study Combining Corpus Linguistics and Discourse Analysis

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Abstract : One of the major threats identified to successful future mining is that women do not find the industry attractive. Many attempts have been made, for example in Sweden and Australia, to create organizational structures and mining communities attractive to both genders. Despite such initiatives, many mining areas are developing into gender-segregated fly-in/fly out communities dominated by men with both social and economic consequences. One of the challenges facing many mining companies is thus to break traditional gender patterns and structures. To do this increased knowledge about gender in the context of mining is needed. Since language both constitutes and reproduces knowledge, increased knowledge can be gained through an exploration and description of the mining discourse from a gender perspective. The aim of this study is to explore what conceptual ideas are activated in connection to the physical/geographical mining area and to work within the mining industry. We use a combination of critical discourse analysis implying close reading of selected texts, such as policy documents, interview materials, applications and research and innovation agendas, and analyses of linguistic patterns found in large language corpora covering millions of words of contemporary language production. The quantitative corpus data serves as a point of departure for the qualitative analysis of the texts, that is, suggests what patterns to explore further. The study shows that despite technological and organizational development, one of the most persistent discourses about mining is the conception of dangerous and unfriendly areas infused with traditional notions of masculinity ideals and manual hard work. Although some of the texts analyzed highlight gender issues, and describe gender-equalizing initiatives, such as wage-mapping systems, female networks and recruitment efforts for women executives, and thereby render the discourse less straightforward, it is shown that these texts are not unambiguous examples of a counter-discourse. They rather illustrate that discourses are not stable but include opposing discourses, in dialogue with each other. For example, many texts highlight why and how women are important to mining, at the same time as they suggest that gender and diversity are all about women: why mining is a problem for them, how they should be, and what they should do to fit in. Drawing on a constitutive view of discourse, knowledge about such conflicting perceptions of women is a prerequisite for succeeding in attracting women to the mining industry and thereby contributing to the development of future mining.

Keywords : discourse, corpus linguistics, gender, mining

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