

Terminology and Collocational Phenomena in United Nations Discourse on Violence against Women from 1995 to 2019: A Critical and Corpus-Based Analysis

Célia Atzeni

PhD student - supervisors : Christopher Gledhill and Florence Binard

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Introduction

the language used to discuss male violence is part of the problem - how an issue is discussed becomes how we think about it. (Philipps and Henderson, 1999)

the word is the most sensitive index of social changes, and what is more, of changes still in the process of growth [...] (Bakhtine, 1986)

- debates on what constitutes an act of VAW eg questioning of ENVEFF survey results (FR)
- controversy over use of certain terms eg *crime of passion* / new terms eg *femicide*
- tension between « langue de coton » (lit. “cotton language”) (Rist, 2002) and influence of feminist discourse

Study's aim

This study aims to determine...

- if/how phraseology = “preferred ways of producing meaning” (Gledhill, 1995 ; Gledhill & Kübler 2015 ; Pecman & Gledhill 2018 ; Gledhill, 2019) in UN discourse on VAW have changed since the 1995 Beijing Conference
- if these “preferred ways of producing meaning” contribute to maintaining the *status quo* or are likely to change it (Bloor & Bloor, 2013)
- if there are any noticeable differences between EN and FR versions of UN texts on VAW

Methodology

- create a large corpus of UN texts on VAW
→ 5.5 million words / EN - FR / reports and press releases / diachronic (Salem, 1991)
- use semi-automatic tools for corpus analysis → TXM, TermoStat (Heiden et al., 2010)
- consult the UN's terminological database → UNTerm (Raus, 2013)
- relate the data extracted from the corpus to historical facts / other texts or discourses (Wodak & Meyer, 2009)

Main results

- lexis between 1995 and 2009 in UN texts on VAW very different from that between 2010 and 2019
- terms such as “crime of passion” and « crime passionnel » disappeared in 2013
- new terms such as “femicide” / « féminicide » and “violence against women and girls” appear in the 2010s
- identification of seasonal collocates : male + violence in 2009
- French resistance to use of term “gender”
- very high nominalisation rate in my English corpus
- agent avoidance in passive structures / avoiding gender identification of perpetrators of acts of VAW

Main issues to date

1. how to find “seasonal collocates” ? (Baker et al., 2008)

“collocates that are very frequent in a small number of years” in a diachronic corpus

accidentally came across seasonal collocates (male + violence in 2009) while looking for linguistic evidence of the backgrounding of men in my corpus

Seasonal collocates = punctual phenomena. How to find more seasonal collocates? How can I decide which words and contexts to observe to find them?

2. agent avoidance in passive structures = one of the preferred ways of producing meaning in my corpus. It appears to be used to mitigate men's responsibility in acts of VAW. Gives the impression that VAW is somehow "self-caused" (Van Leeuwen, 2009), that it just happens.

- (1) violence is the sixth leading cause of death among women in the Dominican Republic, and [...] **rape** occurs once every six hours.

Apart from nominalisations and passives without agents, what linguistic strategies can be used to produce this impression in English and in other languages?

Thank you for your attention !

Contact information :
celia.atz@gmail.com

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