Abstract

This study aimed to review discourses on child abuse that are formed in online communities related to child care information and examine interactions that contribute to the formation, criticizing violent environments against the growth of the social week or children and providing how to cope better with the harmful conditions. For this aim, the study selected some credible online communities that provide child care information and collected data from them for this research. More specifically, the research reviewed materials and replies regarding child abuse that are posted in those online communities. And then, this study analyzed the posts by using Fairclough’s Method of Critical Discourse Analysis in order to determine the superficial and social meanings of discourse on child abuse and socio-cultural implications of that abuse. The analysis found that superficially, information about domestic violence and trustless early childhood education institutions brings the mass media-based formation of discourse on child abuse which focuses its lenses on the traditional notions of corporal punishment and discipline and puts child abusers under intense criticism and hatred. Socially, discourse on child abuse is formed in conjunction with social factors including images from mass media that show abusive parents, family discord, poor domestic environment and excessive child protection involving corporal punishment or discipline. Socio-culturally, finally, discourse on child abuse has practical implications for the need to take measures for children’s human rights and against child abuse, increase child protection agencies and provide parent education. This study is significant in that it tried to help raise social attention to child abuse and provide social or institutional solutions to the problem by investigating discourse on child abuse that is formed in the online child care communities and discussing problems like poor domestic environment that my contribute to child abuse.

[Keywords] Investigation, Child Abuse, Theory of Critical Discourse, Fairclough, Community Discourse

1. Introduction

In the past, Korea had little discrimination between abuse and discipline under the influence of Confucianism. In a similar vein, child abuse at the nursery home or school was considered not as a social problem, but just as a reasonable corporal punishment. But recently, an increasing number of online cafes and social network services (SNS) based on the development of Internet technology and the proliferation of smart devices are quickly spreading information related to child abuse, contributing to a social recognition that views child abuse as a crime[1].

Early childhood exposure to abuse is even more influential to human development than adulthood exposure to it[2]. The abusive experience in the period of growth has negative effects on emotions, self-esteem, peer communication skills, interpersonal relations and so on[3][4]. Negative influences that child abuse on physical and mental development are rather sustained[5]. Notably, it’s possible that children who are the victims of abuse will show social aggressiveness as they grow
up[6]. Lately, thus, child abuse is apparently emerging as a serious social issue. In a similar vein, many different causes of child abuse are being newly identified, especially in conjunction with the prosperity of online communities. All of these situations are bringing child abuse into the great theme of social discourse. The way that such discourse is formed and developed is affected a lot by the online world. In particular, online child care communities are becoming a new area of discourse on child care-related issues including child abuse, in which the community members share feelings, thoughts, emotions, distress, the sense of belonging of homogeneity and exchange a variety of child care information that may actually influence the attitudes or behaviors of child care[7]. Traditionally, child care was a matter of discussions by a limited range of people, who are physically near, like family, relatives and friends. Virtual media or online communities are now replacing the tradition with the formation and development of social discourse that is even more influential. This study looks into the online child care communities where parents’ talks about child abuse lead to the formation of discourse on the matter. And the study attempts to investigate social and/or institutional contexts in which those intercourse are interactively produced and practiced by using Fairclough’s(1995) framework of critical discourse analysis. This move would, expectedly, contribute to making online discussions on child abuse emerge as socially influential discourses and ultimately realizing legal and institutional improvements to eradicate the abusive situation[8].

2. Critical Discourse Analysis(CDA)

Discourse has different meanings that are differently interpreted. From the view of polysemy, discourse may have a variety of meanings ranging from ‘a series of statements, utterance, dialogues or discussions’ to ‘spoken words or conservations in opposition to written texts’[9]. In general, however, discourse is defined as a body of linguistic and semiotic constructs including utterance, texts, genres or gestures that have a particular meaning or message[8]. Critical discourse analysis is to examine such structural relationships in discourse, whether spoken or written, as dominance, discrimination, power and control and reveal power relations or ideologies hidden in discourse, ultimately analyzing casual relations between discourse and social practices. This study tried to develop discussions with reference to Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis in which the substantial or situational contexts of social environment are considered important.

Fairclough(1995) attempted critical discourse analysis from a comprehensive view that bridges between texts and social practices. For the attempt, he assumed 3 conceptual dimensions like text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. The process of discourse analysis is comprised of describing the characteristics of text, interpreting relations between discourse practice and text and explaining relations between discourse and socio-cultural practice[8]. In the dimension of text, what to be analyzed are the contents and form of discourse. In the dimension of discourse practice, interactions between texts are focused. In discourse analysis based on the same dimension, the nature of the process of meaning formation is examined with a combination of texts taken into consideration and the texts are correlated to social practice. When it comes to the dimension of socio-cultural practice, discourse analysis is made in conjunction with different socio-cultural levels like situational, institutional or social contexts under the assumption that power and ideologies may affect those contexts[10].

In critical discourse analysis, the above dimensions of text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice are used as frameworks to analyze discourse in form of description, interpretation or explanation. More specifically, the analysis provides a description of the linguistic characteristics of discourse from the dimension of text, an interpretation of relations between texts from the dimension of discourse practice and an explanation of relations between discourse and social
practice from the dimension of socio-cultural practice. This study was proceeded based on the three dimensions as shown in <Figure 1>.

Figure 1. Fairclough’s framework of critical discourse analysis[8].

3. Subjects and Procedure of Analysis

This study attempted to look into discourse on child abuse found in the online child care communities and examine mothers’ perceptions of that abuse, determining implications that the discourse may have. For the move, the study tried to review materials and replies that were written and posted by members of the communities between Oct. 1, 2017 and Sep. 30, 2018. For the review, above all, this study selected a particular online child care community that seemed appropriate after considering the membership size of that community and Internet shares by major portal sites. As a result, this study finally selected J child care community with 673,742 members that is linked through Naver, a portal site that is highest or 68.96% in Internet share as shown in <Figure 2>.

Figure 2. Internet Shares by Major Portal Sites(2017.10.01.~2018.09.30.)(11).

4. Data Analysis

Online communities are where a lot of verbal interactions, discussions and discourse on a variety of issues are daily and actively made. Taking a notice of the fact, this study focused on texts regarding child abuse that are materials or replies posted in a particular online child care community, and examined how those texts are combined into discourse on child abuse. In association, the study analyzed the texts based on the three dimensions of Fairclough’s framework of critical discourse analysis, as shown in <Table 1>.
**Table 1.** Process of Data Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of analysis</th>
<th>Key concept for analysis</th>
<th>Base of text analysis</th>
<th>Data for analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description from the dimension of text</strong></td>
<td>Parents’ ideology as to child abuse</td>
<td>Words reiteratively found in discourse on child abuse, statements of experience related to child abuse found in that discourse</td>
<td>Materials or replies concerning child abuse that are posted in the online child care community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social relations in discourse on child abuse</td>
<td>Nurseries, kindergartens, domestic violence, family discord, CCTVs, police, reports, news articles, newspapers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identity(power) of the lead in discourse on child abuse</td>
<td>Teachers, parents, children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretation from the dimension of discourse practice</strong></td>
<td>Interpreting social situations that influence the formation of child abuse ideology</td>
<td></td>
<td>Policies, news, information or theses concerning child abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation from the dimension of socio-cultural practice</strong></td>
<td>Examining and explaining child abuse-related policies and the roles of concerned authorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In data analysis, first of all, this study collected texts from the selected online child care community, which are all of the materials and replies regarding child abuse posted in the same community. Next, the study sorted out words reiteratively found and unique or symbolic expressions appeared in the texts and then categorized the words and expressions, through which some themes were drawn out. Based on those themes, finally, this study made the final categorization of discourse on child abuse as shown in <Table 2>, for which the research consulted with experts in psychological counseling for children three times over 2 weeks.

**Table 2.** Final Categorization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of analysis</th>
<th>Category of content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description from the dimension of text</strong></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse that is formed due to distrust and concerns over early childhood education institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse that is reproduced based on the consumption of others’ experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse that is formed via mass media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse in connection with the matter of excessive child protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse in connection with the matter of domestic violence arisen out of family breakage or discord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on child abuse prevention by legal or institutional measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discourse on the criticism or hatred of child abusers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Findings

This study attempted to look into discourse on child abuse that is formed by parents in the online child care community, examine how the formation is made within socio-cultural texts and determine different meanings of the discourse. Through these moves, the study sought to raise social attention to the victims of child abuse as well as problems such as family discord that may contribute to child abuse, ultimately helping create and develop social or institutional solutions to child abuse.

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows.

First, when viewed superficially, discourse on child abuse is formed due to distrust or concerns over early childhood education institutions and in connection with social awareness concerning domestic problems such as family breakage, family discord and domestic violence. Superficially, also, that discourse apparently includes corporal punishment or discipline, which was traditionally tolerated in conjunction with excessive child protection or under the name of domestic education, in the range of child abuse. Recently, the discourse is prospering as an increasing number of experiences related to child abuse are consumed through mass media or communities.

In a similar vein, discussions as to the criticism and hatred of child abusers are being made as a part of the discourse.

Second, the social meanings of discourse on child abuse are formed in association with the mass media image of abusive parents or with a reflection of factor such as corporal punishment or discipline that may be due to poor domestic environment including family discord or excessive child protection. The mass media often focuses on domestic environment in the coverage of child abuse incidents, contributing to the negative view of broken or low-income family and to discourse that drives home an assumption that poor domestic environment like family discord is one of the primary causes of child abuse.

Third, from the view of socio-cultural practice, discourse on child abuse suggests that some actions should be taken and implemented. Those actions include establishing more powerful policies for children’s human rights protection or child abuse prevention in the wake of a recent increase in child abuse incidents, increasing and expanding child protection agencies to keep the victims of child abuse from returning home and suffering the same problem again, and providing parent education that aims to recover the proper function of family under constant attention and support from communities.
6. References

6.1. Journal articles


6.2. Thesis degree


6.3. Books


6.4. Additional references


Author

Bae Gu-taek / Masan University Admissions Offices
B.A. Silla University
M.A. Kyungnam University
Ph.D. Kyungnam University

Research field

Major career
- 2008~present. Masan University, Admissions Offices
- 2018~present. Korean Council for University College Education Admissions Offices Vice Chairman