



On the Semantic Prosody of Career Women in Chinese

Web Reportage

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Abstract

The present study tries to unveil the images of career women depicted on the internet within the framework of corpus linguistics. Based on web corpora, internet reportage of women from the fields of education, politics, business, media, medicine, law, and tourist industry are investigated. Through collocates analysis, it is found that all the above career women demonstrate unfavorable semantic prosody, a unique local semantic prosody on the internet. The unfavorable collocates can be further classified into the semantic sets of erotic events, misfortunes and job scandals. However, through Keyword analysis of reportage of women in China's mainstream newspapers, there presents a quite positive women image. Finally, the author makes possible interpretations of the causes of the violation of semantic prosody on the web and possible consequences it will bring, with two solutions being suggested at the end.

Keywords: career women, semantic prosody, Keyword analysis, web corpus

1. Introduction

The study of media and gender is a vigorous research field in communication studies. Since the 1970s, media and gender studies, which aim to reveal and criticize stereotyped images about gender through the analysis of media discourse, have become an important research field of the critical school in communication studies (Cao, 2005: 3). Sunderland (2006) further illustrates that gender studies are focused on discourse, gender identity, representation, construction and performance of gender. In China, much research has been conducted concerning the study of media and gender (Bu, 2001; Liu 2004, et al.), especially the media of newspapers and magazines. However, few gender studies are carried out through the analysis of web media. As the "fourth media" after newspapers, radios, and televisions, the internet has developed into the world's second communication network only second to the telephone network (Bi, 2007: 69). Owing to its wide popularity and easy availability, the number of people surfing the internet has subsequently sharply increased, enabling the internet to become a primary place for people to obtain information and communicate ideas. Therefore, the question whether there are stereotyped or even prejudiced representations of women images on the web becomes the primary motivation of the present study.

Studies on media and gender have been generally carried out in the framework of communication studies, with few studies from the perspective of linguistics. Researchers like Hu (2007) begin to propose a new way in communication study: discourse analysis, which precludes the interdisciplinary study of women images depicted on various media. As far as discourse is concerned, corpus data can be effective in analyzing various types of discourse (Ma, 2009:28). The present study, therefore, will analyze women images on the web based on web corpora.

Career women are a special woman group who on the one hand have their own careers and contribute a lot to the society as a whole. On the other, they have to shoulder familial responsibilities. They somewhat represent the ideal goal pursued by the Feminist Movement because they can compete equally with men and realize their values not just as housewives. They are also expected to gain respect from society. Then what are their real images presented on the web? The reportage of career women from education, politics, business, media, medicine, law, and tourist industries is chosen as research subjects.



2. Theoretical framework

Sinclair claims that “the recognition that semantic prosody is a constant feature of text is one of the most important contributions of corpus work so far” (2003: 178). With fresh data from COBUILD, he studied the phrase “set in” and found this phrase primarily co-occurred with unpleasant state of affairs. Louw further described this phenomenon by defining semantic prosody as “the consistent aura of meaning with which the form is imbued by its collocates” (1993: 157). Stubbs expanded the notion of semantic prosody by claiming that words can also collocate with semantic sets, as well as with positive or negative groupings of words. His study showed that the word “job” can be both positive and negative whilst the word “career” is always positive (1995: 253). He also found that the word “unemployment” usually collocates with the semantic set of statistics (ibid: 254).

Semantic prosody is not confined to a single word, whilst it can transfer from one word to another or even to the whole text, just as Partington defines semantic prosody as “the spreading of connotational coloring beyond single word boundaries” (1998: 68). In the meantime, semantic prosody has important functions as to express speaker/writer’s attitude or evaluation (Louw, 1993). Sinclair (1998) echoes Louw’s view by claiming that when the usage of a word gives an impression of an attitudinal or pragmatic meaning, it is called semantic prosody. He asserts that “the use of a word in a particular context carries extra meaning of an emotive or attitudinal nature” (Sinclair, 2003: 117). They are meant “semantic preference or attitudinal preference” by Hunston (2007).

A large amount of empirical research on semantic prosody with the help of corpora has been vigorously carried out both at home and abroad. Some scholars broaden the study of semantic prosody in English to contrastive studies of languages between English and other languages (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001; Xiao & McEnery, 2006, etc.). The research of Tognini-Bonelli (2001) not only enriches the studies of semantic prosody but also greatly contributes to translation studies. Xiao & McEnery (2006) find out that the semantic prosody of Chinese is “more sharply divided between the clearly negative and positive ends of the continuum”. The study of semantic prosody has also offered powerful guidance on the research of second language acquisition (Zhang and Zhou, 2008) and lexicography (Ji and Wu, 2000). It has even been expanded to the field of critical discourse analysis (Mi and Zhou, 2009). Through quantitative analysis, by combining the notion of semantic prosody and the framework of critical discourse analysis, Mi and Zhou’s research revealed how ideology manipulates the semantic prosody of “China” in news discourse. Likewise, by using quantitative as well as qualitative analyses, the author will establish the semantic prosody of career women and find out how it is manipulated by the web media.

3. Research design

3.1 Research questions

To get as a comprehensive panorama of the web-page reportage of career women as possible, this study covers the reportage of women from the following seven fields: education, politics, business, media, medicine, law and tourism, namely, 女教师(nv jiaoshi; female teacher) and 女博士(nv boshi; female doctor) from the educational circle, 女官员(nv guanyuan; female official) from the politics, 女上司(nv shangsi; female boss) from the business world, 女记者(nv jizhe; female reporter) from the media circle, 女护士(nv hushi; female nurse) from the medicine profession, 女律师(nv lvshi; female lawyer) from the law circle and finally 女导游(nv daoyou; female tour guide) from tourist industry. See Table 1 below for a clear view of the words selected.

Table 1. The eight Chinese words chosen

Professions	Words
Education	female teacher, female doctor
Politics	female official
Business	female boss
Media	female reporter
Medicine	female nurse
Law	female lawyer
Tourism	female tour guide



A working definition of “word” has to be given in advance in this study. “Word” is defined as a sequence of valid characters with a word separator at each end. This definition works well for the English language since there are spaces between each continuous string of letters. However, Chinese is the language not segmented by spaces between characters. There are single-character words (书-book, 水-water, etc.), two-character words (苹果-apple, 桌子-table, etc.) and words with three or more characters. There have long been controversies concerning the definitions of what a Chinese word and an English word is. Discussions on the definition of “word” will not be carried out in this research. Modern Chinese words can be divided into 18 basic classes like nouns (book, water, etc.) and determiners (male, female, etc.) (Yu, 1998: 27). So 女教师(nv jiaoshi; female teacher) is made up of a determiner 女 (nv; female) and a noun 教师(jiaoshi; teacher). In the present study, for the convenience of study, they are viewed as one word, although its English equivalent—“female teacher” is a unit of meaning consisting of two words.

Thus, the following two research questions are to be answered in this study:

- (1) What semantic prosodies of career women are presented on the internet?
- (2) What are the key words or characteristic expressions in the reportage of women on Women’s Day in China’s mainstream newspapers?

3.2 Research tools

To ensure the efficiency and objectivity of the relevant data retrieved, research tools adopted in this research involve the software of Chinese segmentation, Wordsmith 5.0, and Multi-language Corpus Processing Software (MCPS).

3.3 Research Procedures

The following two steps are to be taken: firstly, to discover how the web depicts career women’s images and the underlying reasons and consequences of such depiction; secondly, to find out how women’s images are presented in China’s mainstream newspapers on Women’s Day. For the former part, the author will collect reportage about career women on the web with the help of Webcorp site (www.webaspcorpus.org). According to Lv (2009:345), web reportage has large amounts of information, but most or even the entire information is contained in news headlines. Since headlines cover the main contents of reportage, and the body of each reportage is always consistent with its title, titles of the reportage of career women are taken into study. The choosing of headlines as research objects is also based on the fact that when people browse web pages, they usually tend to skim through news titles first, and then decide which piece of news to read further. Thus headlines of each reportage are vital for presenting women images. Therefore, the data collected from the web in the present study are confined to a collection of news headlines. For the latter part, the author builds a corpus of about 50 000 Chinese words from newspaper reports about women on Women’s Day (shortened as WDC: Women’s Day Corpus) and a reference corpus of 500 000 words from digital Wenhui Newspaper (shortened as RC: Reference Corpus) and then finds out key words in WDC through Keyword Analysis with Wordsmith.

4. Research findings

4.1 Semantic prosody of “female teacher”

Firstly, sequencing collocates located on the second from the left (N-2) of “female teacher”. With meaningful collocates extracted and unrecognizable words eliminated, there are 30 types (67 tokens) of collocates. These words can be generally classified into attributive adjectives, nouns and verbs or verbal expressions. According to the semantics of these collocates, they can be divided into evaluative, descriptive and behavioral collocates.

1) Evaluative collocates: 性感(sexy), 极品(rare), 感性(sensitive), 麻辣(hot), 全才(all-round), etc. These words evaluate what female teacher is. 性感(sexy) is a word which is a very feminine characteristic of women, not a requirement of a teacher. When it is used before “female teacher”, a profession whose primary goal is to impart knowledge, it is believed to be used negatively. It is the same with “极品”, a neologism defined as a person who is extremely unpleasant. Therefore, except collocates 漂亮(beautiful), 温柔(tender)and 全才(all-round), all the evaluative collocates show a strong sense of feminine or negative meaning, such as collocates of sexy, flirtatious, sentimental, cold and wild, etc. These feminine qualities are what the society traditionally requires of a woman but not of a teacher.

2) Descriptive collocates: 已婚(married), 山村(village), 中学(middle school), 音乐(musical), etc. These words are whether to define the marital status of female teachers or to describe the affiliation school where they teach, etc. They don’t denote language users’ subjective evaluations.

3) Behavioral collocates: 调教(flirt), 诱惑(seduce), etc. These collocates demonstrate that whether female teachers carry on a clandestine love affair or are sexually abused, or seduced by others.

As is shown in the above classifications, except the descriptive collocates, the other words are “Experiential-Interpersonal” bi-matafunctional lexis, words which have referential functions and at the same time denote “evaluative modality” (Peng, 2002: 131), with a strong derogatory sense implied. Thus, the establishment of the semantic prosody of “female teacher” is presented as the following:

Table 2. Semantic prosody of *female teacher* (analysis of N-2 collocates)

Semantic prosody	Collocates	Frequencies	Percentage
Unfavorable	性感(sexy), 极品(rare), 风流(dissolute), 感性(sensitive), 麻辣(hot), 调教(flirt), etc	36	54%
Neutral	已婚(married), 中学(middle school), 家庭(family), 干部(officials), 日本(Japanese), etc	27	40%
Favorable	漂亮(beautiful), 全才(all-round), 温柔(tender)	4	6%
Total		67	100%

Secondly, sequencing collocates located on the six from the right (N+1 to N+6) of *female teacher*. The collocates in this study are not supposed to be as regular as a set of phrases, so manual analysis of each concordance is needed to find meaningful collocates. Altogether there are 50 collocates, with 7 words or expressions like 个人事迹(personal experiences), 故事(stories), 退休年龄(retirement age), 发言稿(speech), 发型(hair style), 剧情介绍(introduction to a story), 晒语录(publicize classical classroom language) describing female teacher’s personal stories, retirement age, or hair styles, etc., which are believed to neutral. However, the remaining 43 words or sequence of words denote negative meanings and these collocates can be semantically grouped into three categories (with their frequencies and percentages behind):

- 1) Indecent photos (20) (46.5%): 不雅照(indecent photos) (10), 艳照(nude photos) (3), 生活照曝光(exposure of indecent photos) (3), etc. All these photos are obviously too private and confidential to be seen by the public. However, they make up such a large percentage, nearly half of the total.
- 2) Erotic events (14) (32.5%): 私密情事(secret love affairs) (2), 三角恋(love triangle), etc. All these words and expressions have negative meanings.
- 3) Suffering misfortunes (9) (21%): 自缢身亡(suicide) (2), 玩出车祸(car accident), 被迫下跪(be forced to kneel), etc. Female teachers suffer suicide, car accident, suspension or degeneration. These collocates suggest female teachers as victims are in need of care and protection.

In sum, the semantic prosody of “female teacher” in the web reportage can be established as follows:

Table 3. Semantic prosody of *female teacher*

Semantic prosody	Collocates retrieved on the left of “female teacher”		Collocates retrieved on the right of “female teacher”	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unfavorable	36	54%	43	86%
Neutral	27	40%	7	14%
Favorable	4	6%	0	0%
Total	67	100%	50	100%

4.2 *Semantic prosody of other career women*

After analyses of N-2 collocates of the other 7 types of career women, research findings suggest that the overwhelming majority of collocates are experiential words—words which only have referential functions. Among these experiential words, most of them can be semantically classified into geographic locations or subsidiary organizations career women belong to, which means that key information of the reportage is distributed on the right side.

In the meantime, it is found out that collocates on the left of “female boss” and “female lawyer” reach statistical importance. Among the 74 frequencies of collocates of “female boss”, 56 collocates (76%) are in the names of novels, games, TV series, music or videos. For example, “漂亮” (beautiful) occurs 18 times as names of novels. Likewise, among the 65 occurrences of collocates on N-2 position of “female lawyer”, 39 frequencies (60%) are the names of TV series, cartoons and novels about “female lawyer”. That suggests that “female boss” and “female lawyer”, instead of being respected, are somewhat treated as the source of amusement or entertainment in the public.

Since the main information of the reportage is located on the right side of key words, meaningful co-occurring words on the right side are extracted and then classified into unfavorable, neutral and favorable collocates, according to their semantics. Considering the large amount of data, see Appendix for the classification of collocates of *female doctor* as an exemplification. We can get the overall semantic prosodies of career women listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Semantic prosodies of career women

SP(%)	Female teacher	Female doctor	Female official	Female boss	Female reporter	Female nurse	Female lawyer	Female tour guide
unfavorable	86	83.3	88	98	72	90	66.7	89
neutral	14	13.1	7	2	8	1	31.6	8
favorable	0	3.6	5	0	20	9	1.7	3

(Note: for the convenience of study, only collocates on the right are counted; SP stands for semantic prosody)

It can be seen that unfavorable collocates make up the predominant percentage of the collocates of career women. Furthermore, research findings show that most of the unfavorable meanings are either classified into the group of erotic events, misfortunes career women suffer or job scandals they are involved (cf. Appendix for the collocate classification of *female doctor*). We can get a clear view of the most frequent semantic groups of the unfavorable collocates in the following table:

Table 5. Semantic sets of unfavorable collocates of career women

Words	Semantic sets			
Female teacher	Indecent photos	Erotic events	Misfortunes	Others
	46.5%	32.5%	21%	0%
Female doctor	Love and life struggles	Misfortunes	Being alienated	Others
	43%	37%	9%	11%
Female official	Job scandals	Misfortunes	Erotic events	Others
	46%	20%	11%	23%
Female boss	Erotic events	Handling of uneasy relationship		Others
	58%	23%		19%
Female reporter	Erotic events	Misfortunes	Embarrassment	Others
	41%	34%	25%	0%



Female nurse	Erotic events		Others	
	82%		18%	
Female lawyer	Erotic events	Job scandals		Others
	63%	24%		13%
Female tour guide	Immoral conduct	Erotic events	Misfortunes	Others
	58%	28%	11%	3%

It has to be pointed out that “love and life struggles” of *female doctor* means that women with the highest academic degree are faced with difficulties involving choosing or getting along with life-time partners, or balancing their work and life (cf. collocates like 征婚-advertise for a life partner, 爱情-love, 择偶-mate selection, etc.). Besides, *female doctor* is also alienated as 灭绝师太(ugly and ruthless), 珠穆朗玛峰(Mount Qomolangma) (which means that female doctors are like Mount Everest that can hardly be reached or conquered), 第三种人(non-human). For *female official*, 46% collocates fall into the semantic group of job scandals, such as conducting fraud to fight over heritages (造假争遗产), suspected of being involved in embezzlement (涉侵吞单位公款), accumulating wealth by unfair means (疯狂敛财), taking bribery, etc. For *female boss*, “handling uneasy relationship” means that it is difficult for employees to get along or curry favor with “female boss”, which can be seen from collocates like how to get along with female boss (如何相处) and to please female boss with gifts (送礼物). For *female lawyer*, “job scandals” refers to 9 occurrences (24%) of frequencies of collocates, e.g. to commit perjury (作伪证), to illegally make money (捞钱), to practise bribery (行贿), etc. The “immoral conduct” of “female tour guide” refers to collocates like to scold tourists (骂游客), to force tourists to buy products promoted by them (威逼购物), etc.

4.3 Keyword analysis of Women’s Day Corpus

There are approximately 50 000 words in the corpus of 43 reportages on women from China’s influential newspapers on Women’s Day (WDC). The size of the reference corpus of reports from Wenhui Daily is over 500 000, 10 times larger than WDC. After segmentation with the Chinese segmentation software, key words are retrieved from Wordsmith as follows (with the first ten key words listed):

Table 6. The first ten key word from WDC

N	Key word	Freq.	%	RC.		Keyness
				Freq.	RC. %	
1	她	278	1.1448	85	0.0325	993.24
2	女性	177	0.7289	5		828.85
3	女	155	0.6383	25		624.39
4	妇女	125	0.5147	10		547.3
5	她们	64	0.2635	8		266.85
6	秀	59	0.243	10		235.66
7	戎	52	0.2141	3		233.7
8	三八红旗手	45	0.1853	0		221.92
9	冠	48	0.1977	3		214.43
10	巾帼	42	0.173	0		207.12

(Note: Freq. refers to the frequency of key words in the corpus under discussion where these key words are key; % refers to the percentage they make up in the corpus in question; RC. Freq. refers to the frequency of key words in the reference corpus; RC. % is their frequency in the reference corpus; Keyness is the statistical significance obtained by comparing patterns of frequencies of the two corpora)

It is obvious that the first five key words retrieved—她(he), 女性(female), 女(female), 妇女(women) and 她

们(they; groups of females) occur more often than would be expected by chance in comparison with the reference corpus. It is easy to be explained since texts in WDC are all about reportage of women. This finding is believed to verify that data obtained through Keyword analysis are effective.

Through concordance analysis, the sixth word 秀 mostly refers to a woman's name-戎冠秀, an outstanding model devoting her lifetime to China throughout the Anti-Japanese War, China Liberation War and China's modernization drive. The other 11 concordances of 秀 refer to the fashion show female elites from the business circle perform to celebrate Women's Day. Likewise, 戎 and 冠 are proper nouns in the model woman's name. The eighth key word 三八红旗手 (woman pace-setter) is an honor awarded to outstanding women on Women's Day, whilst the tenth word 巾帼 originally refers to the headdresses women wear, but now it refers to females, and in a rather commendatory sense, just like a proverb in Chinese:巾帼不让须眉, which means women are by no means inferior to men. To establish the semantic prosody of the word 巾帼, corpus data are further employed. The following table displayed is the pattern of collocates of 巾帼.

Table 7. Pattern of collocates of 巾帼

N	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	的	全国	创	和	集体	巾帼	建功	标兵	代表	集体	表彰
2			三八红 旗手	先	全国		文明	岗	三八红 旗手	表示	热烈
3					争优			全国			

(Note: Collocates of 巾帼 are displayed in terms of their frequency within each column, i.e. the top word in each column is the word most frequently found in that position, the second word being the second most frequent. L1 refers to the first adjacent position on the left of the search word. N refers to sequence of word frequencies.)

It can be seen from the table that except 的(possessive article), 全国(national), 和(and) and 表示(express), most collocates have positive meanings, such as 建功(make huge contributions), 三八红旗手((woman pace-setter), 标兵(pace-setter), 文明(refined), 争优(strive for the best), 表彰(praise), 风采(excellence), 热烈(warm), 代表(model), etc. Therefore, corpus data obtained through looking into the concordances of 巾帼 prove that it has a positive semantic prosody and thus refers to excellent women.

Altogether, there are 198 key words in WDC, with 179 words showing positive keyness and 19 words negative keyness. A word which is positively key occurs more often than would be expected by chance in comparison with the reference corpus. Words with positive keyness are counted, so as to find out words which are outstandingly frequent in the reportage of women. Among the 179 key words analyzed, proper nouns of person, organization and place names (e.g. 戎冠秀, 全国政协, 深圳, etc.), pronouns (e.g. 她, 她们, 我, etc.) and adverbs (e.g. 都, 多次, etc.) are eliminated and there are 66 key words left. They generally fall into the following four semantic groups:

1) Social roles: Women not only play the part of motherhood in families (as is unveiled from words like 妈妈, 母亲, etc.), but also play various roles in society, ranging from industries (采油, 一汽, etc.), business (商业, 经销商, etc.), police and revolution (突击队, 八路军, etc.), medical care (手术, 微创) to service industries (乘客).

2) Leadership positions: Women have stepped into all kinds of professions and at the same time they are promoted to leadership positions. The positions they hold include general manager (老总, 总经理), law officer (检察官), senior personnel (高层), command pilot (机长), board chairman (董事长) and team leader (队长). From these key words, it can be seen that women have the ability to shoulder leadership responsibilities as well as men do.

3) Honors: women's contribution has been recognized by the society, seen through the honors they are conferred, like woman pace-setters (三八红旗手), models (标兵), model workers (劳动模范), entrepreneurs (企业家), experts (能手) and heroic figures (风云人物), etc. There are also key words of verbs showing the action of conferring honors to excellent women, like 表彰, 评为, 获得, 授予, etc.

4) Social recognition: The status of women has been greatly improved, as is seen from key words like 巾帼, 建功, 风采, 半边天, 优秀. Women are praised as being able to hold up half of the sky.

According to Keyword analysis of the reports of women in newspapers on Women's Day, it can be concluded



that women are stepping into various occupations, some of which are even traditionally held by men (like oil drilling), and they are making irreplaceable contributions to the society. This picture is hugely different from their images on the internet, where a strong unfavorable semantic prosody permeates the web.

5. Discussions

Women are presented with a bright outlook in newspapers while the overwhelming majority of collocates of career women in web news headlines are negative ones, thus making career women take on a unique unfavorable semantic prosody. All the words taken into study are made up of the determiner 女(female) and the 职业 (profession). Determiners shall only specify the gender, but shall not change the original meaning of the noun phrase. There are characteristic and pragmatic meanings for the semantic features of modern Chinese nouns (Wang, 2000: 20). For example, the characteristic meaning of “female teacher” is equivalent to that of “teacher”: as being knowledgeable, having high moral integrity, dedicated, etc. Its pragmatic meaning should also be the same with “teacher” as being commendatory. On the contrary, a large number of collocates with conflicting semantic features are used in the reportage of “female teacher”, making a strong negative connotation. This concurs with the findings of Tribble (1998), who claims that a certain word has a unique semantic prosody in a given language environment, not the one universally accepted in the same language community. So why do some words have unique semantic prosody in a particular context? Louw (1993) believes that by violation of semantic prosody, writers want to achieve the effect of irony, insincerity or humor. Research findings by Partington (1998) also show that writers use unfavorable semantic prosody of “dealings” either to express their attitudes or to tamper with readers in a subtle fashion. It is believed that the violation of semantic prosody of career women on the web means more than that. In the following two sections, the author will try to find the possible interpretations of such phenomenon, predict the possible consequences and put forward solutions.

5.1 Possible causes of the violation of semantic prosody on the web

News reportage should reflect the reality. But in reality, it has a high degree of selectivity. Galtung and Ruge once put forward a set of commonly acknowledged standards to judge newsworthiness, one of which is reference to something negative, which means media tend to choose to report negative events (cited in Xin, 2005: 84). It is unavoidable that news reportage is permeated with the attitude of the media. Critical linguistics maintains that linguistic activity is a social practice and it is socially generated and mediated by value-systems. The occurrence of the unique local semantic prosody is induced by the hidden values or profits pursued by all kinds of web media. In a time of media marketization, faced with fierce competition, web media try their best to attract as much audience as possible. Therefore, they deliberately make use of and exaggerate the connotations of the determiner—“female” to produce eye-catching headlines, in order to cater to the audience’s bad taste and induce them to click their websites. The larger the clicking rate is, the more advertisements they can introduce and hence the more profits they may make. By deliberately diverging from the original connotations of professions to the stereotyped and biased images of women, web media achieve their goals as to attract audience’s attention and increase their profits.

5.2 Possible consequences

The frequent occurrence of negative collocates of career women may lead to the following two consequences:

Language violence:

Language violence refers to the cause of mental offense or detriment to others due to the use of vituperated, denigrated, despised or discriminated language on them. Therefore, the discriminated and biased language about career women on the web may cause mental detriment to those women who are working in the professions and at the same time to women who are constantly exposed to a web environment full of negative news. That may affect their mental well-being and their enthusiasm towards their careers. Meanwhile, for those who haven’t formed their own judgment skills, and tend to trust the media to believe that the reportage of career women is the true reflection of reality, this kind of reportage is quite misleading. They can easily believe in the distorted phenomenon that career women are somewhat closely associated with erotic events, or they are too fragile to get rid of misfortunes. Take *female doctor* as an example, they in reality are not as alienated as reported in the media. Yet they are stereotyped as being “the third mankind” and constantly perplexed with the struggle of finding life-time partners or jobs. Therefore, the large quantities of negative collocates may lead to the distortion of social phenomenon.

Degenerated reading habits of the audience:

If the web is filled with negative collocates of career women, in the long run, audience may be accustomed to pornographic information, disasters, misfortunes or scandals, which might lead to the degeneration of the

audience's reading habits and their moral progress. Furthermore, if the audience get used to catastrophic or unfortunate events reported on the web, their sympathy towards "bad news" may diminish. For example, when the web is filled with reportages of suicidal events about *female teacher*, the suffering of "hidden rules" about *female doctor*, the incidental death about *female official*, the suffering of cheat about *female reporter*, and so on, sooner or later people may deem those events as commonplace. The stronger the audience's immunizing power against bad news, the more dangerous the social sympathy and social responsibility become.

5.3 Possible Solutions

To prevent the negative consequences, first of all, we believe that web media themselves shall take up the responsibility of producing unbiased news to the audience. Wu and Wang point out that if employees in the media profession lack the awareness of gender equality, reportage of women will be affected to a considerable degree (2006: 236). That requires network employees to stick to good value orientation and strengthen career ethics (Qing, 2009: 987). The media should also maintain the correct orientation of public opinion and shall not peruse the maximization of profits at the expense of sacrificing the interests of women. Association for Computer Machinery, the national computer organization in America, has put forward eight codes of ethics and career conducts, which include: avoiding harming others, sticking to justice and not taking discriminatory practices, etc. (Bi, 2007: 234). Secondly, when the audience makes use of the internet to obtain information, they shall also reflect upon the seemingly natural phenomenon by viewing the reportage concerning social gender in a critical way (Wu & Wang, 2006: 239). That is also what critical linguists call for: to carry out critical analysis of "public discourse", in order to deal with issues caused by the more and more language involvement in social life.

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Appendix.

Collocate classification of female doctor

Unfavorable collocates (70 occurrences)	Love and life struggles (30): 征婚 7, 爱情 3, 苦恼 3, 择偶 2, 感情故事 2, 恋战 2, 生小孩 2, 爱情密码, 嫁出去, 尴尬婚姻, 婚姻问题, 风流韵事, 应召女, 无聊生活, 找不到工作, 找工作
	Misfortunes (26): 被博导潜规则 7, 遭雷击 6, 裸死 4, 攀岩坠亡 2, 离奇死亡 2 被杀, 被开除, 被骗财色, 自杀, 猝死
	Being alienated (6): 灭绝师太 2, 珠穆朗玛峰, 第三种人, 妖魔化, 妖魔鬼怪
	Others (8): 孤傲 2, 选美 2, T台走秀 2, 舞文弄墨, 独白,
Neutral collocates (11)	柴米生活 3, 彪悍穿越 3, 生存样本, 装修日记, 留校, 宿舍, 个人空间
Favorable collocates (3)	职业格斗女王 2, 固守“中医世界”