Analysis of discursive strategies used in the construction of the anti-feminist discourse in social networks

Análisis de las estrategias discursivas empleadas en la construcción de discurso antifeminista en redes sociales

Jordi Bonet-Martí

Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, España

* jordi.bonet@ub.edu

Background
Anti-feminism has become a discourse increasingly present on social networks. However, there is still little research that addresses its development in the Ibero-American region. This article aims to give an account of the discursive anti-feminist practices to associate the feminist mobilizations of the 8th of March with the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain. The article is based on a critical discourse analysis of tweets on that subject published during March and April 2020 in order to visualize and identify the discursive strategies used to establish such association: nominalization, predication, argumentation, framing, intensification/mitigation.

Aims
We consider in the article the following research questions:
How is the feminist movement represented discursively from anti-feminism in social networks?
What discursive strategies does anti-feminism use to associate the feminist mobilizations of March 8 with the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spain?
What are the differences and similarities between that anti-feminist discourse and the previous forms of anti-feminism?

Method & procedures
The methodological approach of this research is based on the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) applied to Twitter publications on this subject appeared during the months of March and April 2020.

Results & discussion
The results reveal a strategy of undervaluation of the feminist movement by anti-feminism evidenced through the denial of its agency, the promotion of its invisibility and its categorization as a interest group that only responds to particular interests. Thus, a separation is established between women and feminism, which is denied its status as a social movement and it is accused of usurping the voice of women. To do this, it's often used denigrating qualifiers reproducing the traditional misogynistic and macho stereotypes to attack feminist women through their physical appearance, social condition or psychological state.
In relation to the association between March 8 and COVID-19, it's used the post hoc fallacy, ergo propter hoc fallacy to support the association. To intensify this association, it's a commonplace using post-truth strategies disseminating fake news or distorted WHO reports, without providing evidence of a causal relationship between the spread of the pandemic and the feminist mobilizations. Also, we can point to the existence of an instrumental use of anti-feminism, like the one that developed during the anti-gender wave of mobilizations in 2005-2006.
Finally, it's important to note that we are facing the appearance of a new anti-feminist discourse that is characterized by greater discursive aggressiveness, the resort to post-truth and the absence of reference to traditional and religious values. In this sense, the antifeminism analyzed would be closer to the discourses of the new radical populist American right, than to the Catholic neo-conservatism.

Conclusion

This article aims to improve the knowledge of Spanish antifeminism, a research topic that until now has not been sufficiently addressed by the sociological literature or by critical discourse studies. In our research, we have pointed out the existence of two differentiated anti-feminisms: one with a religious matrix, which drove the demonstrations of 2005 and 2006 against same-sex marriage; and a second anti-feminism linked to the discourses of the populist right, which has been predominant in the case study analyzed. Although both movements present discursive differences, there may be overlaps and collaborative relationships, as happened in relation to the rejection of the introduction of sex-affective education in schools.

However, we consider that the characterization of this new anti-feminism should be deepened in a subsequent research program that analyzes its interrelation with other discursive modalities of the populist right (nativism, racism and neo-traditionalism); as well as the denial of gender violence and the categorization of femininity through the analysis of the role played by women in anti-feminist movements.

Keywords: anti-feminism, COVID-19, counter-movement, critical discourse analysis, post-truth

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