

Cyberbullying: The Case of Public Figures

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Abstract

Cyberbullying has become a serious global issue. Previous studies focusing on the prevalence and the consequences of cyberbullying have paid little attention to its linguistic features, especially in celebrity cases. This current study fills this gap by investigating the language that constitutes cyberbully toward celebrities from different cultures. Data were collected from the Instagram accounts of two celebrities representing Asian and Western culture, one is Korean, and another one is British. This study employed the notion of cyberbullying (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008) to label bully comments and categorized them into cyberbullying's type (Willard, 2006). Moreover, speech acts theory was employed to identify the intention of those comments distinguishing cyberbullying from other aggression. To compare the similarities and differences between the two cultures, direct and indirect speech acts were used. An analysis reveals that Korean celebrity received harassment, whereas British celebrity experienced harassment and denigration according to cyberbullying's types. In addition, four classifications of speech act were

found: representatives, directives, expressives, and commissives. The findings show different forms of language are used. Indirect speech acts are commonly found in the case of Korean, whereas direct speech acts are frequently used in the case of British.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cyberbullying is reported as a serious issue around the world. According to UNICEF Poll, 33% of adolescents in 30 countries were victims of online bullying (UNICEF, 2019) while the Pew Research Center reported that 59% of U.S. youth had experience with cyberbullying such as offensive name calling, rumor spreading, and receiving unwanted images (Anderson, 2018). Moreover, a Microsoft study (2012) found that 70% of adolescents in China were bullied online, followed by Singapore (58%), and India (53%).

A study focused on cyberbullying factors found that culture was a strong predictor for victims, with Chinese adolescents tending to be victims and Canadians tending to be perpetrators (Li, 2007). Being a victim of cyberbullying affects psychological health, such as feelings of fear, hopelessness, and depression (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). These negative effects can lead to suicidal ideation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010).

Aside from previous studies, the negative effects are also reported in the media. For example, Thomas Mullaney, a 15-year-old boy killed himself after being threatened online ("Facebook Bullying," 2011) and Amy Everett, a 14-year old girl, committed suicide after being a target of cyberbullying (Graham, 2018). Adolescents are not the only victims, celebrities are also victimized (Pyżalski, 2013). Goo Hara, a South Korean singer and actress, was a victim after admitting that she had plastic surgery. Online abuse turned worse after her ex-boyfriend, Choi Jong-bum, threatened to release a video of the couple having sex (Choe & Lee, 2019). Caroline Flack, former Love Island presenter, ended her own life in February 2020 (Perraudin, 2020). The latter was a target of tabloid and cyberbullying (Perraudin, 2020).

Moreover, findings from Ouvrein et al. (2017) indicated that some adolescents do not interpret negative comments against celebrities as cyberbullying; they perceive those comments as personal opinions. Furthermore, adolescents involved in aggressive online behavior toward celebrities tend to do the same with their peers (Ouvrein et al., 2019).

Given the seriousness of the issue and the consequences of this harmful aggression, there is a need to understand what can be defined as cyberbullying, so that people can raise their awareness of the potential dangers of their opinions. Most importantly, if people disapprove of online aggression directed at celebrities, they might not attack their peers or others.

While many past studies have focused on the prevalence and the consequences on adolescents of cyberbullying, little attention has been paid to the text being used, especially in the case of celebrities. In response to this, the current study aims to investigate the comments on Instagram as it has been named as the most egregious platform for cyberbullying (Hackett, 2017). As noted earlier, culture plays a vital role in online bullying behavior; thus, it is logical to explore further the form of language used in cyberbullying from different cultures.

To this end, two questions are formulated based on the objectives of the study: (1) What is the form of language use in cyberbullying toward celebrities?; and (2) Does cultural difference influence language use in cyberbullying?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Notion of cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is an aggressive action comprised of intention to cause harm, repetition of action, and imbalance of power from a person or a group toward another person who barely protects himself or herself through the use of electronic devices (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). According to Vandebosch and Van Cleemput (2008), the intention to damage a victim distinguishes cyberbullying from a cyber joke, which is described as a playful behavior among peers. Moreover, the relationship between perpetrator and victim is a key to interpret an aggressive act as cyberbullying or cyber joke.

Unequal power between perpetrator and victim also plays a significant role in defining cyberbullying. The anonymity and knowledge of technology are the keys to empower those perpetrators (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). In terms of repetition, a single aggressive action emerging through social network sites is regarded as the repetition of cyberbullying (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) because it can be

forwarded or reposted by other users (Limber et al., 2008; Menesini & Nocentini, 2009). That is to say, a single inappropriate act can be spread countlessly on the Internet (Dooley et al., 2009).

In addition, cyberbullying can be classified according to behaviors. Willard divided cyberbullying into nine forms (2006, pp. 1-2) as follows: (1) flaming is an online fight, the users send electronic messages with profanity; (2) harassment refers to abusive or insulting messages that are repeatedly sent; (3) denigration is an utterance that attacks a person's reputation or friendships by spreading rumors; (4) impersonation is pretending to be someone else and sending or posting messages or images to damage a person; (5) outing refers to the distribution of someone's secrets, this secret can be information or images and is intended to embarrass the person; (6) trickery is the act that attempts to deceive the person into revealing his or her secret then sharing that secret online; (7) exclusion is an intentional action to exclude someone from an online group; (8) cyberstalking is a threat that creates great fear by repeatedly sending severe messages or images, including posting rumors; and (9) sexting refers to nude or sexy images, including sexual messages that are privately sent between two people, then one or more images or messages are widely shared with others.

2.1.1 Related Studies Regarding Cultural Differences in Cyberbullying

The importance of cultural differences in cyberbullying as a variable is widely understood. These differences might affect cyberbullying behaviors, rates of involvement, and victimization. According to Li (2007), culture should be regarded as a forecaster for cyber-harassment and its victim. Li (2008) compared two groups of adolescents from different cultures concerning their cyberbullying experiences and reported that the patterns of the samples were different. That is, when cyberbullying occurred, Chinese students were more likely to report it to adults more so than Canadian students as either victims or bystanders. Li explained this different behavior as a demonstration of cultural differences. Whereas teachers and students in traditional Chinese schools have a formal relationship, teachers and students in Western societies have a simple pattern. In other words, in China, teachers have more authority over students, while in Canada, teachers encourage students to be independent (Li, 2008). In terms of victimization, the influence of culture

is also strong. As aforementioned, Chinese students tend to be the targets of cyberbullying. In contrast, Canadian students were more likely to be perpetrators (Li, 2007).

These results suggest that cultural difference plays a significant role in cyberbullying behaviors. Consequently, this paper further examines whether cultural difference influences the form of language use of cyberbullying or not.

2.1.2 Related Studies on Cyberbullying toward Celebrities

Although peers are the prevalent victim, there are four other types of targets (i.e., random Internet users, groups of people, celebrities, and vulnerable victims) who are also bullied online. Almost 14% of participants were involved in such cyber-harassment against celebrities (Pyżalski, 2013).

Another study by Ouvrein et al. (2017) exploring girls' attitudes on critiquing celebrities revealed that celebrities should be able to deal with negative comments since it is considered a regular part of being famous. Moreover, these adolescents did not believe that famous people read all comments. In addition, these harsh messages could not be labeled as cyberbullying with some of the participants interpreted them as fun and harmless behavior. To be defined as cyberbullying, the adolescents believed that the perpetrator needs personally to know the victim and wants to see them suffer. However, if the aggressive comments occurred to non-celebrities or their peers, some of these youth described them as cyberbullying. This result demonstrated that adolescents applied double standards. Although adolescents underestimated the negative effect of cruel comments, these famous people had negative consequences such as alcohol and drug addictions, self-blame, and depression (Ouvrein et al., 2019).

Additionally, youths who participate in aggressive online attacks toward celebrities tended to do the same with their peers (Ouvrein et al., 2019). For these reasons it is significant to classify cyberbullying as separate from other online aggressions since it not only has negative consequences on the victims or celebrities but also effects adolescents' negative online behavior.

2.2 Speech acts theory

Similar to the cases mentioned above, harmful intention is a significant feature of cyberbullying; this study, therefore, employs speech acts to measure the intention of the comments.

A speech act is an action that performs a speaker's intention via utterance, with effects on the interlocutors. According to Austin (1962), when an utterance is made, three acts are performed: (1) a locutionary act is the performance of an utterance following the rules of grammar to convey the meaning; (2) an illocutionary act correlates with the intention of the speaker; and (3) a perlocutionary act is a consequence that impacts the hearer.

2.2.1 Classification of illocution acts

Searle (1976), in his theory, focused on the illocutionary act in particular. He categorized illocutionary act into five different types as follows:

1) Representatives are speech acts that engage the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. This act enables the speaker to express his or her beliefs, which can be assessed as true or false by the hearer. Reporting, asserting, and concluding are kinds of representatives.

2) Directives refer to an attempt by the speaker to impose some future action on the hearer such as requesting and questioning.

3) Commissives enable the speaker to commit themselves to doing something. This act is used in promise, guaranties, and vows.

4) Expressives impact psychological states, which are used in congratulations, excuses, complaints, likes, and dislikes. In other words, this type of speech act expresses the speaker's feeling.

5) Declaratives affect the change in the institutional stage. This act is primarily used in a formal situation such as sentencing, resignation, and declaring war.

Moreover, speech act can also be distinguished regarding their structure (Yule, 1996). Put differently, speech act can be performed directly or indirectly.

2.2.2 Direct and Indirect Speech Act

Three sentence types have their own communicative functions: declarative, statement; interrogative, question; imperative, command or request (Yule, 1996).

Structure and function of the utterance are considered to identify direct and indirect speech acts. Whenever a structure correlates with its function, the utterance is a direct speech act. On the other hand, whenever a structure is not related to its function, the sentence is an indirect speech act (Yule, 1996, p. 55). For example, when the speaker says “it is cold outside,” it might be a statement, a command, or a request depending on the speaker’s intention. If the speaker intends to inform of the state of the weather, this sentence is a direct speech act since it communicates the literal meaning and the structure and its function are related. However, if the speaker intentionally requests or commands the hearer to close the window, this sentence is defined as an indirect speech act.

Additionally, Yule also noted that an interrogative sentence is one of the most common types of indirect speech act (1996, p. 55). Although this sentence has an interrogative form, it is not used for expecting an answer. Its expectation is an action. For instance, “Could you pass the salt?” This utterance is used to request a future action of the hearer, not for an answer.

Metaphorical utterances can also be identified as an indirect speech act (Searle, 1993). When the speakers attempt to convey something other than what they literally say, the word or sentence is called a metaphor. Searle concluded that the hearer comprehends the actual intention of the speaker because of their knowledge. In other words, the interlocutor shares background information for the hearer to interpret the metaphorical meaning.

According to these theorists, the speech act is an action performed by expressing an utterance. This statement communicates not only the meaning but also the intention of the speaker for the hearer’s action. Therefore, the current study uses speech act theory to interpret the intention of the comments using Searle’s framework to identify the classification of speech act. Then, this study also illustrates which comments can be labeled as a direct or indirect speech act according to Yule’s framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Criteria for selecting participants

Purposive sampling was used for the selection of information-rich cases. Thus, participants were selected based on recent cases of celebrities who were cyberbullied published in the news media. Since this study aims to investigate the similarities and differences of language used in cyberbullying, this case study encompasses different cultures. However, there are many cases of celebrities who confront cyber-harassment reported in the news media. This study, therefore, selected only the cases in which the celebrities committed suicide within two days of posting the last photo on their Instagram account. The public figures matching the criteria are Seo-yeon from an Eastern country, and Olivia from a Western country, as different culture is a controlling factor. However, to give confidentiality, participant names are pseudonyms.

3.2 Participants

To better understand the participants, their profiles are presented as follows.

3.2.1 Seo-yeon

The participant identified as Seo-yeon debuted to the public as a member of the famous K-pop girl group. She was ostracized for posting pictures of herself not wearing a bra and for addressing older male colleagues by their first name in a culture where celebrities should show respect for elders, especially female celebrities (Kang, 2019). Seo-yeon also live streamed a night out drinking with friends and identified herself as a feminist (McCurry, 2019). These behaviors were catalysts for malicious comments (Kang, 2019). According to Park Hee-A, a K-pop journalist, while female K-pop stars are expected not to contradict the precepts of male-dominated, patriarchal South Korean society, Seo-yeon did so (McCurry, 2019).

She once revealed that

“when I first posted pictures of me braless, there were so many different reactions. I could have been frightened and hide, but I didn’t. I wanted people’s prejudices to disappear” (Kang, 2019, para. 13).

She also added that

“I wish people would look at me and think, ‘Well, someone like that exists! Accept the difference’” (Kang, 2019, para. 14).

Seo-Yeon committed suicide in October 2019. After her death, South Korea’s National Assembly considered a bill opposing cyberbullying (McCurry, 2019).

3.2.2 Olivia

The participant identified as Olivia became famous as a reality show host in the UK. She became a target of malicious comments, both online and offline, after publicly revealing her romantic relationship with a member of a British boy band, who was 14 years younger than herself (Doohan, 2015).

In 2019, Olivia was arrested for allegedly assaulting her boyfriend with a lamp. She pleaded not guilty and was released on bail on the condition that she was forbidden to contact him before the trial (Youngs, 2020). Although he withdrew his complaint, the Crown Prosecution Service stated that the case did not automatically be discontinued (Henden, 2020). Olivia was due to return to court in March 2020; however, she committed suicide before appearing in court (Perraudin, 2020).

According to McIntyre et al. (2020), after analyzing the UK print media titles from August 2019 through February 2020, Olivia received double the number of negative headlines in the month of her arrest. Her death prompted questions about the way social media and the press treat celebrities (Youngs, 2020).

3.3 Data collection

The data were utterances in the comment column of Seo-yeon’s and Olivia’s account on Instagram. The researcher selected 10 photos with the most comments in the last six months of their lives to collect a sufficient number of samples. Since these 10 posts draw a considerable number of responses, it is likely these posts will be a fertile ground for the researchers to collect examples of cyberbully. It should be noted that there are disagreements about the actual period of time in terms of the repetition of cyberbullying (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009). However, Nocentini et al.

introduced a six-month timeframe since 52.1% of traditional bullying victims who became cyberbullies revealed that

“at least a quarter of their cyber victims were their former traditional perpetrators within a 6-month period” (2010, p. 218).

Moreover, most cyberbullying behavior often lasted approximately a week, followed by a month, with few cases lasting longer than six months (Smith et al., 2008). In this regard, six months should be sufficient to assess the pattern of the cyberbullying.

Since the data collected are based on all three features of cyberbullying: harmful intention, imbalanced power, and repeated action (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Smith et al., 2008), they are considered good representatives of cyberbullying in terms of content.

All the data were collected on March 8, 2020 using Python, a programming language. This program allows the user to export Instagram’s comments, including photos and videos. It should be noted that the number of comments fluctuates since posts can be added or deleted.

Before committing suicide, Seo-yeon had approximately 6.5 million followers. In her last six months, she posted 166 photos from April 15 through October 12, 2019. There were more than 400,000 comments for those 10 photos. However, this study focuses on comments posted before the tragic incident and the data is also limited by selecting only Korean comments, and does not include other languages or emojis. Therefore, the total number of comments was 8,372. All the comments were translated into English before analysis.

In the case of Olivia, before she was found dead, she had approximately 2.7 million followers and posted 43 photos from August 15, 2019 through February 14, 2020. More than 50,000 comments were posted for those 10 photos. The data comprised of 6,334 comments when selecting only the English comments posted before her death.

3.4 Data analysis

The data were classified according to the following steps. First, the comments that were labeled as cyberbullying were selected, which follows the work of Patchin and Hinduja (2006) and Smith et al. (2008). Second,

they were grouped according to cyberbullying Willard's categorizations (2006). Then, the data were analyzed using speech acts theory based on Searle's classification. Additionally, this analysis consisted of categorizing comments into direct and indirect speech acts, following Yule's framework. Finally, the language pattern used in Eastern and Western contexts were compared to identify the similarities and dissimilarities that might arise due to cultural differences.

In the labeling process, two contributors identified whether the comments were cyberbullying or not to provide reliability. The contributors were given the definitions, classifications, and related examples to help them accurately label cyberbullying. The findings were similar in most cases. There were some comments that they were uncertain about; however, a reconciliation was arrived at after discussion. The total comments labeled as cyberbullying was 135 in the case of Seo-yeon and 278 in the case of Olivia.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Categories of cyberbullying

Table 1

Categories of Cyberbullying Found in the Case Studies

Cyberbullying's Types	Seo-yeon	Olivia
Harassment	100%	32.7%
Denigration		67.3%

As illustrated in Table 1, only harassment was found on Seo-yeon's Instagram, while harassment and denigration were found on Olivia's Instagram. Most of these cases criticized Seo-yeon for not wearing a brassiere and satirize Olivia as an abuser. However, it should be noted that Olivia committed suicide before attending court. Therefore, the comments that bullied her about assaulting her boyfriend are categorized as denigration.

For example, when Seo-yeon posted a picture of herself, some people criticized her as follows: “Seo-yeon is charming and attractive, but she’s out of her mind. If she stays still, she’ll be treated like a princess. It’s a pity that she’s a serious attention seeker,” and “Wear bra. Look sucks.” These comments can be regarded as harassment according to cyberbullying types.

In the case of Olivia, when she posted the image with the quote “In the world where You can be anything, be kind,” with this caption “Anything...we can literally choose to be anything...”. Some comments criticized her as follows: “And you choose to be the victim. After smashing a man’s head when he was ASLEEP. He must have snored too loud,” “And always carry a spare lamp with you. Never know when it can come in handy.” These comments intended to mimic her about attacking her boyfriend. Therefore, they can be categorized into denigration as aforementioned.

4.1.2 Classification of speech act

Since one of the main features of cyberbullying is the intention of the sender, speech acts are a useful theory to identify the purpose of those comments. There are four classifications of speech acts found in the case studies: representatives, directives, commissives, and expressives.

Table 2

Classification of Speech Act Found in the Case Studies

Speech Act Classification	Seo-yeon	Olivia
Representatives	92.6%	96%
Directives	2.2%	1.1%
Commissives	0.7%	2.5%
Expressives	4.5%	0.4%

Table 2 shows that most comments in both cases were representatives. Seo-yeon received more directives and expressives in comparison to Olivia; however, Olivia received more commissives in comparison to Seo-yeon.

For instance, in the pictures where Seo-yeon wore a brassiere, some comments posted were along the vein of “You have no breast like a kid,” and “Where? I can’t see that breast.” According to Searle (1999), the point of representatives is to commit the sender to the truth of the expressed proposition. That is, these comments represent what senders think regarding Seo-yeon’s pictures. By posting them, they commit themselves to the words and show their intention. Therefore, they are representatives.

Another classification is expressives which accounted for 4.5%. This type of speech act is

“to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content” (Searle, 1999, p. 15).

In other words, the sender expresses his or her feeling and genuinely feels that way about it. Examples include “I was your fan before, not anymore,” and “Raise your hand if you don’t love Seo-yeon”. These senders directly reveal that they dislike Seo-yeon. Consequently, they are expressives.

As illustrated in Table 2, directives accounted for 2.2%. The illocutionary point is an attempt by the sender to make the receiver do some future action that the sender sincerely wants (Searle, 1999). The following example from a braless picture is “upload more.” This comment can imply that the sender attempted to make Seo-yeon do as he or she pleased. Moreover, by posting, it can be interpreted as an attempt by the sender. Thus, this comment is directives.

Only one commissives was “I will suck it.” The illocutionary point is to commit the sender to future action (Searle, 1999). He added that the utterance should be the future action and the sender intended to do it with sincerity. As can be seen, the sender commits himself or herself to future action. Moreover, by posting it, the sender is sincere in their wish to make it happen. Thus, this comment can serve as a commissive.

In the case of Olivia, representatives were found at 96%. Examples include “WOMEN BEATER” and “he’s scared of her. She went to kill him whilst he was sleeping. She’s shown terrible abuse. Happened once it will happen again!” By posting these comments, they intentionally criticize

Olivia as an abuser and commit themselves to the truth of the expressed proposition. Hence, representatives can be inferred from these words.

Of the samples, 2.5% are commissives, such as “nope,” and “not interested.” Since these senders refused Olivia when she posted the video of the next season of the reality show that she was a host with the caption, “Who’s ready?” These comments can be interpreted as committing the sender to a future action or not doing that action in this case. Consequently, they are commissives.

Directives were found at 1.1%. An example is “You better open your legs and let me lick that fanny.” The sender tries to make Olivia do a future action. Therefore, it is directives.

Only one expressives was found. That is, when Olivia posted a picture of herself wearing a see-through black tank top, one comment was “BORING!!” This word can be interpreted as meaning Olivia was boring, or the way she dressed was boring. Whether the first or second meaning, the sender was not satisfied, and he or she expressed the emotion of displeasure. Thus, this comment can be categorized as expressives.

4.1.3 Direct and indirect speech act

As aforementioned, a direct speech act has a direct relationship between a sentence type and its communicative function. If there is no direct relationship between them, it demonstrates an indirect speech act.

Table 3

Direct and Indirect Speech Act Found in the Case Studies

Direct and Indirect Speech Act	Seo-yeon	Olivia
Direct Speech Act	45.2%	59.7%
Indirect Speech Act	54.8%	40.3%

Table 3 shows that the indirect speech act is more frequent than the direct speech act in the case of Seo-yeon while the direct speech act tends to be more frequent than the indirect speech act in the case of Olivia.

Table 4*Structure Classified as Direct Speech Act in the Case Studies*

Structure		Seo-yeon	Olivia
Clause	Declarative mood	36.3%	34.9%
	Imperative mood	1.5%	0.7%
Word/Phrase		7.4%	24.1%

From Table 4, the declarative mood is most frequent in both cases. Examples from Seo-yeon's Instagram are "Tight pink T-shirts without a bra. That's too much," and "There's no attention to the seeker like you, attention seeker who show off their boobs." These comments criticize Seo-yeon directly. Therefore, they are a direct speech act.

Words and phrases are occasionally used, such as "crazy" and "very ugly." Since these words were posted on Seo-yeon's Instagram, they can be interpreted as meaning Seo-yeon was crazy and Seo-yeon was very ugly. These examples criticize her directly. Thus, they are a direct speech act.

The imperative mood was also used, such as "Upload more." This imperative mood directly orders or perhaps requests Seo-yeon to upload more braless images. Thus, they are a direct speech act.

In the case of Olivia, examples are "THAT COMING FROM YOU WHO HITS PEOPLE JOKE" and "This is wonderfully ironic and hypocritical." These examples are sarcastic comments meaning what Olivia posted was a joke. They intentionally criticize her behavior. Thus, these are direct speech acts.

The following examples of words and phrases are "Nonce" and "Horrible person attacking your boyfriend." They have literal meaning; therefore, they are direct speech acts.

The imperative mood is also used as a direct speech act such as "Delete your Instagram ya man beater." This sentence orders Olivia to do a future action and calls her a man beater. It directly criticizes her using the imperative mood.

Table 5*Structure Classified as Indirect Speech Act on the Case Studies*

Structure		Seo-yeon	Olivia
Clause	Declarative mood	8.1%	9%
	Interrogative mood	31.9%	15.1%
	Imperative mood	7.4%	13.3%
Word/Phrase		7.4%	2.9%

As illustrated in Table 5, in both cases, the interrogative mood is commonly used to express the senders' opinion, not for asking a question. However, in the case of Seo-yeon, it was followed by declarative mood. Imperative mood and word and phrase were equally used. Meanwhile, in the case of Olivia, it was followed by imperative mood, declarative mood, and word and phrase, respectively.

For example, "Don't you have nipples?" and "Does this person have some kind of mental illness?" These sentences have no function as questions. They are used to criticize Seo-yeon for not wearing a brassiere. Consequently, they are indirect speech acts. A declarative mood is occasionally used. An example is "I don't care what you are doing, but hope it does not become a trend." This sentence does not function as a statement. It indirectly criticizes Seo-yeon as well.

Words and phrases are also used; for example, "pig" and "no bra again, Seo-yeon." These words might be interpreted as Seo-yeon was a pig, and Seo-yeon was not wearing a bra again. Since she was human, not a pig, the first sentence, then, has a metaphorical meaning. Merriam-Webster defines another meaning of pig as "a dirty, gluttonous, or repulsive person." Therefore, this word is an indirect speech act. Likewise, the second does not inform about something. It intentionally criticizes her for not wearing a brassiere.

Another example is an imperative mood, such as "Wear a bra!" It is not an order, but it indirectly criticizes Seo-yeon for inappropriately dressing. Others examples from Olivia's Instagram are "Did you think about this before or after beating your fella with a lamp in his sleep?" and "Did you call him an ambulance after hitting him to be kind hahaha fame hungry rat lol." These interrogative moods are not used to ask a question. These comments indirectly criticize Olivia. Thus, they are indirect speech acts.

Similarly, imperative mood indirectly functions as criticizing Olivia as in "Practice what you preach." Therefore, it is indirect speech acts.

Another type of mood is declarative. An example is "You appear to wear more makeup than clothes." This example cannot be interpreted as a literal meaning. It intentionally satirizes Olivia's behavior. Words and phrases are occasionally used, such as "Lamp." This word does not inform something about a lamp and is used to satirize Olivia as she assaulted her boyfriend with one. Consequently, it is an indirect speech act.

4.2 Discussion

The results are discussed based on the two research questions

RQ1: What are the forms of language used in cyberbullying toward celebrities?

To better answer this research question, the details about cyberbullying comments are provided. As aforementioned, this study labels bully comments according to three features of cyberbullying: repeated action, imbalanced power, and harmful intention. In the case of Seo-yeon, most of the abusive samples were liked, mentioned by someone, or reposted on the same topic by other users. Few of them were posted only once; however, these can also count as cyberbullying since they can be forwarded without control. Moreover, they can remain online for an extended period due to digital footprint.

In terms of power differential, not knowing persons behind these aggressions can result in Seo-yeon feeling powerless in protecting herself. In the part of the intentional aspect, most of these harassments can be classified as representatives according to the classification of speech act. In other words, the senders intentionally demonstrate what they believe. More specifically, they believe that women being braless in public is unsuitable. They blamed her for not following the social norm; for example: "Although you don't wear a bra, at least observe the rules of etiquette for nipples" and "American style clothes are too sexy to Korean."

These comments reveal social expectations. This might be because South Korea has long been dominated by Confucian values and has a set of beliefs and values on femininity related to virtue and modesty (Bell & Chaibong, 2013). More importantly, individuals, especially celebrities, acting against Confucian values are vulnerable to cyberbullying (Debary &

Haboush, 1985). Furthermore, righteousness in the Confucian tradition seems to allow people to become cyber vigilantes and attack wrongdoers according to their perception (Epstein & Jung, 2011).

After labeling bullying comments, all samples were categorized as harassment according to cyberbullying type. Furthermore, indirect speech acts were found more frequently than direct speech acts. Interrogative mood was frequently used, followed by declarative mood. Imperative mood and words and phrases were equally used. This indirectness can be influenced by the social context (Fussell & Kreuz, 2014). According to Ting-Toomey (1988 as cited in Fussell & Kreuz, 2014), people in collectivist cultures tend to be more attuned to other's face than people in individualist cultures. This might imply that South Koreans, as collectivists, tend to be more indirect speakers.

In sum, the most common form of language used in cyberbullying toward celebrities found on Seo-yeon's Instagram is an indirect speech act. More specifically, South Koreans tend to use the interrogative mood to bully celebrities online.

In the case of Olivia, similar to Seo-yeon, most malicious comments were liked, mentioned by others, and repeatedly posted on the same subject by others. The anonymity of the aggressions might have made her feel defenseless. In terms of intention, most of the samples were categorized into representatives as well. For example, "Nasty abuser!" and "Abusive skank." These comments represent that domestic violence is not acceptable.

Moreover, Olivia was harassed because of the age gap in her relationship, such as "Nonce" and "pedophile." These words represent public opinion. It is believed that large age differences in relationships are widely unacceptable, especially female-older relationships (Banks & Arnold, 2001).

After the labeling process, two types of cyberbullying were found: denigration and harassment. In addition, the direct speech act was commonly found in this case study. These findings show that the highest frequency of direct speech act is declarative mood, followed by words and phrases. As noted earlier, people who live in a collectivist culture have a tendency for adjusting to other's face more than people who live in an individualist culture (Ting-Toomey, 1988 as cited in Fussell & Kreuz, 2014). This might assume that English, as a language associated with individualist cultures, speak more directly.

In conclusion, the most common form of language used in cyberbullying toward celebrities is direct speech act. In other words, the English tend to use the declarative mood to bully celebrities online.

RQ2: Does cultural difference influence language use in cyberbullying?

According to the finding of the first research question, it can be concluded that South Korea, as representative of Eastern culture and England, as representative of Western culture, have different forms of language use in cyberbullying against celebrities. In Eastern culture, people speak indirectly, whereas, in Western culture, people speak directly. That is to say, culture influences language form in cyberbullying and can be used as a key to forecasting a verbal bullying pattern. This finding is consistent with the result of Li (2008), who found that cultural differences play a significant role in differences in cyberbullying behaviors and can predict online aggression.

Interestingly, in the case of Olivia, most bullying comments labeled her as an abuser after the media reported her alleged attack on her boyfriend. This action shows how journalists and the tabloid press influence people's perceptions. However, Greenslade, a media columnist for The Guardian, revealed that

“this is one of those great hypocrisies of the British public, that they indulge in reading, and often writing, about these celebrities and then when things go wrong, they turn on the media and say it's all the media's fault” (Marshall, 2020, para. 13).

This quote highlights the relationship between the tabloids and the British public.

Additionally, this behavior is consistent with the finding of Ouvrein et al. (2017), who stated that the participants of their study were entertained by celebrity gossip. They believed that journalists have the right to embarrass celebrities, and the celebrities should be able to deal with it. Indeed, this previous research found that adolescents morally accept this behavior. The affirmation of the journalists' right to report on celebrities in embarrassing situations is because adolescents consider

their intentions as humorous and harmless (Ouvrein et al., 2017). That is to say, the flow of negative comments toward celebrities are fun and harmless in the view of adolescents. This result seems comparable with earlier research revealing that gossip news is a place where the users feel comfortable posting cruel comments (Pyżalski, 2011), and adolescents, as frequent users of the Internet, regularly criticize celebrities online (Whittaker & Kowalski, 2015). This repetitive criticism might increase their acceptance of this aggressive behavior (Ouvrein et al., 2017). This also supports the finding of Ouvrein et al. (2019), who stated that peers' approval of online aggression influences adolescents to participate in such negative online behavior. In other words, cyber-harassment toward celebrities might be regarded as a normal and humorous behavior.

For example, one comment posted after Olivia's death was "...I made a joke about something that was in popular culture. Since then the joke has taken on a new meaning that's not my fault." It is clear that some people consider their post as a joke and as taking part in the process of popular culture which refers to "cultural products such as music, art, literature, fashion, dance, film, cyberculture, television, and radio that are consumed by the majority of a society's population. Popular culture is those types of media that have mass accessibility and appeal" (Crossman, 2019). Generally speaking, making a joke on the Internet seems similar to one of these socio-cultural products.

4.3 Conclusions

The finding not only suggests that the different forms of language use arising from cultural differences are significant but also suggests that the way people use language reflects their societal opinion and culture. People who break with social norms might be more likely to be bullied.

Moreover, the utterances that members of both societies use to bully in these case studies might contribute to the impression that negative online behavior is common, and everyone can engage in it. As aforementioned, one comment posted after Olivia's death was "...I made a joke about something that was in popular culture. Since then the joke has taken on a new meaning that's not my fault." Some people might believe that it is only a joke in popular culture. This joking aspect is similar to the result of Ouvrein et al. (2017) who found that participants view cruel comments as fun and harmless behavior and underestimate their negative

effect. Furthermore, it can be inferred that negative online behavior repeatedly appearing on the Internet is viewed by some as being a part of “popular culture” and that reproducing such negative comments is within the norm.

Of course, there is no absolute way to demonstrate what any one sender aims to perform in terms of intention. Speech act is one theory that helps the receiver interpret the intention to be recognized as an act and it depends on many factors, such as context, social background, and culture. The receiver can observe these cues to interpret the real intention of the sender.

An obvious example is the word “lamp.” This word is ordinary in other contexts; however, the senders intended to satirize Olivia and can be considered as an instance of bullying since it was repeatedly posted on her Instagram after the report appeared in the news media about the alleged assault on her boyfriend. Therefore, it might be difficult to only rely on automatic cyberbullying detection to identify potential risks from the text. It would be better to raise awareness among the population of the risks of posting a personal opinion or even a joke online since they can be interpreted in a negative way.

4.4 Limitations

This study has some limitations. First, the translation across languages might lose some features; however, the translator, a Korean English teacher, has attempted to maintain the intention of the text and its sentence structure since they are significant parts of this study. Second, the current data are based on female celebrities and conducted by focusing on cyberbullying on Instagram accounts, which reflect the language use of a single medium. Last, this study selected only text and does not include emojis, inclusion of which may have extended the results.

4.5 Recommendations

Future studies may include more case studies not limited to female celebrities. Moreover, future work may extend to include emojis and focus on other platforms such as Twitter or Facebook. Different social media engages different groups of people, which may reflect the usage of language. Interestingly, some people try to criticize the bullies by posting

“You’re vile! This is the reason she’s dead. You weren’t there you have no idea what happened you only see stories on the news and everyone assumes it true” and “‘popular culture’ what utter rubbish! You used your so called humour to (put plainly) pick on a her! Your comment is part of the problem and played it’s part in the bigger picture of trolling. I hope hindsight plays it’s part with you”. These comments show how violently bystanders can react to cyberbullying. It would be interesting to examine these bystanders who counterattack through online aggression themselves.

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