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FEMINIST DISCOURSE IN SPORT JOURNALISM

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The article is devoted to the exploration of feminist discourse within the realm of sports journalism, analyzing how language and media representation shape and challenge gender norms in the coverage of athletes. The work examines the linguistic and pragmatic strategies used in sports journalism to reinforce or dismantle gender stereotypes, with an emphasis on promoting equality and inclusivity. Particular attention is paid to the combination of feminist theory and media communication, as well as the influence of lexical choice, metaphors, syntactic structures and framing techniques on the representation of female athletes and non-binary individuals in sport.

The relevance of this topic is due to the importance of feminist discourse as a special type of communication aimed at eliminating patriarchal language norms that emphasise traditional gender roles rather than sports performance in media. It highlights how language in sports journalism serves as a powerful tool for shaping gender perceptions through the use of images and narrative structures that help eliminate bias. The article examines how these linguistic strategies have a direct impact on the development of the gender equality movement in the sports media sphere.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in a comprehensive analysis of feminist discursive strategies common to sports journalism, a field traditionally dominated by masculine narratives. Examining real-life examples from major media sources and international sporting events, the paper reveals both problematic practices and progressive changes in the industry. It also contributes to the broader discourse on gender and media suggesting effective linguistic strategies such as neutral terminology, active constructions and inclusive framing, that can transform sports journalism into a more equitable media space. The study establishes a new framework for feminist linguistic activism in sports media that contributes to the deconstruction of gender stereotypes and the formation of narratives that promote equality and visibility of underrepresented gender identities.

Key words: discourse of feminism, sport journalism, female athletes, gender stereotypes, inclusive language, linguistic strategies, media framing.

Данилова Н. А., Кауза І. Б. Дискурс фемінізму в спортивній журналістиці. Статтю присвячено дослідженню дискурсу фемінізму у сфері спортивної журналістики, зокрема аналізу того, як мова та медійні репрезентації формують і спростовують гендерні норми щодо висвітлення діяльності спортсменів. Розглянуто лінгвістичні та прагматичні стратегії, використовувані у спортивній журналістиці для закріплення чи руйнування гендерних стереотипів, із фокусуванням на рівності та інклюзивності. Особливу увагу зосереджено на поєднанні теорії фемінізму та медіакомунікації, а також на простеженні впливу лексичного вибору, метафор, синтаксичних структур та прийомів фреймування на репрезентацію спортсменок і небінарних осіб у спорті.

Актуальність порушеної проблеми зумовлена важливістю феміністичного дискурсу як особливого виду комунікації, спрямованого на усунення патріархальних мовних норм, які утрадиційнюють гендерні моделі поведінки, а не спортивні результати в медіа. Акцентовано на ролі мови в спортивній журналістиці як потужного засобу формування гендерного сприйняття через використання образів та наративних структур, що допомагають усувати певну упередженість.

У статті вперше в сучасній лінгвістиці проведено комплексний аналіз феміністичних дискурсивних стратегій, характерних для спортивної журналістики, де традиційно домінують маскулінні наративи. У процесі розгляду реальних прикладів з найбільших ЗМІ та міжнародних спортивних подій виявлено як проблемні практики, так і прогресивні зміни в індустрії. Досягнуті результати та зроблені на основі цього узагальнення, що є значним внеском у загальний дискурс про гендер і медіа, уможливили виокремити такі ефективні лінгвістичні стратегії, як: нейтральна термінологія, активні конструкції та інклюзивне фреймування тощо.

Дослідження встановлює нові межі для феміністичного лінгвістичного активізму в спортивних медіа, що сприяє деконструкції гендерних стереотипів і формуванню наративів, які просувають рівність і висвітлюють недостатньо представлених гендерних ідентичностей.

Ключові слова: дискурс фемінізму, спортивна журналістика, спортсменки, гендерні стереотипи, інклюзивна мова, лінгвістичні стратегії, медійне фреймування.

Defining the problem and argumentation of the topicality of the consideration. The work is devoted to the analysis of linguistic and pragmatic means used to represent gender in sports articles, commentaries and media coverage. The relevance of the study is determined by the growing interest of modern linguistic studies in the means by which language reproduces or

challenges social hierarchies, including gender ones, in various fields of public communication. Particular attention is devoted to the role of media discourse in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles, where language serves as a powerful tool for both reinforcing stereotypes and promoting equality. The importance of this analysis is further supported by the necessity to examine

how lexical choices, syntactic structures and framing strategies in sports journalism influence the representation of female and non-binary athletes, as well as how feminist discourse introduces alternative linguistic patterns aimed at achieving greater inclusivity and fairness in sports media coverage.

Analysis of recent research and publications.

The study of feminist discourse has attracted increasing attention from scholars, especially in the fields of sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis and media studies. The study of feminist discourse in sports journalism has become a significant area of inquiry in media linguistics, attracting increasing attention from scholars in sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis and media studies. Recent studies that examine the impact of language choices on perpetuating systemic gender biases or serving as tools for feminist resistance have once again brought renewed focus to how language constructs and challenges gender norms in sports media, particularly through communicative-pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches. The discourse of feminism was and continues to be in the field of interest of such scientists as D. Cameron [4], R. Lakoff [8], G. Clavio & A. N. Eagleman [5], B. J. Risman [10], and others. They have shown how language functions not only as a tool for reporting, but also as an active force in constructing and challenging gender ideologies. The current study integrates diverse approaches from recent feminist and media linguistics research to construct a comprehensive view of how gender is discursively managed in sports journalism. Researchers distinguish the following linguistics means in the discourse of feminism: lexical choices, media framing and descriptors, syntactic structures, use of hyperbole and metaphor, etc.

The scientific novelty of the study lies in the fact that, for the first time in modern linguistic research, a comprehensive and multidimensional description of linguistics means and pragmatic tools based on the methodological principles of sociolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, and media discourse is presented in a scientific work based on the material of the articles from the world sports press. The analysis of real-life media examples and the identification of practical strategies used to promote gender equality through different linguistic techniques is conducted.

Setting the goals and tasks of the article. The purpose of the work is to analyse the phenomenon of feminist discourse within the field of sports journalism, based on the material of sports articles, commentaries and media coverage, taking into account its above-mentioned features by determining the role and place of discourse of feminism in the process of presenting information (impact on the recipient) and constructing gender identities in media narratives.

The outline of the main research material. Feminist discourse refers to conversations and writings that are concerned with issues related to women's rights, gender inequality, and the social structures of femininity and masculinity. This discourse emerged as a reaction to patriarchal systems, focusing on the advocacy of women's voices and identities, as well as critiquing historical inequalities in society. In the setting of the 18th century, feminist discourse began to question

traditional notions of gender roles and advocate for women's education and participation in the public domain. Feminist discourse analysis examines lexical choices, speech patterns, and conversational strategies to identify how they promote or undermine traditional gender roles. For example, studies of gender differences in speech highlight how women's speech is in many ways more polite than that of boys or men, and the reason for this is that politeness involves an absence of a strong statement, and women's speech is devised to prevent the expression of strong statements [8, 45].

Feminist discourse covers a variety of spheres, including media, sport, politics and everyday life, where language serves an essential function in framing perceptions of gender. As Theun van Dijk has pointed out, it explores that language is not merely a reflection of the world but a tool for shaping reality [11]. For example, in the media, feminist discourse can be used to analyse the representation of women in film, television and the news, highlighting how such portrayals contribute to societal views of femininity and masculinity. The role of language in constructing and challenging gender norms is a central issue in feminist discourse analysis. Far from being a neutral medium, language is actively involved in creating our understanding of gender. Linguistic choices such as the use of pronouns, the historical prevalence of the genitive "*he*" and the existence of gendered occupational terms (e.g. "*fireman*" vs. "*firewoman*", "*doctor*" vs. "*nurse*") often serve to perpetuate social stereotypes and reinforce traditional gender roles. For example, the generic masculine pronoun used when the gender of the person in question is unknown or unimportant implicitly centres men in discourse, making other genders invisible and promoting a male-centred worldview. "Feminists have at least since the 60s pointed to gaps and sexist language use in English, and the generic use of "*he*" has been pointed out to be marginalizing to women and non-binary people" [3, 2].

Similarly, research on gender metaphors in media and politics shows how the use of descriptors such as "*bossy*" for confident women or "*emotional*" for female leaders reinforces double standards. Such gendered language not only reflects existing inequalities, but also actively reinforces traditional roles and limits the expression of diverse gender identities. As Risman argues in her work, language shaped by patriarchal values reinforces traditional gender norms and sustains systemic inequality. Within this framework, masculinity is often positioned as the default or norm, while femininity is constructed as the deviation from that standard [10]. Through various approaches, feminist discourse strives to disrupt the linguistic structures that promote gender inequality and create a more equitable and inclusive linguistic environment.

Sports journalism is a specialised branch of media that covers, analyses and comments on sporting events, athletes and the sports industry in general. Over time, as sports became more popular with the wider society, sports journalism evolved into a mainstream media discipline with dedicated sections in newspapers, specialised magazines and entire media networks such as ESPN, Sports Illustrated and Sky Sports. Today, sports journalism embraces a wide variety of formats,

including traditional news stories, fast-paced live broadcasts, insightful interviews with athletes and coaches, investigative journalism that digs deep into the complexities and controversies of the sports world, and engaging columns that offer unique perspectives and provoke discussions. The first and foremost function of sports journalism is the dissemination of information. Journalists report on games, results and athletes' performances in real time, ensure that audiences stay up to date with the latest happenings in both local and international sports. This coverage extends to detailed previews of upcoming events, post-match analyses, statistics and standings – all of which are important to fans and stakeholders who follow sports with an eye for detail. Besides simply informing, sports journalism also serves an entertainment function by creating engaging stories about athletes and rivals. In addition to providing information and entertainment, sports journalism also performs the task of analysis and criticism.

Gender inequality in sports journalism remains an ongoing issue, as male journalists continue to dominate coverage, especially in traditionally "male" sports such as football, boxing and motorsport. Research shows that women represent only about 9% of sports reporters in mainstream media, and their presence is even smaller in management positions and as senior commentators [5, 299]. This imbalance intensifies the perception of sport as a male-dominated field, both on and off the field. For example, while male journalists often cover prestigious events such as the FIFA World Cup or the Super Bowl, women are often assigned to "softer" sports such as gymnastics or figure skating, thus perpetuating gender stereotypes of [6, 333]. The exclusion of women from leading roles in sports media not only limits diverse perspectives, but also discourages female journalists from working in the field.

The media representation of athletes is also highly gendered. Female athletes are often portrayed in a frame that emphasises their appearance, femininity or personal life rather than their physical skills or achievements. The media tends to focus on their looks, relationships or "unexpected" success cases, which can deemphasise their performances. In contrast, male athletes are typically shown through narratives of strength, professionalism and legacy, focussing on their performances, strategic skills and contributions to the sport. Such representational patterns perpetuate a hierarchy that privileges male athletes and discriminates against women, affecting not only public perceptions but also opportunities for women's participation and leadership in sport. A study of tennis coverage found that commentators were more likely to describe women's matches using terms such as "emotional" or "courageous", while men's matches were analysed in terms of strategy and strength [1, 301]. However, the persistence of gender stereotypes and the slow pace of structural change shows that much work remains to be done. The intersection of gender and media in sports coverage continues to shape not only how athletes are seen, but also who tells their stories, emphasising the need for reformation to achieve real equality in sports journalism.

Feminist discourse in sports journalism uses a number of intentional linguistic strategies to contest

established gender norms and change narratives about athletes. One of the main techniques is critical analysis and reconsideration of lexical choices. Traditional reporting often relies on gendered terminology, for example, referring to women as "female athletes" and men as "athletes", or using the diminutive "girls" for adult women and "men" for their male counterparts. Such distinctions reinforce the idea that male athletes are the standard and women are the exception, subtly diminishing women's achievements and status. Equal treatment of athletes, regardless of gender, is a core principle: male and female athletes should be treated with the same level of professionalism and respect, avoiding diminutive or patronising language.

"Now, England goalkeeper Mary Earps is the strong favourite to win the BBC's Sport Personality of the Year award after the six nominees were announced" (1)

The term "goalkeeper" is used without the gendered modifier "female" (e.g., "female goalkeeper"). By omitting gender markers, the text treats Earps's position and achievements as equivalent to those of male goalkeepers, showing her role as normative rather than exceptional. Newsrooms such as The Guardian and ESPN have complemented these written standards with mandatory unconscious bias workshops for reporters and commentators, addressing how subtle linguistic choices can perpetuate stereotypes.

Metaphors and analogies are another important area of interest. Traditional sports reporting tends to describe male athletes in militarised or aggressive metaphors – referring to games as "battles" and players as "warriors" – while women's sports are often discussed in terms of grace, beauty or domesticity, using phrases such as "graceful" or "like a dancer". This language not only perpetuates gender stereotypes, but also reduces the perception of the competitiveness and seriousness of women's sporting accomplishments. Feminist discourse undermines these patterns by using metaphors that emphasise the strength, resilience and empowerment of female athletes, such as calling Megan Rapinoe an "unstoppable force" or referring to the US women's soccer team as "ruthless conquerors" during their World Cup victories. Research shows that metaphors in sports journalism are a powerful tool for redefining what is considered valuable or admirable about athletes of all genders [9, 6].

"Emma Raducanu's remarkable US Open victory last week felt like something straight out of a fairytale; a true Cinderella story" (2)

Terms such as "fairy tale" and "Cinderella" describe Raducanu's victory as magical or serendipitous, rather than the result of skill and training. Such language is rarely applied to male athletes. The lexical field of the fairytale implies that her success is extraordinary for her gender, subtly positioning male victories as an unmarked norm. The Cinderella trope reduces Raducanu to a passive, "rescued" figure (despite her aggressive style of play), triggering stereotypical images of women as fragile and lucky rather than strategic and strong. While male athletes are more often referred to as "warriors" or "gladiators", which emphasises their activity. The Daily Mail's choice of words illustrates how lexical bias perpetuates the notion that women's sport is more of a

novelty than a serious competition. Eliminating these biased modifiers create focus on qualities like strength, determination, and skill, rather than reinforcing stereotypes or using gendered comparison [7].

Syntactic constructions play an equally important role in fighting gender bias. They emphasise the importance of subjectivity in language, advocating the use of the active voice to highlight the achievements of female athletes. Active voice directly attributes success to the athlete, whereas passive constructions can obscure individual contributions [2, 4].

It's been an outstanding Junior year for Charleston Catholic's, Mia Lough! This past weekend she was awarded Player of the Year for all classes from the West Virginia Sports Writers Association! Let's give a round of applause to Mia! (3)

The example of the tweet about Mia Lough demonstrates how syntactic structures shape the image of female athletes. Although the text celebrates her achievements, the passive construction “*she was awarded Player of the Year*” subtly diminishes her activity, making her appear to be a recipient of an action rather than an active participant. This contrasts with how the active voice “*Mia Lough earned Player of the Year*” more clearly positions her as the driving force behind the achievement.

During the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, publications such as The Athletic consistently used active constructions to highlight players' skills, leading to coverage of women's performances with the same importance as men's.

While it is important to celebrate achievements, portraying women's sport as exceptional can unintentionally reinforce the idea that it is outside the norm and less deserving of attention than men's sport. By adopting these strategies, sports journalism can become more inclusive and fair, promoting more precise and respectful representation of all athletes.

Conclusions and directions for further research in this area. The conducted study has demonstrated that the discourse of feminism in sports journalism has a significant role in forming public perception of gender roles and identities in the sports field. Through a critical discourse analysis of real-life media examples, it was

found that linguistic and pragmatic strategies such as lexical choices, syntactic structures, metaphors, framing techniques and speech acts play a central role in reinforcing or challenging traditional gender norms. Feminist discourse in sports journalism actively confronts patriarchal language models, promoting inclusive, neutral and empowering representations of female and non-binary athletes. The study highlights that despite some progress gender bias remains common. Language continues to display the male norm, including through diminutive and affectionate descriptors, passive voice, and the limited visibility of women and non-binary individuals in journalistic coverage. The comparative analysis of English and Ukrainian sports media shows how different linguistic systems influence gender representation and demonstrates that both cultures face different challenges and opportunities for developing an inclusive discourse.

The findings of the study contribute to the development of feminist media linguistics by identifying practical strategies for more equitable coverage of sporting events. These include the consistent use of inclusive terminology, active voice, gender-respectful framing, and focusing on the professional merits of athletes rather than their personal characteristics. Further research could include a large-scale corpus analysis, that can provide statistical evidence of gendered language patterns across sports, time periods and media. Comparative research in non-English media contexts would highlight unique approaches and foster a broader understanding of global feminist discourses in sports journalism. Moreover, examining how audiences interpret and respond to different linguistic representations would help determine the actual impact of inclusive discourse on public attitudes towards gender in sport.

Thus, the analysis of the phenomenon of feminist discourse in sports journalism indicates the versatility and effectiveness of linguistic and stylistic means in shaping media narratives and influencing the perception of gender roles in sports. The results of the work may be useful for further research in the fields of media linguistics, gender studies, and intercultural communication.

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