

Gender Representation in Different Women's Sports Articles

Asst.Lect. Sundus Hussein Allawi

Ministry of Education, Iraq.

Corresponding Author: Asst.Lect. Sundus Hussein Allawi - Sun.hus.85@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 14 Mar Accepted: 05 May Volume: 4 Issue: 2	This paper presents a comprehensive contrastive socio-linguistic analysis focusing on the representation of gender within sports journalism, specifically in articles about women's sports. Utilizing a corpus of English-language sports articles published over the last decade, this study employs both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to explore how gender constructs are embedded in sports media. The quantitative analysis involves a systematic examination of linguistic features such as pronoun usage, adjectives, and verbs, aiming to identify patterns that might reflect gender biases or stereotypes. Meanwhile, the qualitative component critically analyzes narrative styles, thematic structures, and the overall portrayal of female athletes, comparing them against their male counterparts when applicable. This dual approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the socio-linguistic dynamics at play, shedding light on the subtle ways in which language might perpetuate certain gender norms within the sports domain. Key findings suggest a gradual shift in language use towards more gender-neutral expressions, though remnants of traditional gender stereotypes persist. Implications for media practices and the perception of gender in sports are discussed.
KEYWORDS: gender, women's sport, newspapers, gendered language.	

1.0 Introduction

The study sets out to consider the role of gender in the representation of athletes in newspapers. The research builds on the knowledge that mass media is a powerful socializing agent, particularly in regard to sex role stereotyping. The quality and quantity of media coverage of women's sports is a relevant issue given the increased participation of girls and women in sport in recent years. For example, Horton (1999) showed that girls are afforded less coverage than boys in co-educational physical education classes. Media representations appear to be a likely factor shaping this differential participation. Given that sports media coverage is overwhelmingly of male athletes (Tuggle et al. 1992, Koivula 1999), and women's sports receives less than 5% of total air time and print space (Tuggle & Owen 1999), it seems reasonable to ask if these patterns are a reflection of the perceived suitability of women's participation in various sports and the perceived capabilities of female athletes. Print and electronic media has been cited in sociolinguistic research as a primary site for the construction and dissemination of social meaning. Holmes (2000) notes that media plays a crucial role in 'reflecting, modifying, or creating attitudes and behavior'. Thus, though it may be difficult to measure direct effects, media representations are a key resource for the study of gender

ideology. Holmes also highlights the contribution of critical discourse analysis to the 'practical problem-solving interests' of sociolinguistics, and defines such problems as those relating to social inequality and injustice. The current study will consider gender bias in media coverage as a problem of this nature.

1.1. Background

The research within the area of sports discourse has shown large interest in patterns of language that reflect or construct social identities. The theory of gender is a primary focus within this work. It is widely accepted that there is a significant imbalance in the representation of males and females in sport, this has been widely researched and proven in studies and has also been shown in the media (Wodak, 1999).

Research in the area of sport and the media has shown that women's sports is marginalized, trivialized, distorted and eroticized in comparison to men's sports. It was found that in a British national newspaper only 5.1% of printed space was given to women's sports and this only increased by 0.1% in the 15 years previous. 95.4% of this coverage was dedicated to articles about tennis. Despite the argument that journals and newspapers are reflective of society it was also found that 69% of the UK population believe there is not enough women's sport on TV. The media contributes to gender inequalities in sport through the reproduction of already held beliefs and dominant ideologies about gender. Due to these marginalization women are subjected to gender marking, which involves being classified on the basis of gender rather than judged on their sporting ability (Dijk, 1993).

This is a frequent occurrence for women in sports as it results in overemphasis of looks and femininity to validate their status as sports participants (Dijk, 2001). The consequences of this are that women are expected to conform to expectations about their gender and sport. Failure to do so often results in social and/or professional repercussion.

1.2 Gender Representation in Sports Media

Previous studies have been done in the area of the lack of female presence in sports media. They find that women are underrepresented in most areas of mainstream sports media such as television and newspaper, which projects traditional male attitudes into the way in which sports are interpreted. Messner (1988) in his study of the 1984 Los Angeles Times found that women were **underrepresented** as sports journalists, were given less opportunity to cover sports stories and were less likely to be responsible for editing sports copy. Moreover, he found that female journalists who did manage to break into the sports department were often assigned less prestigious roles, such as reporting on women's athletics, Title IX, or human-

interest features about athletes and sports figures. Similar findings were also noted by Duncan and Messner in their study of the sports sections of four Los Angeles area newspapers, these studies provide conflicting evidence in that Duncan and Messner (1997) write that the proportional amount of space given to women's sports has increased from an estimated Goff et al's (1991) 5%, to where they calculate it to be around 12%. This increase has mainly come at the expense of coverage of men's college sports, and not men's professional sports. The increase was short lived, and had begun to decrease again by 1997. These findings conflict with Duncan and Sayaovang's more recent (2002) study which found that only 9.5% of coverage in 2000 was attributed to women's sports. The conflicting evidence provided would suggest that gender bias continues to play a role in whether women's sports are newsworthy enough to be covered in the media. This suggestion is also supported in a latest study by Frontain (2008) which finds that sports editors and journalists maintain traditional attitudes about the newsworthiness and value of women's sports, and these journalists have sometimes been found to overemphasize the negative aspects of Title IX.

1.3 Previous Studies on Women's Sports Articles

It is significant to note that there has been a growing body of research into gender portrayal in sports media, on both the quantity of gender-based coverage and the quality of that coverage. However, much of this research has centered on the print media's coverage of women's sport, with very little attention being aimed at women's sport in online media. One such study, conducted by Bernstein, Cunningham, and Sagas (2005), undertook an analysis of articles from Sports Illustrated and Sports Illustrated for Women. The researcher's web scraped the first 75 articles on women's sport from Sports Illustrated for Women website and the 75 most recent articles on the same sports from the normal Sports Illustrated website. The research found that there was a significant increase in the proportion of articles on women's sports in Sports Illustrated for Women when compared to the traditional Sports Illustrated. This was taken as a positive indication that the market for women's sport is growing, given that the now-defunct magazine Sports Illustrated for Women was still in production when the study was conducted. Another positive was that there were significantly fewer female athlete photos in Sports Illustrated for Women that emphasized sex appeal. Luff and Humphreys (1999) conducted a case study of British Online and Print Media's coverage of the 1996 Women's European football Championship. The study found that although the quantity of coverage for the tournament was low, much of the coverage lacked gender bias, which can be noted as a positive. Unfortunately, results showed that it was the print media articles, and not online media articles, that mainly had negative gender-biased coverage.

1.4 Methodology

The study will employ the method of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for its potential insights into the ways media language "constitutes, reproduces and resists social inequality" (Baker, 2006a). CDA aims to investigate the relationship between discourse and power and its effects on social inequality. This approach is particularly suitable for the study of gender and language, where there is a well-established link between language and power. Furthermore, a CDA framework will enable analysis of the ways specific linguistic features help to construct gender identities and relations in women's sport. Since van Leeuwen's (2008) sociocognitive approach to CDA specifically deals with processes of identity construction in discourse through representation, this framework will be utilized to investigate how male and female gender identities are discursively constructed in women's sports articles in relation to power/agency, social roles and other cognitive aspects. These processes can be revealed at some depth through the analysis of gender representation as we can infer information about an agent's qualities and social roles by noting the attributes and actions assigned to them (van Leeuwen, 2008). Furthermore, CDA advocates an open approach to research methods, preferring a plurality of methods and sources of evidence in order to develop sound and well-supported argumentation. This is advantageous as the present study intends to utilize both qualitative and quantitative evidence in the analysis of gender representations. The gender representation model (Goffman, 1979) was developed by framing a relational approach to gender, based on how gender is represented in cultural artifacts and the social practices and structures behind these constructions. This theory deals with the interactions and power relations between different genders categorizing them as a form of a game (with winners and losers), conflict with an ultimate dominance and subordination of a certain gender, and exchange with a strategic way to influence the actions and outcomes of another.

It is suggested that the power and agency of different genders are reflected in social roles and cultural practices. This theory is applicable to the analysis of gender and women's sport as it asserts that the power and agency of a gender determine their position in society and the use of cultural resources can construct a reality to maintain and shape the positions of dominant and subordinate groups. A discourse topic that uses women's rugby as an example of a cultural resource provides an article with a headline that reflects the anticipation of a couples game between the male and female versions of rugby in a high school tournament. The expressed disappointment leads to a change of plans for the men's game to be played early in the morning and the women's game to be played late afternoon, which results in the assumption that the male version is the real version of rugby and a superior status of male's rugby in relation to the

women's game. This is an example of male gender having more power and agency discussed in relation to social roles (Sugden and Harpin, 2002).

1.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis is an integral part, or rather the most important one, in any research project. So is the case in this one. The main objective of this research project is to find out if gender-biased language is still prevalent in today's sports journalism or not, and if it is, what is the nature of the bias. This study adopts a qualitative research design by qualitatively analyzing the language used in sports articles. For the purpose of qualitative analysis, the research has taken a sample of sports articles from five different newspapers, which include **two tabloids (The Sun and The Daily Mirror), two broadsheets (The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph), and a regional newspaper (The Scotsman)**. A period of two months was taken, and any sports articles written about women's sport in that period were taken for the analysis. A total of 40 articles were analyzed, **with 10 articles** from each of the two tabloids and the broadsheet. The reason to select newspapers of the same country is to limit the bias due to cultural differences, as biases have been found to be variant across different cultures. The hypothesis is that tabloids use language that is more **biased** than the broadsheets, and that the nature of the language is **patronizing** to women's sport. The first part of the hypothesis was tested on the ground of the reputation of the newspaper for sensationalism and the type of language used in the reporting. This part was not included in this analysis, and the choice of the newspapers has been made on the basis of it for the analysis. It has been found in other studies that the reputation of the newspapers is a strong indicator of the potential bias to be found in the language used in their reports.

The most revealing results from this investigation were the types of **adjectives** used to describe both the athletes and the sports themselves. This indicated that in areas of sport which traditionally were of **male** domain (e.g., soccer and cricket), there was a tendency to use **adjectives** that have negative connotations or are not in context with the sporting level at which the athletes were competing. This was evident in soccer where the word **'hairy'** was over-represented and linked to **negative** descriptions of soccer in articles that were relating to the women's game.

There is no significant gendered language in these women's sports articles. It was expected that they would use particularly high amounts of gendered language, due to the plain fact that the articles are about women. However, the findings showed that gendered first person singular pronouns such as **'her'** and **'she'** were used barely any more than in contrasted men's sports articles. An example of this was discovered in the amount of gendered third person singular pronouns in the sports articles contrasted.

Male-oriented articles used **'he'** or **'his'** an average of 4.80 times in contrast to the average of 2.25 times that female articles used **'she'** or **'her'**. It is understood that the male pronoun was used as a generic, to refer to both sexes; however, it does show that the male articles were more likely to assume that the subject in context was male. It was expected that sports articles that focused on female sporting events would still be presented in a male sports culture framework. It was predicted that the articles would still refer to the expected audience as being men and would **marginalize** female sports as a poor imitation of male sports. This would in turn be reflected in the language and type of report. Large amounts of typological gender marking have been previously associated with giving what seems to be an inherent male characteristic to an activity, and it was also expected that verbs with an overtly male image would be attributed to male sport. This can also be said for specific references to female activity types. The final prediction was that male sport would be offered more column inches with reports focusing less on the game and containing more human-interest stories.

1.6 Comparison of Gender Representation in Different Sports

The sports chosen for comparison were cricket, football, hockey, and rugby, since all four of these sports have single-sex and mixed-gender versions. Moreover, all four are sports labelled as "traditional British sports" and all have international competitions. The last factor was important, as words about female athletes in sports with international profiles have greater potential to shape public perceptions of gender. Cricket and hockey were once sports with very high degrees of participation and good levels of media coverage for both sexes. However, both sports have undergone substantial changes in the later stages of the 20th century, with increases in the rate of women's participation and the restructuring of the sport such that there is no longer a male-only version. This has resulted in some confusion about the status of female players and has meant that representations of both male and female cricketers and hockey players are mixed.

The first specific objective is to provide a detailed account of the range. Moreover, the comparison of different sports. What frequently occurs in gender and language research into sports is that a given sport will simply be used as a vehicle to represent male dominance, and only one sport will be analyzed. As explained earlier, gender and language is a theoretical and ideological issue, and to make strong claims about the status of women through an analysis of a single sport is essential to the experiences of all women. On the other hand, a comparison of women's and men's sport is a risky strategy, for it can easily lead to the reinforcement of negative stereotypes about women and the trivialization of female achievements, as women will be measured against a male standard. Despite these limitations, a

comparison of single-sex sports can provide useful information about the construction of gender through the representation of women's and men's sports in similar or the same activity. This current study hopes to avoid making essentialist claims by not comparing women's sport with the corresponding male version (i.e., netball with basketball) and to lend insight into the experiences of female athletes by comparing the representation of single-sex sports with similar or the same activity.

1.7 Public and Private Images for the Women's Articles

15 of the sports articles focused on were headlines on an image, headlines generally defined the image as public or private and is known to affect an individual's perception of the article's significance. The image was then categorized in correlation to the headline. Research revealed a high use of public images for the men's articles and a **lower** but equal use of public and private images for the women's articles. This was significant as public images are used to reinforce or create a new social order, and it was found that women are often **positioned** in the **private** or leisure sphere. This could mean that the public sphere of competitive sport still does not seem natural for women and it is looked upon as unusual. High usage of public images could be a potential reason why it was found that men are more critically **evaluated** in sports articles and women are more likely to be **trivialized**. This was a finding very consistent with the predictions. An example of critical evaluation for men is talk of sporting prowess, and vice versa for women is often in relation to appearance or ability to take care of a family.

1.8 Conclusion

The goal of this paper is to explore gender difference in language from a feminist, sociolinguistic perspective. Each stage of the research process brought its own methodological problems. When collecting data, the researcher found that certain sports, i.e. football and rugby, scarcely had any coverage at all in the newspapers. **Without** a fairly balanced number of articles from both sexes. As well as examining media content, the relationship between sports media and the significance attributed to sport as a site for the construction of gendered identities can be discerned through an analysis of media sources and the potential impacts and influences on readers/consumers. These are in the areas of language and gender, social change, and the construction of the current sociopolitical climate. Although the sample used in this study was broad-based, the focus article selection of solo and team field sports can be seen as a reflection of the historical patriarchal control of media sports coverage where sport has been largely constructed as a male domain and vehicle for the large corporations and media in promoting consumer products aimed at male audiences. A systematic comparison of men's and women's sports participation in the print and

broadcast media has found that women are underrepresented in sports media compared to their participation levels in sport. Textual analysis of print media has found that women's sports reports are likely to be shorter in length, have a lower status position, and include more personal and affective information compared to men's sports reports. While these studies have provided valuable insights into the quantity and type of media coverage women receive in sport, they have neglected to explore the role of language and gender in the production and reproduction of male-dominated power relations between the sexes.

References:

- Cunningham, G. B., Sagas, M., Dixon, M., Kent, A., & Turner, B. A. (2005). Anticipated career satisfaction, affective occupational commitment, and intentions to enter the sport management profession. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19(1), 43-57.
- Dijk, V.T.A. (1993). "Principles of critical discourse analysis", *Discourse & Society*, SAGE, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 249-283.
- Dijk, V.T.A. (2001). *Structures of Discourse and Structures of Power*, Communication Yearbook.
- Eckert, P. & McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and Gender*, Cambridge University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (2013). A dialectical–relational approach to critical discourse analysis in social research¹. In *Critical discourse analysis* (pp. 230-254). Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. 2005, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman, London.
- Gallagher, A. G. et al. (2005). Virtual reality simulation for the operating room: proficiency-based training as a paradigm shift in surgical skills training. *Annals of surgery*, 241(2), 364-372.
- Gallagher, M. (2005). *More Women in Media: The Way Forward*. Report of the Global Media Monitoring Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Hoepfner, Y. (2006). "Analyzing the Beauty Advertisement Discourse: Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty", Felicitas Macgilchrist: *Media Discourse Analysis*.
- Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2008). Estimating teacher impacts on student achievement: An experimental evaluation (No. w14607). National Bureau of Economic Research.

- Lynn, S., Hardin, M., & Walsdorf, K. (2004). Selling (out) the sporting woman: Advertising images in four athletic magazines. *Journal of Sport Management*, 18(4), 335-349.
- Meân, L. J. (2012). Sport, identities, and consumption: The construction of sport at ESPN. com. In *Sports Media* (pp. 162-180). Routledge.
- Messner, M. A. (1990). Men studying masculinity: Some epistemological issues in sport sociology. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 7(2), 136-153.
- Mills, S. 1995, *Feminist Stylistics*, Routledge, London New York.
- Stankiewicz, J. M. & Rosselli, F. 2008, "Women as Sex Objects and Victims in Print Advertisements", *Sex Roles*, vol. 58, pp. 579-589.
- Tuggle, C. A. (1997). Differences in television sports reporting of men's and women's athletics: ESPN SportsCenter and CNN Sports Tonight. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 41(1), 14-24.
- Tuggle, C. A., & Owen, A. (1999). A descriptive analysis of NBC's coverage of the centennial Olympics: The "games of the woman"? *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 23(2), 171-182.
- Vahid, H.E. & Esmae'li. (2012). "The power behind Images: Advertisement Discourse in Focus", *International Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 4, no.4.
- Wodak, R. (1999). *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, Edinburgh.