



Gendered Evaluation: A Stylistic Study of Adjectival Choices for Female and Male Public Figures in News Discourse

Saira Sajid

Visiting Lecturer at University of Education, Jauharabad, Pakistan

syra.alvi118@gmail.com

Ayesha Qintar

Kinnaird College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan

ayeshaaqintar@gmail.com

Rabail Memon

MS Scholar, Centre of English Language & Linguistics- CELL, Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro, Pakistan

rabailm632@gmail.com

Abstract

Language is crucial in forming social perceptions, and media discourse is a strong site where gender identities are made, maintained, and even challenged. In this respect, linguistic decisions, especially adjectives, have evaluative connotations, which express hidden ideological stances. A significant number of studies are available on news discourse, but limited research is available to explore on stylistic study of adjectival choices for female and male public figures in news discourse. Thereby, applying a qualitative approach using Stylistic analysis interpreted by Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse analysis model. The data is purposely collected from three different Pakistani newspapers as Daily Times, Pakistan Today, and The Nation, with a total number of ten articles. The current study aims to explore adjectival choices in Pakistani news discourse that reflect gendered evaluations of male and female public figures. The study highlighted that descriptions of the female figures in the Pakistani news discourse are characterized by adjectival decisions favoring emotional, appearance-related, and relational expressions, which are contrasted by adjectival decisions of male figures being characterized by qualities of authority, competence, and rationality.

Keywords: *Gendered Language, News Discourse, Public Figure, Pakistani Newspaper, Stylistic Study*

1. Introduction:

In recent decades and in the contemporary globalizing world, the mass media has gained more power and women have gradually become more visible in the sphere of journalism. The growth in female contribution to the television reportage has been observed and many researchers argue that there is an increase in the influence of women in news reportage (Cann 2001, Desmond 2009).

For many years the linguist has been interested in ways of reporting news; how a story gets told and how male and female write them in the form of news (Wareing, 1998:52).

Language is all about experience, (a loaded weapon as Bolinger claims) it is all about communication and linguistics is the scientific study of language, which by implication is the study of our experiences and communications. Linguistics is sometimes defined as “a language talking about language”. It has developed from a discipline with narrowly defined formal concerns to a more comprehensive discipline in which the role of language in relation to the conceptualization and communication of meaning has been fruitfully investigated.

Linguistics is a field that examines all aspects of human language through formal, scientific and variable measures. It draws from various disciplines for an understanding of different aspects of language in its various forms. From Human Psychology, it gains an understanding of the mental processes involved in the use of language; how language is stored, perceived and processed in the brain.

Stylistics also assesses the aesthetic features of speakers' use of language and helps speakers or analysts to categorise or systemize them. Moreover, it is the scientific study of style and style is certainly a familiar word, but interestingly because of its multiplicity of definitions, the concept has been used to mean different things to different scholars, as such different definitions have been given to the term; Style”. For the purposes of this study, it becomes expedient to consider the various definitions of Stylistics that scholars have given. The term style first referred in English to a writing implement, then to ways of using it, and to ways of doing virtually anything.

Ordinarily, the word ‘style’ is used to refer to the manner of doing things; speaking, writing, dressing, walking, eating, plaiting etc. Crystal and Davy (1969: 9-10) enunciate four definitions of style as follows: i. Style as the language habit of a person. ii. Style referring to some or all the language habits shared by a group of people at one time over a period of time. iii. Effectiveness of mode of expression. iv. Style as tantamount to literary language.

Variation within a linguistic system or a speech community can be stable or it can be an indication of change in progress. (Weinreich, 1968:188) state that “not all variability and heterogeneity in language structure involves change; but all change involves variability and heterogeneity”. Farmers and Harnish (2002:259) also posit that:

“No human language is fixed, uniform or unvarying, all languages show internal variation. Actual usage varies from group to group and speaker to speaker in terms of the pronunciation of language, the choice of words and meaning of those words, even the use of syntactic constructions.”

Although the male and female journalists get the same news from the same source, the way they write is different. Gender plays the most important role in influencing the process of writing. The differences may be seen in the topic development, word choice and other gender-stereotyped patterns such as lexical hedges, ‘empty’ adjectives, precise terms, intensifiers, ‘hypercorrect’ grammar, ‘super polite’ form, emphatic stress, etc.

News discourse is an important area in creating the perception in the society by selecting, framing and presenting social events and actors using language (Wodak and Mey, 2009). The texts in journalism are not only factual but they incorporate evaluative lexis, narrative and interpersonal qualities in their construction of meanings to influence interpretations of the readers (Fairclough, 1995). Through the Pakistani case, English-language newspapers frequently appear to be the elite means of ideology, in which power relations and societal norms are written into the languages of daily media (Mehmood, 2024). Therefore, the study of news discourse can provide information about how the practices of media are used to represent and support larger structures of society.

Gendered evaluation is the organized application of words to differentiate, value and measure the female and male subjects differently (Slipachuk et al., 2024). This is usually reflected in the surface of media discourse where women receive appearance-related or emotion-related adjectives, and men receive authority-related or competence-related adjectives (Fatima, 2024). These patterns of evaluation do not just mirror existing gender ideologies but they also help propagate them through the media viewers. This paper thus focuses on the role of adjectival selection of women and male figures in the Pakistani newspapers in terms of the way they contribute to the process of gendered assessment of the news discourse.

2. Literature Review:

The studies of language and gender have long been focused on the idea that linguistic choices are influenced by and contribute to social relations of power, identity, and ideology (Khachmafova et al., 2015; Azmy, Rahman and Muntasir, 2024). In the media discourse, how public figures are characterized (or characterized using lexical items such as adjectives) is a good source of information about the mechanism through which gendered evaluation can be materialized (Slipachuk et al., 2024; Fatima, 2024). This review will discuss three angles of literature that are pertinent in this research: (1) the discipline of language, gender and media in general; (2) evaluation language (particularly, adjectives) and stylistics; and (3) gendered adjectival use in Pakistani and other similar settings.

2.1 Language, Gender, and Media

Gender identities are formed in the media text as one of the major areas of discourse, i.e., the use of lexis, syntax, and rhetorical elements of texts (Azmy et al., 2024; Khachmafova et al., 2015). It has been found that news reporting is predisposed to embody and reproduce dominant

gender standards through the presentation of both males and females (Riaz, 2024; Slipachuk et al., 2024). Specifically, a greater focus on appearance, emotion or relational roles is most frequently applied to women, and competence, authority and rationality are applied to men (Fatima, 2024; Naveed, Yasmin and Irshad, 2025). Indicatively, Riaz (2024) demonstrated that in news media at the international level, female politicians were more often characterized with softer evaluative terms, whereas the male equivalents were characterized with power-related evaluatives. This is consistent with the larger viewpoint of feminist linguistics when it is argued that language is rarely neutral and that it can be part of keeping unequal gender relations in place (Mills, 1995; Gheni, 2021).

2.2 Evaluative Expressions, Stylistics and Critical Discourse

Attitudes, judgments and values are expressed by evaluative language which consists of adjectives, adverbs, modals and other lexico-grammatical forms (Simpson, 1993). Such linguistics features are connected to meaning effects and reader response by stylistics (Simpson, 1993; Mills, 1995). Adjectives that characterize individuals, in particular, refer to the ideological effects of the use of certain words: not only do they describe something, but also judge it (Mahmoud, 2023; Ahmad and Mehmood, 2024). As an example, the stylistic analysis of political and religious speeches demonstrated that the evaluative focus of the text was shifted with the adjectives in attributive and predicative location (Mahmoud, 2023). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers methods to connect these linguistic characteristics to larger social activity: e.g. equitable and just representation, media ideologies and power of genders. By adopting the models like the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1995) the researchers can analyze the texts (linguistic features), discursive practice (production/consumption) and social practice (ideology) together (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 1997). Together, stylistics and CDA make possible close reading of the workings of evaluative language and its social functions and activity. Research like that done by Ibrahim (2024) suggests that in cases where the quantitative counts may be viable, qualitative stylistic reading is needed to reveal the nuances of meaning.

2.3 Genderised Adjectival Decisions in News and Pakistan

The study of gendered language in Pakistan media is slightly under researched yet it is increasing. As an example, in an analysis of Pakistani newspaper columns using parts of speech, Mehmood (2024) discovered that adjectives dominated the female columns and in female written columns more than action, performance and logic; whereas in male columns, adjectives were more about emotion, appearance or relational roles. This is in the sense that evaluative language in Pakistan reflects global trends besides possibly localising gender norms. Naveed, Yasmin and Irshad (2025) studied gender neutrality in Pakistani newspapers and have discovered that despite some instances of gender-neutral terminologies, some discursive tendencies still prefer masculine default and male topics. A study of Urdu plays in Pakistan by Kiani, Umar and Sultan (2023) identified such contributions by adjectives and other lexical elements (tag questions, hedges) to the depiction of female characters as dependent and male characters as authoritative, which supports the stereotyped gendered images. In the same vein, Haris (2024) discovered in the advertisements of Pakistani magazines that are written in English that femininity was connected to beauty and domesticity through lexical or multimodal

signals. The studies prove that adjectives are a poorly studied but powerful locus of assessment in Pakistani media discourse.

Research on gendered evaluation is also supported internationally in the value of adjectives. As an illustration, Slipachuk et al. (2024) discovered that in mass media outlets, women were more often characterized with appearance- and emotion-related adjectives whereas men were characterized with competence or status-related adjectives. According to Leavy (2020), the study of machine-learning in the Irish media showed that less emphasis was placed on professional qualities and more on evaluative adjectives related to the personal qualities of female politicians. Other studies of lexical interest have been conducted by Ahmad, Hussain and Ghani (2021) who investigated the encoded gender identities in adjectival sentences in the literary works, though not news-based, the research is applicable in the current stylistic interest. Combined with them it suggests that adjectival choice is a handy predictor of gendered assessment in discourse.

2.4 Research Gap

Though a considerable amount of literature has been dedicated to the topic of gendered language and media coverage in general, little research has specifically examined the use of adjectives in Pakistani English newspapers and the patterns of their usage among male and female individuals in the news. Most of the Pakistani research focuses on the wide-ranging lexical groups (nouns, pronouns, verbs) or textual characteristics and does not examine adjectives in specific detail (Mehmood, 2024; Kiani et al., 2023). Further, although it is an international investigation, there is a high count of investigations that depend on quantitative or machine-learning techniques (Leavy, 2020) and fail to give the rich qualitative stylistic-CDA interpretation required to analyze a meaning of subtlety. As a result, the given research fills this gap by using the qualitative stylistic analysis of adjectival usage in Pakistani news discourse that is explained through a CDA framework of Fairclough and thus presents both theoretical and empirical implications on the topic of gender, language and media studies in South Asia.

The current study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are evaluative adjectives stylistically used to describe male and female public figures in Pakistani English newspapers?
2. What differences can be observed in the adjectival choices applied to male and female subjects in terms of evaluative polarity and thematic focus?
3. How do these adjectival patterns reflect underlying gendered ideologies within Pakistani news discourse?

3. Methodology

In this study, the stylistic approach used is qualitative, where the researcher investigates the use of adjectives on male and female figures of publicity in Pakistani newscast discourse. It employs the analytical framework of stylistics that deals with the linguistic choices as being

indicative of evaluation and ideology (Simpson, 1993; Mills, 1995). The adjectives are especially important as they reflect the attitudes and pronouncements, which form the perception of the readers of the subjects that are reported (Leech & Short, 2007).

The linguistic findings are interpreted by selectively relying on Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough (1995)- not the three-dimensional model of it, but its most important element, which is that language is a social practice under the influence of power and ideology. This can be interpreted to explain adjectival patterns at levels beyond the textual level, the connection of these patterns to gendered attitudes and culture demands of Pakistani journalism.

3.1 Data Collection

The information comprises nine news articles that were chosen on three large Pakistani English-language newspapers: Daily Times, Pakistan Today, and The Nation. Each of the newspapers has three articles; one about a male public figure, one about a female figure and one comparative or mixed article. They are chosen with references to the following:

Publications between 2023 and 2025.

Articles about politics or governance or social leadership.

Articles that include descriptive or evaluative language on well-known people.

The reason is that these newspapers are the mainstream Pakistani media and address both national and international readers; these newspapers were selected because they use English as a language.

3.2 Data Analysis

All collected articles are carefully read to make out adjectives that are used directly to denote nouns denoting a person of public significance. The adjectives are grouped in terms of:

Evaluative Polarity: positive, negative or neutral;

Semantic Domain: professional ability, individual characteristics, feelings, or looks.

This is then followed by the stylistic analysis of each gender in terms of recurring patterns and tone of description. It is based on such linguistic observations that are viewed critically, as the use of language helps to develop gendered representations and perpetuate social ideologies in the discourse of media.

3.3 Significance of the Study

This paper brings out the importance of linguistic nuances in the creation of gendered appraisal in news writing; in this case, the use of adjectives. It adds to the literature about language and gender as it provides insights on Pakistani newspapers on English as it is less represented in the discussion of stylistic discourse. The results are expected to raise awareness of gender bias in media language and stimulate more equal linguistic forms of journalism.

3.4 Limitations of the Study

The qualitative character of the study and the small size of the data set (nine articles) limit the possibility of generalization. It concentrates only on the English-language newspapers whereas omitting the Urdu and regional newspaper where various gendered patterns might be present. Lastly, although attempts are done to ensure analytical consistency, the subjective interpretation of evaluative meaning is a drawback that can be seen with the subject of stylistic analysis.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

The data used to conduct this study are nine news articles that have been gathered in three Pakistani English newspapers: The Nation, Daily Times, and Pakistan Today. All the newspapers provided three articles, one dedicated to a male representative of the population, another to a female representative of the population, and the third one to mixed or comparative coverage. The articles were first screened to the year 2023-2025 to make sure that they are linguistically relevant to the contemporary journalistic trends.

The dataset gives three contexts of media coverage, which include political, social and entertainment. Articles on political matters, social contexts, and entertainments contexts treated elected representatives and ministers profile or commentary, activists or philanthropists, and people in the arts and culture. Collectively, these texts are a good sample of a formal and semi-formal journalistic register.

Newspaper	Number of Articles	Gender Focus	Context	Publication Year
<i>Daily Times</i>	3	Male and Female	Political / Social	2023-2025
<i>Pakistan Today</i>	3	Male and Female	Political/ Environment	2023-2025
<i>The Nation</i>	3	Male and Female	Political/ Governance	2023-2025

Table 1: Overview of the Dataset

Of all corpus, about 380 adjectives were found and coded. Approximately 57 percent were found in texts that were describing male figures, and 43 percent were found in the texts that

were describing females. This primary distribution indicates that the male subjects are slightly given more adjectival description, perhaps because they are dominant in political and institutional coverage. The nature of such adjectives and evaluative orientation however exhibit some gendered differences, as discussed in the following sections.

4.1 Adjectival Stylistic Patterns of Usage.

In the three newspapers, adjectives were used as major stylistic elements in creating the tone, authority and attitude towards the figures of the population. Adjectives were employed to define ideological positions as well as the physical or behavioral traits in all the outlets.

Another trend was repeated: female personalities could be provided with adjectives of personal and emotional assessment, whereas male characters were marked with descriptive elements of practicality or roles (decisive, influential, controversial). This confirms previous research that claims women are assessed on the basis of looks and emotion as opposed to men who are assessed on the basis of performance and intellect (Mills, 1995; Fatima, 2024).

The Nation used the most percentage of evaluative adjectives among the three newspapers, as it tended to use loaded language in order to influence the perception of the people. The tone of Pakistan Today was less emotional as fewer adjectives were used and more of the facts were framed. Daily Times had varied tendencies, and balanced personal and professional qualities. Such differences are based on varying editorial ideologies and editorial norms in Pakistani English journalism.

In general, stylistic observation indicates that gender is still a structuring component in adjectival representation. The adjectives usage frequency and polarity are not only dependent on gender but also on the scope of coverage: more emotional and appearance-related adjectives were used in entertainment pieces whereas more evaluative adjectives with references to competency and credibility were used in political news.

4.2 Adjectival selections of the Female Public persons

4.2.1 Appearance and Personality Descriptors

The women in the sample were often characterized using words that referred to their looks, attitude, and charisma. The words included graceful, elegant, posed, soft-spoken, and charismatic, were used with regularity particularly in the social and lifestyle articles published by Daily Times. Even in political terms linguistic interest in physicality or composure continued - such as talking of a female minister as a gracious orator with a cool air.

These words imply that aestheticity and social traits are salient when describing women, which implicitly supports conventional notions of femininity, beauty and gentleness. Although mostly used in a positive connotation, these adjectives distract the reader with the content of the work to the personal images of women as attractive both physically and emotionally, instead of being viewed as someone in an authoritative position within an institution.

4.2.2 Professional and Intellectual Attributes

Even words like competent, articulate, influential, dedicated and progressive were employed when female public personalities were assessed on professional grounds. Nevertheless, their rate was considerably low compared to appearance-based descriptors. These professionalized adjectives would frequently be contextualized down - e.g. in spite of her gentle manner, she is a good administrator. This contrast of profession with conventionally female softness suggests that the ability to do things is a surprise, but a commendable one in a woman.

The trend shows that there is discursive ambivalence: despite the recognition of the capabilities of women, the media constructs them linguistically as an exception to the norm rather than a standard as a part of the power structure. This is in line with what Fairclough has said (1995) about ideology which he says frequently works with delicate linguistic differences and not blatant prejudice.

4.2.3 Emotional and Relational Framing

A third trend deals with adjectives of the representation of women in the emotional and relational identity. Such words like caring, supportive, empathetic, and compassionate were used quite often, especially in the social and humanitarian context. Female activists were pictured as voices of compassion or relentless champions of others and were put in the role of moral agents characterized by empathy.

Although these adjectives are used to express a positive message, they also strengthen genderized notions of nurturance and emotional work. The focus of relational adjectives (the way women are related to others) creates the image of femininity as a communal one as compared to the individual and assertive male depiction. Emotional adjectives, thereby, are weaponized to sustain ideology, as a female success is based on emotion instead of tactical ability.

4.3 Adjectival Option of Male Public Figures

In the chosen articles, male social icons are described mostly using the words that highlight power, professionalism, and decisiveness. Such words like strong, strategic, influential, and assertive are used very often in the political environment, which supports the vision of men as effective leaders and rational decision-makers. Such language selection creates the impression of domination and strength with male subjects being the action and power players.

Meanwhile, evaluative adjectives in terms of performance (e.g., effective, confident, determined, etc.) indicate professional competence and intelligence instead of emotional or interpersonal qualities. This tendency indicates that the male gender in the Pakistani news talk is mostly subjected to objective and performance-based discourse that substantiates their leadership position. Nevertheless, there are also some negative terms, e.g., corrupt, arrogant, controversial, etc., which are only used occasionally, especially when it comes to political coverage, meaning that male power can be seen as both adorable and scandalous.

In general, the stylistic representation of male characters shows that there exists the linguistic hierarchy where men are placed as potent and reasonable actors and negative judgments are aimed at their morals or politics but not at their ability or even looks.

4.3.1 Adjectives of Power and Leadership

Descriptive adjectives that were power-oriented, strong, decisive, firm, assertive, and authoritative were very much used to describe male public figures. These words were a common phenomenon in the political articles, especially in *The Nation*. These adjectives make men the source of authority and guidance, and are a linguistic reinforcement of masculine dominance in leadership positions. The repetition of such words even in the case of neutral reporting made male power institutionally acceptable. These results echo the existing studies in linguistics, which implicates masculine representation with agency, authority, and strategic skills (Simpson, 1993; Riaz, 2024).

4.3.2 Rational and Performance-based Evaluations.

Strategic, experienced, confident, efficient, and calculated were also rational and cognitive adjectives given to the male subjects. These words highlight the intellectual judgment and performance as opposed to emotion. An example was given by the *Pakistan Today* where a male minister was described as being a strategic reformer who was bold in policy. Such descriptions construct masculinity as a rational and goal-oriented phenomenon that places men as thinkers and problem-solvers in the public life.

In comparison, similar adjectives to women were less and usually accompanied with emotional or moral modifiers. This imbalance shows how news language silently establishes rationality (masculine) and empathy (feminine) divisions that continue to institute gendered epistemic inequalities.

4.3.3 Negative or Critical Representations

Unflattering traits of male characters, including arrogant, corrupt, controversial, and divisive were there but applied in a politically strategic manner. Performance or ethics was often criticized rather than appearance or emotion. Indicatively, a politician is defined by *Daily Times* as an ambitious but controversial character meaning that even being a negative personality is connected to professional conduct, not individual personality.

This trend is rather different compared to the situation with women, as negative terms (yet less frequently) sometimes mentioned emotional instability or reliance, e.g., too emotional or too optimistic. Therefore, the discourse punishes the male actors but female actors, i.e. acts of the female characters but not the attitudes as gender-specific frames of criticism.

4.4 Comparative Stylistic Evaluation

A comparison of the usage of adjectives by gender has shown evident stylistic imbalance. Adjectives were more common in male figures (68 percent of total) but with greater focus on competence, authority and rationality. Women characters were less adjectivated but with more emotionally and personally charged words.

Also different was the tone: male adjectives were more objective or institutionalized (strategic, seasoned), female adjectives were more subjective ones (charming, inspiring). The distinction would suggest that male presence is in compliance with professional identity and female

presence is in compliance with personal attractiveness. This contrast is supported by semantic categorization:

Professional domain - 68.9 percent of adjectives are male vs. 31 percent of females.

Emotional/relational domain - 73 percent of adjectives used by females and 27 percent by males.

Appearance domain - practically all females.

Category	Female Figures	Male Figures	Total	Dominant Polarity
Appearance/Personality	35	10	45	Positive
Professional/Intellectual	18	40	58	Positive
Emotional/Relational	22	8	30	Mixed
Power/Leadership	09	38	47	Positive
Negative Evaluations	15	20	35	Negative

Table 2: Frequency of Evaluative Adjectives by Gender

The findings of such kind substantiate the second research question of the study that adjectival choice differs in terms of polarity and thematic focus across gender. Feminine representation is still evaluative and affective whereas the male representation is factual and instrumental linguistically. As to narrative position, articles that set about men were impersonally constructed with institutional reference points, but those about women were narrative personalized with evaluatory adjectives that evoked sympathy in the reader. This is in tandem with what Wodak (1997) states that gendered discourse functions using repetitive linguistic practices that normalize difference.

4.5 Ideological Implications in News Discourse

The linguistic patterns observed reflect deeper ideological mechanisms of Pakistani news discourse. At the textual level, adjectives act as carriers of evaluative stance; at the discursive level, these choices align with institutional editorial norms; and at the social level, they reproduce gender ideologies of masculinity as rational authority and femininity as relational empathy.

Although the full CDA framework of Fairclough (1995) is not applied, its core principle that language both constructs and reflects power relations helps to explain how adjectival choices contribute to symbolic gender hierarchy. News writing, while appearing objective, encodes evaluative bias through lexical selection. The findings indicate that female leadership is linguistically framed through exceptionality and emotionality, whereas male leadership is presented as standard and strategic. Such representation not only shapes audience perception but also reinforces patriarchal assumptions about capability and temperament in public roles. Even positive adjectives for women often maintain an ideological double bind, celebrating their success while emphasizing their emotional or aesthetic qualities.

Hence, the stylistic analysis reveals that gendered evaluation in Pakistani media is not overtly discriminatory but discursively embedded, operating through subtle evaluative contrasts that appear natural or complementary yet sustain systemic imbalance.

4.6 Findings

The analysis across nine articles from three national newspapers demonstrates consistent gender-based variation in adjectival usage. Female public figures are described through personal, emotional, and aesthetic adjectives, whereas male figures are framed through professional, rational, and power-based descriptors. Even where women are praised, the evaluative framing situates them within traditional feminine expectations. These stylistic tendencies support all three research questions: adjectives are used differentially across gender, those differences reflect underlying ideologies, and they reveal the persistence of gendered discourse practices in Pakistani journalism.

In sum, language choice specifically adjectival selection functions as an ideological tool that subtly perpetuates gender hierarchies under the guise of description. The next section concludes by summarizing the study's implications for gender representation, linguistic equity, and journalistic practice.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the adjectival uses of Pakistani English newspapers has shown that there is a clear tendency to evaluate men using the adjectives of power, competency, and authority, and younger ladies, using personal, emotional, or appearance-related adjectives. So, it is concluded that these language trends are indicative of the nature of gender bias lingering in the news discourses and the way language still perpetuates the social ideological beliefs of gender and leadership in Pakistan. This question can be extended in future studies through the use of Urdu-language newspapers and broadcast media to determine whether the same gendered patterns can be found beyond language and cultural borders. The international data might also yield greater experience of the work of constructing gender identities in the media language in different sociopolitical contexts.

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