
The Role of Translation in Women Athletes' Narratives in Sport News

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Abstract

This contribution will explore narratives and news translation via the lens of women's sport. Women's performance has advanced greatly since the 1900s, but media coverage of women athletes has not kept pace. Media framing of women in sport can be culturally explained in terms of narratives which are inevitably shaped around the predominant voices. Journalism heavily relies on narratives. As news writing draws extensively on foreign sources, narratives are built also through translation, and (foreign) narratives are reconstituted and renegotiated. The goal of this contribution is to study the way translation contributes to "the ideological or aesthetic thrust of a narrative" (Harding 2012, 301) in newspaper articles. We will analyse a corpus of English articles and their Italian counterpart. The articles included in our corpus, drawn from the sports section of generalist newspapers, will focus on internationally debated episodes of female professional tennis: a) the gender gap in prizes (2016); b) Justin Gimelstob's sexist remarks on Anna Kournikova and other female players (2008); c) Naomi Osaka's withdrawal from Roland Garros in 2021. This overview of articles aims at answering the following questions: 1) What are the narratives which characterize the media coverage of female tennis athletes in translated articles in Italy and abroad? Is there a noticeable difference between the two and over time? 2) What is the role of translation in constructing such narratives? Can the shifts in the translated quotations be seen as acts to adjust the narrative? The contrastive analysis will employ Critical Discourse Analysis, which looks at language in a more holistic way and from a macro-analytic approach while showing that gender is not a given, but it is culturally constructed. The results will be interpreted drawing from Narrative Theory applied to Journalism Studies and Translation Studies.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, news translation, women in sport, journalism studies, narratives in translation.

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1. Introduction

Narrative and storytelling are so important to understand our culture and humanity that they may be deemed a “human imperative” (Gottschall 2013, 18). Narrative is the way we organize our experience and our memory of human happenings (Bruner 1991): narrative represents a sequence of events, real or fictional, through language, and more specifically through written language (Genette 1966, 152).

Narrative is not limited to literature. For instance, journalism defines narrative as a “conceptual, abstract artifact that is both created and evoked by the repeated use of certain frames in news products” (van Krieken and Sanders 2021, 1395). Whenever this intangible concept is understood by groups of individuals (typically within a shared culture, nationality, or political orientation) and endures over time, a metanarrative emerges. Therefore, news coverage potentially relies on (or contributes to the creation of) a certain metanarrative for interpretation and sensemaking of facts. The globalised news flow, which was made feasible by the extensive use of translation (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009) allows for these narratives to be investigated from a multilingual and intercultural perspective. As Fairclough noted (1995, 54), the events in the press are interpreted and represented rather than reported transparently. In the case of translated news or translated material for a news article, the mediating act of translation intersects with the framing embedded in the news writing process.

Narratives and stories are also crucial in sport. They provide meaning (Gleaves 2017) and may serve to marginalize and oppress certain segments of the population (English 2020, 3). In fact, the quality of women athletes’ coverage in mass media is crucial in promoting and encouraging women’s participation as well as ensuring exposure and visibility, as most spectators experience sporting events in their mediated version. While women’s performance has advanced greatly since the 1900s, media coverage of women athletes has not followed.

The media’s portrayal of women in sport can be culturally explained in terms of narratives (English 2020, 2). Therefore, this contribution aims to study the way translation contributes to “the ideological or aesthetic thrust of a narrative” (Harding 2012, 301) in a corpus of Italian articles and their Anglo-American counterpart. The articles included in our corpus were drawn from the sports section of generalist newspapers. Taking into account the long-acknowledged media marginalization of women athletes (Bruce 2015, 383), including in written media (Fink 2015, 333), which already reduces the number of articles available, the corpus will include internationally debated episodes of female professional tennis that were selected according to three main criteria. Firstly, the event had to have been covered by both the Italian and the Anglo-American press. Secondly, the event had to involve representation issues reported by the

feminist critique, such as sexist language in all its representational practices (Cameron 2005), the gender pay gap (Karamessini and Ioakimoglou 2007), and the infantilisation of women (Huot 2013). Thirdly, the event could potentially display ambivalence as one of the default settings of sports coverage (Bruce 2013). Thus, this article includes coverage of: a) Justin Gimelstob's sexist remarks on Anna Kournikova and other female players (2008); b) the gender pay gap in tennis prizes (2016); c) Naomi Osaka's withdrawal from Roland Garros (2021); d) Serena Williams's Vogue interview and retirement (2022).

This study aims at answering the following questions:

1. What are the dominant narratives in the coverage of women tennis athletes in Italy and abroad? Is there a noticeable difference between the two?
2. What is the role of translation in constructing such narratives? Can the shifts in the translated quotations be seen as acts to adjust the narrative?

The principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995; Wodak and Meyer 2001) will be applied to discover the narratives embedded in the articles and verify whether they reproduce or challenge the metanarrative on women athletes. Due to its emphasis on the dialectical relationship between language and the social context in which it is used, CDA is able to investigate the role of discourse in the development of dominant-dominated relationships and the management of social conflict (Fairclough 1989). CDA allows to go beyond the text to see what is missing, why it was overlooked, what was made salient/unimportant and why it was manipulated. CDA can be employed for the analysis of a wide range of discourses, including media discourse, gender representation, politics, etc., to detect taken-for-granted background knowledge that encompasses ideological ideas passed down as "common sense" (Fairclough 1995, 28).

The article is divided as follows: Section 2 will discuss the role of narratives in news writing and the repercussions on translated news; Section 3 will introduce the gender problem in sports coverage; Section 4 will present the contrastive analysis.

2. Narrative in newswriting and news translation

The presence of narrative in journalism is only apparently in opposition to the preconceived notion of journalism as fact-based which builds the 'rhetoric of objectivity' (Roeh 1989, 162). Data such as statistics, figures, and facts are the foundations of the narrative, and journalists are the agents who select not only the events but also the narrative point of view, building the links through which reality is reconstructed. Being built from episodes defined by the journalist-

addressee, the ostensibly objective report reveals its subjective nature (Motta 2013, 104). Readers also contribute to the creation of narratives: it is the addressees' active performance that fills the unavoidable gaps and discontinuities of a given discourse (Motta 2013, 101).

Narratives have persuasive power (Bullock et al. 2021): they are used for both internal purposes - attracting new readers - and external purposes - consolidating society around a certain idea (Markova and Sukhovij 2020, 357). Studies on the persuasive power of narrative in journalism (Tamul and Hotter 2019; Oschatz et al. 2021) have shown that narratives can elicit attitudes or emotional involvement that are then applied to the larger social group, thus providing more insights into how journalism can steer public opinion. Syntactical and lexical choices relying on shared narratives and cultural perceptions guide the readers' interpretation. Manipulation of the narrative's discourse and retelling involves avoidance of the linear-type narrative to instigate readers' curiosity, the identification of a neat story perspective, and character emphasis (Hoeken, Kolthoff, and Sanders 2016). Furthermore, direct and indirect quotations improve the narrative by providing sensory perception of characters' voices and facilitating immersion in the text (van Krieken 2018).

In journalism, narratives are closely connected with framing. "To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient" (Entman 1993, 52), promoting and guiding towards a particular causal interpretation or moral judgement. Framing is an active strategy that implies agency and conscious participation in the construction of reality. Depending on the narrative agent, the same story can thus reveal different narratives and frames.

Translation provides another lens through which to examine narratives in general and journalistic narratives in particular. Translation is just one of the steps in the news writing process. The heavy editing and cutting required to merge the various sources into the final news article makes the approach to the source text methodologically different from other translation fields in which the source text is a whole to be translated in its entirety. The source text is thus seen as a component that can be altered as necessary to meet the demands of the news outlet. Therefore, translators (or whomever works on the foreign source)¹ can either reproduce the narrative encoded in the source text or dissociate themselves from it (Baker 2018, 108). As the source texts are rarely translated unabridged, both selection of the excerpts to translate and their - intended or inadvertent - manipulation may play a role in shaping the chosen narrative. Manipulating the interpretive frame is among the strategies that can act on translating narratives, also in newspaper articles (see Author 1 2022), to the point that attempts to

¹ Except for translation-based magazines such as the Italian *Internazionale*, newswires do not generally employ translators (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009, 57; Davier 2015), and this trend emerges also in non-European settings (Matsushita 2020). This allows to hypothesize that most of the time the translation is entrusted to the journalist(s).

legitimize different versions of the relevant narrative may arise because of some specific translation choices.

The role of translation in written and online journalism is starting to gain increasing attention, but the sports field is still on the periphery of translation scholar's investigation. Baines's study (2013) on the power dynamics in translated and interpreted communication involving elite migrant athletes highlights that translation is the indispensable tool for the athletes to be heard and create their own narrative, but the ambiguities and information gaps created by translation may be exploited to the advantage of by various parts. The upcoming analysis aims at discovering the way translation shapes the (meta)narrative about women tennis players.

3. Women athletes in the media

As far back as 1972, the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights passed what is called Title IX against sexual discrimination in federally funded programs, including athletics. Such law gave rise to a noteworthy increase in women's participation in all sports and competition levels (Shaller 2006). However, sport is still a gendered institution (Castelli and Tuselli, 2022).

Sports activities are influenced by gender expectations activities involving strength, endurance, and physical contact are considered to be more masculine; those involving aesthetics, concentration, and flexibility are viewed as feminine (Plaza et al., 2017). This results in expectations regarding the sports selected by young boys and girls. This phenomenon contributes to horizontal segregation in sports participation: soccer, basketball, and tennis are predominantly practiced by boys and men, while volleyball, horseback riding, and gymnastics are more commonly practiced by girls and women (Appleby and Foster, 2013). This results in social evaluation and discrimination against individuals who do not conform to these gendered expectations. A notable example is Algerian boxer Imane Khelif, who won a gold medal at the recent 2024 Olympics: she endured scrutiny during her matches and widespread online harassment due to misconceptions regarding her identity as a woman (for more on gender identity in sport, see Castelli and Tuselli, 2022).

Sport processes also operate within a hegemonic masculine norm (Burton, 2015), and men in sport are universally overrepresented (Deaner and Smith 2013). The increase in women's participation is not mirrored by media coverage, and not only in the US. Over 80% of sports coverage in nations like the UK, Sweden, and Malta is devoted to promoting men's sports (Schailéa et al. 2021). Today's media coverage of women's sporting events interplays not only

with their sense of place in sport (Bruce 2013), but also with the narrative framework of such events. The corpus of academic articles on media sport coverage we have explored for the purposes of the present paper comes principally from the communication and sociological fields. Very few are concerned with the basic analysis of discourse (see Ponterotto 2014, as an example) or with translation studies (Baines 2013). Yet, this corpus becomes essential to understand the unquestionably low presence of women in sport media - regardless of their role - and how such absence or low presence have impacted women's self-perception as competitive human beings and their own narrative as protagonists in the sporting world.

Higgs, Weiller, and Martin (2003) argue that sports media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of sports participation. They note that certain features of women's sports are highlighted while others are overlooked, thereby influencing how spectators perceive women athletes. For instance, Bissel and Duke (2007) found that the video coverage of six beach volleyball games from the 2004 Summer Olympic Games displayed a high level of sexualized talk and concentration on the athletes' body parts. The underlying message asserts that whilst competing, women must still conform to society's view of femininity.

Most of the literature consulted on women's sport coverage in the media agree on their marginalization, both in their athlete as well as in their journalist roles. Not only are they underrepresented, "at the same time the coverage of female athletes centres more often on the soft news features of their performance /.../ over actual athletic competence" (Tejkalova and Kristoufek 2021). Manipulative media techniques can significantly impact female sports participation by shaping perceptions of which sports are considered appropriate for women. Trolan (2013) supports this view, indicating that female athletes who align with conventional notions of femininity tend to receive more advantages compared to those who challenge societal norms.

Knight and Giuliano (2001) found that athletes who garnered more attention for their attractiveness than their athletic performance were viewed by male and female college students as having lower talent, aggression, and heroism compared to those whose athletic skills were highlighted. Additionally, Gurung and Chrouser (2007) reported that female college students perceived female athletes portrayed in a sexually suggestive manner as more attractive, sexually experienced, desirable, and feminine. However, these athletes were also seen as less capable, strong, intelligent, determined, and possessing less self-respect compared to those depicted in appropriate sports attire. This contrast between the pretty woman playing a sport and the powerful male athlete competing in the same sport has always been a typical feature of media coverage. Female athletes shown performing a sport could positively impact female viewers by evoking an instrumental focus on what female athletes' bodies can do and on one's own athleticism (Daniels 2012).

With regards to the working role of women in media sport enterprises, Hans C. Schmidt claims that “the involvement of women in sports reporting has actually decreased in recent years” (2018, 1) both in the US and UK “where less than 5% of sports articles in the national press are written by women .../, and just 3% of sports journalists are women” (ibid.). And this despite the evidence gathered in literature showing that the interest of women in both sport practice and sport writing has increased.

The primary consequence of the above mentioned hegemonic masculine norms is that the experiences of girls and women in sports are largely influenced by policies and regulations set by male governance. A notable example of this is the design of uniforms: men’s uniforms are typically created with comfort in mind, whereas women’s uniforms often prioritize appeal to the “male gaze” (La Voie, 2023). From Norwegian women’s beach handball team being fined for wearing shorts rather than bikini bottoms² to the backlash, later solved, faced by Nike for the uniforms for US athletes designed for Paris 2024³ –issues like these highlight that female athletes are keenly aware of the scrutiny they face, and are consistently monitoring and responding to the standards imposed on them.

It goes without saying that where women’s sport narratives too are framed by male writers; in the majority of cases such reports would result as biased when not marginalized and undervalued.

On a less pessimistic note, it should also be affirmed that social media has improved the way women athletes are being pictured. In fact, most of them are now constructing their own profile, posting their own piece of news and framing and spreading their own narratives (Tejkalova and Kristoufek 2019). These athletes market themselves capitalising on tropes including self-love, self-disclosure and self-empowerment (Toffoletti and Thorpe, 2018). While we should keep in mind that new media is not the solution to all discrimination problems, dominated as it is by men’s sports and athletes (Bruce 2013), female athletes’ visibility turns them into powerful influencers: a study by OnePoll, a UK- and US- BASED quantitative research firm, revealed that 83% of girls believe that female sports stars are inspirational role models⁴.

Academic evidence of women athletes’ coverage on sport media includes some interesting cases involving international tennis champions, such as the former player Maria Sharapova for example, presented in a contrasted analysis of Italian and British quality newspapers (Ponterotto

² Chappell, Bill, A Women’s Beach Handball Team Is Fined for Not Wanting To Wear Bikini Bottoms, *npr*, 21 July 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/07/21/1018768633/a-womens-beach-handball-team-is-fined-for-not-wanting-to-wear-bikini-bottoms> (last consulted 22 October 2024).

³ Graham, B. A. ‘The picture did no justice’: US athletes retreat from criticism of ‘hoo haa’ uniform, *The Guardian*, 17 April 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2024/apr/16/team-usa-uniforms-paris-2024-olympics-nike> (last consulted 22 October 2024).

⁴ <https://beyondsport.org/2024/03/29/study-says-female-athletes-are-inspiring-girls-to-take-up-sports/> (last consulted 22 October 2024).

2014). This study shows how Sharapova's impressive achievements were undervalued at best or ignored at most in favour of expressions not related to tennis or stereotypical characterizations highlighting the champion's child-like attitude, sexual desirability, and powerlessness.

Another interesting perspective on tennis coverage reported how in the televised Ladies Finals at Wimbledon Championships commentators use different narratives from men's (Kennedy 2001). While overtly sexist remarks from sports commentators are less tolerated and occur less frequently today (Messner and Cooky, 2010), assessing the true extent of attitude changes remains challenging. For example, after two U.S. women won medals in the 2012 Olympic long jump event, a commentator asked during an interview, "Okay, ladies, where's that Olympic smile?". By referring to the athletes as 'ladies', the commentator reinforced the notion that their identity as women takes precedence, suggesting they were expected to be feminine ones (i.e., lady-like) (Kaskan and Ho, 2016).

Finally, other scholars debating the same issues found out how the stereotypical view of women as unpredictable and unstable professional athletes is reflected on the biased coverage of their results prediction, which has been systematically contradicted by empirical evidence (Tejkalova and Kristoufek 2019).

The results of the sociological and communication studies taken into consideration above show how the low presence of women athletes in international media coverage has persisted since the 1970s throughout the world. Moreover, when their sporting achievements and role as competitors are acknowledged, their narratives are often biased, when not undermined and gender-discriminated.

The following section will illustrate that the coverage of women tennis champions in a corpus of Italian and Anglo-American press reports confirms the above picture.

4. Analysis

In order to examine the features of narratives on female athletes, the upcoming analysis will examine hard news articles about or involving female tennis players published in the Sport section of well-known Italian generalist newspapers ("Corriere della Sera" and "Repubblica") and foreign news outlets ("Dailynews"; "The Guardian"; "The New York Times"). In the articles of the corpus, translation is used in quotations and official statements. Therefore, these translated excerpts will be examined in order to explore the underlying ideology of the newspaper in terms of what is made salient or what is ignored (the underlined parts of the source text indicate their omission from the Italian articles).

However, to fully grasp the role of translation in shaping the narrative of the news article, the analysis will also extend to the journalist's original writing.

4.1. Justin Gimelstob's sexist remarks on Anna Kournikova and other women players (2008)

In June 2008, during an interview for "The Junkies", a radio chat show broadcast in the Washington DC area, Justin Gimelstob, an American tennis player, Grand Slam winner in doubles with Venus Williams, and, until his removal in 2019, also one of the three ATP (Association of Tennis Players) board representatives elected by the ATP player council, referred to many female players on the Women's Tennis Association (WTA) Tour in deeply offensive terms.

The daily newspaper "Corriere della Sera" reported on the story on 30 June 2008. The headline "Il tennis riscopre la battaglia dei sessi. Dalla sfida King-Riggs agli insulti di Gimelstob: "Le giocatrici? Tutte cagne"⁵ introduces the conflict frame, explicitly referencing the famous match which is controversially remembered as an example of female revendication in response to a man player's provocations.

The headline reprises one of Gimelstob's comments - 'she's a bitch' - on Anna Navratilova. However, the translation is imprecise. Firstly, Gimelstob appears to be referring to all female players ('they're all bitches'). Secondly, the choice of translating the source noun 'bitch' with 'cagne' is a manipulation aiming at reinforcing the impact of the insult. It emerges from Gimelstob's original interview that he "just despise[s] her [Kournikova] to the maximum level just below hate". Gimelstob's use of 'bitch' indicates "an unpleasant or despicable woman"⁶, whose adequate Italian rendition would be 'stronza'; 'cagna' rather indicates "lascivious woman; mean, highly irritable woman" (our translation)⁷. These approximations support Fairclough's (1995: 34) claim that lexicon plays a crucial part in the development of an ideological viewpoint since they help to construct the conflict frame and broaden it to include the complete world of female players. They conform with the Italian practice of heavily editing direct quotations regardless of the verbatim claim (Author 1 2022). The article includes more translations of Gimelstob's comments:

Source Text: She [Kournikova] has a great body but her face is a five (1) [...] Definitely not. I have no attraction to her because she's such a douche (2). I really have no interest in her (3)... I wouldn't mind having my younger brother, who's a kind of a stud, nail her and then reap the benefits (4).

⁵ "Tennis rediscovers the Battle of the Sexes" - From the King-Riggs challenge to Gimelstob's insults: "The players? All bitches". Our translation.

⁶ <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19524?rskey=qzjgvr&result=1#eid>.

⁷ Donna di facili costumi, donnaccia, o cattiva, rabbiosa. 'Cagna' in Treccani. <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/cagna/>.

Target Text: I suoi bersagli sono stati Anna Kournikova (“È una cagna: ha un fisico da urlo ma una faccia da cinque. Non me la porterei mai a letto però non mi dispiacerebbe che quello stallone di mio fratello le desse una bella ripassata...”).

Two sentences from Gimelstob’s interview were fused into one quotation in Italian. The clause ‘è una cagna’ is an addition; ‘Non me la porterei mai a letto’⁸ overinterprets Gimelstob’s lack of interest and makes it explicitly sexual. These amplifications and explicitations aim at emphasising the provocative tone of the sexist remarks, probably compensating for the censored approach noticeable in the translation of the final part of the quotation. The practice of the Italian press to significantly alter translated (but also original Italian) quotations can be defined as “incorporation” (Fairclough 1995: 58), because the voice of the secondary discourse (the reporter) is being translated into the voice of the primary source.

The text of the Italian article appears to support the female players, given the abundance of negative evaluative expressions referring to Gimelstob’s statements - such as “Sguaiatezza senza alibi” (unjustifiable vulgarity) - and career: “dimenticabilissimo [...] ex numero 63 eletto, non si sa per quali meriti, rappresentante dei giocatori nel board dell’Atp”⁹. His authority as a speaker is thus diminished by his low ranking position and the doubt on his professional merits. Gimelstob is depicted as a negative character, which, in narrative terms, impedes readers’ identification.

However, an ambiguity arises when the journalist Gaia Piccardi - whose narrative presence is felt throughout the article - mentions the “naïve audacity”¹⁰ of some old sexist comments by Richard Krajicek, another former top player¹¹. It is unclear whether Piccardi was suggesting that Krajicek’s naivety resided in his views of female athletes or in publicly discussing such views, willingly exposing himself to criticism.

The article also reports the mixed reactions of the female players to Gimelstob’s comments, which weakens the impact of the story. A certain disdain emerges toward Billie Jean King, who demanded and obtained Gimelstob’s public excuses: Piccardi calls her a ‘trade unionist’, which has a negative connotation in Italian. King’s approach is contrasted with Kournikova’s, who chose silence ‘maybe planning a cold vengeance’¹². Therefore, the positive characters appear to be weak or unsympathetic. The narrative, built also through specific translation choices aiming at generalizing the episode, can be synthesized as: ‘Sexist comments towards young women athletes

⁸ I would never get her into bed. Our translation.

⁹ More than forgettable [...] no 63, named player representatives on the ATP board thanks to [...] no 63, named player representatives on the ATP board of directors thanks to inexplicable merits. Our translation.

¹⁰ Our translation of the Italian ‘ardire un po’ naïf’.

¹¹ “Le top 100 sono porcelline che non meritano di essere pagate quanto gli uomini” (the top 100 female players are little sluts who do not deserve to be paid more than men) was the translation provided in the article; the original quotation by Krajicek could not be retrieved.

¹² ‘Forse meditando una gelida vendetta’.

fuel the battle of the sexes. The reactions were mixed'. This article seems to exhibit the characteristic traits of ambivalent coverage (Fink 2015). While the narrative acknowledges the changing norms regarding women's involvement in sport, which do not allow for sexist comments to go unnoticed, resistance to changes is still detectable in the persisting sexualization and sexism evident in the captions of the pictures¹³.

"Dailynews"¹⁴ covered the story on 27 June 2008. The headline, "Tennis player Justin Gimelstob slammed for sexist comments", presents the event without establishing a connection to previous episodes. The journalist Filip Bondy's stance is immediately clarified by the number of negative evaluative expressions (in italics): "If you are going to say something outrageous, offensive and altogether despicable, clearly you're better off working in the world of tennis than in any other sport. That is the lesson to be learned from Justin Gimelstob's profane rant [...]". As in "Corriere della Sera" della Sera, Gimelstob's lackluster career is highlighted: "he is on the periphery of the competitive tour these days".

While reporting Gimelstob's remarks in direct quotations, Bondy explicitly focuses on the lack of concrete and official penalties: "If he were involved with another sport, surely Gimelstob would now be asked to go away for some time, suspended indefinitely [...] But this hasn't happened at all". Therefore, conveying a strong criticism of ATP's superficial approach, which becomes the other negative character of this story, the narrative can be synthesized as: "despite his offensive remarks, Gimelstob was not properly sanctioned by the ATP".

4.2. The gender gap in prices (2016)

In March 2016, Raymond Moore commented on the Women's Tennis Association during the Indian Wells-BNP Paribas Open, the largest international tennis tournament after the Grand Slams. Moore, also former chief executive of the tournament, caused uproar: "If I was a lady player, I'd go down every night on my knees and thank God that Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal were born, because they have carried this sport. They really have." The dismay of the tennis community will lead him to resign¹⁵. Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams, who played in the tournament, commented on the matter.

¹³ While the analysis of pictures is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that the language of the four captions accompanying the pictures in the article is heavily objectifying as well. The captions of Kournikova's and Golovin's pictures reads respectively 'Sexy' and 'Lolita', thus framing the players in sexual terms; Vaidisova is merely 'Blonde', a connotated adjective which goes beyond the physical description ("women's reification emerges also from using synecdoches such as 'Blonde'". Sabatini 1993: 30, our translation).

¹⁴ <https://www.nydailynews.com/sports/more-sports/tennis-player-justin-gimelstob-slammed-sexist-comments-article-1.295857> (Last consulted on 21 August 2022). No pictures

¹⁵ Some headlines called him 'the first victim of the war of the sexes' (*ubitennis*, (<https://www.ubitennis.com/blog/2016/03/20/commenti-raymond-moore-serena-azarenka/>). Last consulted on 20 May 2022).

“Corriere della Sera” reported on the story on 22 March 2016, with an article by Gaia Piccardi titled “Il valore delle tenniste - Djokovic: “Noi abbiamo più spettatori, devono guadagnare meno dei maschi”¹⁶. Williams risponde: “Inappropriato”. Djokovic’s quotation - as reported in English - is:

Source Text: I think that our men’s tennis world, ATP world, should fight for more because the stats are showing that we have much more spectators on the men’s tennis matches. I think that’s one of the reasons why maybe we should get awarded more. Women should fight for what they think they deserve and we should fight for what we think we deserve.

The focus of Djokovic’s argument is not on women earning less, as the Italian sub-headline quotation leads to think, but on men earning more. This is an example of modulation which entails looking upon the same situation from a different point of view (Van Hoof 1989, 126). Furthermore, Djokovic uses mitigating strategies such as the clause ‘I think’, the adverb ‘maybe’, none of which was preserved in Italian translation. The rendition of the deontic modal ‘should’ is coherent with the translation strategy and thus equally interesting. Deontic modals are a way for speakers to negotiate power (Koester and Handford 2012, 262). Djokovic’s weak deontic modal ‘should’ is translated with the stronger deontic form ‘devono (must)’. The Italian translation is therefore an example of modulation that establishes the conflict frame and complements the narrative on the battle of sexes.

Most of the article, as the headline suggests, deals with criticism against money earned by female players. Piccardi’s standing on the gender pay gap is ambiguous. After starting the article by recalling (once more) the Battle of the Sexes and Riggs’ defeat, Piccardi continues: “Rieccoci qui a parlare di uomini contro donne e - che volgarità - di soldi immeritati da ragazze in crisi di immagine”¹⁷. Associating women’s desire for more money with tackiness is particularly interesting, as unequal distribution of money is one of the reasons of women’s dependence on men (Adkins 2018). It is unclear whether her use of negative evaluative expressions (‘money unjustly earned’) represents men’s perspective on the issue or her own standing.

This ambiguity is found also in describing the ‘image crisis’ of women tennis players: “il clamoroso caso doping di Maria Sharapova”¹⁸; “l’insostenibile pesantezza dell’essere Serena Williams, incapace di vincere dal rocambolesco k.o. con Roberta Vinci a New York”¹⁹, the latter

¹⁶ “Women players’ worth - Djokovic: “We have more spectators, women have to earn less than men”. Williams: “Inappropriate””.

¹⁷ Here we are again, talking about men against women and money - so tacky - unjustly earned by girls in an image crisis situation.

¹⁸ Sharapova’s flabbergasting doping ban.

¹⁹ The unbearable heaviness of being Serena Williams, unable to win since the New York debacle against Roberta Vinci’.

being an intertextual reference to Kundera's novel. Piccardi chooses to list the losses of the players, not the successes. In an article about pay gap, the implication becomes that the pay gap is motivated by different performance quality. Piccardi then reprises Djokovic's quotation (this time with a full literal translation), called 'the last dig'. Women tennis players are described as being under attack and in a position of weakness. The arguments for this attack, however, are built by the journalist, since the men players' quotations involve sexist comments (including Gimelstob's, see previous section). Piccardi then writes: "to sum up, it is hard to accept that the girls came to win the same prizes as men with half the effort"²⁰. By using the noun 'girls' instead of 'women' twice in the article, Piccardi is taking adulthood away from the women players (Richardson 1981), thus infantilizing them. In addition to confirming a tendency of infantilizing highly accomplished female athletes (Fink 2015, 334), this use is significant also because none of the articles of the corpus refer to men athletes as 'boys'. Staying on the same sentence, by adding the prepositional phrase 'with half the effort', she is finally taking the men's perspective. Gender pay gap is defined as both "unequal pay for equal work (unequal remuneration in the same job) and unequal pay for work of equal value (low valuation of jobs that women do)" (Karamessini and Ioakimoglou 2007, 34). Piccardi is here either voicing or supporting those who diminish the value of women athletes' results and thus justify unequal pay.

The confirmation of Piccardi's intended narrative on the gender pay gap comes in the closing sentence, which paraphrases a famous Italian song: 'we are women, for God's sake: there is more to us than our wallet'. The implicit message is that money is trivial (even vulgar, as stated in the article's opening lines) and how much women earn should not be a central concern for their social agenda. This conveys the idea that the gender pay gap is not an issue worth debating. The narrative pivots around 'the pointless controversies on gender pay gap'.

"The Guardian" covered the news on 21 March 2016²¹. "Djokovic responds to controversial comments by Indian Wells chief - World No1 says women face more challenges including 'hormones'". The reporting verb is neutral. The first sentences define the background of the debate and choose the more diplomatic parts of Djokovic's statement. In noticeable contrast to the Italian article, the Press Association who authored the article introduced Moore's statement by acknowledging women players' achievements and athletic competence. Serena Williams is clearly shown as a winner: "Seeming to overlook the 21 grand slam titles won by Williams - more than the 17 won by Roger Federer and 14 by Rafael Nadal - Moore added [...]".

Djokovic is said to have "added fuel to the fire" (which implies a negative approach, while the Italian article described Djokovic's statement as 'the last dig', thus implying success). His

²⁰ Our translation.

²¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/mar/21/novak-djokovic-indian-wells-equal-prize-money-tennis> (last consulted on 20 May 2022).

statements on men attracting more viewers and therefore deserving more money are reported, as well as those in which he acknowledges “[women’s] bodies are much different to men’s bodies. They have to go through a lot of different things that we don’t have to go through. [...]” in lengthy direct quotations always introduced by the neutral reporting verb ‘said’. More interpretation is found in the verbs ‘insisted’ and ‘accepted’ to introduce the only instance of indirect speech: “Djokovic insisted he was not entering a men-versus-women debate and accepted that women faced more challenges than men to succeed in the game”. The prevalence of direct speech implies the desire to relay as much of the original remark with the least amount of interference, as opposed to indirect speech which carries ambivalence in the primary source’s voice (Fairclough 1995, 57).

Another significant difference from the Italian article is the space allotted to Serena Williams’s full response, which closes the article. Both perspectives of the debate are thus presented. In this “The Guardian” article, the ‘Press Association’ rarely uses premodifiers, postmodifiers, or evaluative expressions showing stance. The article is largely built on direct quotations, which are known for their reliability (van Krieken 2020) and persuasive power; the narrative is “Djokovic and Williams respond to Moore’s comments”.

4.3. Naomi Osaka’s withdrawal from Roland Garros (2021)

In May 2021, Naomi Osaka - former world n. 1 - was fined by the French Open after announcing she would not do post-game press conferences at the Roland Garros. She later withdrew citing concerns for her mental health and specified in a later tweet to suffering from depression.

The common thread of the Italian headlines is the relevance of the conflict frame. Marco Calabresi’s article from “Corriere della Sera” mentions ‘ultimatum’, ‘sanctions’, and ‘expulsion’:

Target Text. “Corriere della Sera” (30 May 2021): ‘Naomi Osaka non vuole più partecipare a conferenze stampa. Dal Roland Garros multa (e ultimatum)’ - La numero 2 del mondo lo aveva annunciato: “Le conferenze stampa nuocciono alla salute mentale”. 15.000 euro di sanzione, possibile l’espulsione²².

The reporting verb ‘vuole (wants)’ indicates strong will but also refers to children’s tantrums, hinting at Osaka’s infantilization. Infantilization is expressed differently than in Section 4.1, where the journalist’s lexical choices only hinted at it. Here, it is the reporting verb that denotes infantilization.

²² https://www.corriere.it/sport/21_maggio_30/naomi-osaka-diserta-conferenza-stampa-roland-garros-multa-rischia-squalifica-fc80dae6-c162-11eb-9815-2e1f995dd6a2.shtml (last consulted on 20 May 2022).

More neutral lexical choices can trigger different narratives. The journalistic blog “IlPost” titles: “I problemi di Naomi Osaka con la stampa. La forte tennista giapponese ha deciso di non partecipare alle conferenze stampa durante il Roland Garros”²³. The verb ‘decide’ involves agency but is less connotated, as it involves pondering and subsequent choice²⁴. “IlPost” focuses on the player’s decision and consequences while highlighting her talent; “Corriere della Sera” focuses on the conflict with the press and the organizers, as confirmed by the translation of a wide portion of the joint statement released by the four Grand Slams. This further reinforces the portrayal of Osaka as a child being punished by adults. The headline from “Repubblica”²⁵ opts for the conflict frame as well.

Target Text: Tennis, la protesta di Naomi Osaka: “Niente conferenze stampa al Roland Garros” - La 23enne giapponese non parlerà all’Open di Francia a causa della “mancanza di considerazione sulla salute mentale dei giocatori” da parte della stampa. Multa in arrivo: “Mi farò una bella risata”. Nel 2020 si rifiutò di giocare a sostegno del movimento Black Lives Matter.

The article (whose author is uncredited) frames Osaka’s announcement as a ‘protest’. Mentioning the fine builds the conflict frame and establishes the narrative of punishment for ‘bad behaviour’. According to the article, “Osaka, che al Roland Garros non ha mai superato il terzo turno, non è nuova a prese di posizioni sociali”²⁶, thus misunderstanding Osaka’s personal and social reasons for her actions. Furthermore, the relative clause implies that her refusal to do press comes from weakness and fear of being judged.

Both “Corriere della Sera” della sera and “Repubblica” report that Osaka’s reaction to the fine was “Mi farò una bella risata”²⁷ (‘I’ll have a laugh’). This is a misquotation from Osaka’s tweet: “If the organizations think they can keep saying ‘do press or you’re gonna be fined’ and continue to ignore the mental health of the athletes [...] then I just gotta laugh”. ‘I just gotta laugh’ was the reaction to the organizers’ approach to the athletes’ problems with press conferences, while the Italian articles depict Osaka as uncaring and blasé. In this instance, since the journalist’s voice (the secondary source) directly affects the primary source (Osaka), translation aids dissemination (Fairclough 1995: 58). This translated quotation reinforces the

²³ <https://www.ilpost.it/2021/05/31/naomi-osaka-rifiuto-conferenze-stampa/> (last consulted on 20 May 2022).

²⁴ ‘Decide’ in OED: to make a decision regarding (question, issue, etc., on which there is doubt or dispute), esp. after considering several alternatives. <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/48173?rskey=p5xCwj&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid> (last consulted on 20 May 2022).

²⁵

https://www.repubblica.it/sport/tennis/2021/05/27/news/tennis_la_protesta_della_osaka_niente_conferenze_stampa_a_l_roland_garros_-303006483/ (last consulted on 20 May 2022).

²⁶ Osaka, who has never made it past the third round, has taken a social stand before.

²⁷ I’ll have a laugh.

conflict frame and the prevailing narratives: “rebel/stubborn athlete withdraws from tournament”.

The “The New York Times”²⁸ headline is: “Naomi Osaka Says She Won’t Talk to Journalists at the French Open - Citing mental health concerns, the world No. 2 wrote on Instagram Wednesday that she will accept any fines levied for not making herself available to reporters.”²⁹. Matthew Futterman, the author of the article, uses neutral reporting verbs (‘said’ and ‘wrote’). A certain degree of incorporation is visible (Fairclough 1995, 58) as the reported words are absent from Osaka’s statement. Osaka is introduced as “the four-time Grand Slam singles champion” and “one of the game’s biggest stars”, establishing her athletic status and framing the news in terms of the mediatic and athletic impact of her choice. Proper co-text is provided to Osaka’s tweet. Firstly, Gilles Moretton, president of the French Tennis Federation, is quoted:

“I think it’s a phenomenal error,” said. “What is happening here is in my view not acceptable. There are rules. There are laws. We will stick to the laws and the rules on the penalties and the fines.”

Moretton’s statement abounds with nouns related to regulation (rules; laws) as well as punishment (penalties and fines) emphasized by polysyndetic coordination. The verb ‘stick to’ means ‘to adhere or cling to something; to be tightly attached’³⁰, and can also be used figuratively: here, it alludes to a refusal to communicate or establish common ground. This quotation allows readers to further contextualize Osaka’s behaviour and understand her reference to the scarce collaboration. Secondly, Futterman further expanded the narrative by introducing the issues at stake. He contextualizes Osaka’s pressure using epistemic modals (‘not expected’ and ‘could’) to soften his predictions: “clay [...] is considered Osaka’s worst surface. She is not expected to win the tournament and could be upset in an early round. She has never made it past the third round in Paris”. “Repubblica” too featured this information, but with no technical data contextualising Osaka’s mental stress.

Saying that Osaka “is hardly the first athlete to decline to speak with the press” introduces the long-standing issues between athletes and the press, emphasized by the adverb ‘hardly’. Futterman continues: “Attending a news conference, regardless of the outcome of a match, is considered an obligation tennis players fulfil to promote their sport, which has struggled to maintain coverage in some markets in recent years”. The parenthetical explains why athletes dislike interviews and the pressure of answering questions after a disappointing result; the noun

²⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/26/sports/tennis/naomi-osaka-french-open-no-interviews.html>

²⁹ Naomi Osaka dice che non parlerà.

³⁰ ‘stick’ in Oxford English Dictionary.
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/190153?redirectedFrom=STICK+TO#eid1361145841>

‘obligation’ implies constraint and, together with the relative clause, clarifies the economic interests and extra-athletic pressures on athletes. Ending the article with the mention of Osaka’s cordial relationship with the press validates Futterman’s positive framing of Osaka. The emerging narrative is: “strong athlete withdraws from the tournament”.

4.4. *Serena Williams’s Vogue interview and retirement (2022)*

On 9 August 2022, Serena Williams, who had been no. 1 in singles in the Women’s Tennis Association rankings for 319 weeks, announced her intention to retire together with her future plans in an article published in “Vogue”.

On 10 August 2022, “Corriere della Sera” published Gaia Piccardi’s article, titled “Serena ha deciso: si vede mamma; L’ultimo ace”. The headline suggests that the newsworthy aspect is Williams’s desire to raise her family, and summarizes Williams’s words on the way her age and gender influenced her decision but without conveying its negative nuances³¹.

Piccardi’s opening reprises “Vogue”’s, in which Williams told she overheard her daughter answering to an interactive app and saying that she wanted to be a big sister. We see here the attempt to dramatize the story and emotionally involve readers. According to Piccardi, that was the moment Williams understood that she had to retire (“È in quel momento che Serena mette a fuoco il pensiero che fin qui aveva sempre rimandato”). However, Williams’s lengthy excerpt³² clarifies the number of episodes building up to the moment narrated in the article. Considering the inverted pyramid newswriting rule, according to which the most important aspects are to be found at the beginning, it can be assumed that Williams’s search for maternity is the pivotal and newsworthy aspect also in the article.

Williams’s career is conceptualized as a journey: “Finirà così [...] la corsa a perdifiato [...]”³³, “Ed ha senso che il capolinea sia New York”³⁴, and her character as an overflowing liquid that only the biggest tennis court can contain³⁵.

Williams’s social activism is referenced in the translated quotation on her sporting legacy: “Mi piace pensare che, anche grazie a me, le atlete possono essere come sono, mostrare il pugno

³¹ Williams has said: “Believe me, I never wanted to have to choose between tennis and a family. I don’t think it’s fair. If I were a guy, I wouldn’t be writing this because I’d be out there playing and winning while my wife was doing the physical labor of expanding our family. Maybe I’d be more of a Tom Brady if I had that opportunity [...] But I’m turning 41 this month, and something’s got to give. “Serena Williams Says Farewell to Tennis On Her Own Terms—And In Her Own Words”, *Vogue*, 9 August 2022. <https://www.vogue.com/article/serena-williams-retirement-in-her-own-words>

³² “Olympia says this a lot, even when she knows I’m listening. Sometimes before bed, she prays to Jehovah to bring her a baby sister [...] I’m the youngest of five sisters myself, and my sisters are my heroes, so this has felt like a moment I need to listen very carefully to”.

³³ “And so [...] will the breathless run end”. Our translation.

³⁴ “And it makes sense that New York will be the last stop”. Our translation.

³⁵ “Solo il campo centrale più grande del mondo può contenere il carattere strabordante della donna che si è battuta per la parità di salario, il rispetto dei diritti degli afroamericani, la dignità delle minoranze”.

all'avversaria e vestirsi come desiderano senza la paura di sentirsi giudicate". Williams' words on Vogue were:

I'd like to think that thanks to opportunities afforded to me, women athletes feel that they can be themselves on the court. They can play with aggression and pump their fists. They can be strong yet beautiful. They can wear what they want and say what they want and kick butt and be proud of it all.

In addition to the omissions and the final amplification that emphasizes the idea of judgement, the most significant shift concerns women's aggressivity. This is one of the stereotypes of femininity, as women's aggressivity has historically been repressed as inappropriate behaviour (Lavin 2012). Williams uses the informal phrase 'pump one's fists', describing the typical celebratory gesture. Williams hopes that women athletes will feel free to express all their spectrum of emotions while playing; according to the Italian translation, Williams is hoping that women athletes will show aggressivity towards their opponents.

The article ends with an intertextual movie reference to introduce Williams's age and a positive evaluative expression of her as: 'a revolutionary woman, unlike anyone else'³⁶. The narrative is 'after a long career, the exuberant athlete retires to focus on her family'.

On 10 august 2022, the lead-in to "Repubblica" article (on the bottom of the first page) builds on the same narrative: "La scelta di Serena: basta tennis, farò la mamma" (Serena's choice: no more tennis, I'm going to be a mum). The article's headline is instead titled "Bye Serena" and is completed by the informative and neutral sub-headline "Williams annuncia il ritiro. Gli Us Open l'ultimo torneo "Evolvo in un 'altra direzione'", with no mention of Williams' s ideas on maternity until the end of the article:

Arriva un momento in cui dobbiamo decidere di muoverci in una direzione diversa, è sempre difficile quando ami qualcosa così tanto. Devo concentrarmi sull'essere una mamma, immagino che ci sia solo una luce alla fine del tunnel.

The first sentence and the first clause of the second sentence are drawn from the Instagram post in which she announced her Vogue article: "There comes a time in life when we have to decide to move in a different direction. That time is always hard when you love something so much. [...] I have to focus on being a mom, my spiritual goals and finally discovering a different, but just as exciting Serena". The last clause comes from the post-match press conference at the Canadian Open on 8 August 2022: "I guess there's just a light at the end of the tunnel". There are

³⁶ "Una rivoluzionaria. Come lei, nessuna mai".

two relevant aspects in the way translation affects the narrative: firstly, the selection of the translated excerpts reveals that maternity was deemed as the only topic worth quoting; secondly, the copy-and-paste process blurred the meaning of the last clause, making maternity seem the metaphorical end of the tunnel. As Williams herself had said during the conference, she was talking about freedom.

The Italian article introduces Williams's strong personality and will to emancipate from her sister: "she didn't care that Venus was thinner and more beautiful, she would have conquered the world"³⁷. The choice of referring to physical features rather than athletic accomplishments, thus following Williams's article, betrays the stereotypical view of female competition and appearance. Williams is here conceptualized as a predator ("era un giaguaro che azzanna", 'she was a biting jaguar'), and a fighter ("i suoi colpi erano ceffoni, più ring che court", 'her shots were slaps, more ring than court').

The article also evokes the sexist comments from 2021 by Ion Tiriac, former World No.8 player and the current owner of the Madrid Open: "A 39 anni e 90 chili è pesante, dovrebbe ritirarsi". This is an amplification of Tiriac's words that were actually from 2018: "With all due respect, 36 years old and 90kg ...". The quotation chosen for translation shows the interest in Williams's age and body, whose perceived unconventionality characterizes the headline of *La Stampa* ('The glorious majesty of that body that first beat and then enchanted us - exaggerated bosom and amazing glutes, a body far from the standards of tennis that she exhibited as she pleased'³⁸). The narrative is 'after a long and lively career, athlete retires to focus on maternity'.

As to the Anglo-American coverage, Tumaini Carayol wrote an article for "The Guardian" on 9 August 2022: "Serena Williams announces she will retire from tennis after glittering career". The newsworthy aspect is Williams's announcement, introduced with a neutral reporting verb; her results are highlighted by the prepositional clause and the positively connotated premodifier 'glittering'. The sub-headline 'Winner of 23 grand slam titles cites family reasons for decision' is equally informative, providing evidence to support the 'glittering career' and using neutral lexical choices to explain Williams's motivations.

The extensive direct quotations in "The Guardian" article are accompanied by numerous positive evaluative expressions: 'one of the greatest athletes of all time', 'singles champion', and 'a teenage phenom'. Carayol describes Williams's unique career via the combination of preposition and correlative construction: 'Unlike many other greats, Williams's success was not only limited to singles'. Her social impact is also mentioned, emphasized by the use of adverb

³⁷ "Non le importava se Venus era più magra e più bella, lei si sarebbe presa il mondo".

³⁸ "La gloriosa maestà di quel corpo che ci ha steso e poi incantato. Seno esagerato e natiche strepitose, un fisico non conforme al tennis. L'ha esibito come ha voluto: ha preso le nostre idee e la ha sgretolate" (10 August 2022). The full analysis of *La Stampa* article cannot be carried out due to space restrictions.

and comparative: ‘their [Serena’s and Venus’s] achievements carry even greater significance considering what they represent as the first female African American grand slam champions since Althea Gibson in 1958’. The emerging narrative is ‘great champion retires, leaving a mark in the history of tennis’.

“The New York Times” explicitly identifies the primary event and the time period with the headline ‘Serena Williams said she would leave the sport sometime after the U.S. Open’. The initial paragraphs use two metaphors to convey positive evaluative expressions: ‘she stunned her sport’, and ‘a beacon of fashion, entertainment and business’. The former can be interpreted as a metonymy, but its “deep metaphorical structure” is conceptualized as the cause of emotion is a force, which accurately depicts both the cause and effect of the emotion (Kövecses et al. 2019: 156). The latter, whose conceptualization is woman is fire, relates to a tradition of discourses of awe with some influences from religious imagery (Charteris-Black 2018).

Contrary to “The Guardian”, Matthew Futterman, who authored the article, delves beyond Williams’s athletic merits. Williams’s fiery temperament is supported by fight-related lexical choices (“battles, fist pumps and screams”) and reinforced by mentioning “the urge to play competitively again”. To remind readers of highs and lows of her career, the U.S. Open is mentioned as “a fitting end to her storied career” but also as “the site of some of Williams’s lowest moments”. The article features the direct quotation in which Williams expressed her disappointment with having to give up tennis to pursue more maternal goals, along with an outline of her other interests, providing a wider overview of her future options. Contrary to the Italian texts discussed above, the maternity aspect is not brought to the fore. The article concludes with quotations from Rick Macci, the Williams sisters’ old coach, as a way of reminiscing on their past and their training; and from Coco Gauff, presented with both positive expressions (“the rising 18-year-old”) and negative connotations especially in the metaphor that conceptualizes Williams’s heritage as a burden (“who is the latest Black American player to bear the burden of being labeled ‘the next Serena’”). The narrative is more nuanced than “The Guardian”’s and involves ‘past, present and future of a great athlete’.

5. Conclusions

As seen in Section 3, the influence of hegemonic masculinity in sport is evident: men are overrepresented in sports media and female athletes face marginalization, often being portrayed in ways that emphasize their appearance rather than their athletic prowess, reinforcing stereotypes. The underrepresentation of women in sports journalism exacerbates this issue.

Overall, the narratives surrounding female athletes are frequently constrained by gender norms and media representations.

The Italian metanarrative of women tennis players in the Italian articles in our corpus revolves around conflict, which is sometimes blatantly gendered, with female athletes at its centre (see the repetitive use of ‘the battle of the sexes’ in Sections 4.1, 4.2, and the lexical choices of contrasts in Section 4.3). The past conflicts are deemed newsworthy even in celebratory articles (Section 4.4). Therefore, conflict emerges as a news value of the women tennis players covered in the articles.

According to Van Dijk (1998), the views and viewpoints expressed in newspapers are typically social, institutional or political, rather than personal. Both Italian and English narratives are built on perspective (see Section 3), but the Italian narratives downplay the gravity of the (gender-based) conflict by mentioning mixed reactions to it (Sections 4.1), criticising its very existence (Section 4.2), or undermining the credibility of the athlete at the centre (Section 4.3). Except when openly criticising the ATP (Section 4.1), the majority of English articles are neutral in presenting the facts of the conflict (Sections 4.2; 4.3).

The Italian articles give few technical details on the women players’ performances, even when they would have helped to understand the story (Section 4.3) or the historical influence of a retiring athlete (Section 4.4). The focus is on the person, rather than the athlete. A stereotyped vision of women in terms of sexuality is still detectable (see 4.1)³⁹. Furthermore, the Italian narratives hardly encourage readers to identify with the women athletes (Sections 4.3 and 4.2), unless ideas related to maternity are involved (Section 4.4). As identification is an important mechanism of narrative persuasion, the readers are not led to support or identify with women athletes when they are in the spotlight; however, as seen in Section 4.4, retirement is often framed in terms of maternity, which justifies a more sympathetic narrative.

The articles covered in Section 4.1, 4.2 and 4.4 allow to expand the perspective on male writers’ framing of women athletes (see Section 3), in that undervaluation and stereotypical representations in the majority of the Italian articles analysed came from a woman journalist. On the contrary, the English articles written by men journalists displayed a much neater criticism of disrespectful behaviour towards women athletes (Section 4.1) or a less stereotypical stress on maternity (Section 4.4).

Quotations are a narrative-building device (see Section 3), and this is where the role of translation in shaping the narrative of the Italian articles emerges more clearly and proves that gender consciousness and ideological positions of translators make an impact on the translation process. While Osaka and Williams used Twitter to build their own narratives, as discussed in

³⁹ Due to space limitations, the articles covering Osaka’s statement regarding her mental health could not be analysed. However, while an unsympathetic stance still persisted, the Italian articles chose to linger on the athlete’s frailty.

Section 2, the analysis shows that translation can potentially nullify those efforts. The manipulation of the source resulting in the misquotations in Sections 4.1, 4.3, and 4.4 plays a part in framing and reinforcing the narratives. It is unclear whether these misquotations were intentional or rather the result of scarce linguistic and translation competence. Given the nature of the shifts, it is not unreasonable to exclude a feminist approach to translation: feminist translators, in addition to translating women's works or feminist works, also openly challenge translations which endure stereotypical visions of women (Simon 1996).

The Italian articles showed the prevalence of explicitly or ambiguously antagonistic narratives, as well as the persistence of stereotypes against women in sport. A gender-biased approach towards women tennis players, whose achievements tend to be undervalued (Section 4.1), and whose technical abilities are ignored even when they would contribute to the understanding of the story (Section 4.3), was detected. The English pieces used a more balanced tone. Overall, they showed a more serious commitment to providing proper context and acknowledging women athletes' athletic merits.

Research on female athletes in the press indicates a consistent pattern of limited coverage across various contexts. For instance, Martin (2010) highlights similar deficiencies in the Spanish press. In the United States, Bissell (2006) notes that coverage of female tennis players often prioritizes their appearance, personal lives, and sexualized language, rather than focusing on their athletic performance. Furthermore, Delorme and Pressland (2016) document significant discrimination against female athletes in French media.

Exploring the impact of visual elements on the narratives via multimodal analysis could be a future research direction. A wider corpus would permit more comprehensive results as well as a diachronic analysis on the coverage of a single female athlete. To verify whether the results of this study are consistent, the role of translation in shaping the narratives can potentially be explored in other sports fields as well, expanding the corpus. In addition, coverage of men athletes could be included to examine whether and how the narratives diverge. This would also provide new material from the viewpoint of feminist translation which has already begun to broaden its horizons outside of the literary world.

Declarations

While both authors are responsible for the article's design and have co-revised it, Author 1 is responsible for Sections 1, 2, and 4, and Author 2 for Section 3. Both authors are responsible for Section 5.

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