

Sexism Hidden in Verbal Expressions Showing Emotions in English-Vietnamese Football Newspaper Commentaries: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Ngô Việt Tuấn^{1,*}, Phan Thị Mai Hương²

¹*Science and Technology Office, VNU University of Languages and International Studies, Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hanoi, Vietnam*

²*Hai Phong Private University, Đường Hàng Khê, Lê Chân, Hải Phòng, Vietnam*

Received 16 October 2014

Revised 05 January 2015; Accepted 15 January 2015

Abstract: Nowadays, football is undeniably the most favourite sport in the world. It is not surprising that football commentaries in newspapers always interest readers. However, sportswriters' excessively subjective ideas displayed in these commentaries are really problematic because of their negative effects on readers' mind. This research is carried out on some of the most viewed online newspapers in English and Vietnamese. Based on the data analyzed on the basis of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research reveals the existence of sexism embedded in verbal expressions showing sportswriters' emotions as well as certain differences of these demonstrations in English and Vietnamese football commentaries illustrated by explanations of the presence of sexism in those commentaries.

Keywords: Football commentaries, CDA, sexism, verbal expressions.

1. Introduction

It is undeniable that football (or soccer) is the most popular sport in the world nowadays. It attracts billions of people of any age, gender, class, religion, and nation. The world-wide coverage of football as today is remarkably contributed by the mass media, especially newspapers. A lot of people have grown up with the love and passion for football thanks to sportswriters' emotional commentaries in the

newspapers. This reflects how great the power of commentaries to control readers' mind is. However, there is a big trouble that through their emotional but subjective commentaries, sportswriters can easily make readers have biased views about some social problems, typically sexism.

To find out the fact of sexism hidden in verbal expressions showing sportswriters' emotions in newspapers commentaries, this research investigates the articles during the period of 2000-2014 selected from some English e-newspapers such as *The Channel 4*

*Corresponding author. Tel.: 84-906149896
Email: tuanviet8484@gmail.com

News, The Daily Record, The Daily Mail, The Huffington Post, The Guardian, The Bleacher Report and some Vietnamese e-newspapers such as *Bóng đá (Football), Thể thao & Văn hóa (Sports and Culture), VnExpress, Vietnamnet*. These e-newspapers are popular and reliable sources of information and have great effects on reader's feeling and thought, which is considered a potential factor infecting readers with sexist ideologies.

2. Theoretical background and analytical framework

2.1. Theoretical background

Emerging in the 1970s, CDA has developed strongly with its multidisciplinary approach on the analysis of ideology and power relation. It has drawn the attention of many linguists with the outstanding CDA works such as Fowler [1], Kress [2], Van Dijk [3-6], Wodak [7-8] and especially Fairclough [9-11]. Fairclough defines

CDA as follows: “By critical discourse analysis, I mean discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events, and texts (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony”. [11: 132-3]

Fairclough's significant contribution to CDA is the development of the analytical framework which many researchers have considered as a useful tool to do CDA studies so far. In fact, Fairclough gives his opinion on the actual nature of discourse and text analysis through the three-dimensional framework in Figure 1 [12: 42] below:

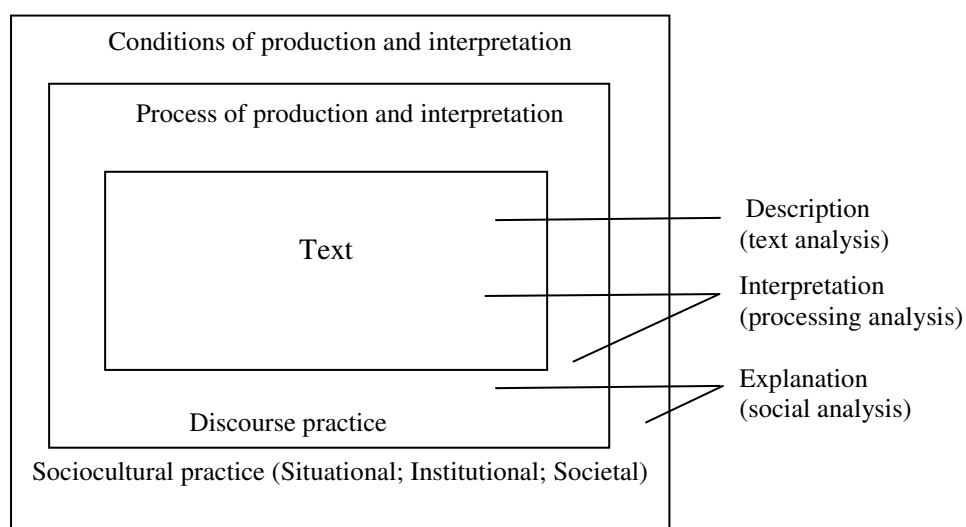


Figure 1. Fairclough's dimension of discourse and discourse analysis.

As shown in Figure 1, Fairclough's analytical framework includes three dimensions of discourse: the text, the discourse practice, and the socio-cultural practice. Corresponding to these three dimensions of discourse, Fairclough identifies three dimensions (or stages) of CDA as follows [9]:

- **Description** is the stage which is concerned with formal properties of the text. In this stage, the analysis of the language structures produced is exercised.

- **Interpretation** is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction - with seeing the text as the product of a process of production, and as a resource in the process of interpretation.

- **Explanation** is concerned with the relationship between interaction and social context - with the social determination of the processes of production and interpretation, and their social effects. Naturally, the analysis in this stage includes the exploration of the ways in which discourses operate in various domains of society.

2.2. Analytical framework

Since the research focuses on only verbal expressions showing emotions in commentaries, the sentences showing sportswriters' emotions are selected for analytical purpose. The analysis is implemented on the basis of Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for studying discourse as stated in **Figure 1**. It means the data analysis in terms of sexism follows three-stage process: **Description, interpretation and explanation**. In the stage of description, the research would particularly emphasize the use of such grammatical units as words, phrases or clauses in each of the sentences showing sportswriters'

emotions to legitimize sexism in football. Sportswriters' emotions are divided into two demonstrations for contrast: positive and negative. In the stage of interpretation, the research would suggest how verbal expressions showing sportswriters' emotions should be interpreted in the specific context of the whole article. In the stage of explanation, the research would mention the socio-cultural conditions such as situational and institutional affecting the way that sportswriters show their emotions as well as what effects those commentaries have on readers' mind.

3. Data analysis

In English football commentaries, sportswriters usually direct negative demonstrations of emotion to women and positive demonstrations to men. These negative demonstrations can be the underestimation of or the insult to women's football, female players, referees and fans; meanwhile, men's football and male peers receive sportswriters' favour such as overestimation or the worship which is hardly granted to even great women.

Unlike the English football commentaries, the Vietnamese ones do not show sexism at all. The fair estimation is always given to both women and men. Actually, this is surprising because it has become common knowledge that social prejudices to women in Vietnam are much more serious than those in Western countries.

3.1. Underestimation and overestimation

In English football commentaries, underestimation of women focuses on two aspects: the boredom and amateurism of women's football, and their limited role in

football. Whereas, overestimation of men focuses on three aspects: the excitement of men's football, the excitement of men's football matches, and men's brilliant talent. On the contrary, in Vietnamese commentaries, women's talent and efforts in football even receive sportswriters' overestimation, which is rarely recognized in English commentaries.

3.1.1. Underestimation

In English football commentaries, the underestimation of women can be exposed through words or phrases which have never been used for men's football as in the following example:

"It's worth examining just why the SFA (Scottish Football Association) and their partners spend £1.2 million each year to bankroll a ladies' version of a game played in men's shorts."

On February 26, 2013, Gordon Parks, a famous sportswriter of the *Daily Record* and the *Sunday Mail*, published an article entitled "Spending £1.2m on women's football isn't justified" on the *Daily Record*. In his article, Parks expressed some of his own ideas about Scottish women's football and the SFA's funds for women's football. He made a serious comment: "It's worth examining just why the SFA and their partners spend £1.2 million each year to bankroll a ladies' version of a game played in men's shorts." The usage of the nominal group "a ladies' version of a game played in men's shorts" in his comment was really arguable because the statement could have been acceptable if the nominal group above had been replaced by "women's football" or "ladies' football". Unsurprisingly, the non-finite clause "played in men's shorts" post-modifying the noun phrase "a ladies' version of a game", in which the metaphor of "men's

shorts" appeared, was regarded to be the origin of argument. Parks implied his devaluation that women's football was just a copy of men's football without any creativity even from the shorts. Parks tried to draw a terrible picture of women's football in readers' imagination for the purpose of convincing readers that the bankroll of £1.2 million each year for a boring copy of men's football was really "worth examining".

Parks made this comment on February 2013 when Scottish women's football, especially Scottish women's premier league (SWPL) began to receive more money from the SFA and more media coverage whereas Scottish men's football, especially Scottish premier league (SPL), had not been paid enough much attention to achieve the success in Europe as well as in the world from his own perspective. It made his raising the topic "Spending £1.2m on women's football isn't justified" receive a lot of Scottish men's approval such as "I agree with everything said in this article" or "It (women's football) is just like a glorified boys U13's game"... However, it is unfair to criticize a supply of money for women's football because in fact, men's football always gets favour much more than women's football in all countries in the world.

3.1.2. Overestimation

It is easy to find the sportswriters' overestimation of men in English football commentaries. This overestimation can be expressed through a very popular word-play in English newspapers. For instance:

"Gareth Bale: Prince of Wales, Prince of Goals"

On December 6, 2013, after Gareth Bale's hat-trick in Real Madrid's 4-0 win to Real Valladolid in the Spanish football league, *The*

guardian published the review by the sportswriter James Richardson in which Gareth Bale was complimented with the beautiful phrases such as “Prince of Wales” and “prince of goals”. Everyone knew that Wales was a country which belonged to the sovereign state of United Kingdom. In Wales, the title “Prince of Wales” granted to the heir apparent of the British monarch meant the representative of the reigning sovereign. In fact, the Welsh footballer Gareth Bale was not the Prince of Wales and not in the relationship with British monarch as well. Therefore, the word “prince” in

Richardson’s comment was the metaphor. It should be interpreted as the symbol of nobility because the word “prince” means nobleman in European countries [13]. The usage of the phrases “Prince of Wales” for the footballer Gareth Bale implied he was really the noble symbol of Wales as well as the supreme representative of Wales in football. Also, the phrases “prince of goals” implied that Gareth Bale was the symbol of goals and that his presence ensured the victory. Clearly, Richardson sent his overestimation to the footballer Gareth Bale.

Table 1. Underestimation and overestimation

Gender Grammatical units	English		Vietnamese	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
words or phrases	- <i>park football</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>) - <i>ladies’ version of a game played in men’s shorts</i> (<i>Daily record</i>)	- (<i>super</i>) <i>classical football</i> (<i>The guardian</i>)		- <i>bóng đá đỉnh cao</i> (<i>Bóng đá</i>)
		- <i>battle of the giants</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>) - <i>epic / blockbuster match</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>)		- <i>trận cầu siêu kinh điển</i> (<i>Vnexpress</i>)
	- <i>ponytailed and earringed players</i> (<i>Huffington post</i>) - <i>outsider in football</i> (<i>Channel 4 News</i>)	- <i>France master</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>) - <i>superstar</i> (<i>Bleacher report</i>) - (<i>super</i>) <i>hero</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>) - <i>superman</i> (<i>The guardian</i>) - <i>a man for the big occasion</i> (<i>Daily mail</i>)	- <i>các cô gái vàng</i> (<i>Thể thao & Văn hóa</i>) - “ <i>vô tiền khoáng hậu</i> ” (<i>Bóng đá</i>) - <i>niềm tự hào của cả đất nước Việt Nam</i> (<i>Bóng đá</i>)	- <i>siêu nhân</i> (<i>Vietnamnet</i>) - <i>siêu sao</i> (<i>Bóng đá</i>)

Richardson’s review was made in the context when Gareth Bale became the Spanish club Real Madrid’s member with a world record transfer fee of £85.3 million (€100 million) as the English press reported. The glory of the record transfer fee could have a

strong influence on Richardson’s ideas because the scoring of a hat-trick like Gareth Bale’s was not really too strange and great in men’s football and even in women’s football. Frankly, the fly words such as *princess*, *princess of goals* or something like that have not yet been used

for women. Richardson's review greatly affected the readers, which was found in some readers' comments praising Bale such as "*he is a real superman*" or "*Bale is my superhero*".

3.1.3. Summary

In general, as observed in the collection and research of the data, the underestimation and overestimation in football commentaries in English and Vietnamese newspapers can be specified as in the Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, only words or phrases are used to show underestimation and overestimation in both English and Vietnamese commentaries. While "*park football*", "*ladies' version of a game played in men's shorts*" are used to underestimate women's football, "*classical football*", "*bóng đá đỉnh cao*" (*very amusing and typical football* in English) is used to overestimate men's football. Men's football matches are praised as "*a battle of the giants*" or "*a blockbuster match*" in English or "*trận cầu siêu kinh điển*" in Vietnamese (*a very exciting match of two great and powerful teams* in English). Regarding the role women or men in football, English commentaries use "*ponytailed and earringed players*" or "*outsider in football*" to refer to female footballers but they use praising words such as "*France master*", "*superstar*", "*superman*", "*superhero*", "*a man for the big occasion*" to compliment male footballers. Vietnamese commentaries also use wonderful words such as "*siêu nhân*", "*siêu sao*" ("*superman*", "*superstar*" in English) to refer to male footballers but female peers are overestimated with even more wonderful words like "*các cô gái vàng*" (*golden girls* in English), "*vô tiền khoáng hậu*" (*unprecedented* in English), "*niềm tự hào của cả đất nước Việt Nam*" (*the pride of Vietnam* in English).

3.2. Insult and worship

In the English football commentaries, the insult to women focuses on two aspects: women's poor appearance and their poor performance. Whereas, the worship to men focuses on three aspects: the excitement of men's football, the excitement of men's football matches, and men's out-of-imagination talent. On the contrary, in the Vietnamese football commentaries, the sportswriters do not express the insult or worship to women and men in football at all.

3.2.1. Insult

In English football commentaries, the insult to women can be expressed through the emotional word as in the following example:

"*This, after all, is not 'England' we're talking about, it is 'England Women' - or the equally abhorrent 'Lionesses'.*"

On July 14, 2013, after England's 3-2 defeat by Spain in Women's Euro 2013, *The Daily Mail* ran a noteworthy column entitled: "Let's stop being nice about women's football" by the famous sportswriter Laura Williamson. She violently criticized England Women's football team although their loss to Spain was just their debut in the tournament. After comparing England Women's football team to England Men's football team, Williamson made a heavy comment: "This, after all, is not 'England' we're talking about, it is 'England Women' - or the equally abhorrent 'Lionesses'." It should be noted that the nickname of England Men's football team was *the Three Lions* [14]. In her comment, the usage of the words 'England' and 'England Women' more clearly showed her discrimination against England Women's football team. Williamson implied that England Men's football team represented the nation of England whereas England

Women's football team represented England Women only. Last but not least, she expressed her true emotion about England Women's football team through the adjective "abhorrent" which meant causing or deserving strong dislike. Obviously, this was an overt insult to England Women's football team.

Williamson's comment was made in the context of Women's Euro 2013 held in Sweden. At that time, England Women's football team was greatly expected to become the champion after their regrettable loss to Germany in the final match in Women's Euro 2009. Therefore, it was understandable why Williamson was so angry and disappointed with England's loss to Spain. Surprisingly, Williamson's comment received the approval from a lot of readers as revealed in such comments by both male and female supporters as "*women's football is a waste of time*" or "*women's football total joke.....well worth a watch for the comedy value*".

3.2.2. Worship

In contrast with the insult to women in football, the sportswriter's worship to men is expressed through flying words which can make female footballers feel self-pity such as in the example below:

"We are all blessed to live in the Messi era to be able to witness this artist at work."

On March 8, 2012, after Barcelona's 7-1 win to Bayer Leverkusen in the UEFA Champions League, *the Bleacher report* published an article named "Leo Messi: King of the Night. King of Football Kings" by the sportswriter Xoel Cardenas. He made the comment: "We are all blessed to live in the Messi era to be able to witness this artist at work." It was easy to see Cardenas' excessive worship to the footballer Messi. Firstly, the word "blessed" originally was a religious word

meaning lucky [13]. For Cardenas, the usage of this word implied that seeing Messi play was more than the luckiness and it seemed to be a divine grace. Secondly, the use of the finite clause "to live in the Messi era" showed his idolization more clearly. The word "era" meant a period of time with the extremely particular characteristics or events [13]. The new term "Messi era" could be interpreted that Messi formed his own period by his great landmarks. In short, Cardenas' comment implied it was a divine grace for everyone to live in Messi's period of history.

Cardenas made the comment in the context when Messi was judged as one of the best football players in the world. Messi's achievements had great effects on Cardenas' viewpoints. It explained why Cardenas had such emotionalistic praises. The usage of such words as "blessed", "era" really was luxury to women's football. Anyway, Cardenas' commentary made a lot of readers have the illusion of Messi's extraordinariness such as "*actually, Messi is irreplaceable*"...

3.2.3. Summary

In general, as observed in the collection and research of the data, the insult and worship in football commentaries in English and Vietnamese newspapers can be specified as in Table 2.

In Table 2, words or phrases are used to show insult and worship in English commentaries only. Men's football match is sanctified with the phrase "*a clash of European titans*". Along with "*abhorrent*", "*turn-off*" is used by the sportswriter to insult female footballers. Whereas, male peers are worshiped as "*king of football kings*", "*king*", "*legend*", "*god*", "*genius*", "*the measuring device for greatness*", "*extraterrestrial*", "*from another planet*", "*out of this world*".

Table 2. Insult and worship

Gender		English		Vietnamese	
Grammatical units					
	Women	Men		Women	Men
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>abhorrent (daily mail)</i> - <i>turn-off (huffington post)</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>a clash of European titans (huffington post)</i> - <i>king of football kings (bleacher report)</i> - <i>extraterrestrial (daily record)</i> - <i>genius (bleacher report)</i> - <i>king/legend (daily mail)</i> - <i>god (daily mail)</i> - <i>from another planet (daily record)</i> - <i>out of this world (daily mail)</i> - <i>the measuring device for greatness (bleacher report)</i> 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>not expressed</i> 	
words or phrases					

4. Discussion

In fact, sexism in football has been a big trouble all over the world so far. Even Mr. Sepp Blatter, the incumbent president of FIFA (International Federation of Association Football), showed his own sexist opinion in August, 2014 when he said: "Football is very macho. It's so difficult to accept [women] in the game. Not playing the game, but in the governance." [15]. Therefore, it is not weird to see the presence of sexism in English football commentaries. Sexism in English football commentaries now is not too serious and overt as it used to be but it is showed more sophisticatedly through words or phrases used in a selective manner by sportswriters. Clearly, those sportswriters are smart enough to take advantage of their power of language to send readers their sexist messages without being discovered.

On the other hand, the absence of sexism in Vietnamese football commentaries can be explained from the achievements of Vietnam women's football. It is a fact that it was not until 2001 that women's football was paid

attention to in Vietnam when Vietnam women's national football team firstly became the SEA-Games champion, which men's national football team has not ever been. Since then, women's football has been always Vietnam's pride in regional and continental tournaments. Vietnamese women in football have overcome social prejudices and occupational difficulties to brighten Vietnam sports, which makes them deserve much respect and admiration.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, sexism can be clearly seen in English football commentaries. Women in football suffer from the underestimation or even the insult while their male peers are granted the overestimation or the worship by sportswriters. These demonstrations of emotion are populated through words and phrases. No matter how negative or positive they are, these demonstrations have great effects on readers. However, sexism is not showed in Vietnamese football commentaries. The words and phrases used by the Vietnamese sportswriters reflect

their fairness of estimating women and men in football. The underestimation of and insult to women are absolutely absent in Vietnamese football commentaries.

Actually, this research highlights an issue which is worth rethinking over the press today: Journalists who own the great power of language are not aware (accidentally or intentionally) of the dangers which might result from their used power of language.

References

- [1] Fowler, R., On critical linguistics, In Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. & Coulthard, M. (Eds), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. Routledge, 3-14, 1996.
- [2] Kress, G., Representational resources and the production of subjectivity: Questions for the theoretical development of Critical Discourse Analysis in a multicultural society, In Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. & Coulthard, M. (Eds), *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*. Routledge, 15-31, 1996.
- [3] Van Dijk, T.A., *Pragmatics & Beyond*, Vol. 3, *Prejudice in Discourse*, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984.
- [4] Van Dijk, T.A., *Principles of critical discourse analysis*. *Discourse & Society*. Sage, 4(2), 249-83, 1993.
- [5] Van Dijk, T.A. *Aims of critical discourse analysis*. *Japanese Discourse*, 1, 17-27, 1997.
- [6] Van Dijk, T.A., *Critical Discourse Analysis*. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen, & H.E. Hamilton, (Eds), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell, 352-71, 2001.
- [7] Weiss, G. & Wodak, R. (Eds.), *Critical discourse analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- [8] Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (2nd revised edition), London: Sage, 2009.
- [9] Fairclough, N., *Language and Power*, London: Longman, 1989.
- [10] Fairclough, N., *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.
- [11] Fairclough, N., *Critical discourse analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, London: Longman, 1995.
- [12] Locke, T. *Critical discourse analysis*, London: Continuum, 2004.
- [13] *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* 8th edition, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- [14] Sammie Frimpong, *World Cup 2014: How the teams had their nicknames*, 2014. <http://www.goal.com/en-sg/news/3883/features/2014/06/09/4451680/world-cup-2014-how-the-teams-had-their-nicknames> accessed on 16 October 2014.
- [15] Teddy Cutler, *France's Claire Lavogez scores goal of the year candidate in Under-20 World Cup*, 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/france-s-claire-lavogez-scores-goal-of-the-year-candidate-in-under20-world-cup-9653870.html> accessed on 16 October 2014.
<http://www.channel4.com/news/>
<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/>
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/>
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/>
<http://www.theguardian.com/uk>
<http://bleacherreport.com/>
<http://bongdaplus.vn/>
<http://thethaovanhoa.vn/>
<http://thethao.vietnamnet.vn/>
<http://thethao.vnexpress.net/>

Kỳ thị giới tính ngầm ẩn trong cách thể hiện cảm xúc bằng ngôn từ ở các bình luận bóng đá trên báo tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt: Một phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán

Ngô Việt Tuấn¹, Phan Thị Mai Hương²

¹Phòng KH-CN, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, ĐHQGHN, Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

²Khoa Ngoại ngữ, Trường Đại học Dân lập Hải Phòng, Du Hàng Kênh, Lê Chân, Hải Phòng, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Ngày nay, không thể phủ nhận rằng bóng đá là môn thể thao được yêu thích nhất trên thế giới. Vì vậy, không có gì đáng ngạc nhiên khi những bình luận bóng đá trên báo chí luôn thu hút được sự quan tâm của độc giả. Tuy nhiên, những quan điểm có phần cảm tính của các cây viết thể thao thực sự là vấn đề cần xem xét bởi những tác động tiêu cực của chúng tới suy nghĩ của độc giả. Nghiên cứu này được thực hiện trên một số trang báo điện tử tiếng Anh và Tiếng Việt được nhiều người xem nhất. Sau khi thu thập, những bình luận sẽ được phân tích trên cơ sở khung ba lớp dành cho phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán của Fairclough. Kết quả nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra sự tồn tại của kỳ thị giới tính ngầm ẩn trong cách thể hiện cảm xúc bằng ngôn từ của các cây viết thể thao đồng thời nêu bật những khác biệt nhất định trong cách thể hiện cảm xúc ở các bình luận tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt cũng như lý giải nguyên nhân tại sao dạng bất bình đẳng này lại hiện diện.

Từ khóa: Bài bình luận bóng đá, phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, kỳ thị giới tính, cách biểu đạt bằng ngôn từ.