

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN CRICKET COMMENTARY: A MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract:

The aim of the research paper is to explore the differences between male and female cricket commentary by applying Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model (1995) and a multimodal framework (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The main objective of this study is to examine how language, and non-verbal cues like visuals are used differently by male and female commentators in cricket commentary. For this study researchers choose Pakistan vs. South Africa Women's T20I series held at Multan Cricket Stadium on September 16, 18, and 20, 2024. Fairclough's CDA model helps to analyze how power dynamics, gender, and social roles are reflected in the language used by commentators, while the multimodal approach looks at how both verbal and visual elements combine. By comparing the male and female commentators, this study seeks to understand whether there are distinct patterns in how they describe the game, interact with the audience, and convey emotions. Ultimately, this paper highlights the impact of gender on the commentary experience and provides insights into how media representation can shape public understanding of sports.

Key Words: CDA, Fairclough, multimodal analysis, cricket commentary

Introduction

Cricket commentary, long dominated by male voices, serves not merely as a narrative overlay to sport, but as a powerful cultural instrument that frames the way audiences perceive the game. In media studies, sports commentary has been shown to reflect and perpetuate broader social dynamics, particularly concerning gender. For example, research on Olympic coverage reveals that women athletes are more likely to be described using non-sporting characteristics, age, marital status, or physical appearance, while men are depicted with performance-focused descriptors such as "fast" or "strong" (Messner et al., 1993). This imbalance echoes broader media trends: over 90% of sports anchors and reporters are male, which contributes to the underrepresentation of women and reinforces patriarchal narratives in sports coverage.

Cricket commentary, like other sports narration, is not immune to these disparities. Female commentators often face skepticism concerning their cricketing knowledge, and their contributions, though increasingly visible, are still met with scrutiny and limited by entrenched stereotypes. In Pakistan, for instance, sports anchor Aalia Rasheed has remarked on how female commentators endure mockery and judgment from male colleagues, underscoring the persistent hurdles they face entering the commentary box (Rasheed, 2021). Globally, pioneers like Donna Symmonds—the first woman to cover Test cricket in the West Indies in 1988—have played critical roles in challenging such gendered boundaries, as have trailblazers in other regions, including Alison Mitchell, Lisa Sthalekar, and Kass Naidoo (The Cricket Monthly, 2016).

Despite their growing presence, academic inquiry specifically focusing on the gendered dynamics of cricket commentary remains scarce. Broad discourse analyses have investigated sportscasting and media language—such as Halbert and Latimer's (1994) study on gendered language in coed tennis broadcasts, which found differences in naming, descriptive terms, and praise directed at male versus female athletes. Fairclough's (1995) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a theoretical lens for understanding how discourse both

reflects and constructs power relations—including those based on gender—as it navigates text, discourse practice, and sociocultural context.

Complementing this, the multimodal approach emphasizes that meaning in sports commentary is crafted not only through words, but through a dynamic blend of verbal, visual, and paralinguistic cues. Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) systemic-functional model, for instance, underscores how language fulfills ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions, each contributing to meaning-making in live commentary. Yet, the intersection of verbal and visual modes, especially comparing male and female commentators, remains underexplored within cricket discourse.

To address this critical gap, the present study brings together two complementary analytical frameworks:

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)_to interrogate how language choices in cricket commentary reflect gendered power structures and social roles.
- Multimodal Discourse Analysis_to explore how verbal narration and visual/paralinguistic elements interact to construct gendered identities and influence audience engagement.

Building on these frameworks, the study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To analyze how language use in cricket commentary reflects gendered power relations and social roles.
2. To examine how verbal and visual elements in cricket broadcasts interact to construct gendered identities.
3. To compare the commentary styles of male and female commentators in terms of descriptive strategies, audience engagement, and emotional expression.

By situating cricket commentary in the broader web of sports media and gender discourse, this study seeks to uncover whether—and how—gender shapes the commentary experience. It aims to illuminate the subtle (and sometimes overt) ways in which commentary practices construct or challenge normative understandings of competence, authority, and audience connection in cricket broadcasting.

Literature Review

1. Gender and Sports Media Representation

Gender representation in sports media has been a subject of sustained scholarly interest, with a strong consensus that women are underrepresented both in coverage and in authoritative roles such as commentary (Billings & Eastman, 2002; Bruce, 2016). Studies reveal that when women do appear, the narrative often emphasizes personal life, physical appearance, or emotional traits, rather than athletic performance or analytical expertise (Fink, 2015; Messner et al., 1993). This selective framing sustains a discourse of male authority in sport, positioning men as the primary arbiters of sporting knowledge.

In cricket broadcasting, these patterns are evident in the commentary box, historically dominated by male voices. Even when women such as Isa Guha, Alison Mitchell, and Lisa Sthalekar are included, their expertise is frequently scrutinized more harshly than that of their male counterparts (Rasheed, 2021). Kane and Maxwell (2011) note that such scrutiny often serves as a form of symbolic exclusion, where women's presence is acknowledged but their authority remains contested. This reflects broader findings that sports media perpetuates structural inequalities, limiting women's influence in shaping the sports narrative.

2. Language, Power, and Critical Discourse Analysis in Sports

Language in sports commentary is not merely descriptive—it is constitutive of social meaning and power relations. Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a theoretical and methodological framework to examine how commentary constructs ideologies, identities, and hierarchies. CDA has been applied to sports contexts to reveal linguistic

asymmetries, such as differing evaluative terms for male and female athletes, or the tendency to attribute male success to skill and female success to effort (Halbert & Latimer, 1994; van Dijk, 2008). In cricket, these patterns may manifest in the descriptors used by commentators, the metaphors invoked, and the narrative focus of coverage. Locke (2004) emphasizes that discourse in sports often works to “naturalize” gender hierarchies, embedding them in seemingly neutral descriptions of play. By applying CDA to cricket commentary, researchers can interrogate the subtle ways in which male and female commentators align with, resist, or reframe these gendered norms.

3. Multimodal Discourse Analysis in Live Sports Broadcasting

While CDA focuses on the textual and spoken word, sports commentary is inherently multimodal. It integrates spoken language with visual imagery, on-screen graphics, gestures, intonation, and other paralinguistic features (Jewitt, 2014). Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) examines how these elements interact to produce meaning (O’Halloran, 2011). In cricket, for example, camera focus, replay angles, and crowd shots can reinforce or undermine verbal narratives.

Iedema (2003) introduces the concept of resemiotization, where meaning is transformed as it moves between modes—for instance, from verbal analysis to visual replay. In the context of gender, multimodal cues can subtly shift audience attention; for example, focusing on a female commentator’s appearance rather than her analytical content can diminish perceptions of her authority. Combining CDA with MDA allows researchers to capture both the ideological dimensions of language and the semiotic interplay between verbal and visual communication.

4. Research Gap

Although gender and sports media have been widely studied, there is limited research focusing specifically on cricket commentary through a combined CDA and MDA lens. Most studies of gender in cricket broadcasting focus on athlete representation rather than commentator performance. Moreover, comparative analyses between male and female commentators—especially in terms of how verbal and visual modes construct gendered authority—remain scarce. This study addresses this gap by applying Fairclough’s CDA alongside a multimodal framework to examine how male and female cricket commentators differ in their descriptive strategies, audience engagement, and emotional expression.

Methodology:

This study adopts a qualitative comparative research design that integrates Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) to examine differences in cricket commentary between male and female commentators. CDA, based on Fairclough’s (1995) three-dimensional model, is employed to investigate how power relations, gendered identities, and social roles are constructed in spoken commentary, while MDA, following Jewitt (2014) and O’Halloran (2011), is used to analyze how verbal and visual modes work together in live sports broadcasting. The analysis focuses on three primary objectives: to examine the linguistic choices and discursive strategies employed by male and female cricket commentators; to investigate the integration of verbal and visual modes in their commentary; and to explore how power relations and gendered identities are constructed through language and multimodal elements in cricket broadcasts.

Purposive sampling was used to select cricket matches that featured both male and female commentators in significant speaking roles. The sample for this study comprises the Pakistan vs. South Africa Women’s T20I series held at Multan Cricket Stadium on September 16, 18, and 20, 2024, where the commentary panel included Bazid Khan, Ejaz Ahmed, Hijab Zahid, Kainat Imtiaz, and Sana Mir, with Sawera Pasha as the presenter (PCB, 2024). These matches were chosen because they provided a clear instance of mixed-gender commentary

within the same broadcast context. The primary data include verbal commentary transcripts obtained through manual transcription of the match recordings, video footage for capturing visual cues such as camera framing, replays, and on-screen graphics, and paralinguistic elements such as tone, pitch, and pause. In total, approximately ten hours of commentary were analyzed, covering all three matches and ensuring balanced representation of male and female voices within the live broadcast.

The CDA process involves textual analysis of vocabulary, grammatical structures, modality, metaphors, and evaluative language, followed by examination of discursive practices such as turn-taking and narrative co-construction, and finally the interpretation of these findings within the broader social practice of sports broadcasting. The MDA focuses on the interaction between spoken language and visual elements, including camera angles, replay sequences, graphic overlays, and the body language of commentators. A combined coding scheme was developed, covering categories such as descriptive language use, audience engagement strategies, alignment between speech and visuals, and emotional expression through tone and gesture. Two coders independently analyzed a subset of the data, and inter-coder reliability was measured using Cohen's kappa, with a target agreement of 0.80 or higher; discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed, as the study relies solely on publicly available broadcast material without collecting any personal or private data from commentators or players. All extracts are credited to their respective broadcasters and used under fair use provisions for academic purposes. Nonetheless, the scope of the study is limited to English-language television broadcasts, excluding radio and other language contexts, and the relatively small dataset means the findings are not intended to be statistically representative but rather to provide a qualitative insight into the ways gender differences manifest in cricket commentary.

Analysis:

The analysis integrates Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis with a multimodal framework (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), focusing on three aspects: linguistic features, turn-taking and discursive practice, and visual-paralinguistic integration.

1. Linguistic Style & Lexical Choices

"She's gone for the Yorker again, just missing her length — that's why you see the extra bounce off a good surface like this in Multan." (Bazid Khan)

Lexical items here are highly technical ("Yorker," "length," "surface"), with causal explanation framed in cricket-specific jargon. This aligns with male commentators' tendency to assert technical expertise.

"That's a brave choice under pressure — she's been working hard on that slower ball, and you can see the confidence growing with each over." (Sana Mir)

While retaining technical vocabulary ("slower ball"), the sentence foregrounds affective elements ("brave choice," "confidence growing"), embedding narrative within technical commentary.

- **Technical density in male commentary:**

"If she misses that fuller length again, there's every chance the batter will free her arms square on the off side." (Ejaz Ahmed)

Here, abstracted conditional phrasing and dense cricketing jargon ("fuller length," "free her arms," "square on the off side") reflect a knowledge-authority stance. This aligns with previous findings that male commentators often emphasize predictive authority (Whannel, 2002).

- **Narrative and evaluative layering in female commentary:**

“You can see she’s trusting her rhythm now — earlier she was rushing, but this over shows her calmness.” (Hijab Zahid)

Female commentators frequently contextualized play within an emotional or developmental narrative, intertwining technical analysis with psychological framing (“trusting her rhythm,” “calmness”).

- **Metaphor and identity construction:**

Male commentators more often used metaphors drawn from warfare or mechanics (“*she’s firing in those Yorkers,*” “*tightening the screws*”), while female commentators leaned toward affective or communal metaphors (“*the crowd is lifting her,*” “*she carries the team’s spirit*”). Such metaphorical asymmetry reflects gendered discursive positioning noted in sports discourse research (Mills, 2017).

- **Boundary-crossing by female commentators:**

Instances occurred where female commentators directly challenged or reframed technical points.

Example:

Male commentator: “*That fielder should’ve been at point.*”

Female commentator (Sana Mir): “*Actually, point was covered — it’s the gap between cover and extra cover that was exposed.*”

Such interventions function as micro-resistances to gendered role allocation, asserting technical authority in a traditionally male-coded space.

- **Humor and relational talk:**

Male commentators were more likely to employ banter directed at co-commentators (e.g., “*You’d have dropped that catch too, Bazid!*”), whereas female commentators employed humor to build rapport with players or audiences (e.g., “*She’ll be replaying that shot in her head tonight — I know I would!*”). This reflects gendered discursive strategies in audience engagement (Connell, 2005).

2. Visual and Multimodal Integration

Screen captures from the broadcast showed clear production patterns:

- **Male-led segments** often coincided with *on-screen tactical graphics* (field placement maps, bowling speed meters).
- **Female-led segments** were more frequently paired with *crowd reaction shots* or *close-ups of players*.

Example – Visual pairing

- Commentary: “*She’s targeting the off stump with a packed off-side field.*” (Bazid Khan)
- On-screen: Field map overlay highlighting off-side positioning.

Example – Visual pairing

- Commentary: “*Look at her smile — that’s the joy of cricket right there.*” (Kainat Imtiaz)
- On-screen: Close-up replay of the bowler celebrating.

Voice-paralinguistic alignment:

Male commentators often delivered at a steady, assertive pitch, especially during tactical explanation, while female commentators modulated tone dynamically — rising pitch with excitement, softening during reflective or empathetic observations. This paralinguistic range reinforced the narrative vs. technical division.

Camera dynamics:

When female commentators provided tactical insights, the camera sometimes lingered on their studio presence rather than overlaying field graphics, visually repositioning authority from game space to commentator space. This subtle framing effect echoes Van Leeuwen’s (2008) observation of how multimodal texts assign legitimacy through spatial positioning.

Interpretation:

These findings reinforce Fairclough's (1995) claim that discourse simultaneously reflects and reproduces social hierarchies. The gendered alignment of linguistic, discursive, and multimodal resources suggests that cricket commentary is not a neutral description of play but a structured performance where technical authority remains more strongly associated with male voices. However, the data also show female commentators actively negotiating and at times subverting these discursive roles, carving out spaces of technical credibility and affective resonance within a male-dominated broadcast framework.

Results and Discussion

The results reveal clear patterns in how gendered identities and power relations are constructed within cricket commentary through both language and multimodal representation. Three main findings emerge from the analysis.

1. Lexical and Stylistic Differences

Male commentators consistently relied on dense cricket jargon and tactical descriptions, which reinforced their authority as technical experts. Phrases such as "extra bounce off a good surface" or "targeting the off stump" foregrounded analytical precision and mastery of cricketing vocabulary. In contrast, female commentators combined technical analysis with affective framing, often embedding emotional or relational dimensions such as "brave choice" or "confidence growing." This dual emphasis reflects a negotiation between establishing authority and connecting with audiences through narrative personalization. Such findings resonate with earlier work by Halbert and Latimer (1994), who observed differential evaluative framing of male and female athletes, and align with Locke's (2004) argument that sports discourse tends to naturalize gendered hierarchies.

2. Turn-Taking and Discursive Positioning

The coding of turn-taking revealed an asymmetry in role allocation: men dominated the immediate, technical, ball-by-ball commentary, while women were frequently positioned in reflective or contextual roles. Although female commentators occasionally asserted tactical expertise—such as Sana Mir's corrective interjections—these moments were marked as disruptions of the established order rather than the norm. This finding highlights the persistence of what Kane and Maxwell (2011) describe as symbolic exclusion, whereby women are included in the discourse but not consistently recognized as authoritative voices. At the same time, the ability of female commentators to reframe tactical interpretations demonstrates their agency in contesting these boundaries, reflecting Fairclough's (1995) notion of discourse as a site of struggle.

3. Multimodal Alignment and Visual Framing

The multimodal analysis indicates systematic alignment between the commentator's gender and the visual cues selected by broadcasters. Male voices were frequently paired with tactical graphics (e.g., field maps, speed meters), reinforcing their association with technical authority. Female voices, by contrast, were often accompanied by crowd shots, close-ups, or emotive replays, which highlighted affective or human-interest dimensions of the game. This pattern underscores Iedema's (2003) concept of resemiotization, as meaning shifts across verbal and visual modes in ways that subtly reinforce gendered hierarchies. Importantly, while female commentators brought richness through affective narratives, the broadcast framing limited their discursive authority by visually decoupling them from technical analysis.

Interpretation of Findings

Taken together, these findings suggest that cricket commentary remains a gendered discourse where technical expertise is discursively and multimodality aligned with male voices, while women's contributions are often reframed toward affective or relational aspects of the

game. Yet, moments of resistance—such as corrective interjections and the use of technical vocabulary by female commentators—demonstrate that women are actively negotiating these boundaries rather than passively reproducing them. This dynamic reflects broader cultural shifts in sports media, where women are increasingly present but still navigating structures that privilege male authority (Bruce, 2016).

Conclusion

This study examined the gendered dynamics of cricket commentary through the combined lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). By analyzing commentary from the Pakistan vs. South Africa Women's T20I series (2024), the research revealed that: Male commentators were discursively positioned as technical authorities, using dense cricket jargon and frequently paired with tactical graphics. Female commentators combined technical knowledge with affective and narrative framing, but were visually framed with emotive or crowd-focused shots rather than technical overlays. Discursive practices such as turn-taking and role allocation positioned women in reflective or contextual roles, though female commentators occasionally disrupted these patterns by asserting tactical authority.

The findings highlight how commentary not only describes but also constructs gendered power relations in cricket broadcasting. While women commentators are increasingly visible, structural and multimodal practices continue to frame them as less authoritative than their male counterparts. At the same time, their hybrid use of technical and affective commentary strategies suggests a potential reconfiguration of what counts as “expert” commentary, challenging narrowly defined models of authority in sports media.

Implications:

For media producers, the results underscore the need to consciously align female voices with technical visuals and allow more balanced turn-taking to challenge entrenched stereotypes.

For academic research, the study demonstrates the value of combining CDA and MDA in uncovering the layered ways gender is constructed in live sports broadcasting.

For broader discourse, the findings contribute to ongoing debates about representation, authority, and inclusivity in sports media, illustrating that commentary is not only entertainment but also a site where social hierarchies are reproduced and contested.

Future research could expand this work by analyzing larger datasets, including radio and non-English broadcasts, and exploring audience reception of male versus female commentary styles. Such studies would help build a more comprehensive understanding of how gendered discourse in cricket commentary shapes audience perceptions and broader cultural narratives of authority in sport.

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