RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES FOR FORMING THE IMAGE OF AN ATHLETE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TV PROGRAMS

TÉCNICAS RETÓRICAS PARA FORMAR A IMAGEM DE UM ATLETA EM PROGRAMAS DE TELEVISÃO EM INGLÊS

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The portrayal of athletes in the media is an important part of sports fans' image of a country or team, which is why this study's objective is to identify the rhetorical and visual techniques used by English-language sports channels to create the image of Russian athletes.

Methods: The research methodology includes a qualitative content analysis of American and British sports broadcasts on NBC and SKY Sports. The authors conduct a frequency analysis of the terms and codes used by anchors that affect the viewer's perception of athletes.

Results: The results show the predominance of negative rhetoric and the creation of images of the "enemy" and "other" in NBC and SKY Sports programs, as well as the direct association of athletes with the country they represent. The personal characteristics of athletes are lost in favor of a collective identity. Non-verbal techniques of anchors and experts, such as gestures, facial expressions, and intonation, emphasize an aggressive tone and unfriendly attitude.

Conclusions: The conclusions highlight the importance of visual and rhetorical devices in forming media images of athletes and stipulate the need for further research to fully understand their impact on spectators.

Keywords: Sports TV programs; Rhetorical devices; Impact on the audience; Image of an athlete.

RESUMO

Objetivo: O retrato dos atletas na mídia é uma parte importante da imagem que os fãs de esportes têm de um país ou equipe. Por isso, o objetivo deste estudo é identificar as técnicas retóricas e visuais usadas pelos canais esportivos de língua inglesa para criar a imagem dos atletas russos.

Métodos: A metodologia de pesquisa inclui uma análise de conteúdo qualitativa das transmissões esportivas americanas e britânicas na NBC e na SKY Sports. Os autores realizam uma análise de frequência dos termos e códigos usados pelos âncoras que afetam a percepção do espectador sobre os atletas.

Resultados: Os resultados mostram a predominância de uma retórica negativa e a criação de imagens do "inimigo" e do "outro" nos programas da NBC e da SKY Sports, bem como a associação direta dos atletas com o país que representam. As características pessoais dos atletas são perdidas em favor de uma identidade coletiva. As técnicas não verbais dos âncoras e especialistas, como gestos, expressões faciais e entonação, enfatizam um tom agressivo e uma atitude hostil.

Conclusões: As conclusões destacam a importância dos dispositivos visuais e retóricos na formação de imagens de atletas na mídia e estipulam a necessidade de mais pesquisas para entender completamente seu impacto sobre os espectadores.

Palavras-chave: Programas esportivos de TV; Dispositivos retóricos; Impacto no público; Imagem de um atleta.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sport is an important component of the image of countries and regions. Professional athletes often need to not only represent their country or team at the international level but also to correspond to certain ideas about a citizen of their country. This image is designed to influence the masses and set a model of approved behavior. The image transmitted to foreigners affects their view of the entire team or country that the athlete represents.

Being public figures, athletes often come under intense media scrutiny. An athlete's image influences the attitude of spectators and fans towards them, which can significantly affect their career.

Thus, athletes' portrayal on TV is an important area of media research. This analysis is based on the understanding that the media not only reflects but also constructs the public image of athletes, influencing their perception through various rhetorical techniques.

Despite extensive research on the representation of celebrities and politicians in the media, the images of athletes are not comprehensively understood. The influence of rhetorical techniques on forming the images of athletes is also understudied.

Sports media have specific language and strive for an objective analysis of the events

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in an arena or stadium. When covering international events on TV, politics and subjective opinions penetrate professional sports commentary. The specifics of language and the presentation of material about athletes during competitions can significantly affect the public perception of not only an individual but also their team and country, which makes the study of rhetoric important for understanding the processes of forming an integral image.

Thus, this study aims to identify the rhetorical devices used in athletes' portrayal on popular English-language sports channels (NBC and SKY Sports).

2   METHODS

We studied the rhetoric of English-language sports media using a qualitative content analysis of American NBC Sports and British SKY Sports analytical programs before and during the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang. The primary analysis of fragments allowed us to identify two large thematic blocks:

1) The detection of doping in curler of the Russian Olympic team A. Krushelnitsky's sample;

2) The admission of Russian athletes to competitions under a neutral Olympic flag.

Using content analysis, we selected fragments from four programs that discussed the use of doping by Krushelnitsky. The second thematic block was studied based on The Dan Patrick Show analytical program, the issue "Russia banned from Olympics; athletes can compete as neutrals" and the Soccer AM program.

After transcribing these programs, the frequency content analysis of the texts was conducted using Yoshikoder and Atlas.ti.

To determine units of analysis, frames were used as stable cognitive structures that "fulfill the function of metacommunicative definition of a situation, setting a semantic framework for its representation and understanding" (Malinova, 2016, p. 21). In other words, a frame is a situational semantic frame that describes a fragment of a person's knowledge and ideas about the world (Varganova, 2006), which helps set the boundaries of concepts in selected cases.

After conducting a qualitative content analysis using Yoshikoder, an initial list of frames was generated based on the frequency of certain words in the programs.

We formed a list of frames and identified the main indicators of analysis. Then we coded and processed the analytical programs. The list of codes in the programs was determined using the method of open coding. We generated a code cloud to determine

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which selected and formulated codes had greater significance and frequency.

3   RESULTS

The list of frames obtained from the analysis of selected programs about Krushelnitsky is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The frequency of words in stories about Krushelnitsky in the NBC and SKY Sports analytical programs

Unit of analysis	SKY Sports	NBC	Total
Athlete/athletes	21	36	57
Russia	18	11	29
Anti-doping	15	5	20
Doping	5	13	18
Ban	5	12	17
Bronze/bronzes	7	3	10
Olympic	4	3	7
Flag	2	5	7
Krushelnitsky	3	3	6
War	0	5	5

The most frequent characteristic of the frame used to describe Krushelnitsky was the word "athlete", with 57 mentions in total. NBC connected the athlete and Russia as a country more often than SKY Sports.

The key role of analysts and experts on SKY Sports was to promote adherence to the Olympic rules and anti-doping policy. It also discussed possible manipulations with samples. However, there was also a version about the unintentional use of doping by the Russian athlete.

On American TV, this idea was categorically denied. One of the common words used in reference to Russian athletes on NBC was "ban". Americans more often recalled the anti-doping scandal in terms of not allowing Russian athletes to compete. Only American shows used the frame "war", including words and phrases on the topic: *bomb, attack, declared war, protect athletes, need to be burned out*.

The confiscation of medals from some curlers was not emotionally evaluated on any channels.

Using the method of open coding, we listed codes used in the analytical programs.

1. Krushelnitsky is the enemy;

2. The athlete is innocent;

3. The athlete is Russian;

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4. Krushelnitsky is just an athlete (human qualities);

5. Such athletes are not needed;

6. Krushelnitsky at the Games is a WADA's mistake;

7. Indifference to the athlete;

8. Sarcasm regarding doping;

9. Doping is someone's conspiracy;

10. The athlete is married;

11. Krushelnitsky is the winner;

12. The athlete is disqualified;

13. Sympathy for the athlete.

Based on the obtained data, the characteristic "Krushelnitsky – Russian" was most often used in reference to the athlete. The code indicated not only that the athlete belonged to another country but also the differences between Russian athletes and those from the USA and UK.

The anchors and experts compared the Russian athlete with his counterparts from the broadcasting countries: the "righteous" British, the honest victories of the Americans, and the unlawful actions of the Russians. In this regard, Krushelnitsky's nationality was his main verbal characteristic.

To analyze this opposition, let us turn to the classification of images based on the work by O.V. Popova (2009).

According to the model, there is the following classification: "I (friendly) – another – other (stranger/misfit/enemy)." The "we – they" concept denotes the difference between people, nations, and their characteristics. Thus, the British and American programs characterized Krushelnitsky as different from them and having different characteristics.

The opinion imposed by the anchor has a significant impact on the viewer since this narrative dwells not on the individual characteristics of the athlete but rather on his social position and collective function (Baumann & Gingrich, 2004; Todorov, 1992).

The "misfit" combines the values of the group of origin and the new collective where they strive to blend in (Abizadeh, 2005; Malinova, 2015). This image is perceived as a possible threat to society. For the Olympic community, the Russian curler was presented as a misfit, i.e., he was described using the code "there is no place for such athletes". Krushelnitsky was classified as an athlete and an Olympian while highlighting his alienness and difference from the rest of the group. The athlete's use of doping was condemned, and TV programs focused on the deviance of this act. However, the intentionality of using

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prohibited drugs was not considered by the media.

The athlete's personal characteristics fade into the background: the fact of winning a bronze medal, having a wife, his other human qualities, including conscience, and the possibility of everyone making a mistake and admitting guilt and fear.

The most radical personification of the "other" is the "enemy". In the analytical program on NBC, two codes prevailed. The first (hostile) code is expressed using words with a negative meaning. Krushelnitsky was presented not only as an athlete opposed to the entire country and society, but an emphasis was also placed on the harm caused by his behavior, actions, and presence in the Olympic community. NBC aimed to impose a negative attitude toward the Russian curler.

The second code the American analytical programs actively used was "disqualification". They indicate the inevitability of punishment, justice for other athletes, and response measures to doping. NBC mentioned the official position of the Olympic Committee and experts. The experts invited to the program agreed that Krushelnitsky should not have participated in the Olympic Games. This code corresponds with the frame of war and political confrontation between the US and Russia, also implied.

The following codes were identified in The Dan Patrick Show dedicated to the participation of Russian athletes in the Olympics under a neutral flag: *clean, athlete, criminal, doped, games, Putin, regime, Rodchenkov, Russia, and a single team*. Using Atlas.ti, we conducted the final coding of the analytical program "Russia banned from Olympics: athletes can compete as neutrals".

The most frequent codes were "Putin", "athlete", and "criminal", which confirms the position of SKY Sports in Krushelnitsky's case: Russian athletes represent "aliens" who, under the personalistic regime, are forced to dope and will continue this practice. Using doping is regarded as a national characteristic not inherent in the British.

The frequency analysis of the words used in the programs showed that the most popular concept was *"athlete"* and, in particular, *"Russian athlete"*. The word *"decision"* was mostly used in conjunction with *"doping"*. The images of the "other" prevailed in the British programs. The American programs used the image of a threat from the Russian athlete and transferred responsibility from the athlete to the entire state represented on the international stage.

There were no positive images of athletes in the programs. They were filled with negative connotations, and guest experts generally supported the anchor's assumptions, without expressing an opposing opinion.

While analyzing the visual features of an athlete's image on TV, it is important to consider non-verbal communication methods.

There are several elements in non-verbal communication (Labunskaya, 1999):

1. Posture and gestures. Anchors actively use gestures to better convey the meaning of what is being said and place an emphasis in their speech.

The British anchors used gestures when justifying their position. When describing the Russian athlete A. Krushelnitsky, anchors and some experts took an aggressive pose, leaning forward towards the interlocutor and waving their arms.

2. Facial expressions. Facial expressions transmit information about the tone of speech (Stolyarenko, 2001), the anchor's mood, and the feelings to which they appeal. Therefore, it is possible to track and analyze the signals used by the anchor.

Dan Patrick, the British anchor of an analytical sports program, used different expressions including disgust, anger, indignation, and even surprise. In most cases, aggressive facial expressions were used when pronouncing "Russia". In the second half of his speech, Patrick mentioned the Russian athlete E. Medvedeva, who spoke at an IOC meeting dedicated to the possible disqualification of the entire Russian team and a ban on Russian athletes from competing in the Olympic Games. When discussing the female athlete's position, the anchor verbally and emotionally expressed disagreement and surprise that young athletes do not support the "global" position of not allowing athletes whose country is "involved in the biggest doping scandal" to compete.

3. Distance between interlocutors. Since direct contact between the anchor and the audience is impossible on TV, this characteristic applies only to the anchor's communication with experts or viewers in the studio (Panfilova, 2007).

The format of analytical sports programs on British and American TV does not involve the presence of an audience in the studio. American experts stand opposite the anchor, which allows them to maintain eye contact and indicates physical and semantic proximity between the invited experts and the anchor. This creates the effect of solidarity and common opinion and shares the authority of the experts with the anchor.

4. Intonation and other voice characteristics combining verbal and non-verbal means of communication. With the help of intonation (volume of speech, timbre, tone), the general atmosphere of the program is created. Using various intonation means can radically change the meaning of a particular word, adding sarcasm or making it sound like a joke, accusation, or convincing statement.

In addition to video, sports programs also show digital images using photomontage.

On March 15, 2018, the Soccer AM program used an image in which the President of the Russian Federation sits on a bear and "rescues" Russian Olympic athletes from Pyeongchang. The images were complemented by jokes, ironic statements, and off-screen laughter.

As part of British and American analytical programs, graphic messages were used, including quotes by T. Bach, V. Putin, V. Mutko, IOC members, athletes, and sports experts. When demonstrating a quote, a photograph of the person being quoted was provided. The color and font choice depended on the overall design of the channel. In the case of NBC, the logo was used at the bottom right of the screen. For the SKY Sports channel, the color scheme differed. For evening shows, a dark palette was used. For morning broadcasts, the black font on a white background prevailed. The logo was not used in the British shows.

Each TV channel uses exclusive corporate colors to increase brand recognition. Such colors are developed by specialists and chosen consciously since, according to marketers, each color has an emotional connotation and symbolism.

NBC also uses modern technologies: holograms in the studio, complex collages, and high-quality video footage. In the TV programs, the following types of visual images of athletes were identified:

– A person's image without a corresponding caption. This type of graphic message can be a hologram projected exclusively on the screen and used directly in the studio. This option conveys the effect of the presence of an athlete or any other personality discussed in the studio. Some anchors addressed the holograms with accusatory speeches.

– Quotation without a corresponding image of the person but with the use of subtitles, i.e., a caption or verbal explanation from anchors indicating the person who produced the statement;

– Spatial images, including geographical locations, photographs of the Olympic Village, the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne, the state flag, or other graphic elements indicating the athlete's affiliation with a particular organization, country, or community.

Our empirical research showed that anchors' personal qualities, verbal characteristics, and humor had the greatest influence on the viewing audience. This factor became significant during statistical processing.

4   CONCLUSIONS

We identified the most used expressions and codes in English and American

broadcasts about Russian Olympians. Based on them, we concluded that the rhetoric of the anchors toward Russian athletes during the 2018 Winter Olympics was generally negative. When these images prevail, the personal characteristics of athletes are neglected. As a result, they are presented one-sidedly.

Our study showed the influence of visual and speech techniques on athletes' perception in the media as exemplified by English-language sports channels. The visual techniques consist in the transmission of graphic elements that evoke certain emotional reactions, citations, and holograms creating the effect of the presence of athletes in the studio. The speech techniques include speech expressions, intonations, and characteristics of the speaker's voice.

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