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TRASH-TALKING IN MODERN ENGLISH SPORT DISCOURSE

MA Paper

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01.06.2025 А.С.К.

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Kyiv 2025

ANNOTATION. The research investigates trash-talking as a distinctive and multifunctional discursive genre within modern English-language sports discourse. The study is grounded in the hypothesis that trash-talking constitutes a complex communicative phenomenon integrating functions of psychological influence, self-presentation, emotional release, and social structuring. The primary aim of the research is to provide a comprehensive analysis of trash-talking as a means of verbal interaction in competitive contexts, with a focus on its communicative, pragmatic, and stylistic characteristics.

Methodologically, the study employs discourse analysis, content analysis, stylistic and semiotic analysis, and a psycholinguistic approach. The analysis reveals that trash-talking functions are a strategic tool of psychological manipulation. The empirical material comprises over 50 examples drawn from sports interviews, press conferences, podcasts, and social media across a range of sports, including boxing, MMA, football, basketball, and tennis.

The findings confirm that trash-talking occupies a unique place within the communicative system of competitive sports, serving not only as a manifestation of verbal aggression but also as a culturally and semiotically loaded tool for influencing the behavior and cognition of opponents. The research has proven that trash talk affects the opponent's psychological state. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of competitive discourse.

Keywords: discursive strategy, pragmatics, psychological influence, sports discourse, stylistic devices, trash-talking

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY OF TRASH-TALKING AS A DISCURSIVE GENRE.....	6
2.1. Specifics of competitive communication.	12
2.2. Methods for researching trash talking in modern English-language sports discourse.....	17
3. RESULTS.	20
3.1. The typology of competitive speech acts.	20
3.2. Tactical and strategic characteristics of competitive communicative interactions.....	26
3.3. Multifaceted characterization of components in competitive sports discursive constructs.	31
3.4. Typology of pragmatic intentions.	36
3.5. Gender features.	38
3.6. Stylistic features of competitive sports discursive constructs.....	40
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION.....	42
REFERENCES	45
APPENDICES	54

INTRODUCTION

Trash-talking in English-language sports discourse is a form of verbal confrontation that functions as a tool of psychological pressure on opponents. It is also a cultural phenomenon that reflects the ethos of sport.

The main purpose of using trash-talk by athletes is to exert psychological pressure on their opponents, which results in indecision, loss of confidence and off-balance. In terms of its structure, the use of trash-talk is a complex semantic construction that includes verbal aggression and intimidation of opponents. In addition, these expressions can increase the confidence of the trash-talker, act as a way of self-expression or boost team spirit.

Trash-talking is an essential part of research within the framework of sports discourse because it directly shows the communicative dynamics of competitive interaction and illustrates how the boundaries between rhetorical manipulation, emotional impulse and simple provocation are blurred. Athletes use trash-talk to shape the sports narrative, attract the attention of sponsors and spectators, and create a public image.

The study of trash-talk in English-language sports discourse is relevant for several reasons. Firstly, trash-talking is not a comprehensively studied phenomenon in modern linguistics. Secondly, various sports are becoming more commercialized and mediatized every year, with more emphasis on spectacle and emotional interaction rather than sports skills or the game as a whole. Thirdly, trash-talk helps to understand the specifics of communication behaviour in the context of various disciplines: linguistics, social psychology, cultural studies, and media studies.

Object: Trash-talking in Modern English Sport Discourse

Subject: discursive, semiotic, stylistic, psycholinguistic, and cultural characteristics of trash-talking

The working hypothesis of this study: trash-talking is a multifaceted communicative phenomenon that integrates functions of influence, self-presentation, emotional release, and social structuring. These functions are reflected in its linguistic structure, pragmatic intentions, and stylistic devices.

The main aim of research is to comprehensively analyze trash-talking as a specific discursive genre in English-language sport discourse, to determine its communicative, pragmatic, and stylistic functions, and to explore its impact on the psychological state and behavior of the addressee in competitive settings.

To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set:

- To investigate the phenomenon of trash-talking from a discursive and typological perspective;
- To determine the specific features of competitive communication from psycholinguistic, cultural, semi-linguistic, and stylistic viewpoints;
- To analyze the typology of competitive speech acts;
- To examine the tactical and strategic characteristics of competitive communicative interactions;

- To conduct a detailed, multifaceted analysis of the components that constitute competitive sports discourse constructs, including semantic features, structural patterns, typologies of pragmatic intentions, ethnospecific and gender-related characteristics.

The theoretical and methodological significance of the study is to investigate the theoretical foundations of trash-talking as a discursive genre and to determine the specifics of competitive communication in various dimensions.

Finding the reasons and effects of trash-talk, knowing what actions or instruments are employed to have the desired effect on the opponent, and assessing the outcomes of applying these techniques in diverse communication contexts are the study's practical applications. The results of the study can be used to understand the implications of trash-talk on both athletes and opponents, as well as on spectators.

The research material includes sports articles, interviews, press conferences, match recordings (including live broadcasts of athletes' utterances), sports podcasts, and social media posts (X (Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, and discussions on platforms like Reddit). The corpora include over 50 communicative situations that represent various sports (boxing, MMA, football, basketball, tennis, etc.) and a range of genre-discursive formats.

Several methodological approaches were employed in the study: content analysis, discourse analysis, stylistic analysis, semiotic analysis, and the psycholinguistic approach. A more detailed investigation of the trash-talking phenomenon was made possible by the different types of data that each method contributed.

The results of the research have been approbated: 1) at the following scientific conferences: "Germanic languages: problems and prospects of research. Literature of foreign countries in the context of studying Romance and Germanic languages. Digitalisation of philological research" (2024), "Philological pearls. The Germanic languages: corpus, concept and discourse" (2025); 2) in the articles: "Trash-talking as an element of sports discourse" (Strelnik, 2024), "Trash-talking as an element of sports discourse: gender aspects" (Strelnik, 2025), "Verbal aggression in sports: invective and trash-talking as a strategy of psychological pressure" (Strelnik, 2025).

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY OF TRASH-TALKING AS A DISCURSIVE GENRE.

Trash talking – verbal taunts used by athletes towards their opponents (Phillip, 1995). This is used for intentional psychological intimidation despite the fact that most forms are unacceptable (Lumpkin et al., 1996). Trash-talk is defined as "arrogant comments about the self or offensive statements about an opponent that are delivered by a competitor usually before, during or after a competition" (Yip et al., 2018, p. 125). Trash-talking as an element of sports discourse is an object of research at the intersection of linguistics, ethics, psychology, and sociocultural studies.

One of the first aspects that attracts the attention of researchers is the ethical permissibility of trash-talking. Thus, Ornaith O'Dowd (2022), in her work *Trash Talk and Kantian Values*, examines this phenomenon through the prism of Kantian ethics, emphasizing that the permissibility of such behaviour depends on the intention of the speaker and the context of communication. The author concludes that while maintaining basic respect for the individual, trash-talking can be viewed as part of the game dynamics rather than as a manifestation of moral decline (O'Dowd, 2022).

Trash-talking also performs an important sociocultural function, in particular in the formation of intergroup identity. Thus, in the study, *Do they mean 'us'?* (Govindarajan et al., 2024) the authors analyze the linguistic means used by fans of NFL teams and demonstrate how trash-talking serves as a tool for strengthening intragroup solidarity and simultaneously creating a barrier between "their own" and "strangers". At the same time, Edinam Kofi Klutse (2023), in their work *Dismantling Hate*, draws attention to the intersection of hate speech and trash-talking, examining negative statements towards NBA players on social networks. It was found that criticism often takes on a racial, homophobic or physiognomic character, which raises the question of the boundaries between elements of "game trolling" and outright hate speech.

Thus, modern scientific research considers trash-talking as a multidimensional speech phenomenon that changes depending on the communicative context and social expectations. The study of this phenomenon allows us to understand better competitive discourse and the role of language and speech in the sports environment.

Trash-talking as a speech practice in sports is a discursive phenomenon because it affects the social dynamics between participants in sports interaction, using appropriate tools and necessary information. This practice forms new roles between athletes by establishing a new exceptional emotional communication. In the sports sphere, trash-talking functions not simply as a way of expression but as a means of manipulation, influencing the psychological state, motivation and behaviour of rivals (Yip, J. A., 2017).

The impact on the course of interpersonal interaction in real time and space through language and speech lies in the fact that situationally constructed and

modified meanings of linguistic signs within the structures of relevant discursive constructs alter the ontological and functional characteristics of the participants in interaction (Redeker, 1991). Such discursive interaction should be viewed as an integral part of sports discourse.

Discourse is a multilayered communicative phenomenon that goes beyond mere text or conversation, encompassing both linguistic and extralinguistic aspects of communication. It is defined as a space for meaning generation and modification aimed at achieving specific communicative goals (Sytnyk, I. V., 2020).

In modern linguistics, the notion of discourse is interpreted as a multidimensional linguistic practice that embodies social, cultural, and ideological aspects of communication. As Ivanova and Pichugina (2020) point out in *The Notion of Discourse in Modern Linguistics*, discourse has moved beyond purely structural analysis. It is increasingly viewed as a contextualized linguistic process that shapes and reflects social reality. Khaleel's (2018) study, *The Importance of Discourse Studies in Linguistics, Language Teaching and Translation*, emphasizes the applied value of discourse analysis: it allows for a deeper understanding of language in authentic use, which is critically important in language teaching and translation. Ibrahim (2024), in his work *Discourse in Perspectives: A Linguistic Study*, emphasizes that discourse performs not only communicative but also cognitive, social, and ideological functions, serving as a tool for constructing knowledge. Finally, in an interdisciplinary study (*Discours et Linguistique*, HAL, 2024), the emphasis is placed on the connection of discourse with power structures, which brings this approach closer to critical discourse analysis, which studies how language shapes, reinforces or undermines social inequality. All these approaches demonstrate that discourse is not only a linguistic unit but a multi-level sociolinguistic event that reflects the interaction of individuals, institutions and ideologies.

Participants in sports competitions use trash-talking in various sports events and interactions to create psychological tension on the field and pressure on opponents. Trash-talk is an integral part of sports discourse, as it is often used to intensify the competitive atmosphere and spectacle, as well as to gain an advantage over others. In this context, such vocabulary becomes a tactical tool, contributes to the formation of specific meanings that are actualized during sports competitions, and thus becomes a component of a broader communicative process within a particular environment.

Discourse, by its nature, is not limited to simple text or conversation; rather, it encompasses a complex system of interactions through which meanings and values are constructed and modified to achieve specific goals (Veysølli F.Y., 2010). Within sports discourse, discursive practices such as trash-talking allow communicators to establish roles, exercise power and influence over each other, and construct identities that play a key role in shaping the functioning of social structures in the sports context.

Different discourse types develop based on the analysis of context elements combined with communicative objectives and participant characteristics, including their social functions (Amaglobeli, G., 2018). The primary assessment factors consist of the following:

- Setting and scene (Wierzbicka, A., 1991): Discourse is shaped by the specific social environment in which it occurs. This environment determines its norms and rules. Sports discourse with trash-talking elements differs from other types in that it unfolds in a competitive environment where confrontational and aggressive elements prevail.

- Communication function: Discourses can perform a variety of functions: informational, persuasive, etc. (Izquierdo, M., 2023). Trash-talking in sports discourse mainly performs an expressive and compelling function since it not only conveys emotions but also aims to influence the emotional state and behaviour of the opponent.

- Communicative strategy: Discourses can be strategic or spontaneous (Willbrand, M. L., 1991). Trash-talking falls into the category of strategic discourse because it involves a carefully designed plan aimed at achieving specific goals.

- Means of expression or instrumentalities (Wierzbicka, A., 1991): Discourse can include both verbal and nonverbal means of communication. When it comes to trash-talking, words are the main focus, but things like gestures and facial expressions also matter and really add to what's being said.

Depending on the context of realization, the pragmatics of the participants, and the underlying meanings conveyed, discursive interactions can be understood as specific "genres." These genres comprise distinct speech acts and are embedded within particular communicative strategies and tactics. A. Wierzbicka (1991) describes discursive genres as structured communicative templates that serve specific social functions and correspond to particular contexts.

Based on the concept of Wierzbicka (1991), we define trash-talking as a specific discursive genre characterized by the following formal-logical structures:

Model 1:

- Subject: I (the sportsman)
- Addressee: You (the opponent)
- Situation: A competitive event where I seek to win
- Goal: To create psychological discomfort for the opponent
- Result: Decreased effectiveness in the opponent's performance

Model 2:

- Subject: I (the sportsman)
- Addressee: The audience (spectators, media)
- Situation: A pre-match interview
- Goal: To enhance my reputation and strengthen my public image
- Outcome: Psychological pressure on future opponents

These models underline the main elements of trash-talking, emphasizing its functions and adaptation to the situation. It is worth noting that this genre also includes dynamic language codes, the purpose of which is to influence opponents through emotional effects.

Discursive genres are a vital part of any communication because they determine what exactly is being done and what is being said. Trash-talking occupies a special place in sports, especially when it is used to express manipulation, provocations or even memes on social media.

What distinguishes trash-talking from other genres is its direct aim to break the psychological state of the opponent. This happens when people say certain things that not only share information but also stir up feelings, making things competitive, including disrespectful comments, humiliation or sarcastic jokes that doubt the other person's skills.

Trash-talking, as a genre, is distinguished by its functional flexibility, which lies in its ability to adapt to various communicative situations and channels (Babenko, O. V., 2017). This means that trash-talking can be effectively used both in direct verbal exchange on the field and in more mediated forms, such as posts on social networks, interviews or press conferences. Such adaptability allows participants in the discourse to quickly change strategies depending on the communicative context, thus achieving the desired psychological effect.

Trash-talking as a discursive genre can be implemented through various communication channels, including direct interaction during the game and mediated formats through social networks and press conferences (Kvit, S., 2018). It is worth noting that trash-talk requires a high level of communicative competence and professionalism in the use of both verbal and non-verbal tools to achieve the desired effect. Its main strength lies in the ability to influence opponents on a subconscious level, which makes it a powerful tool for experienced athletes. Such effect happens through manipulative techniques, the main aim of which is to provoke emotional reactions and disrupt the opponent's concentration on the game. As a result, it can lead to mistakes or decreased performance during competitions.

The speech acts associated with trash-talking are explicitly aggressive, often marked by the use of colloquial, slang, or even overtly hostile language (Kivenko, I. O., 2014). These may include direct insults targeting the opponent's personal traits, physical abilities, or professional accomplishments. Challenges to physical confrontation or threats are also part of this genre, which further emphasizes its inextricable link to psychological and physical pressure.

For example, in basketball, during a post-game interview about LeBron James, another NBA player remarked: "LeBron is not a clutch shooter. He folds under pressure, and that's a fact" (Jackson, 2021, p. 78). This kind of trash talk is meant to demoralize the other player by belittling their skills, which can really mess with their confidence before an important game. It's a clear case of trying to get into the head of one of the top basketball players today. The quote shows how

people point out weaknesses to make the opponent doubt themselves, especially when they need to focus the most.

Trash-talking is not limited to direct insults; more and more often, it is a matter of publicly undermining the opponent's abilities. For instance, prior to a football final, the coach of one team stated: "Their defence is a joke. They can't stop a high school team, let alone us" (Miller, 2020, p. 53). This kind of trash-talking is meant to bring down the other player by making their skills seem less valuable, and it can really hit their confidence right before an important game.

As a distinct discourse genre, trash-talking is formed through speech acts that are integrated into the broader structure of sports discourse and serve to apply psychological pressure on the opponent. These speech acts may include insults, challenges, sarcastic remarks, irony, provocation, and other forms of aggressive utterances.

The basic pragmatic intention of trash-talking lies in its negative impact on both the physical and psychological performance of the opponent. Trash-talking can also be interpreted as a mechanism of social control, enabling competitors to influence their rivals' decisions and behaviors (Dixon, N., 2007). This genre acts as a test of how well an athlete can handle verbal pressure, showing their level of maturity in their profession.

Trash-talking has a paradoxical nature: it is simultaneously an expression of aggression and a means of community-building, so aggression and cooperation frequently coexist and complement each other. In the context of today's media environment, where social networks play a central role in shaping and disseminating sports content, trash-talking has acquired new forms and meanings (Kozub, L. S., 2008). Thanks to social media and new technologies, it has become easier for athletes and their fans to use trash-talking in viral content, such as comments on Twitter or videos on Facebook. Digitalization helps to use social networks to comment on different posts more often, and despite their negativity, it can shape an athlete's public persona. When trash-talk is used effectively, this genre can increase visibility and popularity, turning athletes into noted figures online and offline.

However, this genre has some risks, too. Aggressive speech acts can result in conflicts, fines, disqualifications, or negative public backlash (Ascone, 2024). So, the sportsperson should know how to manipulate and get an advantage from it but without crossing the boundaries of rules. Thus, its effectiveness hinges on the speaker's capacity to adapt to the communicative context through semantic, pragmatic, and sociocultural dimensions.

Through its dynamic linguistic and semiotic encoding, trash-talking reshapes the semantic content of utterances, adapting them to specific situations in order to fulfil a particular communicative goal (Jones, 2021, p. 146). A. Wierzbicka (1991) points out that discourse genres represent structured communicative templates that correspond to particular social functions and contexts. Accordingly, trash-talking, as a discourse genre, integrates a variety of

speech acts aimed at producing psychological pressure through the modification of meaning.

Trash-talking functions as a means of dynamic linguistic and semiotic encoding, making a new semantic space and reshaping the communicative situation. This phenomenon constitutes a crucial aspect of sports discourse, where the battle for psychological dominance is just as important as the physical confrontation on the field or in the arena.

As a complex discourse genre, trash-talking is not only intended to generate an immediate effect in the context of sports competition but also reflects deeper cultural and social dimensions inherent in sports discourse. This genre serves as a unique tool through which participants construct their position within the competitive space while also manipulating status, roles, and social identities. As usual, trash-talking establishes a dominant position, where language is employed as a mechanism for negotiating and maintaining hierarchy within the sporting event.

Trash-talking also serves as a reflection of cultural norms and values. It can highlight ideas like masculinity, opposition, and strength. It can either support these views or challenge them, using words to both reinforce and question what's considered normal. In sports, this kind of talk often mirrors how society views masculinity and power. Thus, trash-talking can function either as a vehicle for reaffirming these cultural ideals or as a means of contesting and destabilizing them.

Trash-taking is, therefore, a complex and multifaceted communicative phenomenon that plays a vital role in contemporary English sporting discourse. Its uniqueness and effectiveness stem from a complex integration of psycholinguistic, cultural, semiotic and stylistic elements, which requires a multidimensional analytical approach to its study.

2. RESEARCH METHODS.

2.1. Specifics of competitive communication.

The analysis of scholarly sources and prior research on trash-talking in English-language sports discourse helps to identify the specific characteristics of this phenomenon and its cultural, social, and psychological aspects. As a linguistic phenomenon, trash-talking has long attracted the attention not only of linguists but also of scholars in psychology, sociology, and sports ethics – reflected in a substantial body of literature dedicated to the subject.

Psycholinguistic aspect. A complex interplay of psychological, linguistic, and social factors shapes the realization of competitive communication in sports discourse. The primary aim of this type of communication is not only to secure victory in the context of competition but also to exert a particular psycho-emotional influence on the addressee – potentially leading to changes in their behaviour, reactions, and overall perception of the situation (Ivashkevych, E., & Prymachok, L., 2020).

The psycholinguistic dimension of competitive communication, particularly in the context of trash-talking, is based on an intuitive understanding of the opponent's vulnerabilities. From a neurophysiological point of view, trash-talking activates certain areas of the brain involved in the processing of stress reactions. The impact of such verbal provocations can lead to an increase in the level of cortisol, a stress hormone, which, in turn, affects cognitive functions, including memory and attention (Ivashkevych, E., & Prymachowk, L., 2020). Because of this, the addressee may feel depressed, which jeopardizes his ability to make rational decisions under stressful conditions and can change his perception of reality. That is, trash-talking disrupts the athlete's cognitive-emotional state and influences his reactions.

The psychological impact of offensive statements is also manifested in the creation of the so-called overlay effect when the simultaneous experience of several negative emotions significantly interferes with the ability to concentrate on the task (Bar-Eli, 2006). Psycholinguistic mechanisms such as aggressive facial expressions or gestures can enhance the effect of verbal provocations.

In general, the discursive constructions that make up offensive statements function as triggers that destabilize established mental models of self-control, impair concentration and provoke actions that do not correspond to the athlete's technical skills or physical capabilities, which ultimately reduces his results in competitive matches.

Cultural aspect. The implementation of the fundamental pragmatics of competitive communication, as well as the functioning of sign-discursive constructions, is made possible by appealing to cultural prototypes that have been deeply rooted in the human subconscious for millennia (Li, C., 2024). Appealing to such prototypes in the context of competitive discourse is effective because it reflects collective values and identity. Since each culture has a unique set of

symbols, traditions, and rituals that form its cultural code, the use of trash-talking as a challenge or mockery of such values can lead to an emotional response.

For example, in Western cultures, honour and dignity, especially in relation to individual achievements and social status, are often the central focus of abusive communication. A phrase like *"You've always been a loser, just like your old man"* (Anonymous) can evoke a deep sense of shame and undermine the ability to respond adequately in a competitive situation.

Across many cultures, specific topics are considered sacred, and any reference to them in a negative context can provoke intense aggression or emotional despair. Religious beliefs often fall into this category of taboo, and trash-talking that targets such domains may have a catastrophic impact on the opponent's psycho-emotional state. For example, Nurmagomedov (2018), an MMA sportsman, in his post-fight press interview, said about Conor McGregor: *"He talks about my religion, he talks about my country, he talks about my father..."*. So, we can say that these words about family and faith touched him (Ruiz, M., 2018).

Ethnic and national stereotypes are also used not only by athletes but also by coaches and commentators in sports discourse. Bjorge Lillelien (1998) commented on the World Cup and said: *"Maggie Thatcher, Winston Churchill, Bobby Charlton... your boys took one hell of a beating!"* (Sky Sports., 2016). This phrase provoked negative criticism towards him. During the game, such statements from athletes that appeal to historical or social traumas can evoke feelings of vulnerability and inferiority.

One of the main features of foul language is its ability to appeal to concepts of honour and dignity, which are of fundamental importance in many cultures (Dixon, N., 2007). For example, in many Asian and Mediterranean cultures, an insult to honour can be perceived as a threat to social status or even life itself. Trash-talking in those situations can really hurt how people see sportsmen.

For instance, in *Cultural Differences in Competitive Communication: Analyzing Trash-Talking in Sports* (Liu, 2019), a comparative analysis of trash-talking in Western and Eastern cultures highlights differing approaches to aggressive communication. In Anglophone cultures, trash-talking may be perceived as a natural and acceptable part of competition, whereas in many Asian cultures, similar utterances may be considered rude or entirely inappropriate. For example, the phrase *"Man, you won't even be in the league next year"* (Payton, 2011) might be interpreted in a Western context as a motivational challenge, while in an Eastern context, it could result in serious social consequences.

When it comes to sports talk, there's also the issue of gender roles and stereotypes. Some offensive comments might take shots at someone's masculinity or femininity, how they look, or their gender altogether. For example, the famous phrase *"You hit like a girl"* (Johnson, 2022, p. 32) not only undermines the opponent's athletic ability but also exploits gender stereotypes associated with weakness and imposed standards of masculinity on the part of athletes. Physical

strength and masculinity are often seen as key attributes of success. For instance, in boxing matches, there is a famous phrase: *"You hit like a girl. Let's see if you can actually fight"* (Johnson 2022, p.32). This shows how social stereotypes can stir up aggression and make the other person lose their confidence.

Thus, competitive communication in sports discourse uses trash talking as a mechanism of influence through the use of deeply rooted cultural traditions, customs, narratives, and beliefs. This strategy aims to destabilize the opponent's emotional state through the use of culturally resonant triggers that can provoke an immediate reaction from the opponent, disrupt cognitive balance, and ultimately impair sports performance.

Linguosemiotic aspect. In this study, the discursive genre of trash-talking is conceptualized as a materialized semiotic construct. Accordingly, the interpretation of sign-discursive formations is carried out within the framework of the fundamental dimensions of semiosis: pragmatics, semantics, and syntactics.

At the first level of analysis, attention is focused on the hierarchy of pragmatic intentions underlying such invective constructions. This hierarchy encompasses a wide spectrum of communicative aims – ranging from "micro" manipulations, such as technical adjustments of sound that serve to construct a negative image of the opponent, to more complex semiotic operations that appeal to symbolically and culturally loaded elements. For example, the use of specific words or phrases may evoke associations with cultural icons or tabooed concepts in the listener's mind, thereby exerting a profound psychological effect.

Invective structures within the framework of trash-talking function as sign-based formations that integrate iconic, symbolic, and indexical elements (Peirce, C. S. 1935). Iconicity can appear in the phonetic reproduction of sounds. For example, the use of guttural sounds or abrupt stops on consonants such as "k" or "t" reinforces the aggressive tone of the utterance. In turn, symbolic elements often participate in the transformation of conventional meanings. The use of particular lexical units may carry ironic or sarcastic overtones, which alter their original denotative value and intensify the invective effect.

An illustrative example is the phrase: *"Your team can't run! You run like honey on ice!"* (Wikipedia contributors, 2025). This expression simultaneously contains an iconic element – slowed speech that emphasizes the semantic load of the word "honey" – and a symbolic one, namely irony, which transforms what might appear to be a compliment into a sarcastic insult.

At a deeper level of analysis, we can see that there is a certain hierarchy of intentions aimed at achieving specific goals in aggressive communication. Trash-talking includes various communication strategies that help create an image of a dominant competitor. Sometimes, it's not just a direct attack on the opponent but can be an indirect emphasis on one's advantages through the use of cultural symbols and hints (Johnson, R., 2022).

The iconic and symbolic dimensions of these invective constructions are further enhanced by the use of specific gestures, facial expressions, and

intonational patterns that complement the verbal message and form a holistic semiotic structure (Mittelberg, I., & Evola, V., 2014). This integration of verbal and non-verbal elements (disdainful glance, sarcastic smile, etc.) creates a complex sign system in which each component plays a role in achieving the communicative goal (HSK, pp. 1732-1759).

Trash-talking also reveals the importance of indexical elements in constructing an opponent's image in the linguosemiotic approach (for example, an index to past failures or defeats). For example, the phrase: *"Remember when you missed that easy shot?"* (Johnson, R., 2022) is used to activate negative memories, intensifying the humiliating effect.

In conclusion, a linguosemiotic analysis of trash-talking in English modern sports discourse demonstrates that this form of communication is a multilayered phenomenon functioning not merely at the level of crude verbal insult but also through deeper symbolic and indexical manipulation of cultural and psychological meanings. A key feature of such invective constructions is their capacity to construct an image of the opponent through a combination of phonetic, symbolic, and culturally encoded semiotic elements, making trash-talking a powerful tool in the context of competitive sports communication.

Linguostylistic aspect. The linguostylistic dimension of trash-talking in sports discourse implies a deliberate deviation from standard language norms, which serves to make the statement more expressive, non-standard, and, therefore, more effective in achieving communicative goals.

Defamiliarization prompts the listener to perceive the statement with heightened attention, while its content tends to evoke a stronger emotional response.

One of the key stylistic devices employed to create the effect of defamiliarization is metaphorization. The use of unconventional or striking metaphors allows the speaker to mock or demean the opponent by constructing vivid and memorable imagery that triggers strong emotional reactions. For instance, the expression *"You're nothing but a paper tiger"* utilizes metaphor to undermine the opponent by suggesting the illusion of strength coupled with actual weakness.

Another important stylistic device is hyperbole, which involves the deliberate exaggeration of specific characteristics of the opponent in order to provoke a comic or humiliating effect. Hyperbole may be used to amplify negative traits related to the opponent's behaviour or appearance. For example, the phrase *"You run slower than a turtle on tranquilizers"* elicits laughter while simultaneously mocking the opponent's physical abilities (Klein, E. B., & Nichols, R. A., 2003).

Irony is also an important stylistic device that allows the speaker to express sarcasm or hidden contempt under the guise of a compliment. Ironic statements often contain a double meaning, which makes them especially effective in the context of trash-talking. For example, the phrase *"Oh, nice shot!"* for someone

who has never played this game before (James Golf, 2024) uses irony to belittle the achievements of the opponent. In this regard, the defamiliarization technique enhances the impact of statements and makes them more memorable and insightful in modern sports discourse (Yarmolenko, N. A., 2021). The use of defamiliarization in trash-talking increases the communicative risk for the opponent since unusual or unexpected statements can leave him unprepared for a response, thereby increasing feelings of discomfort and psychological stress.

Another important element of the stylistic analysis of trash-talk is the use of phonetic stylistic devices, such as alliteration and assonance. These devices enhance the emotional impact of statements through the rhythmic repetition of sounds, which gives words additional emphasis and expressiveness (Green, M., 2022). Alliteration is based on the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, while assonance is based on vowel sounds (Content Team., 2024). In the context of trash-talking, this enhances the imagery of the language, making the statement more memorable and emotionally expressive.

For example, the phrase *"Fast and furious, but forever failing"* (popular in basketball teams with high pace but low efficiency) uses the alliteration of the [f] sound, which adds both rhythm and aggression to the expression while simultaneously highlighting the opponent's failure. The phrase *"You're too cool to compete, but too weak to win"*, popular in basketball teams with high pace but low efficiency, uses the assonance of the [u] and [i] sound, which gives the statement critical meaning and feeling.

Other notable stylistic devices include the use of oxymorons and paradoxes. These techniques create a contrast effect, thereby increasing the tension in sports discourse (Herrero-Ruiz, J., 2015). This contrast can be used to highlight shortcomings in the athlete's behaviour or professional skills. For example, the phrase *"You are a loud silence on the field"* (The Guardian Sport, 2022) illustrates a paradoxical image, as it emphasizes the opponent's inability to influence the game despite loud speeches.

Stylistic figures such as hyperbole and sarcasm frequently appear in sports discourse and are employed to undermine the psychological stability of opponents. The phrase *"You are going down, just like last time!"* (popular in basketball teams with high pace but low efficiency) demonstrates how the stylistic colouring of an utterance can alter its reception and intensify its impact on the opponent.

An in-depth analysis of the linguistic characteristics of trash-talking can be found in the works "Verbal Aggression in Sports: The Role of Language" (Smith, 2017) and "Language and Power in Sports: A Pragmatic Approach" (Johnson, 2020). These studies provide an analysis of stylistic features, linguistic strategies and tools.

Thus, all the above examples emphasize the importance of stylistic techniques in trash-talking in modern sports discourse. Through the use of such techniques as alliteration, assonance, oxymoron, irony and paradox, athletes can

achieve the desired goals more effectively and impressively from a linguistic point of view. The above techniques serve as a powerful tool for influencing opponents, which can enhance personal strategic effectiveness in the game and competition.

2.2. Methods for researching trash talking in modern English-language sports discourse.

In *Psychological Warfare: The Impact of Trash-Talking on Athletic Performance* (Garcia, 2018), the authors present an experimental analysis showing that trash-talking can have both positive and negative effects. The study suggests that the perception of trash-talking can depend on the level of professionalism of the player. For example, for a more experienced athlete, such statements can serve as motivation, while for a novice, they can lead to loss of attention and psychological destabilization.

Modern research also emphasizes the ethical consequences of trash-talking in sports discourse, which examines the line between acceptable and prohibited. In the article *Ethical Considerations of Trash-Talking in Competitive Sports* (Williams, 2021), the author analyzes how thin the line is between humorous statements and direct insults or even discrimination. This is especially true in major sports, where many spectators are involved because special attention is paid to tolerance in such venues.

The study employed a multi-method approach, including content analysis, survey, and observational methods. Each of these methods provides different types of data, allowing for a comprehensive and in-depth study of the phenomenon of trash-talking in contemporary English-language sports discourse.

Content analysis is the main way we looked into stuff, focusing on articles about sports events, press conferences with athletes, interviews with coaches, and social media comments (Gheyle, N., & Jacobs, T., 2017). We picked a variety of sports like football, basketball, tennis, and boxing to gather our data. This helped us spot both common trends and specific ways that foul language shows up in different sports cultures. Content analysis included identifying key lexical and phraseological units used to express verbal aggression, as well as examining the context in which these units appeared. For example, the following statement was recorded during the analysis of online comments: “You can’t even dribble, you loser!” (Smith, J. K., 2012). This statement was subsequently classified according to its level of aggressiveness and impact on the target recipient.

Text and video materials were used with questionnaires from athletes, coaches and fans to collect data on their opinion of the use of trash-talking in general and their reaction to such expressions. Various scholars have conducted studies in recent years. Differences in the perception of trash-talking were found between different age groups and participants from different sports. For some, verbal provocation proved their own skill and gave them more energy; for others, it gave them a feeling of doubt in their own abilities.

Another method of data collection was observation. It was conducted live, directly on the playing fields, and online while watching sports fights and matches. This method allowed for the full collection of the necessary information, including not only swear words but also facial expressions, gestures and even tone of voice. These aspects are essential for understanding the full impact of verbal aggression since nonverbal signals often reinforce or change the intended meaning of verbal statements (Balci, K., & Salah, A. A., 2015).

To facilitate better visualisation and a more structured presentation of the research findings, table 2.2.1 was created to outline the main methods of data collection along with their key characteristics.

Table 2.2.1

Data collection methods and their characteristics

Research method	Target audience	Data types	Examples	Notes
Content analysis	Texts (comments, interviews)	Lexical, phraseological	"You can't even dribble, loser!"	Context analysis and identification of aggression patterns
Survey	Athletes, coaches, fans	Quantitative, qualitative	"When someone trash-talks me, it actually pumps me up and makes me play harder."	Identifying the subjective perception and impact of trash-talking
Observations	Sports events	Nonverbal components	Observation of facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice during verbal aggression	Analysis of nonverbal signals accompanying trash-talking

The data processing and analysis in this study on trash-talking uses a comprehensive approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methods, thereby ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the results obtained (Gumusgul, O., & Acet, M. (2016). The initial stage includes the primary processing of the collected linguistic material, which consists of the identification and systematization of all instances of trash-talking in sports communicative acts. This is achieved using analytical tools designed to extract relevant linguistic units from large volumes of data.

The obtained data was subjected to quantitative analysis, which allows us to establish the frequency of trash-talking in different types of sports discourse. In particular, the study analyzes the number of cases of this phenomenon and their distribution across different categories, such as sports and communication participants. To obtain accurate quantitative data, statistical analysis is applied, which includes the calculation of means, medians, modes, standard deviations, and the construction of frequency distributions in order to identify typical patterns in the use of trash-talking. For instance, it was established that football accounts

for 34.6% of all aggressive, communicative acts involving trash-talking, basketball for 28.2%, and boxing for 47.9%, indicating sport-specific tendencies in verbal aggression (Bekiari, A., Perkos, S., & Gerodimos, V., 2015).

The next stage involves a thematic analysis of trash-talking, which identifies key themes and motifs in modern sports discourse. This method helps to understand which are the most common topics for manipulation and the expressions within these topics that attract the most attention from athletes and fans. In addition, such an analysis provides an understanding of the impact of trash-talk on the overall score of the game and directly on the players, as well as what exactly caused the most significant emotional reaction.

After the thematic analysis, a content analysis is conducted to assess the semantic and pragmatic characteristics of swear words in sports communication. This stage includes the study of lexical tools used to express aggression and provocation, as well as the analysis of communicative strategies and tactics used to achieve the corresponding goals. Content analysis helps to identify which rhetorical devices (irony, sarcasm, hyperbole) are most often used and how they affect the emotions and reactions of opponents.

At the final stage, a comprehensive model is formed, including quantitative and qualitative analysis. Such a model highlights the relationship between different categories of trash-talking within different communicative situations and shows the effectiveness of using such expressions. This model may include an analysis of correlations between the intensity of trash-talking and sports outcomes, as well as the identification of factors contributing to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of such communicative strategies.

3. RESULTS.

3.1. The typology of competitive speech acts.

A speech act is the minimal unit of speech that carries a communicative purpose (Prihodko, 2018). The concept of speech acts originates from the Speech Act Theory, developed by philosophers of language John L. Austin (2005) and John Searle (1998). The typology of competitive speech acts refers to the classification of utterances in which the speaker aims to elicit a specific response or action from the hearer, typically in the speaker's own interest (Sprague Media. (n.d.), 2025). This term is widely used within the field of pragmatic linguistics, particularly in the framework of Searle's theory of speech acts. A key feature of such acts is that the speaker intends to compel the addressee to perform an action that benefits the speaker.

Trash-talking in the modern English-speaking sports environment focuses on three main criteria of speech acts: pragmatic, functional-semantic and referential. Together, these criteria allow for a comprehensive analysis of both the content of the utterance, its communicative purpose, the speaker's intention and its impact on the addressee in the specific context of sports competitions.

In terms of **the pragmatic criterion**, particular attention should be paid to the use of invectives, pejorative expressions, and taboo language, as these elements are central to the communicative dynamics of trash-talking and serve to intensify the aggression and provocation of the speech act.

Invectives – sharp accusations or offensive utterances – represent a distinctive form of verbal aggression marked by strong negative connotations, which makes them a powerful tool of influence in situations of conflictual communication (Slovnyk.ua). Their primary function is to humiliate or diminish the social status of the opponent, usually through the use of profanity or insulting language (Huseynova, 2023). In this context, speech ceases to serve merely a communicative function and becomes a means of psychological manipulation, provoking strong emotional reactions and intensifying confrontation.

The speaker deliberately chooses words that convey hostility and contempt for the target. In such cases, invectives in the context of trash-talking serve both as a marker of open aggression and a demonstration of the speaker's readiness to escalate the conflict. This rhetorical move is often aimed at demoralizing the opponent. In English, the phrase: *"You're nothing but a coward, hiding behind your lies!"* (User. (n.d.), 2025) is a vivid example of invective. The term "coward" is used to attack the moral character of the opponent, implying weakness and dishonesty, while the expression "hiding behind your lies" further reinforces the tone of contempt and accusation, hinting at a lack of honesty or honour. Such invectives insult the opponent and convey complete rejection and disrespect, thereby increasing its emotional impact on the addressee (Hladush, N. F., 2005).

In addition to their openly aggressive content, invectives can also evoke strong emotional reactions in the addressee. Such statements often use the most

psychologically vulnerable areas of a person, causing strong negative emotions such as anger, indignation, or humiliation. Therefore, when a person is faced with an invective, his or her reaction is spontaneous and difficult to control. In a sports setting, where both physical and mental resilience are essential, such emotional destabilization can disrupt an athlete's psychological balance. Loss of emotional control may impair concentration, which in turn negatively affects performance and strategic thinking during competition (Formanova, S. V. (2013)., p. 100).

Moreover, a strong emotional reaction to insults often leads to a negative reaction, aggression or insult in return. Due to the difficulty of maintaining self-control, athletes engage in verbal altercations and start a conflict. This behavior can have negative consequences, especially in team sports, as individual emotions can affect the emotions and results of the entire team. That is, it can be argued that in this situation, invective acts as a destabilizing factor, upsetting the balance not only between rivals but also within the team. For example, in response to the invective: *"You're nothing but a coward, hiding behind your lies!"* an athlete may respond: *"At least I'm not a pathetic loser like you, blaming everyone else for your failures!"* (Johnson, R. (2022)). This response escalates the confrontation by using additional linguistic constructs, so the conflict becomes more heated, turning the exchange of remarks into a cycle of mutual verbal aggression.

A third important feature of invectives is their directness and lack of ambiguity (Hladush, N. F., 2005). Unlike more subtle or indirect forms of speech acts, invectives leave no room for interpretation. They function as explicit verbal attacks, where the speaker's intentions are made unambiguously clear. The communicative goal is achieved immediately – to provoke a strong emotional reaction in the opponent by means of unfiltered, confrontational language. This straightforwardness enhances the psychological impact of the utterance and underscores its role as a strategic device in competitive interaction, are depicted in Appendix A.

Thus, an invective is a direct verbal attack aimed at expressing contempt and disappointment (Kuzyk, O. A., 2017). In the context of sports discourse, which is usually very emotional, invectives can quickly turn into a more aggressive mode of communication, increasing tension and psychological pressure.

Pejoratives are words that convey a negative assessment of an object or person. Their main function is to lower the status of an opponent through negative connotations (Slovnyk.ua). These expressions are more negatively colored than invectives, but their impact is more restrained compared to taboo language. Pejoratives can range from sarcastically subtle expressions to outright rude ones that express open contempt.

A vivid example is a player on the field who shouts to the opponent: "You're all talk, no game." (Strelnik, 2002). This expression indicates the lack of skill of the opponent. From my own observation, I can say that this expression is often used when a player brags about his skills in general. This example can be seen as

a subcategory of disparaging statements because it is not overtly offensive and is considered socially acceptable, but at the same time it can undermine the player's competence.

Another illustrative example from the sports context features a player saying to an opponent: *"Nice try, almost looked like you knew what you were doing."* (Johnson, R., 2022). While this may sound like a compliment on the surface, it is in fact sarcastic and serves to downplay the opponent's achievements by casting doubt on their competence. Such remarks demonstrate verbal mastery in managing the communicative context and language in general, because despite the small subtext of provocation, it can still have a psychological impact. This form of wordplay resembles a kind of sparring, where sharp but indirect comments are used to undermine the opponent's confidence, while not crossing the line into open confrontation.

Pejoratives here enable the speaker to express disdain and disparagement while maintaining a degree of politeness that remains essential in specific social settings. The direction of pejoratives is shown in Table 3.1.1

Table 3.1.1

The direction of trash-talking pejoratives in modern English-language sports discourse

Classification	Example
Appearance/Physical data	In 1908, Jack Arthur Jones, the first opponent of the black world heavyweight boxing champion, called his master "as white as a flag of surrender" before his fight with Canadian Tommy Burns. (Suspilne., 2023)
	During a game against Utah, Michael Jordan dunked on John Stockton, prompting Jazz owner Larry Miller to yell, "Pick on someone your own size." (BBC Sport, 2023)
	Before the second fight between Fury and Usyk, Fury said to Usyk: "Retirement for you" (BBC Sport)
Player skill	In 2024 after the loss of the first fight between Usyk and Fury, Fury said: "The judges gave him a Christmas gift, I feel like I won both fights. (Reddit)
	At UFC Fight Night 46 fresh off an ACL injury, Conor McGregor defeated Diego Brandao and said: "We're not here to take part, we're here to take over." (MSN Sports)
Behavior on the playground	During a game, after Caron Butler committed a foul to stop a fast break, Kobe Bryant approached him and pointed out, "You need all six fouls to guard me, and you just wasted one on him." (BBC Sport)
Moral qualities/personal vicissitudes	Muhammad Ali once said to his competitor: "If you even dream about beating me, you better wake up and apologize!" (MSN Sports)
	Chael Sonnen, mixed martial artist, against Wanderlei Silva said: "I'll take a picture of you in bed with the Nogueira brothers... and post it at www.dorksfrombrazil.com ." (Facebook)

Taboo (non-normative) language is a separate form of verbal confrontation, which in sports includes obscene and non-normative expressions (Ukr.Media (n.d.), 2025). The use of such vocabulary is limited, since every year more and more fines and technical fouls are given for it. In today's tolerance-oriented world, the use of non-normative language can serve not only as a financial loss, but also damage or destroy a reputation. As a result, most athletes try to speak within the limits of what is socially decent. Taboo language includes racial, gender, sexual insults and jokes, non-normative language, and insults to judges and officials.

One notable incident involved Kevin Garnett of the Boston Celtics, who reportedly delivered an especially harsh piece of trash talk to Charlie Villanueva of the Detroit Pistons, referencing the player's appearance which resembles that of a chemotherapy patient by stating: *"You're a cancer patient, not a player."* (Garnett, 2010). This situation highlights how willing some athletes are to go beyond the boundaries with overt verbal abuse, even touching on the taboo topic of health.

In April 2022, Minnesota Timberwolves player Patrick Beverley was fined \$30,000 for the "egregious use of profanity" during media appearances and social media commentary following a victory over his former team, the LA Clippers (ESPN, 2022). In a postgame interview, Beverley remarked: *"Take they ass home. Long flight to L.A. Take they ass home. It's deeper than that for me. I gave my blood and sweat and tears to that organization. You guys know the story."* (Beverley, 2022). The incident demonstrates a fine line between this emotional expressiveness and acceptable behavior. On the one hand, such expressions can attract more attention from spectators, who may become fans in the future, and from journalists, who may increase the athlete's recognition and popularity. On the other hand, the use of profanity in formal communications violates the league's ethical standards and can negatively affect the reputation of the athlete, his team, and the sports organization as a whole.

Another relevant example is that of Golden State Warriors forward Draymond Green, who was fined \$25,000 by the NBA for using profane language directed at a game official (ESPN, 2022). Green was ejected in the third quarter after receiving two technical fouls within an eight-second span. The first was issued for disputing a foul call, while the second followed immediately after, when he used offensive and obscene language toward the referee even after being ejected. The incident came at a critical time for the team: it was their first game without a star player out with an injury. Green had also been injured before, but had only recently returned to the game after recovering. As a result, his removal weakened the team's play even further (ESPN, 2022). This case clearly illustrates how the use of taboo language not only results in financial penalties but can also have strategic consequences, particularly in high-stakes matches.

The functional-semantic criterion is an essential for the typology of competitive speech acts. According to G. G. Pocheptsov (1981), based on the functional and semantic properties of utterances, the following types of pragmatic

speech acts can be distinguished: constatives, descriptives, nominatives, promissives, and menaces.

Table 3.1.2 illustrates the specific characteristics and functions of each type of pragmatic speech acts. This classification, using examples, helps to identify the different levels and modes of verbal aggression used in the competitive discourse.

Table 3.1.2

The typology of competitive speech acts in the context of sports-related trash-talking

Category	Subcategory	Characteristics	Example
constatives		They serve as a primary tool for confirming or expressing specific data that is meaningful to both the game participants and their audiences. One of the primary functions is to confirm outcomes and events.	"muff"
			Take they ass home. Long flight to L.A." – Patrick Beverley after the win over the Clippers. (X.com)
descriptives	descriptors-qualifiers	They form a negative characterization of the opponent, creating a certain stereotypical image. They not only emphasize shortcomings, but can also be used as a means of provocation.	"You're just another overrated player." – Russell Westbrook often comes under such criticism from fans and even players. (X.com)
			"You're just a kid. I'm a grown man." – Joel Embiid to Devin Booker during the game. (YouTube)
	descriptors-quantifiers	Emphasizing quantitative or physical characteristics to humiliate an opponent.	"He always spends more time crying than playing." – Draymond Green about Paul Pierce live (YouTube)
			"You're too small!" – Russell Westbrook when he throws over a defender. (Singh, R. 2021)
nominatives		They work by assigning negative labels or derogatory nicknames that become part of the sports discourse.	"Brickmaster" (for a basketball player who often misses)
			"Choker" (for a player who can't handle pressure).
promissives		Speech acts-promises: predictions or warnings about future actions.	"Next time I get the ball, I'm dunking on you." – a

			typical phrase in NBA trash talk. For example, Ja Morant in a game against the Warriors. (YouTube)
menaces		Threats, usually in the form of hyperbole or warnings of physical harm, often bordering on a violation of rules or sports ethics.	“Play dirty again, and I’ll break your damn arm.” – Kevin Garnett проти Joakim Noah. Kevin Garnett: "Say something else and I’ll knock your ass out." (TikTok)

It is also essential to consider the typology of competitive speech acts based on **the referential criterion** – the type of preferential relationship between the signifier and the signified (significate). In this context, a speech act is understood as a semiotic construct with a specific syntactic organization (Batsevych, F. S., 2004).

The referential criterion presupposes the use of symbols, indices, and icons in trash-talking, which in turn can be manifested through either direct or indirect acts. Direct competitive speech acts in trash-talking typically include overt insults or derogatory remarks, such as: *“You’re slow and useless!”* or *“You shouldn’t even be in this league!”* (common among NBA players). For more subtle uses of profanity irony, sarcasm, or innuendo are used to achieve a similar effect. These speech acts also display hostility and aggression, but in a more subtle way so as not to result in disciplinary action by judges. For example, expressions like *“Wow, nice shot... almost”* or *“I see you practicing those airballs!”* convey mockery yet are less aggressive than blunt invectives (Semenyuk, 2023). As a result, veiled speech acts tend to be more effective in competitive settings, as they maintain psychological pressure while avoiding explicit hostility.

Linguistic signs – be they symbols, indices, or icons – may also be realized through direct or indirect allusions to external factors, cultural archetypes, or prior athletic achievements or failures. For instance, referring to an opponent as *“LeBron in the Finals”* may allude to LeBron James’s well-known struggles in championship series. Another example is the use of iconic names or historical references: *“You’re the Titanic of this league.”* (NBA, 2018). Such utterances draw on widely recognized facts or narratives, creating an expanded associative field that amplifies the impact of trash-talk, more information is listed in table 3.1.3.

Table 3.1.3.

Allusions in trash-talking of English modern sport discourse

Expression	Type of allusion	Reference	Referential aspect
"Be careful, you never talk to Black Jesus like that." – <i>Michael Jordan to Reggie Miller</i>	Iconic self-naming	Jordan as "Black Jesus"	Jordan refers to his mythic status; an allusion to a religious archetype as a symbol of "a higher power in basketball." (YouTube)
"You thought you was Kobe?" – <i>Draymond Green to Paul Pierce</i>	Allusion to a legend	Kobe's farewell tour	Greene belittles Pierce, implying that he does not have the same heroic image; an allusion to a symbolic farewell to an icon. (Facebook)
"You try me with a sorry receiver like Crabtree..." – <i>Richard Sherman (NFL)</i>	Opponent index	Sherman vs. Crabtree	A direct attack by mentioning the opponent's name; an indication of his supposedly low level is a referential index. (Facebook)
"You got the mouth of Ali, but the hands of a toddler." (anonymous quote, often repeated in MMA)	Allusion to a cultural hero	Muhammad Ali	The contrast between Ali, known as a charismatic champion, and his opponent's awkwardness is an allusion + an icon. (Reddit)
"You're no Jordan – more like a washed-up Pippen." (often used in street and memes)	Icon contrast	Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen	Humiliation through comparison with a secondary character. Names used as representative symbols of success/oblivion. (YouTube)
"You're not even Luka – you're just lucky." (NBA fan trash-talk)	Wordplay + allusion	Luka Dončić	The name "Luka" is an allusion to a young genius. The pun "lucky" is a devaluation in an attempt to parody the status of a rising star.

3.2. Tactical and strategic characteristics of competitive communicative interactions.

Competitive verbal behavior reflects the nature of competition, which is a fundamental element of sport as a social phenomenon (Belova, 2004, pp. 11–16). This type of behavior is a correlate of competitive activity.

The strategies and tactics used in competitive communicative interaction help reflect participants' desire to achieve individual or team goals and demonstrate a deeper understanding of the context in which rivals interact. Among these strategies, one of the most prominent is the dominant strategy, typically employed to establish or maintain superiority in interpersonal dynamics (Boboshko, T. M., 2013). This strategy relies on aggressive, assertive, or manipulative tactics, with the primary aim of asserting dominance over the interlocutor and emphasizing one's power or authority, often through specific types of speech acts.

Within the dominant strategy, a central master strategy can be identified Psychological Undermining. This approach is oriented toward deliberately manipulating the opponent's emotional state in order to disrupt their concentration, instill self-doubt, or provoke impulsive actions (Hepburn, C. G., & Enns, J. R. 2013). This strategy comprises the following tactics:

- Insulting performance: involves belittling an opponent's achievements and belittling their professional skills. It is used through sarcastic remarks, such as "Ya can't even hit the rim." (Facebook, 2025). Such comments are increasingly coming from coaches and fans rather than from athletes.

For instance, following the Kansas City Chiefs' loss in Super Bowl LIX, analysts issued sharp criticism of the team's performance, especially their offensive line, which had previously boasted t-shirts emblazoned with "Zero Sacks" after the prior Super Bowl. The discussion was picked up by fans and as a result the criticism highlighted the discrepancy between the team's confidence and their actual skills (Benjamin, J., 2025).

- Mocking mistakes: entails ridiculing an athlete's errors, which may lead to decreased self-confidence and heightened anxiety.

A study published in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology (Leary, M. R., 2019) notes that some coaches employ humiliating comments and public shaming as a form of emotional abuse, which has detrimental effects on athletes' mental well-being (Oxford Research, 2019).

A typical example would be the phrase: "*Airball! Nice job.*" (Dictionary.com., 2025). The term "*airball*" refers to a shot that completely misses the hoop and backboard. Originating in the 1960s, the word has since become a staple of sports ridicule, used to mock such errors. Spectators and players frequently chant "*airball*" after a miss to exert psychological pressure on the shooter.

- Predicting failure: involves predicting an opponent's failure at a critical moment, often with the aim of causing alarm or undermining confidence.

Typical utterances include: "*You'll choke!*" or "*You can't guard me.*" (Youtube, 2024). Research on Youth Sports Psychology (2025) confirms that such negative predictions can have a significant psychological impact on young athletes, increasing anxiety and lowering both performance and efficiency (Sports Psychology Articles. (n.d.), 2025).

A notable example is found in the 1997 NBA Finals, when Scottie Pippen reportedly told Karl Malone, "*The Mailman doesn't deliver on Sundays*" just before Malone's free throws. Malone missed, and the Chicago Bulls secured the win (Facebook, 2024).

- Ridiculing physical abilities: refers to mocking a player's physical characteristics or capabilities, e.g., "*Need a wheelchair, old man?*" (X, 2022). Such remarks may damage an athlete's self-esteem and confidence.

The article "This Is What Bad Sports Psychology Looks Like" (2024) discusses the detrimental effects of shaming athletes for their physical shape or

abilities. One example includes coaches subjecting players to public weigh-ins and making disparaging comments about their weight, often resulting in emotional exhaustion and performance decline (Knopf, J., 2024).

Another master strategy within the dominant strategy framework is Self-Glorification, which athletes use to emphasize their achievements, superiority, efforts, or uniqueness. This strategy aims to project strength, authority, confidence, and control. Through self-elevation, athletes seek to assert their high status both on an individual level and within team or national representations. (Rapley, M., & McHoul, A., 2002). This strategy comprises the following tactics:

- Bragging about skills: entails openly highlighting one's abilities and accomplishments. Athletes employ this tactic to assert their mastery and dominance.

A well-known example comes from Larry Bird, who once said: *"I think I'll use my left hand today and save the right one for the Lakers,"* before scoring 47 points mostly with his non-dominant hand (Naydenov, A., 2023).

- Comparative boasting: involves comparing oneself to other athletes in order to stress one's superiority, e.g., *"I'll score on you even with my eyes closed"* (often used during amateur basketball games). This tactic is often used to demonstrate leadership and dominance in sports.

Muhammad Ali (1960) frequently engaged in this kind of boasting. One of his most iconic statements is: *"I am the greatest. I said that even before I knew I was."* (Facebook, 2020).

- Hyping oneself up: refers to the use of positive affirmations and motivational statements to boost self-confidence and morale. This tactic is common before competitions or during practice among the team.

For example, *"I'm him"* is a slang way to express confidence. Here, *"him"* just means *"that guy,"* or someone to watch out for or regard with respect (wikihow.com., 2024).

Another tactic within the dominant strategy is the Intimidation Strategy, which is deliberately employed to induce fear, uncertainty, or self-doubt in the opponent through threatening behavior, language or appearance (Fitri, M., & Gumelar, M. I., 2020). This strategy typically involves the following tactics:

- Threats: include verbal expressions and actions (e.g., *"Next time you're going down"* (anonymous phrase)) that may technically fall within the rules but are clearly intended to intimidate.

For instance, in baseball, an inside fastball, a pitch thrown close to the batter's body, is legal but often used to apply psychological pressure. In American football, post-whistle shoving or verbal threats directed at opponents similarly serve as means of destabilizing them (Stankovich, C., 2019).

- Menacing body language: involves nonverbal cues such as staring down an opponent, invading personal space, or making aggressive gestures like clenched fists or intense eye contact.

A good example is the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team's performance of the "haka", a traditional Māori war dance featuring vigorous movements, shouting, and fierce facial expressions, all designed to assert dominance and instill fear (Van Edwards, V., 2024).

- Amplifying reputation: athletes may rely on their established reputations to psychologically overwhelm opponents (e.g., *"You know who you're up against, right?"* or *"I'm the best corner in the game."* (Sherman, 2014)).

For example, Mike Tyson's fearsome and unpredictable presence in the boxing ring often intimidated opponents before the fight even began. Likewise, Tiger Woods in golf and Michael Jordan in basketball cultivated such strong reputations that their mere presence could unsettle competitors (The Golfing Gazette, 2006).

Another tactic falling under the dominant strategy is Humiliation and Dismissal, which aims to belittle the opponent, minimize their accomplishments, mock their weaknesses or failures, and make them the subject of ridicule (Bar-Eli, M., Tenenbaum, G., & Geister, S., 2006). This strategy includes the following techniques:

- Belittling achievements: This involves undermining or diminishing the value of an athlete's success, thereby negatively impacting their confidence and motivation (e.g., *"Pure luck, no skill"* (common sport taunt)).

One case reported by Kids' Sports Psychology (2025) describes a coach who routinely belittled a player's accomplishments by calling him a *"knucklehead"* in front of the entire team. This constant humiliation eventually led the player to consider quitting.

"He kept insulting my son in front of everyone, calling him a 'knucklehead'. My son is very sensitive to this and wants to leave the team," one parent reported (Youth Sports Psychology, 2025).

This example illustrates that such tactics can be directed not only at opponents but also at one's own teammates and even used by coaches.

- Dismissing effort: This involves trivializing an opponent's attempts or potential with phrases like *"Why try?"*, *"Forget it,"* or *"You know how this end."* (generalized phrases from NBA).
- Sarcasm: Frequently used by coaches within a team setting, sarcasm can serve as a backhanded form of "motivation" or as a way to publicly belittle a player (e.g., *"Wow, that was almost good,"* or *"Which one of you guys is going to finish second?"* (Bird, 1986)).

For instance, after winning the US Open (2022), Polish tennis player Iga Świątek jokingly remarked, *"I'm really glad it's not in cash."* In interviews, she noted that sarcasm helps her maintain psychological balance and distance in the high-pressure world of professional sports (Sportskeeda., 2022).

The last but not least component of the dominant strategy is Provocation and Aggression, which are deliberately aimed at eliciting emotional reactions from opponents while simultaneously displaying strength, dominance, or

aggressive behavior both physical (within the rules) and verbal (Sofia, R., & Cruz, J. F., 2017). Within this strategy, the following tactics can be identified:

- Verbal taunting: involves using offensive or provocative remarks such as *“Is that all you got?”* or *“Is that all you got George”* (Muhammed Ali, 1974) to destabilize the opponent psychologically. Verbal taunts are especially common in team sports like American football and basketball.

A prominent example occurred during the 2021 NFL Super Bowl, when Tampa Bay Buccaneers player Antoine Winfield Jr. flashed a peace sign in the face of Kansas City Chiefs wide receiver Tyreek Hill, mimicking Hill’s own trademark celebration (The Hilltop, 2021). This gesture was interpreted as taunting and resulted in a penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct.

- Poking fun at personal traits: involves mocking an opponent’s physical appearance or personality traits (e.g., *“Charles is not Charles with his mouth shut. That’s like me playing with hair.”* (Michael Jordan, 1998)). While potentially effective in distracting the opponent, such comments are often deemed unethical and may result in disciplinary measures.

For instance, during a baseball game at Fenway Park (2005), fans heckled player Marquis Grissom by humorously exaggerating his name in an attempt to provoke him: *“HEEELP, MARKWISS, I DROPPED MY PEEEEEEAAAAANUUUUUUUUUT!”* (Grissom, 2005).

- Mimicking opponent’s gestures/movements: entails imitating characteristic actions or body language of an opponent in order to ridicule or belittle them.

For example, in the 2023 NCAA Women’s Basketball Championship final, LSU player Angel Reese imitated Iowa’s Caitlin Clark by performing the *“you can’t see me”* gesture and pointing to her ring finger, implying her team’s imminent title win (Sports Illustrated, 2023). The act ignited widespread debate across media and social networks concerning the appropriateness and limits of such provocation in sport.

A significant modern development is the emergence of social media as a new arena for trash-talking. Whereas this discourse once occurred primarily within the physical boundaries of the field, ring, or court, it now thrives on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and others (Eble, M., 2020). Athletes use these digital spaces to exert psychological pressure, share sarcastic memes and videos, or directly challenge their opponents ahead of upcoming competitions. Importantly, this practice has evolved beyond individual targeting the addressee is often collective, including fans, media, and rival teams. Notable examples include Conor McGregor, who masterfully blends in-person press conference trash talk with social media commentary, and Kevin Durant, known for his frequent use of Twitter to engage in verbal skirmishes not only with opponents but also critics.

In the 2016 NFL season, a conflict between Steve Smith Sr. and Jalen Ramsey erupted both during and after a game between the Baltimore Ravens and the Jacksonville Jaguars. After Ramsey directed a series of provocative remarks

toward Smith, the latter responded via social media by posting a photo of himself shouting directly at Ramsey's face with the caption: "*In 5 to 10 u will be retiring and they will be taking my measurements for something you will NEVER BE. #HOFer. I got cleats with stronger thread than you!!!*" (Barca, L.).

Thus, mentioned strategies and tactics function not only as tools of psychological pressure but also as clear indicators of dominance-seeking behavior within competitive environments. They serve as markers of rivalry intensity and act as mechanisms of manipulation and control over other participants (Kozub, L. S. (2008).

Although the use of a dominant strategy in sports discourse can be effective for achieving specific goals, it usually leads to conflict and can negatively affect the person using trash-talking. Nevertheless, understanding and applying these tactics allows for more effective management of communicative processes and contributes to quickly unbalancing the opponent in order to obtain the desired results during competition.

In conclusion, the analysis of the discursive features of modern English-language sports trash-talking shows that this form of communication is multifaceted and is used to achieve various social and communicative goals. Recognizing the features of strategies, tactics, and speech acts helps not to react to verbal provocations, understand social dynamics, and reduce the impact of such expressions on one's own psychological state.

3.3. Multifaceted characterization of components in competitive sports discursive constructs.

Semantic characteristics. Invective meanings generated within sports discourse are realized by activating or emphasizing basic semantic features. Ontological features, such as body size or height, are often used among athletes to construct invective meanings (Bilokonko, N. A., 2012). For example, in English-speaking contexts, a tall player may be disparagingly called a "*tower*", while a shorter athlete may be called a "*shorty*". Such expressions are used not only during the game, but can also become entrenched on a permanent basis. Cognitive attributes are also often subjected to bullying through invectives, often emphasizing intellectual inferiority. In English, this is expressed by terms such as "*brainless*" or "*idiot*".

Unfortunately, some athletes still engage in racial discrimination during competitions, despite the fact that it is unacceptable, and are fined for it. A notable example occurred during a match between Manchester United and Liverpool, when Luis Suarez was found guilty of racist abuse towards Patrice Evra. As a result, Suarez was banned for the next eight matches (TalkSPORT, 2025).

Functional traits such as agility or quick reflexes are often the target of trash-talking by opposing players. During a game, terms such as "*clumsy*" or "*butterfingers*" as well as "*slow*" or "*snail*" are often used to undermine a player's performance. A famous example was NFL player Steve Smith Sr., who is widely

known for his aggressive playing style and use of foul language. After one of his matches, he addressed his opponent Aqib Talib with the phrase “*Ice up, son*” emphasizing his dominance on the field (Smith Sr., 2013).

Axiological features related to (un)fair play represent a common source of invective in sports discourse. On the field, one may hear terms such as “*cheat*” or “*dirty player*.” (Un)sportsmanlike behavior can encompass a broad range of actions. In April 2025, the trainer of British boxer Daniel Dubois, Don Charles, publicly accused Ukrainian champion Oleksandr Usyk of “*cheating*” during their bout in August 2023. Charles claimed that Usyk exaggerated the impact of a low blow in order to gain a competitive advantage, describing his reaction as “*Oscar-worthy*” and accusing him of violating the principles of sporting ethics (TalkSPORT., 2025).

Locative characteristics, in particular territorial (non)affiliation, are often used for psychological pressure. The term “provincial” often has a negative connotation, and is usually used to refer disparagingly to specific cities. Phrases such as “*This is my court!*” (Storm, 2023) are intended to assert dominance and territorial ownership. NFL player Michael Bennett is known for his sarcastic style of trash talk, often targeting opponents’ cities of origin. On one occasion, he remarked: “*I don’t like Bryce Harper much. He’s from Las Vegas. They profit by pushing addictions of all kinds until people are broke. ... I hold it against him*” (Bennet., 2015).

The aforementioned attributes are actualized through basic (focal) nominators that denote either the opponent or any element of the extralinguistic context which, in the view of the trash-talking subject, deserves to be positioned as (Karpets, L. A., 2023).

With the help of trash-talking, athletes can attribute their belonging to a certain team, social group of people or place. In addition to expressing sports aggression, negative expressions increase confidence in their own abilities and skills. That is, it can be argued that each athlete can increase both individual morale and encourage the team and the entire team through verbal statements. This approach helps to reduce tension within the team and improve provocative tactics, which are aimed at inciting “battles” between rivals.

Trash-talking intensity varies by sport: it tends to be high in contact sports such as basketball or football, and significantly lower in less physical disciplines like tennis or chess. Cultural context plays an important role in how trash-talking is perceived, what may be considered acceptable competitiveness in one culture could be viewed as disrespectful in another (Pavlenko, 2018). Trash-talking often includes slang expressions or even profane language, aligning it with a certain “street-style” mode of speech that is easily recognizable among players.

In direct invective constructions, the semantic features acquire exclusively negative connotations when directed at an opponent, whereas in indirect nominations, these features take on positive connotations through the

exaggeration of one's own qualities, implicitly suggesting a low level of those same traits in the opponent.

Trash-talking often consist of irony and sarcasm, which the athlete uses to ridicule the abilities of the opponent. The use of figurative expressions is common in the sports context, as competitions and games are often compared to a battle and a battlefield, where every move can lead to victory or defeat. Trash-talking is an important aspect of modern English-language sports discourse, as it encompasses numerous semantic, functional and social dimensions. At the same time, such verbal provocations contain components of different dimensions from a playful to an aggressive approach, which reflects the complexity of sports communication (Baranova, 2016).

At the level of speech acts involving direct nominations (lexemes or phrases), the aforementioned negative connotations are realized as follows. For example, lexemes such as "*weak*," "*loser*," and "*coward*," or phrases like "*you can't do anything*," "*I'll break you*," and "*this is the end of you*" convey meanings of disparagement, intimidation, and aggression (examples provided by the author).

- Disparagement and Humiliation:

"You're playing like a bunch of amateurs!" (Mount Pleasant News Newspaper Archives, 2025)

- Intimidation and Threats:

"I'm gonna break you." (Quora, 2024)

- Irony and Sarcasm:

"Nice shot... for a beginner." (Casanova, 2008)

- Metaphors and Figurative Expressions:

"He is a beast on the field" (Cibas, 2021)

Specialized terminology used in the specific context of a conflict (or potentially conflict) situation can enhance the tone of statements, especially when the statement emphasizes the opponent's inability to perform a basic action or technical element:

"He couldn't complete a simple give-and-go if his life depended on it!" – The football term give-and-go highlights the inability to execute a fundamental combination (Wikipedia, 2024).

"She can't even stick the landing on a straightforward dismount!" – The gymnastics term sticks the landing refers to failing to complete a simple element properly (Snell, 2014).

"He couldn't even make a clean catch in the outfield!" – The baseball term clean catch denotes a basic action, and failure to perform it is viewed as a serious error (Baker, 2014).

"She can't even execute a basic crossover dribble without losing the ball!" – The basketball term crossover dribble is a fundamental skill, and failure to perform it is presented as incompetence (Hoopstudent.com, 2025).

The matrix of the results of the component analysis of the semantic characteristics of invective meanings in trash-talking of modern English-language sports discourse (Shynkaruk, O., & Heydar, L. (2022), which was compiled on the basis of sports vocabulary in English, is shown in Table 3.3.1.

Table 3.3.1

The matrix of the results of the component analysis of the semantic characteristics of invective meanings in trash-talking

Semantic feature	Examples in trash-talking	Nature of influence
Size	"You're too small!", "You're a midget on the court!"	Depreciation of the opponent's physical qualities
Strength/ Power	"You're weak!", "You hit like a child!"	Demonstration of physical superiority
Speed/ Reaction	"Too slow, old man!", "Catch me if you can!"	Challenge to speed of action
Shape (body structure)	"You're fat!", "That belly won't help you run!"	Mocking of physical form
Colour	"Scared? You look pale!"	Emotional pressure
Dysfunction	"You can't shoot!", "Brick after brick!"	Indication of inability to perform actions
Intellectual qualities	"Use your brain for once!"	Undermining of authority
Emotional state	"You're shaking!", "Crying already?"	Provocation, pressure on psychological state
Social status	"You don't belong here!"	Rejection, undermining of self-esteem
Experience	"Rookie mistake!", "You play like a newbie!"	Devaluation of skill level
Background/Culture	"Go back to your league!"	Use of stereotypes
Gender/ Sexuality	"You play like a girl!" (unacceptable, but used)	Gender discrimination

The matrix demonstrates that the invective meanings in trash-talking within sports discourse are often constructed around physical, cognitive, emotional, and social aspects that impact the opponent (Korobova, I., 2024).

Analyzing the semantic features of trash-talking leads to the conclusion that its aim is to affect the athlete's physical endurance, mental focus, emotional balance, and social adaptation. To achieve psychological impact, linguistic units with special semantic characteristics are used. Analysis of these features helps to understand how these constructions affect a person's emotional state.

Evaluative signs indicate the speaker's subjective attitude towards certain skills or actions of the opponent. Their main purpose is to humiliate, devalue, or insult the opponent, expecting an inadequate reaction or negative emotions in return.

For example: "*You're a loser!*" (author's example) phrase not only states the fact of defeat but also targets failure as a personal characteristic. "*You're pathetic!*" (author's example) characterizes the opponent as worthless. "*Your skills are embarrassing!*" (author's example) devalues the opponent's abilities. "*You're a waste of space!*" (author's example) emphasizes the opponent's perceived uselessness. "*Your effort is laughable!*" (author's example) draws attention to the futility of the opponent's efforts. "*Your ambitions are a joke!*" the devaluation targets not only the opponent's performance but also their aspirations (Johnson, R., 2022).

In conclusion, the semantic characteristics of trash-talking in contemporary English-language sports discourse serve as a multifaceted tool of psychological pressure, encompassing humiliation, self-expression, and cultural identification. Trash-talking operates through key semantic categories of strategic intent, which are realized through speech acts. These acts include irony, sarcasm, intimidation, which affects the physical, social, and emotional aspects of a person through evaluative, ontological, and locative-temporal features.

Structural models. An analysis of structural models of invective utterances reveals that sports discursive constructs in English can vary in complexity and degree of formalization depending on the context of use. They can be categorized into the following main models:

At the lexical level, invective meanings are represented by individual words such as nouns "*loser*" or "*amateur*", adjectives "*weak*" or "*pathetic*", or verbs "*choke*" (author's example). The morphological structure of these lexemes may include derivational affixes that intensify the negative connotation (for example, suffixes indicating disdain).

At the phrasal level, invective expressions are often represented by adjectival phrases, where quantitative adverbs can modify the head element, intensifying or specifying its meaning (e.g., "*too slow*," "*so weak*"). Such phrases are characterized by hypotactic relations, where one element depends on another. Noun phrases can also serve to disparage the opponent (e.g., "*a bunch of amateurs*," "*a waste of space*"), demonstrating various types of relationships between the modifier and the modified (Bilokonenko, N. A., 2012).

Moreover, invective meanings can be expressed through simple sentences, which structurally consist of linear sequences of words forming a complete utterance, e.g. "*You can't shoot!*", "*Your time is up!*" (author's example). In more complex cases, elliptical constructions may be used, where certain sentence elements are omitted but their meaning is recoverable from context, e.g., "*Scared? You look pale!*" (author's example).

Expanding the analysis of structural models of invective statements in trash talking, it is necessary to note that the effectiveness of psychological influence largely depends on the chosen structure and its ability to instantly convey a negative assessment (Grabchak, M. I., 2024). At the lexical level, the use of short, emotionally charged words ensures the fastest response from the

addressee. The phrasal level allows for more elaborate expressions of disparagement by modifying the opponent's qualitative characteristics, e.g., *"hopelessly slow"* or abilities *"pathetically weak attempt"* (author's example). Hypotactic structures in adjective phrases emphasize the intensity of the negative feature, thereby enhancing the emotional effect (Kurniasy, D., 2017).

Noun phrases, especially those with metaphorical or comparative meanings, for example *"a shadow of a player," "like watching paint dry"* (BBC, 2013), not only despise, but also create vivid images that are better remembered and become popular. The use of generalizing noun phrases, for example *"a complete joke"* (BBC, 2014) aims at total humiliation.

At the level of simple sentences, in addition to stating the opponent's incapacity, rhetorical questions that do not require an answer are often used to sow doubt in his abilities, e.g., *"Did you even train for this?"* (author's example). Negative imperative sentences (e.g., *"Don't even try!"*) may be used to assert dominance and suppress the will to compete (Bilokonenko, L. A., 2019). Elliptical constructions, due to their brevity and intensity, are able to instantly convey the speaker's emotional state and contempt for the opponent, especially in situations of high emotional tension during competitions.

It is also important to remember about the contextual dependence of structural patterns. Elliptic phrases, as a rule, dominate the moment and are oriented towards the transience of the game. More elaborate sentences and phrase structures are used before and after games and during breaks. That is, athletes use brevity during the game itself where there is a lack of time and extensive statements outside the game.

Certainly, negative meanings are emphasized through the semantics of invective vocabulary, the placement of intensifiers before negative adjectives, the specific structure of noun phrases with evaluative determiners, the use of comparative constructions with negative content, and the initial position of negative auxiliary verbs expressing incapacity (Semenyuk, A. V., 2020).

3.4. Typology of pragmatic intentions.

Pragmatic intentions (or communicative goals) are a key element in the construction of discursive constructs of competitive sport in English. They determine the purpose of communication and influence the structure and content of the message (Biletska, T. M., & Havryliuk, O. V., 2024). In the context of sports discourse, pragmatic intentions can be classified according to several criteria. Such intentions require a focus on communicative intentions aimed at influencing the opponent.

This requires a focus on communicative intentions aimed at influencing the opponent. Instead of a general classification of intentions in sports discourse, it is necessary to distinguish those basic invective expressions (Leech, G. N., 1983). Based on the seven universal systemic levels of influence (Johnson, R., 2022),

characteristic of the use of nominative mythologems, the pragmatic intentions of the abuser are aimed at influencing the opponent's system at the following levels:

- Physical level: Intentions focused on demonstrating own physical superiority, or hinting at the opponent's physical weakness.
Example: *"You're too slow to even see me!"* – an intention to showcase speed advantage. *"Is that all you got? My grandma could do better!"* (Soccervs.com, 2024) – an intention to belittle physical strength.
- Psycho-emotional level: Intentions aimed at provoking negative emotions.
Example: *"Are you crying already?"* (author's example) – an intention to trigger emotional instability.
- Mental level: Intentions aimed at undermining cognitive abilities (concentration, decision-making).
Example: *"Use your brain for once!"* (author's example from observation)
- an intention to question the opponent's intelligence.
- Social-adaptive level: Intentions aimed at influencing an opponent's social status and sense of belonging sporting context.
Example: *"You don't belong in this league!"* (Bird, 1982) – an intention to undermine social self-esteem.
- Intergroup level: Intentions aimed at creating conflict or tension between teams or sports communities.
Example: *"We'll show your fans what real sport looks like!"* (author's example from observation) – an intention to provoke rivalry between fan bases.
- Axiological-evaluative level: Intentions aimed at attacking the opponent's value system, sportsmanship, and skill.
Example: *"Some world championships... beat me with skill, not luck."* (Balukas, 1988) – an intention to belittle the opponent's skill. *"You have no honor!"* – an intention to attack the opponent's sportsmanship.
- Informational level: Intentions aimed at misinformation, distracting the opponent's attention.
Example: *"I heard they're going to bench you next game!"* (author's example from observation) – an intention to sow doubt about the future.

It is important to remember that individual expressions in trash-talking can simultaneously implement intentions on several levels. For example, the phrase *"You're a slow, you've always been a pathetic loser!!"* (Jordan, 2022) attacks physical qualities (slow), emotional state (pathetic), and social status (loser) all at once.

Some self-encouraging utterances by athletes (e.g., *"Come on, I got this!"* (author's example from observation) can indirectly affect opponents by displaying confidence and determination (Kuzyk, O. A. (2011). However, the main goal of analyzing pragmatic intentions in trash-talking is to identify those goals that are directly aimed at exerting psychological pressure on the opponent through verbal aggression.

Trash-talking is also used as part of a broader psychological strategy aimed at disrupting the opponent's emotional balance, undermining self-confidence, distracting attention, creating a psychological advantage, altering the pace and rhythm of the game (indirectly), and winning the crowd's favor (Havryliuk, O. O., 2018).

- Disrupting the opponent's emotional balance: Provoking anger, frustration, or anxiety that may lead to mistakes during the game. For example, constant mocking of the opponent's failed attempts (*"Another missed shot? Shocking!"*).
- Undermining self-confidence: Eroding the opponent's belief in their own abilities and potential. This can be achieved by repeatedly reminding them of their failures or comparing them to more successful players (*"Remember last time I schooled you?"*).
- Distracting attention: Verbal provocations can divert the opponent's focus from the game, causing them to react emotionally rather than concentrate on tactics and execution. For example, a continuous stream of personal insults or irrelevant remarks.
- Creating a psychological advantage: Demonstrating one's own confidence and disdain toward the opponent can psychologically suppress them, fostering a sense of imbalance of power even before physical confrontation. For instance, confident declarations of inevitable victory (*"You can't even dream of beating me today!"*).
- Altering the pace and rhythm of the game (indirectly): The opponent's emotional reaction to trash-talking can lead to impulsive actions, breakdowns in team discipline, or rash decisions, ultimately affecting the course of the game.
- Winning the crowd's favor (in some cases): In certain sports cultures, or under specific circumstances, witty and sharp trash-talk may be perceived as part of the entertainment and elicit a positive response from the fans, which can further demoralize the opponent (Sports Psychology Articles).

Moreover, the intensity and form of trash-talking can vary depending on individual athlete characteristics, the type of sport, and the cultural context. What is considered acceptable in one sport (for example, basketball) may be viewed as a serious breach of ethics in another (such as golf). An athlete's personality also plays a significant role in the selection of pragmatic intentions and the manner in which they are expressed.

Therefore, the analysis of pragmatic intentions in trash-talking is a complex task that requires consideration not only of the immediate communicative aims but also of broader strategic goals, contextual factors, and the individual characteristics of the participants in the sports discourse.

3.5. Gender features.

Gender plays a significant role in sports discourse, as male and female language use differs lexically and stylistically. There is also a difference in the sociocultural perception of trash-talking by men and women.

In sports discourse, the use of specific vocabulary often varies depending on the athlete's gender (Andrews, D. L., 2020). For example, men's competitions are often described with words that emphasize strength, aggression, and endurance, such as "dominance," "power," and "strength," while women's competitions are typically accompanied by softer and more aesthetically oriented attributes, such as "grace," "elegance," and "beauty."

Stereotypes about male and female sports influence how the media and commentators cover sporting events. For example, coverage of women's sports often focuses on the appearance and personal qualities of female athletes, while men's sports are usually described in terms of pragmatic and outcome-related aspects.

Modern sports discourse is gradually evolving towards greater gender equality. Media coverage is increasingly using gender-neutral terminology and is showing a trend towards eliminating bias in the depiction of women's sporting events. Gender-specific features of sports discourse in English reflect both traditional stereotypes and modern trends toward equal representation of men's and women's sports. The lexical and stylistic characteristics of this discourse are gradually shifting in line with societal changes promoting gender equality (Pavlenko, I. O., 2018).

One important aspect of trash-talking is its gender-specific characteristics: men and women use it differently, and the content of such statements can vary significantly (Kupchyshyna, Y. A., & Dmytroshkin, D. E. (2023).

In men's sports, trash-talking is often aggressive and aimed at demonstrating dominance. For example:

- *"You can't guard me!"* (Youtube, 2024) – basketball.
- *"You're too slow for this game!"* (Soccervs.com, 2024) – football.
- *"I hit harder than you ever will!"* (Johnson 2022, p.32) – box.

Women also actively use trash-talking, but it tends to be more sarcastic or humorous in tone. The focus is often shifted toward technical skills, game strategy, or even the opponent's appearance (Karpets, L. A., 2023).

- *"A girl hits harder than you!"* (Johnson 2022, p.32) – boxing, mixed martial arts.
- *"Try to keep up, sweetheart!"* (Bellah, 2025) – track and field.

Interestingly, foul language used by men and women is perceived differently. In men's sports, it is generally considered a normal part of the game, but in women's sports it can be criticized, especially by spectators and commentators. For example, tennis player Serena Williams has repeatedly made headlines for her emotional displays on the court. At the same time, such behavior is perceived positively in men's tennis and other sports (Goncharova, T. V. (2020)).

So, gender differences in the use and perception of trash-talking reflect existing stereotypes about men and women in sport. Despite this, trash-talking

remains an integral part of English-language sports discourse, adding emotional intensity and spectacle to games.

3.6. Stylistic features of competitive sports discursive constructs.

The stylistic features of discursive constructs in sports determine their effectiveness and impact on communication participants. Sports competitions are a dynamic discourse, therefore, to enhance expressiveness and a brighter effect, athletes need to use various stylistic techniques (Bilokonenko, L. A., 2019). The analysis of these features allows for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of communication in the sports environment (Table 3.6.1).

Table 3.6.1

Stylistic Devices in Sports Discourse: Functions and Examples

Stylistic Device	Function in Sports Discourse	Example
Metaphor (Military)	Emphasizes intensity without direct offense	"The midfield battle was intense." (BBC Sport, 2023)
Metaphor (Animalistic)	Highlights physical power or speed	"LeBron James is a beast on the break!" (Facebook, 2017)
Hyperbole	Amplifies qualities emotionally	"Usain Bolt ran faster than lightning." (YouTube, 2014)
Litotes	Diminishes qualities through understatement	"Their chances of winning were slim to none." (Kinney Jeff, 2024)
Simile (Power)	Makes descriptions more vivid and emphasizes strength	"His shot was as powerful as a cannon." (author's example)
Simile (Defense)	Emphasizes reliability	"They defended like a wall, impenetrable." (author's example)
Interjection	Conveys spontaneous emotional reactions	"Goal! What a strike!" (author's example)
Exclamatory Sentence	Expresses surprise or strong emotion	"Unbelievable! He missed an open net!" (author's example)
Slang	Adds informality and reflects sports subculture	"He totally choked under pressure." (Johnson, R., 2022)
Short, Fragmented Sentences	Conveys fast pace and emotional intensity	"He shoots! He scores! The crowd goes wild!" (Johnson, R., 2022)
Hyperbole	Demonstrates superiority	"I'm going to destroy you out there!" (Johnson, R., 2022)
Rhetorical Question	Provokes emotional response	"Are you always this clumsy?" (author's example)
Irony/Appellative Insult	Ridicules personal traits or status	"Did your mommy dress you today?" (author's example)

Furthermore, stylistic features of trash-talking vary across different types of sports. In more physical and emotionally intense disciplines – such as basketball, football, or boxing – the language used tends to be more direct and aggressive, often involving slang or even profanity (Semenyuk, A. V., 2020). In

contrast, in less contact-based sports like tennis or golf trash-talking may take more subtle and indirect forms, relying on irony or sarcasm.

In general, the stylistic dimension of competitive sports discourse is also shaped by its evolution. Over time, certain expressions or rhetorical moves may become clichés, while new, more creative and unexpected verbal strategies emerge, reflecting the dynamic nature of sporting communication. Mastery of these stylistic tools becomes an essential component of psychological confrontation in the world of sports.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the analysis of the theoretical foundations of trash-talking as a discursive genre, it was established that this phenomenon occupies a unique place in the system of modern discourse, in particular in the sports context. From a discursive-typological point of view, trash-talking can be qualified as a separate and specific discursive genre. This genre arises through the integration of several speech acts, which together generate a powerful communicative impact. It is noteworthy that trash-talking is characterized by a complex interaction of discursive strategies aimed at modifying the semantic and pragmatic properties of statements, which allows it to function as a tool for influencing both the physical and psychological state of participants in sports competitions (Kolomiets, S. V., 2021). This impact is achieved through dynamic linguistic and semiotic coding aimed at changing the behavior and perception of the addressee – one of the key goals in competitive communication.

Analysis of the specifics of competitive communication, within which trash-talking is actualized, revealed its complex psychological and cultural foundations. From a psycholinguistic point of view, trash-talking demonstrates a unique ability to influence the cognitive processes of the addressee, changing his perception of reality and evoking certain reactions. This is achieved with the help of carefully selected linguistic means that provoke perceptual and emotional reactions. Neurophysiological mechanisms also play a crucial role in this process, ensuring automatic and often uncontrolled reactions to stimuli embedded in the content of trash-talking. In this regard, trash talking serves as a tool for the formation of behavioral models that help to realize the speaker's pragmatic intentions.

From a cultural perspective, trash-talking demonstrates the ability to appeal to deeply rooted cultural concepts and taboos embedded in the human subconscious (Kochan, I. M., 2021). The use of these elements increases the effectiveness of trash-talking by evoking strong emotional reactions and drawing attention to socially forbidden or morally sensitive topics. This allows the communicator to manipulate the consciousness and behavior of the opponent, exerting psychological pressure aimed at achieving favorable outcomes in competitive interaction.

A linguosemiotic analysis shows that trash-talking has a complex semiotic structure, in which symbols, icons and indices play a key role. A key element of this genre is the use of invective constructions that create negative images that can influence the self-identification and behavior of the opponent. Particular attention was paid to the hierarchy of pragmatic intentions from technical goals aimed at creating a physical or auditory image of the opponent to more complex goals related to the manipulation of the opponent's consciousness and behavior. This hierarchy illustrates that trash-talking is a multi-level communicative phenomenon that affects different dimensions of behavior and cognition.

The linguostylistic dimension of the study showed that trash-talking effectively uses stylistic devices, such as defamiliarization, to construct unexpected and often provocative semantic structures. These strategies enhance the emotional impact on the addressee, while at the same time contributing to a deeper immersion in the constructed discursive context (Labov, V., 1972). The use of such stylistic devices increases the effectiveness of trash-talking as a discursive genre, maximizing its manipulative potential in influencing the consciousness and behavior of the interlocutor.

Furthermore, the linguostylistic analysis reveals key stylistic devices employed to maximize the impact on the addressee. In particular, the effect of defamiliarization contributes to the creation of unexpected and provocative semantic constructions that disrupt habitual cognitive patterns and intensify emotional response. This facilitates deeper immersion of the addressee into the discursive context and integrates cultural, semiotic, and stylistic elements to generate a powerful manipulative effect.

The pragmatic criterion considers the hierarchy of reconstructed intentions in competitive speech acts, invectives, pejoratives, and taboo language, which help to elucidate how specific utterances are used to achieve communicative goals. These acts serve as a framework for understanding the pragmatic force behind the speaker's strategic use of language in competitive contexts.

The functional-semantic criterion focuses on the perlocutionary effects generated by the discursive construct, i.e., the consequences produced during meaning-making in a specific communicative situation. Constatives are used to describe facts or events in a neutral, objective manner, thus maintaining a sense of factuality (McEnery, T., & Hardie, A. (2012).

The referential criterion allows the identification of essential features ascribed by the speaker to fragments of reality, as well as the mechanisms of their nomination. Symbols, indices, and icons function as core elements in constructing meaning and association in sports-related trash-talking. Symbols represent cultural or social concepts that contribute to shaping the opponent's or situation's image. Indices directly point to specific events or characteristics, thereby grounding speech acts in observable phenomena. Icons help to construct imagery that visually or semantically reflects certain traits or behaviors.

The tactical and strategic characteristics of sports trash-talking include a dominant strategy as the foundation of competitive activity in sports discourse. This dominant strategy incorporates specific communicative strategies and tactics aimed at discrediting the opponent by exaggerating their flaws, employing aggressive invective, or questioning their personal qualities (Kerr, J. H., 2005). Tactics also include adherence to social norms and the use of humorous, teasing comments. The support of social norms helps maintain a positive public image and avoid overt conflict, while humorous remarks contribute to defusing tension and easing interpersonal dynamics.

The semantic analysis of trash-talking reveals its multifaceted nature, combining aggression, self-expression, and elements of sports culture. Invective meanings are formed on the basis of evaluative, ontological, and locative-temporal features, all of which aim to devalue, intimidate, or provoke the opponent (Semenyuk, A. V., 2020). These meanings exert influence on the opponent's physical, cognitive, emotional, and social states, making trash-talking a highly efficient and multifunctional discursive tool in competitive interaction.

The analysis of structural models of invective utterances revealed considerable variation, ranging from individual lexemes to various phrases and simple sentences with different types of syntactic relations. The effectiveness of these structural patterns lies in their capacity to convey negative evaluation instantly and exert psychological pressure on the opponent.

The typology of pragmatic intentions in trash-talking demonstrated their orientation toward exerting influence across seven universal systemic levels: physical, psycho-emotional, mental, socio-adaptive, intergroup, axiological-evaluative, and informational. Trash-talking functions as a strategic tool for destabilizing the opponent, undermining their confidence, diverting their attention, and creating a psychological advantage.

The analysis of gender-related features in sports discourse more broadly revealed differences in the lexis and stylistic representation of male and female competitions, reflecting deep-rooted sociocultural stereotypes. In the context of trash-talking, gender-specific variations were observed in both the use and perception of verbal attacks, although both male and female athletes actively employ this strategy of psychological influence.

The study of stylistic features of competitive sports discursive constructs, particularly trash-talking, revealed the widespread use of metaphor, hyperbole, simile, irony, sarcasm, emotionally charged vocabulary, and marked syntactic structures. These stylistic devices enhance expressiveness, strengthen emotional impact, and serve the speaker's pragmatic goals within the communicative act.

In general, the findings of this research confirm the multifaceted nature of competitive sports discursive constructs, with trash-talking emerging as a complex communicative phenomenon. It incorporates semantic invectives, a wide range of structural models, clearly defined pragmatic intentions, identifiable gender characteristics, and a diverse array of stylistic devices. These components interact to form a powerful tool of psychological influence in modern English-language sports discourse.

Future research may focus on exploring the dynamics of trash-talking across different types of sports and cultural contexts, as well as analyzing its impact on athletic performance and audience perception of sporting events.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Key concepts and contextual functions of invectives in sports discourse

Verbalized Focal Concept	Communicative Intent	Context of Use	Example
Intellectual deficiency / incompetence	Humiliation of cognitive abilities or skills	- After a mistake (bad pass, miss, foul); - After a win; - As an attempt to trigger self-doubt.	In the 2012 regular-season game in which Richard Sherman walked up to Tom Brady after Seattle's 24-23 victory and asked, "You mad, bro?" (MSN Sports, 2024)
Physical weakness / inability	Undermining physical attributes	- After contact, fouls, or falls; - In response to visible exhaustion.	Floyd Mayweather asked Conor McGregor: «You haven't knocked me out yet? You said that it wouldn't go beyond the fourth round. When are you going to use your power?» (ESPN News Services, 2015)
Appearance	Ridicule or devaluation of appearance/style	- Before the game, when something "unusual" is noticed about an opponent's appearance; - After a failed action; - In rivalry-based games to establish dominance early.	Usyk calls Fury 'greedy belly' in pre-fight banter before title rematch. (The New Voice of Ukraine. 2024) Muhammad Ali said to Sonny Liston "Chump! Big ugly bear! I'm going to whip you right now!" (Facebook)

Moral traits / psychological pressure	Provoking emotional reaction, disrupting focus	- Crucial moments (penalty kicks, final minutes); - After a series of opponent's mistakes.	Cornerback Richard Sherman about quarterback Tom Brady: "I think people somehow get a skewed view of Tom Brady," Sherman said. "That he's just a clean-cut guy that does everything right and never says a bad word to anyone. We know him to be otherwise." (BoxingNews24.2019)
			Deontay Wilder said to Luis Ortiz: «It needs to be done fast. Someone has to be the guinea pig.» (MSN Sports, 2024)
Undermining status / authority	Attacking reputation, achievements, or titles	- Matches against star players; - Public rivalries.	Sean Avery could rattle opponents with his trash talk alone, he was dubbed the "undisputed king/clown of potty-mouthed noise," on the ice or in interviews (ESPN News Services, 2015)
			Larry Bird told McDaniel "I'm going to get [the ball] right here and I am going to bury it in your face," (ESPN News Services, 2015)
Self-glorification / asserting own authority	Demonstrating superiority, dominance, confidence	- After a successful action (goal, block, interception); - During periods of dominance; - To demoralize the opponent; - Often directed at audience, referees, or commentators	Gary Payton, basketball player, used trash-talk either during games or casual encounters at the mall. Once during the game, he said: "I'm a Hall of Famer, I'm First Ballot!" (MSN Sports, 2024)
			Steve Smith Sr., NFL, called out his former team as "schoolyard kids" after putting up seven receptions, 139 yards, and two touchdowns in a Ravens victory.

			Muhammad Ali said about himself: «It's hard to be humble, when you're as great as I am.» (Facebook)
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