

Discourse Construction in the Headlines of French Media *Le Figaro* on the Ban Hijab at the 2024 Paris Olympics

Ainun Nurfadhila Syahban^{1*}, Aprillia Firmonasari²

¹Master of Linguistic, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

²Master of Linguistic, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ainunnurfadhilasyahban@mail.ugm.ac.id^{1*}, aprillia@ugm.ac.id²

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the discourse construction in the headlines of the French newspaper Le Figaro regarding the hijab ban at the 2024 Paris Olympics. The focus of the study lies in how the media represents this issue through language choices and discourse structure. This study employs a qualitative approach using Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis model, which encompasses macro-structural, superstructural, and micro-structural analysis (semantic, syntactic, stylistic, and rhetorical). The research data consists of five news headlines discussing the hijab ban at the 2024 Paris Olympics. The results show that Le Figaro consistently employs nominalization, incorporating external parties such as the UN, athletes, and others. It also adopts different focal points, including criticism of the UN as an international institution, the legitimacy of the policy, reactions from specific organizations, and the voices of athletes as affected parties. These issues are presented to illustrate that Le Figaro aims to maintain neutrality in its discourse, obscuring its alignment with any particular side, and seeks to position itself as an objective source of information. Based on this analysis, Le Figaro is indeed a media outlet that is both liberal and conservative. It is liberal because it features external parties expressing negative opinions regarding this policy, and conservative because it also explains the policy's legitimacy under the legal framework of the Olympics.

Keywords: 2024 Paris olympics; critical discourse analysis; hijab ban; Le Figaro

INTRODUCTION

The Olympics are a major international sporting event that brings together athletes from various sports in one place, at one time, and with one spirit (IOC, 2021). This quadrennial event has been held 33 times, and France will host the 33rd Olympics in 2024. As a prestigious global event, there is no doubt that all eyes are on this occasion from the lead-up to its conclusion. Similarly in France, the Paris 2024 Olympics have set records, not only in ticket sales but also in television viewership. The opening ceremony became the most-watched television event in French history (Chrisafis, 2024).

One of the hot topics surrounding the Paris Olympics is the policy announced by the French government specifically by Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa Castéra on a television program on September 24, 2023-banning French Muslim athletes from wearing the hijab at the Olympic Games (DimancheEnPolitique, 2023). Undeniably, this policy has garnered significant attention from various parties, both those in favor and those opposed. Supporters view this policy as an integral part of France's secular principles and therefore non-negotiable,

as explained by the Minister on France 3 television (Métairie, 2023) Meanwhile, those who oppose this policy will argue that it constitutes a form of discrimination against the rights of Muslim women and undermines the value of inclusivity in sports (Amnesty International, 2024).

France is a secular state, or a "*laïque*" state, which is an ideology that separates state affairs from religion (Firmonasari et al., 2020). In the French context, this ideology encompasses two concepts. First, the state is neutral, remaining separate from religion and granting its citizens full freedom of belief Second, the state grants full freedom to religious groups to organize under private law (Chelini-Pont & Ferchiche, 2015), so that ideally, anything related to religious elements is not displayed or shown in public. This philosophy then became the basis for the policy banning the hijab in France, as the hijab is viewed as a religious symbol of a private nature. On the other hand, from an Islamic perspective, the hijab is women's attire that covers the entire body in accordance with religious rules (Qasthalani, 2014) and is obligatory; thus, failure to comply results in sin (Anjani et al., 2023). Consequently, this phenomenon has become a subject of controversy because each side holds firm convictions based on their respective principles, leaving the hijab and Muslim women at a crossroads in this context.

This is also evident in the news media both French and international. The topics covered range from ministerial statements to reactions from international organizations and fellow athletes. These topics are mediated by media outlets that have the potential to inject ideological foundations into the news discourse (Saidy et al., 2026), one of which is through headlines. Instead of serving as a source of information, the published news discourse can become fuel for an ongoing feud, whether from authoritative organizations or the general public. This is because news is not neutral. The lack of neutrality in news discourse is inevitable because it is inseparable from perspective (Van Dijk, 1988). One media outlet actively covering the story is Le Figaro. This is one of the oldest media outlets in France, known for its liberal-conservative stance (Hélène, 2026).

One of the key features of a news discourse is the headline, as it can identify the topic, metaphors, representations, and even the point of view (Van Dijk, 1988; MacRitchie & Seedat, 2008). The headline is the first thing users notice, although only a word or phrase, it can dramatically change the overall message of the content (Marutho et al., 2018). The headline serves as the primary indicator or trigger for readers in a news discourse, potentially leading, highlighting, or concealing certain parties that maybe being the cause of conflict. Therefore, it is important to analyze how headlines are constructed by each media outlet in reporting their discourse, in order to identify points of bias within the discourse.

To uncover the strategies the media employs in constructing its discourse, Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is utilized. CDA is a critical perspective on scholarship: it is, so to speak, discourse analysis "with an attitude" (Van Dijk, 2015). More specifically, Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, Critical Discourse Analysis take explicit position and thus want to understand, expose and ultimately resist social inequality (Van Dijk, 2008). In its analytical phase, this model is known for its 'triangulation' framework: discourse, social cognition, and social context (Wodak & Michael, 2001). These three dimensions are employed because readers are not merely asked to seek meaning within the discourse itself, rather, the value of a discourse stems from its connection to the context and the society in which it is situated (Klos P & Czerwińska, 2015).

In this article, to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the construction of Le Figaro's headlines, the focus will be solely on the discourse dimension. Therefore, this article will

address the question: What discourse strategies does Le Figaro employ in reconstructing its news headlines based on Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive qualitative study using discourse analysis based on Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis. The data analyzed consists of five news articles from Le Figaro regarding the policy banning the hijab at the 2024 Paris Olympics, as follows:

TABLE I. Research Data

News Media	Title
Le Figaro	1. Sport: l'interdiction du hijab lors de compétitions en France est «discriminatoire» selon des experts de l'ONU - Le Figaro 2. JO 2024: l'ONU s'oppose à l'interdiction du hijab pour les athlètes françaises - Le Figaro 3. JO 2024: l'interdiction de porter le hijab pour les Françaises est compatible avec les règles olympiques - Le Figaro 4. JO-2024: un organisme sportif islamique «profondément préoccupé» par l'interdiction du hijab en France - Le Figaro 5. JO - Beach-volley: «Je ne te dis pas de porter un hijab et tu ne me dis pas de porter un bikini», la prise de position de l'Égyptienne Doaa Elghobashy - Le Figaro

The news outlet Le Figaro was selected as the subject of this study because it is the second most widely used media outlet among the French population, according to the Alliance for Press and Media Statistics (ACPM) in 2025. Data collection was conducted using the documentation method because the data used consisted of online news texts published by Le Figaro. Data analysis consisted of discourse analysis covering macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure as follows:

TABLE 2. Analysis of Van Dijk's CDA Discourse Dimensions

Structure	Item for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic (what it was said?)	Topic
Superstructure	Schematic (How to compile and assembled)	Schema
Microstructure	Semantic (Meaning that wants to emphasize the news text)	Background, detail, intentions, presuppositions, nominalizations
	Syntactic (How to deliver?)	Tenses, coherence, pronouns
	Stylistic (Word choice)	Lexicons
	Rhetorical (How and in what way the emphasis is done?)	Graphic, metaphor expression

Source: Sobur (2001, p.74)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 3. Analysis of Le Figaro headlines 01

Sport: l'interdiction du hijab lors de compétitions en France est «discriminatoire» selon des experts de l'ONU		
Structure	Items for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic	Topic: The UN deems the ban on the hijab at the Olympics discriminatory
Superstructure	Schematic	- "L'interdiction du hijab lors de compétitions en France" as the main news item

Microstructure	Semantic	- "est «discriminatoire» selon des experts de l'ONU" as a reaction to the main news
		Background: Sports, spesifically the 2024 Paris Olympics
		Details:
		- "L'interdiction du hijab": as the object of French policy
		- "de compétitions en France" as a space of prohibition
		- "est «discriminatoire»" as a reaction to the policy
		- "selon des experts de l'ONU" as the party offering a reaction
		Intentions: this ban has drawn a reaction from the UN
		Presuppositions: there is the ban on the hijab at the Olympics; the UN is justified in responding
		Nominalizations: "L'interdiction du hijab" is a noun formed form the verb "interdire".
	Syntax	Tenses: Present
		Coherence: policy → reaction from the UN
	Stylistics	Lexicons: hijab and discriminatory
	Rhetoric	Quotation marks «discriminatoire»

In the macrostructure section, the topic addressed is that the policy received negative reactions from international organizations, namely the UN, so this issue is considered not only a national issue but a global one because it concerns individual rights. The superstructure section consists of two parts: the main information the ban on the hijab at the Olympics and the second part the reactions to the policy. Thus, Le Figaro's approach follows a pattern from issue to reaction, indicating that this policy is currently a subject of debate due to the negative reactions it has gamered.

Furthermore, in the microstructure section, the context chosen is sports, as indicated in the headline, so this issue is framed within the realm of sports rather than religion or politics. However, because the UN is mentioned, the issue extends into the realms of human rights and global affairs. In the details section, the headline focuses on the criticism that has been raised. In the "intentions" section, it is evident that this media outlet highlights the debate surrounding the issue by using the word "discriminatoire" in the headline while maintaining distance by citing the source of the statement-a UN expert. In the "presuppositions" section, the headline presupposes that the hijab ban at the Olympics is a fact, and that the UN, as an international institution, has the legitimacy to offer an opinion on this issue. In the nominalization section, the nominalization of the phrase "l'interdiction du hijab" serves to obscure the perpetrator, directing readers to focus not on the perpetrator but on the action itself. In the syntax section, the use of the present tense indicates that this issue is currently unfolding, with a cause-and-effect coherence: the policy implemented has drawn, a negative response from the UN. In the stylistic aspect, this media outlet uses the word "hijab which is specific to Muslim women's identity, and the word "discriminatoire" indicates injustice toward individual rights. However, in the rhetorical aspect, the word "discriminatoire" is placed in quotation marks, indicating that the term is a quote rather than a direct statement from Le Figaro, thereby creating the impression of maintaining distance and avoiding direct partisanship.

TABLE 4. Analysis of Le Figaro headlines 02

JO 2024 : l'ONU s'oppose à l'interdiction du hijab pour les athlètes françaises		
Structure	Items for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic	Topic: the ban on the hijab at the Olympics has been rejected by the UN
Superstructure	Schematic	Actor → object of rejection → affected party
Microstructure	Semantic	Background: 2024 Paris Olympics
		Details:
		- The UN as the actor that opposes
		- "s'oppose" as its action
		- "interdiction du hijab" as the object
		- "les athlètes françaises" as the affected party
		Intentions: This issue has been rejected by the UN

	Presuppositions: There is a hijab ban at the Olympics; the UN has the right to voice its opinion; and the affected party is the French athletes.
	Nominalizations: "L'interdiction du hijab" is a noun formed from the verb "interdire".
Syntax	Tenses: Present Coherence: Policy → opposition → target group
Stylistic	Lexicons: s'oppose, hijab and les athlètes françaises
Rhetoric	The UN as the initial subject in the title

In the macrostructure, the topic raised is that the policy faces opposition from an international institution, namely the UN, so the issue centers on the conflict between the policy and the international institution's response. In the superstructure, the UN becomes the actor opposing the policy regarding French athletes, thereby guiding readers to view this issue as a significant and controversial matter on a global scale.

Additionally, in the microstructure section, the context cited is the 2024 Summer Olympics, indicating that this is a global issue. In the details and intentions section, the headline appears to focus on the UN's rejection of the policy. In the presuppositions section, the headline presupposes that the hijab ban at the Olympics is a fact, and that the UN, as an international organization, has the legitimacy to oppose this issue. In the nominalization section, the nominalization of the phrase "l'interdiction du hijab" serves to obscure the agent, directing readers to focus not on the agent but on the action itself. In the syntax section, the use of the present tense indicates that this issue is currently unfolding, with a cause-and-effect coherence: this ban has triggered a global reaction. In the stylistic aspect, the media uses the word "s'oppose," which is considered stronger and more assertive, indicating that the UN firmly opposes the issue. Furthermore, the word "hijab" is specific to Muslim women's identity, and the phrase "les athlètes françaises" indicates that those affected are citizens of the country itself, not outsiders. Furthermore, in the rhetorical aspect, this media outlet positions the UN as the primary subject opposing this issue, indicating that it maintains neutrality by making the UN the central focus.

TABLE 5. Analysis of Le Figaro headlines 03

JO 2024: l'interdiction de porter le hijab pour les Françaises est compatible avec les règles olympiques		
Structure	Items for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic	Topic: This hijab ban is stated to be in accordance with Olympic rules
Superstructure	Schematic	Policy → rule legitimacy
Microstructure	Semantic	Background: 2024 Paris Olympics Details: - "l'interdiction de porter le hijab" as a policy - "pour les Françaises" as the target of the policy - "est compatible avec les règles olympiques" as justification that the policy aligns with Olympics regulations Intentions: to normalize and provide objective legitimacy to the policy Presuppositions: the existence of a hijab ban at the Olympics; Olympics rules have the power to serve as a justification Nominalizations: "L'interdiction du hijab" is a noun formed from the verb "interdire".
	Syntax	Tenses: Present Coherence: policy → legal justification
	Stylistic	Lexicons: compatible; les règles olympiques; and hijab
	Rhetoric	The phrase "compatible avec les règles olympiques" serve as the informational climax

In the macrostructure of the title, the topic raised is the hijab ban policy, which is in accordance with Olympic rules. In the superstructure, the scheme used is to discuss the policy first and then its legality, so that readers are guided to view this policy as legally valid.

Furthermore, in the sections on details and intentions, it is noteworthy that the news headline focuses on the legality of the policy-namely, that it complies with Olympic regulations-thereby treating the issue as routine and normal because it has a solid foundation. Then, in the presuppositions section, "les règles olympiques" is presupposed as the highest legitimate standard because it is used as a justification. In the coherence section, the logical connection established is that the policy is accompanied by legal justification, thereby guiding readers to understand the ban as a legitimate policy. In the rhetorical section, placing the justification at the end serves as a strategy to conclude the issue in this case, the hijab ban policy.

TABLE 6. Analysis of Le Figaro headlines 04

JO-2024: un organisme sportif islamique «profondément préoccupé» par l'interdiction du hijab en France		
Structure	Items for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic	Topic: concerns of islamics sports organizations regarding the hijab ban at the Paris Olympics
Superstructure	Schematic	Subject → reaction → cause
Microstructure	Semantic	Background: 2024 Paris Olympics
		Details:
		- "un organisme sportif islamique" as the subject
		- ««profondément préoccupé»» as the subject's opinion
		- "par l'interdiction du hijab en France" as the cause
		Intentions: to demonstrate the reaction of Islamic groups
		Presuppositions: the existence of a hijab ban at the Olympics; the existence of a reaction from Islamic groups
		Nominalizations: "L'interdiction du hijab" is a noun formed from the verb "interdire".
	Syntax	Coherence: reaction → cause
	Stylistic	Lexicons: organisme sportif islamique; profondément préoccupé
	Rhetoric	«profondément préoccupé» uses quotation marks

In the fourth headline, the topic to be discussed is the reaction of Islamic organizations to this policy, using the subject → reaction → cause structure. Unlike the previous headlines, the details and implications of the fourth headline explicitly focus on the emotions of Islamic organizations regarding this policy. It is evident that the actors and their opinions are clearly included in the news headline. The use of the term "organisme sportif islamique" is highlighted and presented as a specific religious group that may create a distance from the general reader, while "profondément préoccupé" conveys deep concern. The use of these words comes across as emotional and subjective as a reaction to the policy. In the rhetorical section, the words are placed in quotation marks to emphasize that the phrase is a direct quote with a source, maintaining neutrality while also serving as a marker of emotional language.

TABLE 7. Analysis of Le Figaro headlines 05

Beach-volley: «Je ne te dis pas de porter un hijab et tu ne me dis pas de porter un bikini», la prise de position de l'Egyptienne Doaa Elghobashy		
Structure	Items for Observed	Element
Macrostructure	Thematic	Topik: an athlete's statement regarding freedom of dress in sports
Superstructure	Schematic	Specific sport → direct quote → source
Microstructure	Semantic	Background: Beach-volley
		Details:
		- ««Je ne te dis pas de porter un hijab et tu ne me dis pas de porter un bikini»» as a direct quote
		- "la prise de position de l'Egyptienne Doaa Elghobashy" as the source of the quote

	Intentions: to express Doaa Elghobashy's opinion on freedom of dress in sports
	Presuppositions: the existence of differences in clothing
	Nominalizations: -
Syntax	Tenses: present Coherence: two sentences as a reciprocal → source Pronouns: "je" and "me" (I); "tu" and "te" (you)
Stylistic	Lexicons: hijab vs bikini
Rhetoric	Using quotation marks

In the fifth headline, the topic addressed is an athlete's statement regarding freedom of dress in sports. Unlike the previous headlines, this fifth headline features the individual voice of an athlete who also wears a hijab in a sports context. The layout is comprehensive and clear, including the specific sport-volleyball as well as the content and source of the quote, indicating that the media also provides space for personal perspectives. Volleyball as the background of the headline indicates that, in the context of volleyball, bikinis and hijabs are two options available to athletes. The details of the quote consist of two contrasting actions-wearing a hijab and wearing a bikini- as well as the portrayal of two parties, "je" and "tu" who do not impose their choices on one another.

In terms of intent, the media appears to want to discuss the principle of individual freedom of dress through a direct quote from a female volleyball player who wears a hijab. In terms of coherence, there is a logical connection between the quote and its source. Within the quote, there is a reciprocal relationship-one in which neither the hijab nor the bikini is imposed on the other. The title also uses the pronouns "je" and "tu," making it more personal and guiding readers to feel a sense of equality that ideally must exist in the world of sports. In the lexical section, the use of the words hijab and bikini is depicted as two contrasting concepts covered and uncovered that can coexist in the world of sports.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The policy banning French athletes from wearing the hijab during the 2024 Paris Olympics is a topic that continues to spark discussion. One aspect worth examining is how news media indirectly frame this issue in line with their respective agendas. One such outlet is *Le Figaro*. This is one of the largest and most widely read newspapers in France for current news. In this context, *Le Figaro* has actively covered the hijab ban at the 2024 Paris Olympics through five published news articles.

Based on the five headlines analyzed, there are similarities and differences in their construction. The similarity is that the nominalization "l'interdiction du hijab" is consistently used in all five headlines. This strategy indicates that the media consistently seeks to focus solely on the policy itself, rather than on the parties behind the policy's enactment. Furthermore, all headlines feature external actors, including the UN (headlines one and two), Olympic regulations (headline three), Islamic organizations (headline four), and athletes (headline five). This demonstrates that the issue is not merely an internal matter for France, but an international issue involving many parties.

Furthermore, the differences among the five headlines above lie in their varying focuses on issues ranging from criticism of UN institutions, the legitimacy of the policy, the reactions of specific organizations, and the voices of athletes as those directly affected. These issues serve to illustrate that *Le Figaro* aims to maintain neutrality in its discourse, obscuring its alignment with any particular side, and seeks to position itself as an objective source of information. Based on a discourse analysis of the five *Le Figaro* headlines, it can be concluded that *Le Figaro* is indeed a media outlet that is both liberal and conservative. It is liberal because

it features external parties expressing negative opinions regarding this policy, and conservative because it also explains the legal legitimacy of the policy within the context of the Olympics.

The conclusion above is not a definitive conclusion regarding Le Figaro's discourse construction, as this article focuses solely on the news headlines, which cannot necessarily be generalized to reflect the entire content of the news. It is recommended that future researchers examine the full text of the news to uncover, in a more critical and in-depth manner, the strategies employed by each media outlet-particularly Le Figaro-regarding the hijab ban at the 2024 Paris Olympics.

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