

ЛИНГВОДИДАКТИКА И НОВАЦИИ. ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСНОВЫ ИЗУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКОВ И  
КУЛЬТУР | LINGUODIDACTICS AND INNOVATIONS. PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF LEARNING  
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

## Корпоративный феминизм? Эмма Уотсон и движение ООН #HeForShe

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В этой статье приводится исследование речи актрисы Эммы Уотсон, которая была посвящена запуску движения HeForShe, произошедшему в 2014 году в штаб-квартире ООН. Особый акцент в выступлении был сделан на отношение к мужчинам — якобы движение HeForShe, признавая важность роли мужчин, отличается от традиционных феминистических подходов. Данное исследование направлено на поиск и изучение противоречий как непосредственно в заявлениях актрисы, так и в самом движении, с помощью смешанного метода анализа: применяются традиционные методы для разбора политической риторики, оценочного языка, фрейминга, способа решения проблем, натурализации, замалчивания. Результаты подчеркивают дискурсивное напряжение, связанное с изображением мужчин, которое преуменьшает их вину в несправедливом отношении к женщинам на протяжении истории и подчеркивает их жертвенность. В заключении выявляются некоторые корпоративные противоречия, пронизывающие движение HeForShe.

**Ключевые слова:** HeForShe, Эмма Уотсон, феминизм, корпоративный брендинг, оценка, аргументация, убеждение

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## Corporate Feminism? Emma Watson and the UN's #HeForShe Movement

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This study regards actress Emma Watson's key speech launching HeForShe at the United Nations in 2014, with a special focus on the way she refers to men. The #HeForShe initiative ostensibly differs from traditional feminist approaches in its recognition of the importance of reaching out to men. This study aims to explore

tensions in her argumentation and within the movement itself. It uses a mixed method analysis that consists in the application of some traditional tools in the analysis of political rhetoric, evaluative language, framing, problem-solution, naturalisation, erasure. Results are to highlight a discursive tension in the portrayal of men that downplays their role as perpetrators of historical injustice for women and instead emphasises their victimhood. The conclusion brings out some of the corporate contradictions inherent in the HeForShe project.

**Keywords:** HeForShe, Emma Watson, feminism, corporate branding, evaluation, argumentation, persuasion.

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#HeForShe, at the time a new initiative in the area of gender equality, was launched on 20 September 2014 by then Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and actress Emma Watson, the UN Women Global Goodwill Ambassador. It represents an attempt by the organisation to further the cause of women's rights around the world by aligning men with the traditional ideals of feminism, reaching out to heads of state, multinational CEOs, celebrities and other prominent figures including academics and politicians (Puspita and Antoni 2019). In Watson's words, the involvement of men is fundamental:

*We want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality. And we don't just want to talk about it, but make sure it is tangible*

Though her speech was well received in some quarters because of #HeForShe's perceived impact on discourse, culture and social practices (Engström 2019), it also attracted a fair measure of criticism, with Ahmad (2020) describing the initiative as a 'mere promotional campaign', and feminists critiquing the efforts of

*a privileged, wealthy, white, dabbling elitist, exploiting her substantial platform to presume to speak on behalf of women whose lives and struggles she could never truly understand (Straughan 2022)*

As (Lawson et al. 2021) argue, the achievement of true social change in the area of gender equality requires the multilevel transfer of power from men to women. Though the place for top-down initiatives in achieving social change is complex, a historical example like France's reform of capital punishment shows that such action may indeed have a long-term effect on underlying mindsets (Donovan 2014). However, in the case of feminism the question is harder to assess, since there is no binary process (to execute or not to execute) that may signal a shift in cultural attitudes. Rather, the longed-for result of gender equality depends on a range of intangible factors such as religious, cultural and philosophical attitudes, ideologies, prejudices, entrenched patterns of thought and feeling that, collectively, determine gender profiles and social practices (Fairclough 2003).

This study explores framing, argumentation and evaluation in Watson's key speech, with a special focus on the way she refers to men. As already noted, the #HeForShe initiative ostensibly differs from traditional feminist approaches in its recognition of the importance of reaching out to men, frequently identified as the oppressors in first wave feminism (Heilmann 2000). It is therefore of interest to note, from a traditional, Aristotelian perspective on persuasive rhetoric (Furley and

Nehamas 2015) and one that incorporates notions from modern linguistics, how Watson approaches the discursive task of turning the traditional enemy into a valued ally.

### #HeForShe: framing

From an examination of #HeForShe's published materials and an exploration of the website, it is apparent that the designers share many of the marketing strategies of some of their corporate partners (Schroeder, Salzer-Mörling, and Askegaard 2006; Ng and Koller 2013). The site uses state-of-the-art web design: it opens with a video that features male characters, many black, who hold the #HeForShe slogan (figure one):



Figure 1. #HeForShe homepage

The characters rapidly succeed one another until the camera angle changes; some coloured shots appear, the first of which shows a black girl with a brilliant smile, who precedes images of the project's activities involving both men and women. The video culminates with a frontal shot of some determined-looking young men – again, non-white-European types, walking purposefully down a corridor. This initial multimodal reel is a semiotic encapsulation of the organisation's message; from the first shots of random male individuals expressing their support, through illustrations of diverse ongoing, gender-related projects, to the final group of men whose steady gait expresses their commitment to the ideal.

The website thus enacts a substantial rebranding of feminism which, in its traditional as well as its modern versions, has always been viewed as primarily concerned with women (Riley 1988). As Watson's speech makes plain, and as is also very clear from a glance at the website, the role of men is fundamental. Indeed, since the video begins and ends with shots of male social actors, it appears to advance the subliminal message that they, of the two genders, have the most important role. This points towards a tension within #HeForShe, arguably within feminism itself. If one unpacks the organisation's name, 'he for she', using the tool of pragmatic relevance (Wilson and Sperber 2015) the meaning of the fragment could be re-constructed in the following terms: He (i.e., all males everywhere) is for (stands with, expresses support for, believes in, etc. She (all women everywhere). To further extrapolate these implicatures (Leech 2016), the inference is that women are still dependent on men for the achievement of their ultimate goals; to the extent that they are dependent on them, they could also be seen as inferior or subordinate to men. Thus, in its very name the #HeForShe movement, arguably, reproduces the same ideology it purports to refute.

In Watson's speech the same tension will be observed. On the one hand she aims to reach out to men, to involve them in her movement; on the other, however, it is hard for her to refer to unjust

patterns of gender relations, a feature of all feminist discourse, without castigating men for their role in these processes.

### Methodology

Textual semantic analysis is carried out using the Appraisal Framework of Martin and White (2005), a tool that enables the analyst to assess the speaker's attitude towards the social actors and phenomena described in the speech, both in explicit and implicit language. Of this Hallidayan framework, (Hunston and Thompson 2003) offer the following description:

*The enormously varied lexical choices are seen as construing a small range of general categories of reaction. The main category or sub-system is AFFECT, which deals with the expression of emotion (happiness, fear, etc.) Related to this are two more specialised sub-systems: JUDGEMENT, dealing with moral assessments of behaviour (honesty, kindness, etc.), and APPRECIATION, dealing with aesthetic assessments (subtlety, beauty, etc.)*

I shall present an example from Table One (below) for each of these three macro semantic categories, beginning with what the authors term 'Affect', or adjectives/evaluative text dealing with the expression of emotion:

*But sadly [- Aff: Unhappiness] I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.*

This is an instance of explicit evaluation, since Watson expresses her emotion (considered by Martin and White a negative one, signalled by the symbol '-') with a specific adverb from this semantic domain. Moving on to consider Judgement, the evaluation of people's positive or negative (+/-) ethical qualities, their abilities, tenacity or truthfulness:

*When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings. [t – J: capacity]*

In this case Watson's evaluation of her male friends is negative – they are incapable of expressing their emotions. However, this judgement is not given in explicit lexis, and Martin and White speak of a 'token' (t) of Judgement (J), and italicise the relevant stretch of text.

The final category is Appreciation, or the evaluation of objects, natural or mental phenomena, etc:

*I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me [+ App: composition]*

Here she expresses positive evaluation of her philosophy, feminism.

In the case of this speech, we explore Watson's characterisations of men and women in order to probe the construction of these categories within #HeForShe more generally, to understand more precisely the rhetorical strategy and argumentation that she outlines here.

As already indicated above, the notion of framing (Goffman 1986, Entman 1993) is central in this critique, which aims to shed light on the linguistic and discursive strategies Watson uses to achieve the delicate rhetorical feat of enlisting men alongside women in their struggle - against male hegemony. An example of this is her statement

*Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too (my emphasis)*

She goes on to provide examples of how current gender relations are harmful to men, and thus gives an alternative frame that discursively aligns men with women in the position of the victim of an injustice, rather than its perpetrator.

Also noticeable is the presence of a familiar rhetorical pattern from the context of political argumentation – among other deliberative rhetorical genres - the Problem-Solution pattern (Winter 1977). Identification of this pattern at times requires the application of pragmatic techniques of relevance to stretches of text such as:

*We want to try and galvanize as many men and boys as possible to be advocates for gender equality*

Here we can infer that ‘gender equality’ relates to something that our world knowledge (Van Dijk 2008) tells us is a global issue; hence, the galvanization of men and boys as ‘advocates’ for equality appears as the speaker’s preferred ‘solution’. Rhetorically, this implicit pattern contributes to the speech’s persuasive impact (Bosman 1987).

### Aristotelian persuasion in #HeForShe

In the Aristotelian view of persuasion (Aristotle and Bartlett 2019), the three key components are Ethos (respect due to the speaker), pathos (emotional effect of the speech), and logos, the logical, argumentative element. It has been suggested that, of these, only logos can be seen as truly argumentative (Braet 1992), since it is the only factor to depend on rational ideas that enforce a reasoned conclusion. However, the contributions of the other factors are widely acknowledged to be highly influential in contexts, such as the courtroom or political debate, that rely on effective rhetorical communication (Charteris-Black 2009; Reyes 2014; Rosenthal 1966).

In our case the speaker’s ethos is considerable, deriving not simply from her institutional role with the United Nations, but also as a cultural icon whose image has influenced the hearts and minds of cinema-goers, especially the young, all over the world. As will be seen during the analysis that follows, her use of the Affect system (Martin and White 2005) forms a significant part of the persuasive force of her speech, as she frequently expresses her feelings during it, in ways that align with the force of her argument. For example, her reference to the tragedy of male suicide supports the central proposition of her talk just cited, that gender equality is ‘their issue too’.

The following section explores Watson’s use of logos, identifying the various points of her argument, and showing how they are supported by her evaluations, which make frequent use of the emotional dimension.

### Data

Table One (below) shows the evaluative patterns in the speech:

Table

**Watson’s speech, evaluation**

	Text	What is appraised?	AF
1	galvanize as many men and boys as possible	Men and boys	[+J: tenacity, irrealis]
2	become synonymous with man-hating	Fighting for women’s rights	[t - Aff: dissatisfaction]
3	I was confused at being called “bossy,”	Emma Watson	[-J: propriety]

4	I started being sexualized by certain elements of the press.	Elements of the press	[t -J: propriety]
5	When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings.	My male friends	[t - J: capacity]
6	this seemed uncomplicated to me	Feminism	[+ App: composition]
7	feminism has become an unpopular word	The word 'feminism'	[-App: reaction]
8	expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive	Feminism	[- App: reaction, intens.].
9	Why is the word such an uncomfortable one?	The word 'feminism'	[- App: reaction]
10	it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts.	Britain's practices in women's pay	[+J: propriety]
11	it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body	Britain's approach to gender	[+J: propriety]
12	it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my country	Britain's politics	[+J: propriety]
13	it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men	Britain's social policies	[+J: propriety]
14	sadly I can say that there is no one country	Global countries	[- Aff: unhappiness]
15	I am one of the lucky ones	Emma Watson	[t + aff: happiness]
16	my parents didn't love me less because I was born a daughter	Emma Watson	[t + aff: happiness]
17	My mentors didn't assume I would go less far because I might give birth to a child one day	Emma Watson	[t-J: tenacity/capacity]
18	they are the inadvertent feminists who are changing the world today	Watson's mentors	[t +J: capacity]
19	if you still hate the word	The word 'feminism'	[t – App: reaction]
20	Sadly many of the things she wanted to	Hilary's speech	[- Aff: unhappiness]

	change are still a reality today.		
21	my father's role as a parent being valued less by society	EW's father's role	[t – App: valuation]
22	I've seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less "macho"—in fact in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49 years of age; eclipsing road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I've seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don't have the benefits of equality either	Situation of men	[t - Aff: unhappiness]
23	men and women should feel free to be strong	Men and women	[+J: capacity, irrealis]
24	who is this Harry Potter girl?	Emma Watson	[t – J: capacity]
25	I don't know if I am qualified to be here	Emma Watson	[t – J: capacity]
26	my nervousness for this speech	Emma Watson	[- Aff: insecurity]
27	one of those inadvertent feminists	Listeners	[t + J: propriety]
28	the good news	News	[+ App: reaction]

The general tenor of Watson's argumentation has already been indicated; broadly, it consists in the proposition that men need to be brought on board with the ideals of feminism if these are to be achieved. Part of the rhetorical approach is to represent gender discrimination as harmful to men as well as women, thus incentivising men to buy into her message. Evaluation plays a role in the linguistic enactment of this strategy:

5. *When at 18 my male friends were unable to express their feelings* [t - J: capacity]

The fact that this is a 'problem' for her male friends is signalled earlier in the speech; this is listed among the circumstances that made Watson start 'questioning gender-based assumptions'. She paints a view of a society that imposes strict behavioural and identity norms on men which inhibit emotional expression (as in 5), and notions of 'success' that can have dangerous consequences:

22. *I've seen young men suffering from mental illness unable to ask for help for fear it would make them look less "macho"—in fact in the UK suicide is the biggest killer of men between 20-49 years of age; eclipsing road accidents, cancer and coronary heart disease. I've seen men made fragile and insecure by a distorted sense of what constitutes male success. Men don't have the benefits of equality either* [t - Aff: unhappiness]

From the first lines here, we infer that it is important for men to look 'macho'. Failure to

conform to this idea of oneself can lead men to develop mental illness and suicidal tendencies. From the Aristotelian perspective, outlined above, this line of argument evokes pathos, and it is the more effective to the extent that Watson only hints at her sadness at these tragic facts, rather than spelling out explicitly how sad she finds them.

It is not just young men who are pressed to conform to a narrow conception of what it means to fulfill their gender identities:

21. *my father's role as a parent being valued less by society* [t – App: valuation]

From this we can infer that Watson believes fatherhood to be an important component in a true male identity, and that this is currently socially undervalued in Britain.

This part of the speech is effective: Watson thus succeeds in problematising gender relations as not just an issue for women, who have traditionally come off worse in this area. Moreover, the implicit 'problem' responsible for these ills is not the one frequently identified in feminist discourse, i.e., a patriarchal hegemony or, to put it in one word, men. Rather, the problem is shifted towards a more abstract dimension, the current state of our society, the way things are organised, the way things are. Male hegemony is 'naturalised' (Barthes 2006), but Watson makes the paradoxical point that this does not always benefit men.

Certain parts of her speech, however, do raise the familiar rhetorical enemies of feminism, albeit in allusive or implicit form. An early instance of this:

4. *I started being sexualized by certain elements of the press.* (t-J: propriety)

Once more it is necessary to deduce pragmatically the meanings here. To be 'sexualised' presumably means to be held up, through the publication of suggestive images, stories, jokes, leading questions and the like, as a sex object, in processes which typify media treatment of females in the public eye, whether they be models, politicians, sportswomen or Hollywood superstars (Kehily 2012; Attenborough 2013; Sherry, Osborne, and Nicholson 2016). What is harder to deduce is the gender of those 'certain elements', but it is safe to assume that Watson is unlikely to be complaining about female journalists. The strategical exploitation of images of the female body has been a constant trope in feminist critiques of hegemonical, male-dominated mass media since the latter part of the last century (Manca, Manca, and Scarlato 1994; D'Enbeau 2011; Hatton and Trautner 2013).

The gender of the implied enemy/ies in the following extract is harder to pin down:

*I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called "bossy,"* [-J: propriety] *because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not.*

We cannot be certain that those calling Watson 'bossy' in these childhood recollections were all male, though this would be a plausible interpretation. However, the scenario in which females – of all ages - face opposition when their behaviour leads them to adopt positions of command over males, is a familiar one from feminist discourse (Coward 1999; Greer 2007).

The same pattern is found throughout the speech: in passages where Watson aims to describe oppressive social features, these are naturalised, and those responsible are effectively erased (Van Leeuwen 1996; Stibbe 2012). Some examples:

*When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they didn't want to appear "muscly" (who is generally blamed for this ideology?)*



*I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and unattractive (By whom? Male-dominated media?)*

*No country in the world can yet say they have achieved gender equality (So in every country men are – still – dominant?)*

*My parents didn't love me less because I was born a daughter (Why should they? Presumably there are many places where sons are loved more?)*

*Not all women have been afforded the same rights that I have (Why not? What gender is the person or persons able to 'afford' these rights to women?)*

These examples could be multiplied, but hopefully the point has been made, that Watson consistently avoids identifying men as a group, as causes of the problem of gender inequality. She frames the current state of gender relations as the result of largely impersonal, historical processes, and men as the co-victims, with women, of these processes, rather than the perpetrators.

### **Discussion, Conclusion**

Emma Watson advances a persuasive argument which, as has been suggested, attempts to engage men with the cause of women principally by emphasising that they too stand to gain from the achievement of more equable gender relations. Her argument in this sense is that, in the current state of societies men suffer because they are compelled to fulfill dominant, macho roles that make it impossible for them to express their whole personalities:

I want men to take up this mantle. So their daughters, sisters and mothers can be free from prejudice but also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human too—reclaim those parts of themselves they abandoned and in doing so be a more true and complete version of themselves.

Men, from this perspective, in order to be 'complete' need to be 'vulnerable' and 'human', traits which current gender roles stigmatise.

This proposal is not wholly original, since research has long targeted the role of men in feminism (Cornish 1999; Baily 2015). As suggested above, the novelty of the #HeForShe project resides in the adoption of the doctrine by a global colossus like the United Nations, and its enlistment of a Hollywood A lister such as Emma Watson to present it to the world.

Linguistic analysis revealed tension in the speech, as Watson attempts to perform the rhetorical sleight of hand identified by Orwell, when he speaks of 'naming things without calling up mental pictures of them'. If feminism is a struggle for social justice then it is hard to avoid identifying men as the main antagonists, since research shows that even males who study feminism are resistant to renouncing the privileges associated with their dominant role (Pleasants 2011).

A similar tension may be observed in the branding of #HeForShe which, as stated above, appears indistinguishable from many promotional sites run by multinational companies. This is not the place for an in-depth study of the organisation's multi-modal branding, which may provide the topic for future research. However, we should at least note a sort of corporate crossover in the branding (Stride 2006), which leads to the appearance of images such as the following on the website:

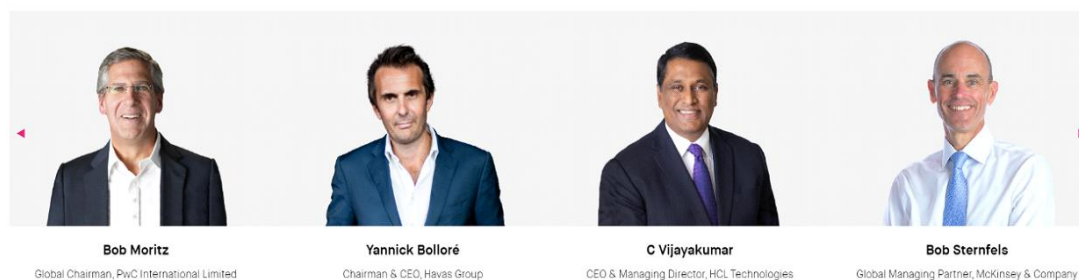


Figure 2. #HeForShe: Corporate Champions

Curiously, these ‘corporate champions’ are all highly successful men; another circumstance that underlines the patriarchal ideologies that nest within the #HeForShe moniker.

It might also be worth asking, as a final thought, why the UN chose to go with a ‘privileged, wealthy, white, dabbling elitist’ for the role of gender ambassador, rather than a more populist figure such as Malala Yousafza, for example. She is just as well-known as Watson, but has characteristics that would arguably better suit her to advance this particular cause, specifically a history of combatting gender inequalities, working for the people, striving to change preconceptions and prejudices. Was this ‘Harry Potter girl’, as Watson describes herself in the talk, really the most suitable ambassador for the cause?

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