

Linguistic Patterns of the Coach as a Factor in Building Wrestler's Competitive Confidence: A Psycholinguistic Approach

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Annotation. This article explores the role of verbal interaction within the coach's discourse as a key factor in shaping an athlete's competitive confidence in the context of freestyle wrestling. The relevance of the study lies in the need to reconceptualize the communicative component of the sports process, where the coach's words serve not only an instructive but also a psychoregulatory function. Within an interdisciplinary framework, the study analyzes recurring verbal patterns (linguistic patterns) used by coaches, taking into account their semantic, prosodic, and situational features.

Based on a functional classification - supportive, mobilizing, instructive, and destructive - the research identifies regularities in the impact of these patterns on the wrestler's emotional and cognitive state under competitive pressure. The psycholinguistic mechanism of influence is interpreted through the prism of cognitive processing under stress, where the coach's utterance operates as a trigger of affective activation or as a block to confidence, with direct behavioral implications.

The study proposes a conceptual model of strategic coach communication, structured according to phases of the competition process - preparatory, active, and reflexive. Methodological guidelines are formulated for enhancing coaches' language competence, including principles of verbal ecology, intonational literacy, construction of adaptive linguistic patterns, and implementation of tools for reflective analysis of verbal interaction. The proposed model has strong potential for integration into coach education systems, particularly in sports demanding high psychological resilience.

The findings possess both theoretical and applied significance for the fields of sports pedagogy, psychology, and psycholinguistics, and they open new avenues for research at the intersection of humanities and applied sciences.

Keywords: freestyle wrestling, verbal interaction, coaching discourse, psycholinguistics, competitive confidence, linguistic patterns, sports psychology.

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Introduction

In today's highly competitive sports environment, where performance outcomes depend not only on technical excellence or functional indicators but also on psychological stability, the issue of competitive confidence takes on fundamentally new significance. This is especially true for sports such as freestyle wrestling, where instantaneous decision-making, resilience under stress, and internal mobilization are inextricably linked to emotional and cognitive regulation. Against this backdrop, the coach's language – long perceived merely as a tool for instruction – has increasingly emerged as a powerful factor influencing the athlete's internal state.

At high levels of competition, where emotional instability becomes a dominant context, the coach's verbal cues can serve not simply as a response but as a decisive stimulus: they may act as support or obstacle, a stabilizer or a trigger. This underscores the need for an interdisciplinary investigation of linguistic interaction as a factor of psychological regulation. A psycholinguistic approach, in particular, allows us to conceptualize coaching discourse as a system of recurring linguistic patterns that demonstrably affect the athlete's competitive confidence.

Ukrainian academic literature has accumulated a significant body of work focused on the psychology of confidence, communicative interaction in sport, and pedagogical modeling of the training process. Researchers such as Horbachov Ye., Hryban H., Didora A., Yevdokymova L., Ivanenko H., Kozhanova O., Komotska O., Kosenko N., Korotia V., Kuchma A., Lakhtadyr O., Lishtaba T., Melnikov A., Opanchuk D., Sovhiria T., Skoryi O., and Shynkaruk V. have examined various aspects including competitive anxiety, motivational support, stress resistance, and the influence of coach authority. However, the linguistic structure of coaching speech – its cognitive load, intonational dynamics, and emotionally semantic impact on the athlete's state – remains underexplored.

The aim of this article is to identify, classify, and conceptualize linguistic patterns in coaching discourse as factors shaping the wrestler's competitive confidence, to justify the psycholinguistic mechanisms of their influence, and to develop a practical model for strategic linguistic interaction.

Results

The formation of competitive confidence under the high physical and psychological demands characteristic of freestyle wrestling is a complex psychophysiological and communicative process, where not only the athlete's internal mobilization but also external influence – primarily from the coach – plays a pivotal role. A wrestler's confidence should not be perceived as a static trait, but rather as a dynamic state shaped, maintained, or undermined by the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and situational-linguistic factors. Within this context, the linguistic channel of communication – words, phrases, intonation – serves not only an informational purpose but also performs regulatory, motivational, and emotional-cognitive functions [1].

Contemporary sports psychology conceptualizes competitive confidence as a construct combining expectations of success, belief in personal competence, motivational stability, and control over internal states under pressure. These components, in turn, are continually influenced by external feedback, primarily from the coach. In stressful contexts, the coach does not merely convey tactical or technical information but creates an environment in which the athlete's self-perception is cognitively and emotionally reinforced or destabilized [2]. Thus, the coach's language becomes not only a medium of instruction but also a framing tool that shapes the internal dialogue of the athlete.

In psycholinguistics – particularly in the cognitive paradigm – language is seen as a dynamic instrument capable of influencing imagery, expectations, and affective states. Linguistic patterns – stable constructions that regularly recur in communication – may serve distinct functions: motivational, calming, directive, or evaluative. In competitive settings, where perception speed and cognitive processing are impaired by emotional arousal, it is these brief and familiar patterns – not extended explanations – that have the greatest impact. Subconscious responses, developed through training or shaped by past interactions between coach and athlete, are activated [3].

When verbal reinforcement is regular, consistent, and emotionally appropriate, it can not only reduce anxiety but also enhance the athlete's self-regulation and improve their sense of control over the situation. Conversely, inconsistency in a coach's verbal behavior, linguistic aggression, or unintended contradictions can generate cognitive dissonance, which undermines confidence – even in highly skilled athletes.

Thus, in the theoretical and methodological dimension, competitive confidence in freestyle wrestling must be considered not solely a psychological category but one that closely interacts with communicative strategies. Its development is a process grounded in a shared semiotic field between coach and athlete, where language acts as a means of regulation and linguistic patterns become the primary tools for shaping the internal emotional foundation of competitive performance.

Coaching discourse in wrestling is not merely a functional channel for transmitting technical and tactical instructions but a complex system of speech behavior in which each verbal gesture affects the athlete's emotional and cognitive state. This interaction is particularly critical in the stressful environment of competition, where any statement made by the coach can activate or neutralize the wrestler's inner resources of confidence. Therefore, linguistic patterns – as recurring verbal constructions with targeted emotional and semantic functions – should be viewed as a potent instrument for either fostering or disrupting the athlete's psychological readiness for combat.

In coaching discourse, linguistic patterns can be classified into supportive, mobilizing, neutral, and destructive categories. This classification is based not only on semantic content but also on intonational features, contextual usage, and the psychological sensitivity of the individual wrestler. Supportive patterns are typically aimed at reducing anxiety, enhancing a sense of control, and promoting emotional calm. Mobilizing patterns, by contrast, activate internal resources, direct focus, and provide a stimulus for action. Neutral patterns may serve an informative or descriptive function but do not exert a direct influence on confidence. Destructive patterns – whether intentional or unintentional – undermine composure, provoke doubt, or draw attention to mistakes, which is especially dangerous in high-pressure, time-sensitive decision-making contexts [1, 4].

Table 1

Typology of linguistic patterns in coaching discourse in freestyle wrestling

Type of Pattern	Example (Hypothetical)	Communicative Function	Psychological Effect	Optimal Phase of Application
Supportive	"You've done this before – you can handle it"	Reframing, emotional reinforcement	Increases confidence, reduces anxiety	Before stepping on the mat, during breaks between periods
Mobilizing	"Get in the zone! This is the moment!"	Activation, attention focus	Boosts combat readiness, triggers internal mobilization	At the point of fatigue, in critical moments of the bout

Neutral-instructive	"He's holding his right hand high – go under it"	Tactical instruction	Encourages task focus, rationalization of the moment	During calm fight phases or in training analysis
Destructive	"What are you doing? We went over this!"	Disappointment, criticism	Elicits doubt, confusion, undermines self-regulation	Inappropriate at any stage of competition
Anxiety-amplifying pattern	"Just don't lose!"	Pseudo-support with hidden fear	Increases internal pressure, fear of failure	Inappropriate, especially before the match
Ritual-positive	"Good job! Keep it up!"	Reinforcement, positive framing	Enhances confidence stability, establishes internal standards	After successful action or at the end of a training phase

Summarised by the author

This typology enables the transition to the next stage of the study – analyzing the psycholinguistic mechanism through which these patterns influence competitive confidence. It is the interaction between the content of an utterance, its intonational delivery, and the psychological context that forms the subtle verbal influence capable, in critical moments, of either supporting the athlete or shattering their composure.

In psychologically tense competitive environments, the coach's words acquire the function of a trigger that can instantly activate or suppress the wrestler's cognitive-emotional processes. Linguistic patterns – being concise, emotionally charged, and contextually appropriate – act as verbal cues that bypass conscious filtering and act directly on the affective level of perception.

The psycholinguistic effect is shaped by a combination of semantics (the message content), paralinguistic features (intonation, volume, tempo), and the personal frame already established in the athlete-coach relationship. That is why the same phrase can have radically different outcomes depending on its delivery, the situational context, and underlying associative background [9].

From a neuropsychological perspective, a pattern activates specific neural networks associated with motivation, memories of success, or fear of failure. If a coach's statement evokes associations with past successful actions, it triggers a dopamine response and reinforces focus. Conversely, it may initiate a cortisol cascade, resulting in somatic markers of anxiety – tightness, delayed reactions, or self-doubt [4].

Thus, the psycholinguistic mechanism functions as a language-based moderator of confidence, capable of regulating an athlete's readiness to fight as effectively as physical training stimuli.

Coach-athlete communication during pre-competition preparation is not merely a matter of instructional accuracy – it is a strategic tool for regulating confidence, mobilizing internal resources, and preventing destructive anxiety. In freestyle wrestling, where psychological balance can determine the outcome as much as technical mastery, the deliberate and strategic use of linguistic patterns adapted to each phase of the competitive process is a critical factor for effective interaction.

The proposed model of strategic communication encompasses three key stages: the formation, application, and reflection of verbal influence. The wrestler's internal dynamics during the phases of anticipation, action, and post-action are aligned with the sequence of

these stages. This approach does not rely on improvisational reactions but rather on a pre-constructed communicative strategy tailored to the athlete's individual psychotype, current arousal level, previous experience, and the nature of the opponent.

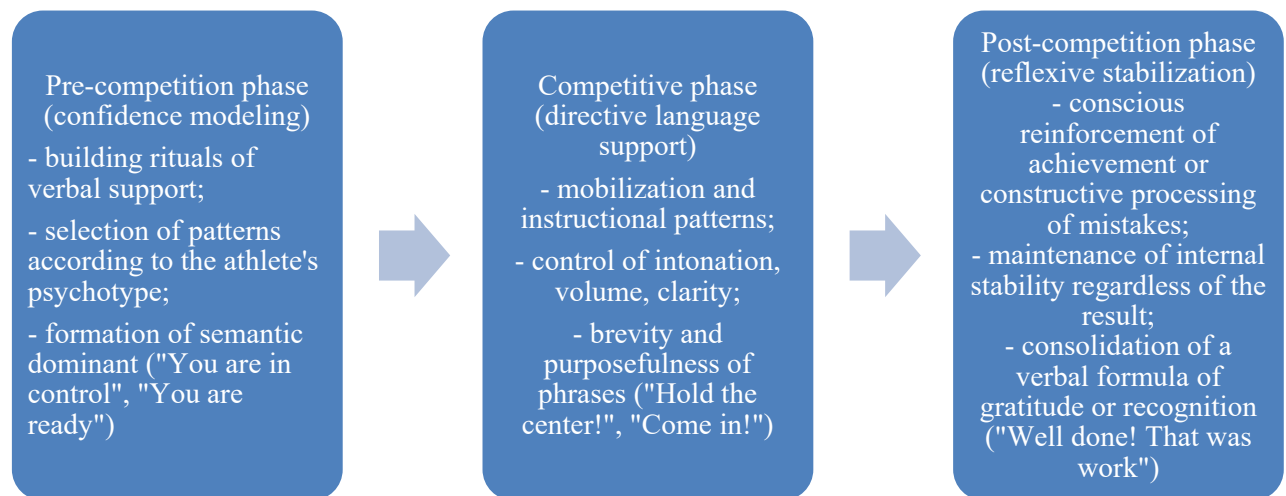


Figure 1. Stages of the Coach's Strategic Verbal Interaction During the Competitive Cycle

The proposed framework enables the coach to consciously structure their verbal communication not only to convey functional instructions but also to maintain the athlete's internal stability amid the emotional fluctuations of competition. This strategy is particularly crucial for elite athletes, whose success often depends less on technical superiority and more on the psychological tone of decision-making in critical moments.

The development of such a strategy should become an integral part of the professional linguistic training of coaches, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of their influence not only during competitions but throughout the long-term trajectory of cultivating a confident athlete.

The study of verbal interaction in the training of elite wrestlers has revealed a deeply underestimated dimension of coaching: the verbal. In a sport where even a millisecond of doubt can alter the course of a match, a coach's words become not merely an accompaniment to action but a precursor to the action itself – a verbal cue that encodes the wrestler's internal state. Recognizing this opens a new methodological dimension in coaching education.

One of the key insights arising from this analysis is the need to transition from intuitive to intentional verbal influence. A coach's linguistic competence cannot remain incidental; it must become the subject of systematic training that integrates psycholinguistic knowledge, elements of cognitive psychology, and verbal reflection skills. This involves not just the technique of speaking but the strategic use of verbal resources as a factor in building competitive confidence.

According to the developed typology of patterns, a coach must be capable of identifying, constructing, and adapting verbal models in accordance with the athlete's personality profile, the stage of training, and situational context. Therefore, coaching education should include training in verbal rituals, the creation of a semantic bank of supportive constructions, analysis of undesirable verbal interventions, and simulation of communicative scenarios in emotionally realistic environments.

The results of this article also allow for the formulation of a new practical paradigm – a model of strategic verbal interaction throughout the competitive cycle, in which speech functions as a quasi-tactical instrument. This model not only transmits information but also

activates behavioral scripts, neutralizes anxious cognitions, and affirms the athlete's state of confidence. Such an approach advocates for the integration of linguistic management into the structure of pre-competition preparation through both team protocols and individual coaching strategies.

From the perspective of scholarly novelty, the proposed study establishes an interdisciplinary bridge between psycholinguistics and athletic training, opening new directions for future inquiry – such as the analysis of verbal markers of high or low confidence, the study of intonational profiles of successful coaches, and the modeling of linguistic interaction in extreme performance conditions.

The coach, as a carrier of verbal influence, is not only an organizer of motor action but also a creator of the athlete's psychological environment. Recognizing this reality should transform pedagogical paradigms in sport, demanding a new level of linguistic precision, emotional intelligence, and strategic foresight. Sometimes, a single well-timed and carefully chosen word can be as decisive as a physical advantage – equal to victory itself.

Conclusions

This study allowed for the identification and conceptual understanding of the verbal interaction between coach and athlete as a critical psycholinguistic factor that directly influences the development, maintenance, or disruption of competitive confidence in freestyle wrestling. Under the intense emotional dynamics of competition, the coach's words function as instruments for managing the athlete's internal state, conveying not only instructions but also psychological positioning – support, determination, and belief.

Through a systematic analysis, the article proposed a typology of linguistic patterns in coaching discourse, allowing for the identification of their impact on the athlete's psycho-emotional state: from mobilizing and emotionally reinforcing patterns to destructive constructions that undermine confidence. The psycholinguistic approach employed here demonstrated how verbal constructions – through semantic and paralinguistic channels – form a microfield of meaning that can activate or suppress adaptive behavioral strategies.

A key result of the research is the proposed model of strategic coach-athlete communication, structured according to the phases of the competitive process. This model outlines the sequence of verbal actions: from a pre-planned framework of support to targeted mobilizing interventions and post-competition reflective stabilization. It can be effectively applied in both individualized athlete preparation and formal coach training programs.

Particular attention is drawn to the methodological guidelines formulated for developing a coach's linguistic competence as a component of their professional profile. This includes the implementation of strategic speech training, the study of intonational influence, reflective audits of coaching language, and the formation of ethical verbal conduct in emotionally intense situations.

Thus, the article initiates a new scientific vector within the fields of sports pedagogy and psychology, in which language is not regarded as a secondary tool but as one of the primary regulators of a wrestler's psychological readiness. The theoretical foundations and practical model proposed here may serve as the basis for further research – particularly into the connection between coaches' verbal profiles and the stability of athletic performance outcomes.

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