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The Perception of Male and Female Voices in Radio Broadcasting

ABSTRACT

This study examines how gender-based voice norms have developed historically and persist to this day in the radio environment, and how these norms influence the perception of the credibility, competence and genre suitability of voices. The theoretical section traces developments from the early days of radio through its golden age, characterised by a predominance of male voices, through the television and digital eras, to current debates on synthetic voices generated by artificial intelligence, drawing on insights from sociophonetics and the concept of communicative injustice. The empirical section is based on pilot research (total number of respondents $N = 32$; for selected items $N = 16$) and utilises standardised audio samples of two professional newsreaders. The male voice achieves a higher average rating (7.88/10) compared to the female voice (7.44/10), and respondents prefer it more strongly for news formats, while the female voice slightly prevails in ratings for sports and service programmes. An interesting generational shift is indicated by the under-25 age group, which shows more balanced preferences across genres, including news. A lexical analysis of the descriptions used confirms the presence of stereotypical attributes: respondents characterise the male voice as pleasant, concise and clear, and the female voice as clear and fluent, though at times monotonous. Based on these findings, the study recommends building editorial diversity through casting, voice coaching, sound design and genre framing, and urges caution and transparency in the use of AI voices, particularly in utilitarian formats. The research findings highlight the need to evaluate voices based on performance and context, rather than gender, and to systematically address perceived audience biases.

KEY WORDS

AI Voices. Credibility. Gender Stereotypes. News. Radio. Sociophonetics. Voice.

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1 Introduction

Radio is a voice-based medium and, in the absence of images, the voice conveys not only information but also the speaker's identity. How we assess a voice as credible, competent or suitable for a particular genre does not arise in a vacuum – it is shaped by historically inherited norms, cultural expectations and editorial practices which, in both the European and Slovak contexts, have long favoured male voices in authoritative formats (news, politics) and female voices in service or entertainment programmes. Meanwhile, the technological landscape is changing – podcasts and synthetic voices generated by artificial intelligence are expanding the range of vocal expressions, yet at the same time raising questions of authenticity, ethics and influence on listeners' perceptions.

The aim of this study is (1) to summarise theoretical knowledge on the perception of voice in radio from a gender perspective, (2) to empirically verify listeners' preferences when comparing professional male and female voices under standardised conditions, and (3) to propose practical recommendations for editorial teams regarding casting and voice coaching, sound design, and the transparent use of AI voices. This paper combines a historical-theoretical framework with a sociophonetic perspective on the acoustic properties of the voice, and presents preliminary findings that highlight persistent stereotypes, but also a possible generational shift in preferences. The aim is to provide a basis for informed decision-making regarding voice representation, so that “who is speaking” is not more important than “how and what they are saying”.

1.1 A Brief History of Radio Broadcasting

The roots of radio broadcasting date back to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when Guglielmo Marconi and Lee de Forest experimented with wireless signal transmission. The first official broadcast took place on 2 November 1920 in Pittsburgh, when KDKA broadcast the results of the presidential election between Warren G. Harding and James Cox (Sterling & Kittross, 2001; CBS News, 2012), marking the beginning of public radio.

Gender dynamics in the early days of radio. The early days of radio broadcasting were marked by pronounced gender hierarchies. Male voices dominated, embodying technical competence, credibility and authority (Briggs, 1995), whilst female voices were primarily employed in aesthetic or entertainment roles – singing, storytelling or on programmes devoted to culture and domestic topics (Wood, 1994). Only a handful of women worked as presenters at the BBC, and they faced institutional resistance. The “neutral” radio voice took the form of a male voice – calm, deep and emotionally restrained. Kay (2020) and Van Bauwel & Krijnen (2021) argue that these notions of “vocal authority” reflected communicative injustices rooted in gender power relations, which encoded cultural hierarchies placing men in the position of reason and truth, and women in the position of emotion and empathy.

The Golden Age of Radio and the Second World War. Between 1920 and 1950, male voices became firmly established as the professional norm: announcers projected an air of authority and rationality that society traditionally associated with masculinity (Sterling & Kittross, 2001; Wood, 1994), while women appeared only in highly gendered formats such as children's programmes or home advice shows (Kay, 2020). During the Second World War and the Cold War, broadcasters such as the BBC Overseas Service, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe relied on charismatic male voices to convey patriotism and reliability (Heil, 2003), whilst women worked behind the scenes as translators and researchers (Kay, 2020; Mendes et al., 2018). Exceptions, such as the war correspondent Mary Marvin Breckinridge, however, demonstrated that vocal credibility is not necessarily a male trait – and at the same time suggested that vocal expression can be a site of resistance to gendered communication norms (Kay, 2020).

The era of television and digital emancipation. The rise of television in the 1950s spurred the diversification of radio and opened up space for community stations, which, through programmes for women and minority groups, challenged male-dominated institutions (Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021; Wood, 1994). Feminist movements from the 1960s onwards accelerated institutional inclusion – Scandinavian public service broadcasters incorporated gender equality directly into their programming strategies (Mendes et al., 2018). Kay (2020) argues that the acceptance of women as newsreaders symbolised a broader dismantling of communicative injustice. The subsequent rise of FM radio and podcasting further disrupted the hierarchies that had previously barred access: women were thus able to bypass the “neutral” male voice of authority and enter the public discourse on their own terms through interviews, commentary and storytelling (Kay, 2020; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021). Hendy (2000) notes that digital media and on-demand audio promote a relational model of listening that values emotional connection as much as factual accuracy – shifts that foreshadow current discussions on synthetic voices and artificial intelligence (Furtáková, 2023; Oyedokun, 2023).

The present: The hybridisation of vocal norms. In the 21st century, public broadcasters are increasingly adopting gender balance policies, reflecting a recognition that vocal representation is never neutral, but rather socially constructed (Kay, 2020; Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021). Research confirms context-dependent patterns: female voices are perceived as warmer in health and community programmes, whilst male voices retain associations with authority in news reporting (Roche et al., 2023; Holmberg et al., 2024; Oyedokun, 2023). AI-generated voices further complicate this situation – the default feminisation of digital assistants demonstrates how historical hierarchies persist in a technologically mediated form (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Schiffrin, 2024). Kay (2020) emphasises that inclusive voice design requires active attention to communicative justice, so that synthetic voices reflect diversity rather than reproducing dominant norms. Today’s audio environment is thus characterised by hybridisation: the coexistence of human and synthetic voices, the interplay of authority and empathy, and the multitude of vocal identities that together shape contemporary sound culture.

1.2 Basic Characteristics of Radio Broadcasting

Radio communicates exclusively through sound – the spoken word, music and sound effects. The voice therefore serves both an informative and an identifying function: listeners form mental images of presenters based on the tone, timbre and rhythm of their voices. From the very beginning of broadcasting, male voices dominated news and current affairs programmes, where authority and credibility were expected, whilst female voices were used in cultural, lifestyle and entertainment programmes – reflecting broader gender stereotypes (Crisell, 1994; Brník et al., 2020). More recent studies confirm that this gender-based perception persists: male voices continue to be rated as serious and objective, while female voices are perceived as emotional or empathetic (Roche et al., 2023; Holmberg et al., 2024).

Intimacy, transience and intelligibility. The deeply personal nature of radio communication, with a voice speaking directly into the listener’s ear, creates the illusion of a personal dialogue (Hendy, 2000; McLeish, 2005). Female voices are often perceived as warmer and more emotionally open, making them effective in talk shows and health communication (Kay, 2020; Holmberg et al., 2024); however, researchers caution that such perceptions reflect socially constructed gender norms rather than natural differences (Gill & Orgad, 2018). As radio is an ephemeral medium that takes place in real time with no possibility of rewind, listeners subconsciously associate a lower pitch and slower tempo with competence and authority, whilst coding expressiveness as feminine and approachable, yet less trustworthy (Roche et al., 2023; Kay, 2020). However, modern acoustic research demonstrates that intelligibility depends more on voice training and modulation than on gender (Titze, 2000; Kent & Read, 2002): the perceived advantage of male

speech in noisy environments was the result of social norms and production practices, not biological superiority (Roche et al., 2023).

As a flexible and cost-effective medium, radio has gradually expanded the representation of female voices in journalism, news reporting and sports commentary, reflecting a growing recognition that credibility is no longer defined by the gender of the voice (Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021; Hendy, 2000; Kay, 2020). Understanding these dynamics is key for radio professionals striving for a more equitable and representative audio landscape.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Voice as a Carrier of Identity in the Media

The voice is the result of a complex physiological process involving the coordinated activity of the respiratory system, the vocal cords and articulators such as the tongue, lips and soft palate. Voice production begins with the exhalation of air from the lungs, which causes the vocal cords in the larynx to vibrate; this is known as phonation (Titze, 2000). The vibration of the vocal cords generates a fundamental sound, which the articulatory structures shape into specific speech sounds.

One of the key acoustic parameters of the human voice is the fundamental frequency (F_0), which determines the pitch of the voice and is related to the tension and length of the vocal cords. Male voices generally have a lower fundamental frequency (on average around 100 to 120 Hz), whilst female voices range from approximately 180 to 250 Hz (Baken & Orlikoff, 2000). Another important group of acoustic properties are formant frequencies ($F_1, F_2, F_3...$), which are related to the resonant properties of the vocal tract and determine the quality and intelligibility of vowels. Formants arise from the filtering function of supralaryngeal structures, and their values are influenced by the length, shape and configuration of the vocal tract (Kent & Read, 2002).

These acoustic properties are determined partly by anatomical factors, such as biological sex, as men typically have a longer and wider vocal tract, and partly by learned articulatory habits developed during language acquisition. Speech production is also conditioned by the cultural and linguistic environment: differences in articulation between languages lead to different vocal habits (Laver, 1994). The perception of the voice and its characteristics, such as “masculinity” or “femininity”, cannot therefore be reduced to biological traits. It also encompasses learned socio-phonetic elements (Zimman, 2012).

In radio broadcasting, the voice is the most important element of media communication. Unlike visual media, radio lacks images, and so all messages, meanings, emotions and the speaker’s identity are conveyed exclusively through the voice. The voice becomes not only a carrier of information, but also a socially and culturally legible sign that the listener automatically interprets. Its acoustic properties, such as pitch, speech rate, intonation, articulation and volume, play a key role in shaping the impression of the speaker. They convey not only linguistic information but also non-verbal signals about age, gender, emotional state and social status. For example, a higher pitch is often perceived as a sign of youth or femininity, whilst a lower voice is associated with authority, dominance and competence (Roche et al., 2023).

The acoustic properties of the voice cannot, therefore, be interpreted solely as physiological givens. They are culturally encoded and semantically defined, which means that the voice becomes both a vehicle for and a product of social identity (Kay, 2020). In the media, and particularly in radio, where the visual element is absent, the voice has an even more pronounced representational function. It becomes the main channel through which listeners form an impression of the speaker and their social status. Gender stereotypes present in radio are therefore not merely part of individual perception, but are systematically reinforced by the media discourse itself.

One of the most prominent categories that listeners automatically decode is gender identity. For several decades, research has focused on so-called socio-indexical features, which enable listeners to identify the speaker's gender, age, regional accent or emotional state (Strand, 1999; Nygaard & Queen, 2008). These features are deeply rooted in cultural contexts and significantly influence the perception of the speaker. Linguistic research has also found that gentleness and caution in speech are socially associated with femininity, whilst assertiveness and emphasis are associated with masculinity. These notions are reflected in media practice: male voices are more frequently heard in positions of authority and expertise, whilst female voices are stereotypically associated with emotional, empathetic or service-oriented roles.

Gender as a social category is reflected not only in what the speaker says, but particularly in how they say it. These stereotypes have concrete consequences in media practice: women appear more frequently in entertainment and emotional formats, whilst men dominate news reporting and commentary, that is, in areas perceived as the bearers of professional and social discourse (Kay, 2020).

There are currently efforts to challenge traditional norms of vocal representation in the media. Feminist media criticism highlights the need for greater diversity of voices on air and the necessity of critically reflecting on gender inequalities in the presentation of speech (Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021). Radio occupies a unique position in this process, as its power lies in its ability to convey intimacy, emotion and closeness without a visual filter. However, it is precisely the absence of images that creates space for stereotypes to be projected more strongly into sound. We examine gender stereotypes in greater detail in a separate subchapter.

2.2 Gender Stereotypes and Their Impact on the Perception of the Voice

Although radio offers scope for diverse vocal expressions, their perception is shaped primarily by gender stereotypes, which also influence professional decision-making in media. Gender stereotypes function here not only as social expectations but also as active filters through which listeners interpret the characteristics of a voice.

One of the most visible mechanisms is intonation. A study by Roche et al. (2023) showed that the same intonation pattern, known as *uptalk*, was perceived as a sign of uncertainty only in female voices. In male voices, the same expression did not evoke the same impression, pointing to a marked asymmetry in the assessment of vocal confidence. When respondents did not know the speaker's gender, this effect was significantly weakened. This suggests that stereotypes come into play primarily when the listener "knows who they are listening to".

Similar conclusions were reached by Holmberg et al. (2024), who found that even experts, specifically speech and language therapists and voice therapists, evaluate the same voice differently depending on whether it is presented to them as male or female. These results show that gender biases regarding the voice are deeply ingrained and difficult to consciously influence.

In media practice, these preferences are reflected in the casting of roles across different genres. As Kay (2020) points out, the voice is not perceived as a neutral entity in the media but is framed by genre expectations as well as audience expectations. News remains the domain of male voices, whilst female voices are more frequently found in entertainment or emotionally charged formats (Wood, 1994; Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021).

These mechanisms lead to communicative injustice: certain voices are devalued not for their content, but for who is speaking to them (Kay, 2020). In radio, where the voice represents the speaker's entire persona, these biases are amplified. The result is that even though women have formal access to the microphone, their voices may not be perceived as equal.

It is therefore not enough simply to increase the quantitative representation of women's voices. It is important to reflect on the stereotypical ways in which they are assessed and to actively challenge them. Radio has great potential in this regard: as a medium of trust, closeness and personal connection, it can act as a counterbalance to the stereotypical division of airtime.

2.3 The Voice in the Context of Radio Broadcasting

As one of the oldest forms of public communication, radio broadcasting has long reproduced gender hierarchies in the distribution of speaking roles. Although technologies and formats have evolved, gender stratification in broadcasting persists, often hidden behind professional conventions and listener expectations. In news and analysis formats, male voices associated with authority, rationality and objectivity still predominate. Female voices, by contrast, appear more frequently in entertainment, lifestyle or morning programmes, where they are expected to speak in a pleasant, friendly and emotionally accessible manner (Wood, 1994; Kay, 2020; Avilés Rodilla & Venier, 2024).

This division is not accidental. It stems from long-standing media stereotypes that attribute competence, self-confidence and stability to male voices, while associating female voices with emotion, care and support. Female voices therefore appear on air as supplementary rather than authoritative. Kay (2020) points out that such patterns are not merely the result of individual editorial decisions, but are systematically reinforced by institutional norms, listener feedback and subtle forms of gendered voice management. Gender coding of vocal expression is also illustrated by research in the fields of advertising and children's broadcasting. Johnson and Young (2002) found that television adverts aimed at children employed distinct vocal strategies: toys for boys were promoted by male voices emphasising strength and control, while toys for girls were promoted by female voices evoking affection, care and passivity. These findings demonstrate how vocal gender coding functions as a symbolic expression of power, with this effect extending to radio, where the voice serves both as a mediator and as a marker of gender identity.

Similar trends can be observed in the Slovak radio landscape: female voices typically feature in emotional or entertainment programmes, whilst male voices dominate news, politics and sport. This pattern reflects broader cultural stereotypes that associate women with communal attributes such as empathy, warmth and expressiveness, and men with agentic traits such as authority, decisiveness and expertise (Brník et al., 2020; Van Bauwel & Krijnen, 2021). Popa & Gavriliiu (2015) emphasise that the media play a key role in creating and maintaining these gender representations. On the radio, these representations are not visual but auditory. They manifest through tone, rhythm and intonation. When a particular type of voice is consistently associated with news, authority or truth, a norm emerges that limits vocal diversity.

The voice on the radio is therefore not merely a technical tool of communication, but also an instrument of symbolic power. Representation on air determines who is heard, in which genres, and with what degree of credibility. It is therefore essential for radio organisations to consciously consider gender patterns when casting voices and to actively promote greater inclusivity and diversity in vocal representation.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence and Synthetic Voices in the Radio Environment

The development of artificial intelligence is fundamentally changing the way radio content is created and distributed, including in terms of the voice as a carrier of information. At the forefront of these changes are synthetic voices created using neural networks, generative

language models and voice cloning technologies. The specialist literature distinguishes between three basic categories:

- synthesised (created artificially, without a real model);
- cloned (e.g. based on real voices); and
- generative (production takes place in real time based on messages, data and language inputs) (Gómez López, 2024; Singh, 2024).

One of the most talked-about cases was the deployment of AI Ashley, a voice clone of the American presenter Ashley Elzinga, who hosted an entire shift on Live 95.5 radio in Portland. This experiment sparked a wide-ranging debate on the authenticity of the voice, jobs and the audience's relationship with synthetic speech (Gómez López, 2024). In Europe, a similar project was carried out in Spain under the name Intar Radio, presented as the country's first radio station entirely controlled by artificial intelligence. However, listeners perceived the synthetic voices as monotonous, emotionally empty and less trustworthy than human voices (Gómez López, 2024).

Similar results were obtained in an experiment by the Swiss station Couleur 3, where AI presenters broadcast at weekends. Although this was a planned test of technological capabilities, listeners' reactions were predominantly negative: they missed authenticity and a sense of live interaction (Keaten, 2023). A case study shows that although synthetic voices mimic linguistic patterns, they are unable to express intonational dynamics, emotions or natural rhythm in the same way as humans (Singh, 2024).

The Slovak context is illustrated by research from the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at UCM, which examined the ability of artificial intelligence to create news formats. It turned out that the outputs generated by tools such as ChatGPT were not suitable for immediate broadcast without editorial intervention: they were characterised by linguistic inaccuracies, a lack of context and insufficient stylistic variety (Furtáková, 2023). However, artificial intelligence is already present in other formats on Slovak radio. Fun Radio tested a programme in which one part of the show was prepared by presenter Sajfa and the other by artificial intelligence. The results were clear: listeners preferred the human voice, which they considered more authentic, more entertaining and more natural (Gómez López, 2024).

From the audience's perspective, the credibility of the voice is key. Research shows that although artificial intelligence can be informative, the human voice is still significantly preferred in news reporting, journalism and emotionally charged formats (Avilés Rodilla & Venier, 2024). In experiments assessing the emotional impact of speech, AI voices were described as "cold", "predictable" and "unremarkable", which is directly linked to their limited intonational flexibility (Yaguana Romero et al., 2022).

Ethical issues in this area are becoming increasingly pressing. In the context of so-called deepfake audio, concerns are growing about the misuse of cloned voices for manipulation, the spread of disinformation or breaches of privacy. In the UK, for example, there was a fraud case in which a deepfake voice was used to persuade a manager to transfer funds (Singh, 2024). UNESCO (Schiffrin, 2024), the European Commission (2019) and other institutions therefore recommend developing frameworks for the regulated and transparent use of artificial intelligence in the media.

The voice of artificial intelligence is thus not merely a technological novelty, but is changing the cultural perception of spoken communication. Radio, as a medium of trust and intimacy, must carefully take these changes into account. Authenticity, spontaneity and emotional adaptability remain the domain of humans, at least for now.

3 Methodology

This research, conducted in autumn 2024, set out to explore how listeners perceive the appeal and credibility of male and female voices in radio broadcasting. We focused on differences in preferences between different types of voices and on which voices were rated most positively.

Research Questions

Based on the research objective, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What type of voice (male or female) do listeners prefer in radio news broadcasts?
2. In which radio broadcast formats can listeners envisage a female voice as being on a par with a male voice?
3. What acoustic and qualitative characteristics do listeners attribute to male and female voices?
4. Are there identifiable links between the evaluation of a voice and its verbal description?

The research was conducted using a quantitative questionnaire containing audio samples of two real human voices: a male voice (presenter No. 1) and a female voice (presenter No. 2). After listening to the samples, respondents rated the voice on a scale of 0 to 10, indicated the type of programme in which they could best imagine the voice (news, sport, weather), and described it in three words. The study involved 32 respondents of various ages and genders. The selection was deliberate and focused on people who actively listen to the radio or podcasts, with all age groups from 18 to 60 represented. A subgroup of 16 respondents answered questions regarding format preferences.

Participants were played audio samples of a male and female presenter reading the same text.

Presenter No. 1 was a middle-aged man, a professional presenter on Expres, Slovakia's most listened-to radio station.

Presenter No. 2 was a middle-aged woman, a professional presenter at the same station. Each voice was played separately and in the same order for all participants, thereby ensuring standardised conditions. The samples were recorded in a neutral studio environment without sound effects, and data were collected via an online questionnaire which respondents completed while listening to the recordings.

The ratings obtained were analysed using descriptive statistics, specifically the arithmetic mean. At this stage, we focused on each presenter's main rating, while duplicate or secondary questions were not included in the analysis. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the research and participation was voluntary. No personally identifiable information was recorded during data collection, and all responses were processed anonymously.

4 Results

The research focused on the perception of two real voices: male (editor No. 1) and female (editor No. 2), with the aim of determining which of them elicited a more favourable evaluation from the listeners. Both editors read the same text in a neutral tone, with the difference between them lying primarily in gender and the acoustic characteristics of their voices.

Based on the responses of 32 participants, an arithmetic mean score was calculated for each voice:

- Presenter No. 1 (male voice): average 7.88 / 10
- Presenter No. 2 (female voice): average 7.44/10

The male voice was therefore perceived slightly more favourably than the female voice. Although the difference is relatively small (0.44 points), on a scale of 0 to 10 it represents a noticeable trend towards a preference for the male voice. Respondents also answered the question of in which formats they could envisage using the voice in question.

Results

News

- Male voice: 9 respondents
- Female voice: 4 respondents
- Don't know: 3 respondents

Sport and weather

- Female voice: 8 respondents
- Male voice: 6 respondents
- Don't know: 2 respondents

Male voices were preferred in news programmes, while female voices were slightly more prevalent in sports and service programmes. It is interesting to compare these preferences by the respondents' age. The chart below provides a more detailed view of how preferences for male and female voices differ across age groups in the context of news and sports or lifestyle formats.

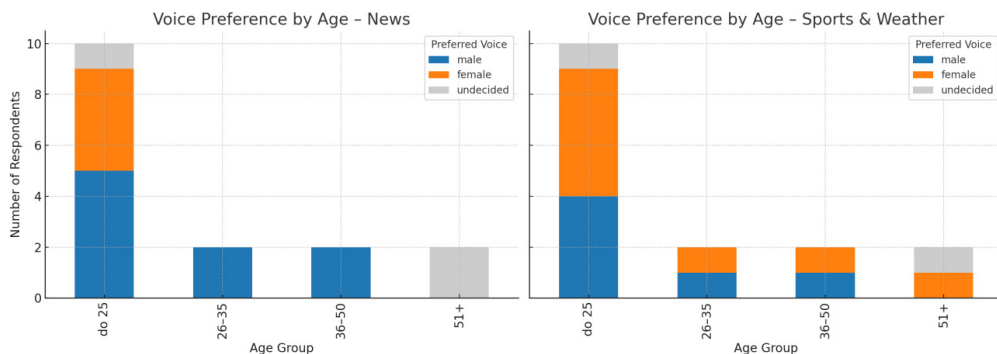


Figure 1: Voice preferences by age group and format

Source: own processing, 2026

When asked which voice they would prefer in news programmes, a preference for male voices prevails across all age groups, with the preference being most pronounced in the 26 to 35 age group. However, the under-25 age group shows a relatively balanced distribution between male and female voices, which may indicate an emerging shift in generational perceptions of vocal authority. The 36 and over age groups remain faithful to the traditional pattern, in which the male voice holds a stronger position.

The situation is different for formats such as sport and weather. Here, female voices received greater support across all age groups up to 50 years old, with the most significant difference evident among younger respondents. This may reflect the perception of female voices as more pleasant, approachable and suitable for lighter, less formal programmes. However, the 51+ age group still prefers a male voice in this format, confirming that age significantly influences voice preferences in the media.

The results point to persistent stereotypes in the perception of voices, but at the same time suggest a generational shift, particularly among younger listeners, who are less strict in associating specific voices with specific genres. This development opens up scope for a more flexible and gender-balanced approach to voice representation in radio broadcasting.

In addition to numerical ratings, respondents were asked to describe the voices of individual presenters in three words. The aim was to gain a qualitative insight into which voice attributes are perceived as positive, neutral or negative, and how these assessments differ between male and female voices.

Word	Number of occurrences
pleasant	4
quick	3
concise	2
clear	2
good	2

Table 1: Editor No. 1 (male voice) – keywords and their frequency

Source: own processing, 2026

Respondents gravitated towards words like “pleasant”, “concise” and “fast”, qualities that tend to signal professional delivery, and the repeated use of “clear” further reinforced this positive impression.

Word	Number of occurrences
clear	4
monotonous	3
fluent	2
more natural	2
calm	2

Table 2: Presenter No. 2 (female voice) – keywords and their frequency

Source: own processing, 2026

Although the presenter was often described as “clear” and “fluent”, critical assessments also emerged, such as “monotonous”. Words such as “calm” and “more natural” suggest that her voice came across as gentler and less dynamic. The balanced occurrence of positive and slightly negative descriptions points to an overall neutral to positive perception, though without any significant emotional impact.

Given the same text content and identical playback conditions, this difference can be interpreted as a manifestation of gender-based perception of the voice, which confirms assumptions from the academic literature. As noted by Wood (1994) and Kay (2020), male voices are more frequently associated with authority, objectivity and credibility in the media. Female voices, although generally rated as pleasant or empathetic, tend to be perceived as less competent in news and serious formats.

Research has also confirmed a tendency for listeners to subconsciously attribute greater value to male voices, even in cases where no significant differences in speech, pronunciation or quality of expression were recorded. It is therefore important to view such preferences critically, particularly in the context of maintaining gender balance in the media.

5 Discussion

The voice in radio broadcasting is not perceived as a neutral entity, but as a meaning-coded sign that listeners interpret on the basis of cultural expectations, personal experiences and gender stereotypes. The male voice (presenter No. 1) was rated higher not only on the attractiveness scale, but also in the context of its use in news reporting, while the female voice (presenter No. 2) found more favourable application in lighter programmes, such as weather

and sports reports. These results are consistent with previous research on the media portrayal of the voice (Kay, 2020; Wood, 1994), which repeatedly highlights that male voices are socially coded as “bearers of authority”, while female voices are associated with empathy, emotionality or a service-oriented approach. In practice, this means that even if a female voice is intelligible and phonetically correct, in the context of factual genres such as news reporting, it may not be perceived as equally “credible”.

The difference in ratings itself was not significant: male presenter No. 1 scored 7.88 compared to 7.44 for female presenter No. 2, which may suggest that listeners’ perceptions are gradually changing, partly due to the greater representation of female voices in contemporary media production. However, implicit gender stereotypes continue to influence the choice of voice by genre, as confirmed by the respondents’ verbal descriptions. Presenter No. 1 was characterised as “pleasant”, “clear” and “concise”, attributes typically associated with competence and efficiency, whilst Presenter No. 2 was rated as “clear” and “fluent”, though several respondents also used the term “monotonous”. The same speaking style can therefore be evaluated differently for different genders, while the verbal descriptions also correlate with the numerical ratings, which attests to the methodological consistency of the research.

The results thus reflect not only the quality of the voices themselves, but also the listeners’ assumptions based on long-established media structures. Although the speech of both presenters was identical in content and phonetically correct, the evaluation also depended on the extent to which the voice met the expectations associated with a specific format.

Age as a Factor in Voice Preference

The age of the respondents was also an important variable in the research. In news reporting, all age groups preferred male voices, but this was most pronounced in the 26 to 35 age group. Younger respondents under 25 showed greater openness to female voices, which may indicate a gradual generational shift in the perception of vocal authority. In the areas of sport and weather, a preference for female voices prevailed in all categories up to the age of 50, whilst only the oldest group (51+) retained a more traditional pattern and preferred male voices in this format as well. These results confirm that voice preference is not merely a matter of gender, but also of generational attitudes: younger listeners are more willing to accept female voices even in traditionally male-dominated programmes.

Answers to the Research Questions

1. What type of voice (male or female) do listeners prefer in radio news broadcasts?

The results clearly showed that male voices dominated news broadcasts. Of the total of 16 respondents who answered this question, 9 preferred a male voice, 4 a female voice, and 3 were undecided. Male voices are perceived as more suitable for serious and factual programmes, which confirms the established stereotype linking the male voice with authority and objectivity.

2. In which radio broadcast formats can listeners imagine a female voice as being on a par with a male voice?

In the case of formats such as sport and weather, the situation was the opposite: 8 respondents preferred a female voice, 6 a male voice, and 2 were undecided. A female voice is more often perceived as suitable for less formal, more dynamic or more emotionally charged programmes.

3. What acoustic and qualitative characteristics do listeners attribute to male and female voices?

Verbal descriptions revealed differences in the perception of both voices. Presenter No. 1 was characterised as “pleasant”, “concise”, “clear” and “fast”, which are attributes typical of professional and effective speech. Female Presenter No. 2 was most frequently described as “clear”, “fluent” and “calm”, though the term “monotonous” also appeared, suggesting lower perceived dynamics or emotional variability. The male voice was generally rated as more dynamic and professional, while the female voice was rated as calmer and more intelligible, but less expressive.

4. Are there any identifiable correlations between the evaluation of the voice and its verbal description?

Yes. Editor No. 1, who received the highest numerical rating (7.88/10), was described predominantly in positive terms: terms such as “pleasant”, “concise” and “clear” confirm the reasons for his preference. Presenter No. 2, with a rating of 7.44/10, was also frequently described as “clear”, though the occurrence of terms such as “monotonous” or “too calm” suggests certain reservations regarding the expressiveness of her delivery. The verbal descriptions thus reflect the numerical ratings well and provide a comprehensible explanation for them.

Gender stereotypes in the perception of radio voices clearly persist. Male voices are intuitively preferred in authoritative roles, while female voices receive a more positive response in more relaxed or service-oriented programmes. However, the assessment is not strictly black and white: respondents attributed qualities such as clarity and pleasantness to both genders, which creates scope for balanced representation on air. The results thus raise the question of how the media can take a more sensitive approach to gender balance when selecting voices. What matters is that voices are assessed on the quality of their delivery, not the gender of the person behind them.

6 Conclusion

This study focused on how gender-coded voice norms shape perceptions of credibility, competence and genre appropriateness in radio broadcasting. The theoretical analysis traced the historical development from the male-dominated early days of radio, through the gradual but incomplete emancipation of female voices, to the current era of artificial intelligence’s synthetic voices. An empirical pilot study confirmed persistent stereotypical attributes: the male voice received a higher average rating (7.88/10) and was more frequently preferred in news programmes, while the female voice slightly predominated in sports and service formats. A lexical analysis of listeners’ descriptions further confirmed this asymmetry: male voices were associated with professionalism and conciseness, while female voices, although rated predominantly positively, also earned the critical label “monotonous”.

Generational data, however, offer a cautiously optimistic sign: respondents aged 25 and under expressed more balanced preferences, suggesting a gradual normative shift. These findings support practical editorial interventions, including voice casting with a focus on diversity, targeted voice coaching, contextual sound design and genre-framing strategies, which can collectively be termed “diversity design”. In the case of AI voices, the evidence suggests transparency and restraint: synthetic voices may serve utilitarian segments, but human authenticity and intonational richness remain crucial in trust-sensitive formats such as news.

The study is limited by its pilot scale (total N = 32; N = 16 for format-related questions) and the use of a single pair of voices from a single Slovak station. Future research should utilise larger, stratified samples, multiple voice pairs across different languages and stations, and longitudinal designs to track generational changes. The key recommendation remains the same: to evaluate voices based on performance and contextual appropriateness, not gender, and to systematically address perceived audience biases through media literacy, editorial transparency and institutional commitments to diversity.

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