

## VERBALIZATION OF THE CONCEPT *HUMAN RIGHTS* IN ANALYTICAL REPORTS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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**Lytyvnenko H.** Verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS in analytical reports of non-governmental organizations; кількість бібліографічних джерел – 16; мова англійська.

**Abstract.** The article examines the verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS in analytical reports of non-governmental organizations which deal with the protection and raising awareness of human rights infringements around the world. The topicality of the research was substantiated by the growing importance of the agenda of such organizations as well as their discursive and argumentative strategies of drawing public's attention to growing concerns. The analysis of previous studies proves that research dedicated to the peculiarities of legal discourse and verbalization of the concepts concerning human activity is highly relevant. However, NGO reporting was rarely addressed, which justified the aim of the research. Through critical discourse and lexical-semantic analysis, the research reveals how lexical choices construct and represent human rights violations, with the ultimate aim of informing the public and promoting advocacy-based agenda.

Drawing on a corpus of NGO texts, released by two prominent organizations Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, the research identifies core and peripheral lexical means used to construct HUMAN RIGHTS. The author analysed lexicographic definitions of two key terms within the research – 'human rights' and 'rights' with the further aim of establishing how they function as anchors in constructing NGOs' rhetoric. Peripheral means included negatively marked lexemes denoting neglect (*inequality, ill-treatment* etc), violations (*crackdown against, persecution, abuse* etc), main groups (victims and perpetrators). Some notable lexical units were analysed, in particular 'draconian', 'apartheid', 'marginalization' which actively function within this discourse to broaden the scope of verbalization of HUMAN RIGHTS. The author also pointed out the difference in the representation of the concept within official legal discourse, which is usually neutral and abstract, and NGO reporting which employs emotionally-charged lexis in understanding of HUMAN RIGHTS. The summary gives an outline of relevant findings and discusses potential pedagogical expediency of introducing this source material in ESP classes.

**Keywords:** human rights, discourse analysis, analytical reports, language representation, argumentative strategies.

**Problem statement.** In the modern globalized world, the problem of respecting human rights on a global scale is becoming particularly urgent in connection with military conflicts, migration crises, political instability and the growth of cases of systemic violations of fundamental freedoms. Hence, the discourse of human rights is constantly transforming, reflecting both socio-political changes and public opinion. Human rights are not only a legal category reflected in international documents or court rulings, but also a complex socio-cultural and axiological phenomenon.

An important role in spreading awareness of current issues related to the infringement of human rights lies within open-access sources, including social media platforms, mass media, and analytical reports produced by international non-governmental organizations (hereinafter – NGOs) such as Amnesty International. Given the contemporary reality marked by digitalization, these channels have become an immediate source of transparency in reporting, impartiality, informing the public and can also shape the way human rights issues are perceived and interpreted.

Consequently, a steady trend in the field of linguistics and translation studies is being observed, namely the study of concepts and the peculiarities of their verbalization in different types of discourse. Particular attention is usually paid to language means that surround the concept and bring its emotive and evalu-

ative components. In light of recent socio-political issues, a vast majority of studies takes into consideration concepts within legal and political discourse. Typically, the source material for such research includes political speeches, newspaper articles or official documents, which provide invaluable insight into how key concepts are framed and interpreted.

Analytical reports, on the other hand, represent a form of institutional discourse in which human rights have a central place. Therefore, the study of the verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS in the analytical reports of NGOs appears both relevant and methodologically justified.

**Analysis of the previous research.** Despite the significant number of studies devoted to legal discourse, its features, translation peculiarities and critical discourse analysis of texts of international organizations, the issue of verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS as a cognitive structure in analytical reports remains insufficiently systematized. Research by L. Radelytska and M. Dilai on corpus-based approach to the analysis of the verbalization of the concept of DIGNITY in Ukrainian and English media discourse [Раделицька, Ділай 2025] is notable in relation to this article since DIGNITY forms an integral part of the broader concept of human rights, demonstrating how linguistic means can reveal both conceptual structure and evaluative nuances. Another vital investigation in

the field was carried out by V. Lykina on the verbalization of the concept DEMOCRACY in Anglophone political discourse [Лікіна 2022]

Among other significant contributions, it is necessary to highlight the one by V. Blidchenko-Naiko on specifics of translation rendering of concept JUSTICE / СПРАВЕДЛИВИСТЬ in Ukrainian translations of English international legal discourse [Блідченко-Найко 2022]. Despite the fact that the researcher has mostly focused on treaties and declarations, justice is an integral element of the broader concept of human rights.

A more detailed insight into NGOs' documents, in particular Amnesty International, is given in Wine Tisseur's paper "Amnesty International's Language Strategy Put into Practice: A Case Study of the Translation of Press Releases" [Tisseur 2012]. The paper aimed to illustrate how the strategic use of language and translation plays a vital role in mediating the NGO's message and in contributing to its visibility and success. The author drew on the ideas expressed in a more global research by A.M. Clark "Diplomacy of conscience. Amnesty International and changing human rights norms" [Clark 2001], which is highly relevant in the scope of the research. It has been mentioned that NGOs play a crucial role in shaping global human rights discourse through strategic use of language and advocacy. This perspective provides a valuable framework for analyzing the verbalization of the concept of human rights in analytical reports of NGOs.

The issue under consideration has also been addressed in the work of T. Sikorskyi on the conceptual modeling of "HUMAN RIGHTS" within dimensions of political, legal and business discourses [Сікорський 2014].

**Research aim and objectives.** The aim of the research is to analyze language means employed in verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS in analytical reports of NGOs in particular Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (hereinafter – AI and HRW respectively). The study further seeks to identify key lexical and stylistic means as well as evaluate how language choice contributes to the global understanding of the concept.

**Methods and techniques of the study.** The research is based on a combination of general scientific and linguistic methods. Given the aims of the article, the primary method was conceptual analysis, since it facilitates understanding of concepts, their components, features, properties. Additional methods included critical discourse analysis (hereinafter – CDA) and lexical-semantic analysis. Elements of CDA are utilized to reveal evaluative and persuasive strategies in representing human rights issues, since it is an approach to studying language that sees it as part of social life and, in the case of this research, how linguistic choices contribute to the description of reality in the context of advocacy. Lexical-semantic analysis is used to identify key thematic groups and recurrent collocations that constitute the key concept.

Source material in this research is the 2025 edition of AI's annual report "The State of the World's Human Rights" (report human rights concerns in 2024) and World Report 2026 (events of 2025) by HRW [Am-

nesty International 2025; Human Rights Watch 2026]. The reports cover key human rights issues across various regions, including countries in Asia, Europe and the Middle East, addressing the protection and violation of fundamental rights in diverse socio-political contexts and legal systems. Key domains in this article were women's rights, rights of minorities and issues concerning human rights defenders.

**Presentation of the basic material.** A primary notion in research of this kind is "concept". In the field of cognitive linguistics many definitions of "concept" may be found. This research understands it as 'a global mental unit, which represents a quantum of structured knowledge. The content of the concept includes information about objects, their properties, about what a person knows, thinks, assumes, imagines about objects in the world' [Тихоніна 2025, с. 231]. The starting point is the concept RIGHT/RIGHTS as the basic unit constituting broader notion of human rights:

1. 'the fact that a person or animal can expect to be treated in a fair, morally acceptable, or legal way, or to have the things that are necessary for life' [Cambridge Dictionary]
2. 'something to which one has a just claim' [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]
3. '...what you are morally or legally entitled to do or to have' [Collins Online Dictionary]

The concept HUMAN RIGHTS is, in and of itself, not homogeneous. However, it is understood that it constitutes claims belonging to each individual. To clarify, it is useful to consult dictionary definitions:

1. 'the basic rights to fair and moral treatment that every person is believed to have' [Cambridge Dictionary]
2. 'rights (such as freedom from unlawful imprisonment, torture, and execution) regarded as belonging fundamentally to all persons' [Merriam-Webster Dictionary]
3. 'basic rights which many societies believe that all people should have' [Collins Online Dictionary]

Although the wording slightly differs across the sources, the core emphasis is on fundamental entitlements inherent to every person. While some definitions highlight the moral aspect (as *belonging to all, should have*), others foreground the legal nature, which is particularly relevant for the present research, as it reflects the complex nature of the concept under analysis.

In a similar vein, T. Sikorskyi claims that the interpretation of "human rights" today is focused on clarifying the content of the components of terminological concepts: the right to personal freedom, the right to life, equality before the law, the right to choose religion, the right to education, etc., which complement the concept, specify and describe it. Different types of discourse create conditions for the actualization of different components of the conceptual content. However, the researcher also underlines that a complete understanding of the concept is possible only on the basis of an analysis of its functioning in different types of discourse [Сікорський 2014, с. 247].

The discourse under analysis in this research is the analytical reporting of two NGOs, namely AI and

HRW.V. Pylypak highlights that analytical discourse encompasses texts based on a problem, recommendations for its solution, and reasoned justification. Such texts spread ideas, values, beliefs, and influence the further actions of their addressees [Пилипак 2025, с. 202].

AI and HRW are NGOs aimed at monitoring, documenting and publicizing the facts of human rights violations in different countries of the world, all the while they are not promoted or incentivized by any government. Their texts combine legal argumentation, references to national legislation, factual documentation as well as evaluative component and persuasive techniques with the ultimate aim of facilitating the protection of human rights.

It should also be mentioned that although such organizations cannot participate in norm drafting at a level equal to that of states, AI has been an active participant in the norm-drafting process at the UN. It has regularly participated in debates and lobbying over what should be included, or excluded, over nuances of wording, and over the projected and actual implications of how new formal norms may be framed. As the case studies will show, AI became a key actor and commentator in the construction of international norms on human rights [Clark 2001, p. 35].

Being backed by public support and receiving substantial visibility only strengthens the soft power of this medium. Unlike court decisions, legislation, academic discourse and even legal fiction, analytical reports and media coverage spread awareness, shape public opinion, and construct particular narratives around human rights.

As K. Reed convincingly claims: “Arguments framed on legal grounds – where the content of the argument, what it is that the speaker wants the recipient to do, is conditioned on an appeal to a legal reference – outperform those made without a legal frame. This appears especially pronounced when dealing with the most demanding human rights topics” [Reed 2025, p.12]. Consequently, the reports under analysis prove to be methodologically sound a reasonable source for linguistic analysis.

However, when deconstructing discursive strategies of NGOs, it is vital to be mindful of their discursive powers. As Ana Fernández-Aballí points out, NGOs are often criticized for reinforcing rather than transforming existing local and global power inequalities. This creates a significant challenge for such organizations, as it calls into question the extent to which their practices contribute to meaningful social change [Fernández-Aballí 2016, p.364].

Turning now to the main findings, dictionary meanings of HUMAN RIGHTS narrow down to mor-

al and legal frames. The core of the concept is a sensory-visual image, formed on the basis of personal experience. It is therefore extremely specific. The image, which is the basis for the concept, performs the functions of coding for it [Полюжин 2015, с.218]. The analysis of a selected corpus of analytical reports allows for delineation of a core consisting of lexemes and phrases that directly nominate HUMAN RIGHTS: *fundamental rights, access to rights, international human rights obligations, respect for rights, freedoms*. These units perform a nominative function and set the basic framework within which HUMAN RIGHTS appear as a universal value.

On the periphery is the “interpretive field of the concept”, which encompasses the assessments and interpretations of various features of the concept by speakers of the same language. These assessments are reflected, for example, in the use of proverbs and sayings and other collocations, as well as in other expressions that reflect the interpretation of individual conceptual features [Полюжин 2015, с.219]. The periphery of the analysed concept is represented by lexemes that describe the practical context of HUMAN RIGHTS, including specific violations, subjects of protection, institutional responses.

Given the mass-oriented approach of NGOs, their analytical reports tend to present the information in thematically structured clusters, grouping instances of abuse, highlighting certain spheres of violations and emphasising accountability [Amnesty International 2025]. AI systematically addresses the following groups of human rights: healthy environment, right to health, right to education, right to food, rights of refugees, migrants, internally displaced people, arbitrary arrests and detentions and enforced disappearances, media freedom, impunity and the right to truth, justice and reparation.

These groups can be broadly divided into two categories: basic (beyond codified law) and those associated with legal protection and institutional enforcement. These basic findings are consistent with T. Sikorskyi’s research, according to which lexico-semantic field of HUMAN RIGHTS consists of mega field and micro field [Сікорський 2014, с.247].

The conceptual structure may be further extended through several thematic domains located in the periphery. These domains specify the application of human rights to particular social groups and spheres of life. Within the framework of this research the groups including women’s rights, minority rights, and the protection of human rights defenders are taken into consideration. In the table below, the patterns of their verbalization (key lexical units, recurrent collocations, evaluative markers) are illustrated.

Table 1. Lexical markers of HUMAN RIGHTS

Domain	Lexical Markers
Women’s rights	<i>gender equality, reproductive rights, violence against women, gender-based violence, pregnant people’s right to..., gender persecution, gender apartheid</i> [Amnesty International 2025, p.71].
Minority rights	ethnic and minority populations, cultural figures, marginalization, calls for linguistic diversity, religious minorities, stigma and stereotypes, low-income individuals, indigenous persons.
Human rights defenders	<i>human rights defenders and activists, people critical of the authorities, others expressing dissenting views, opposition.</i>

To increase organizations' message, intensifying and emotionally-charged vocabulary is employed, in particular '*gender apartheid*' in regard to infringement of women's rights. According to Cambridge Dictionary, '*apartheid*' is now understood not only as a discriminatory system once present in South Africa, but as a "system of keeping groups of people separate and treating them differently, especially when this results in disadvantage for one group" [Cambridge Dictionary]. Such intertextuality contributes to the agenda by drawing on historically and culturally loaded references.

Alongside this term, the use of '*marginalization*' in regard to minority rights, allows for a broader categorization of affected groups, thereby expanding the semantic field of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS. Dictionary definitions center around this term as "the act of treating someone or something as if they are not important" [Cambridge Dictionary] and "the act of relegating someone or something to the fringes, out of the mainstream" [Collins Online Dictionary]. Recurrent usage of this term allows NGOs to make a stronger stress on the systemic nature of discrimination.

Consequently, since the primary aim of these reports is to spread awareness and turn public's attention towards current agenda, one of the most verbalized groups is that denoting violations. Following lexical means are recurrently employed: [groups] *have been denied rights, grave human rights violations, ill-treatment, rampant attacks, past abuses, crackdown against, clamp down on human rights, suspend fundamental rights, undermine the rule of law, ignored and circumvented judicial orders, use dehumanizing rhetoric, suppress languages and cultures, groups have been scapegoated, stigmatized human rights defenders* [Amnesty International 2025].

For a discursive analysis of abovementioned verbalizers, it is necessary to contrast their discursive usage with formal definitions. Some of the most recurring terms are *undermine* and *violations*. According to Cambridge Dictionary: '*to make someone less confident, less powerful, or less likely to succeed, or to make something weaker, often gradually*' [Cambridge Dictionary] and '*an action that breaks or acts against something, especially a law, agreement, principle, or something that should be treated with respect*' respectively.

NGOs in question employ these notions alongside intensifiers *significantly, severely, further, persistently (undermine); grave, multiple, numerous, serious, continuing* (violations) to highlight the extent of agenda, raise pragmatic effect, evoke sense of moral support and international reaction.

The usage of the adjective '*dehumanizing*' is particularly significant in the framework of research, as it directly invokes the core principle underlying HUMAN RIGHTS that is its universality. By describing certain practices, actions, rhetoric strategies and policies as dehumanizing, NGOs draw attention to oppressing nature of perpetrators.

Following this line of thought, some of the metaphorical means utilized in the reports are '*crackdown against*' and '*clampdown on*'. However, according to Cambridge Dictionary, '*crackdown*' is defined as 'a

situation in which someone starts to deal with bad or illegal behaviour in a more severe way' [Cambridge Dictionary], highlighting state's enforcing role.

Nonetheless, NGOs re-contextualise this expression to point out oppression and violation in regard to human rights: "Authorities continued the crackdown on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association" [Amnesty International 2025, p.360]. HRW uses the epithet '*draconian*' to give a more vivid portrayal of oppression and injustice, given the definition in Cambridge Dictionary 'laws, government actions, etc. are extremely severe, or go further than what is right or necessary' [Human Rights Watch 2026, p. 8; Cambridge Dictionary].

Alongside these lexemes, NGOs often refer to actions of '*scapegoating*' and '*stigmatizing*' to draw attention to dehumanizing strategies. These items contribute to the verbalization of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS by representing not only the fact of rights violations, but also the mechanisms of their discursive construction. In particular, the lexeme '*scapegoating*' is understood as "*the act of blaming a person or group for something bad that has happened or that someone else has done*", while '*stigmatized*' encodes being "... *unfairly regarded by many people as being bad or having something to be ashamed of*" [Cambridge Dictionary; Collins Online Dictionary].

Although these lexemes do not denote the concept directly, they structure the discursive periphery, highlighting social and moral dimensions of HUMAN RIGHTS. The lexeme '*dehumanizing*', in particular, occupies a borderline position between core and periphery, as it both elicits evaluative judgment and relates to the fundamental component of the concept i.e. dignity. Collectively, these lexical items contribute to broader verbalization of HUMAN RIGHTS in NGO discourse.

The next prominent group in the verbalization of HUMAN RIGHTS concept is participants. Following the analysis of AI and HRW reports, two broad groups can be distinguished: perpetrators and victims. The former is expressed through '*authorities*', '*governments*', '*militia and armed groups*', '*forces*', '*states*', whereas the latter: '*human rights defenders*', '*activists*', '*groups*', '*victims*'. Notably, these groups are strongly differentiated through grammatical patterns: reporting of perpetrators' actions tend to occur in active voice constructions, while victims are more frequently realized in passive structures: "Dozens of individuals were subjected to enforced disappearance", "Thousands of refugees and asylum seekers ... were arbitrarily detained and expelled" [Amnesty International 2025, p.154].

On the contrary, grammatical choice to give account of perpetrators' group serves to establish the source of aggression without any ambiguity regarding responsibility: "Authorities remained highly intolerant towards peaceful gatherings and other peaceful assemblies. Throughout the year, security forces prevented at least three human rights and cultural events from taking place and arrested at least 64 activists who attempted to organize peaceful gatherings" [Amnesty International 2025, p.75]. In line with previous findings, these ac-

counts are coupled with emotionally-charged lexis with the aim of emphasizing severity of accusations.

Thus, drawing on V. Lykina's approach to the verbalization of the DEMOCRACY concept and previous findings, within the structure of HUMAN RIGHTS concept three levels may be outlined: notional, perceptual and evaluative [Лікіна 2022, с.170]. Notional consists of the terminological core i.e. key nomination ('rights') and the accompanying lexemes. Perceptual is associated with the sensorimotor and social experience of the individual [ibid]. In NGO discourse, it is verbalized through the specification of actors, in particular through the lexemes 'victims', 'defenders', 'individuals', 'communities', 'governments', 'forces', 'states'.

Lastly, the evaluative level of HUMAN RIGHTS concept is manifested in its close connection with basic social values. Building on the results of previous findings, this level is represented through evaluative vocabulary, modal structures and rhetorical strategies that stress the inalienability of human rights and necessitate the need for their protection.

Despite not having any legislative powers, NGOs strongly influence human rights agenda, thus, the reports often include prescriptive measures. These communicative markers are also relevant in understanding HUMAN RIGHTS as a concept which does not function descriptively. AI gives guidelines to perpetrating groups using modal verbs which express necessity and obligation: 'All governments should implement...', 'Governments must end ... discrimination', 'Governments should adopt ... policies' [Amnesty International 2025]. Overall, the discourse of NGO analytical reports performs a number of different functions, such as informing, evaluating, condemning, and calling for action. HUMAN RIGHTS concept actively operates as a set of undivided freedoms which must be protected. Unlike other legal texts, where HUMAN RIGHTS are less verbalized and function within a set legislative frame, NGO reporting places HUMAN RIGHTS at the

centre of evaluative narrative. Where court ruling may refer to infringement, an NGO report the same breach as a 'crackdown'.

Consequently, the verbalization of the HUMAN RIGHTS concept in this context reveals a complex interplay between legal and evaluative language, strategies of persuasion and argumentation with the final aim of promoting organizations' agenda.

**Conclusions.** As it has been argued before, linguistic analysis of core concepts concerning human activity and society may be considered a promising aspect of research given the challenges of modern times. The article has conducted a linguistic analysis of the concept HUMAN RIGHTS, which has previously remained an under investigated issue in the field of philology.

This study adds to the body of knowledge around verbalization of concepts denoting societal values such as dignity, law, justice and others that receive significant public attention. However, an important novelty is the source material of the investigation, namely analytical reports of NGOs concerning protection and spreading awareness of human rights.

Drawing on previous findings in both domestic and foreign articles dedicated to the topic, this study confirms that the discourse of human rights in NGO rhetoric is public-oriented. The identified language means confirm goals of intensification and accountability. To conclude, the following features of the verbalization of HUMAN RIGHTS can be distinguished: prevalence of negatively marked lexis reflecting violations and oppression, use of intensifiers, interplay between active and passive structures in reporting two acting groups within the concept.

Prospects for further research may involve the integration of analytical human rights discourse into ESP classrooms, with the aim of enhancing students' critical thinking skills, language competence, involve interdisciplinary studies, promote intercultural competence through the analysis of authentic materials.

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## ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЯ КОНЦЕПТУ ПРАВА ЛЮДИНИ В АНАЛІТИЧНИХ ЗВІТАХ ПРАВОЗАХИСНИХ НЕУРЯДОВИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ

**Анотація.** У статті охарактеризовано вербалізацію поняття ПРАВА ЛЮДИНИ в аналітичних звітах неурядових організацій, що займаються захистом та підвищенням обізнаності суспільства про порушення прав людини у всьому світі. Закцентовано на зростаючій важливості роботи таких організацій, а також їх дискурсивних та аргументативних стратегіях привернення уваги громадськості до зростаючих проблем. На основі аналізу джерельної бази доведено, що наукові підходи, присвячені особливостям правового дискурсу та вербалізації понять, які стосуються людської діяльності, є актуальними. Водночас звітність неурядових організацій рідко ставала об'єктом наукового аналізу, що й зумовило мету цього дослідження. За допомогою критичного дискурс-аналізу та лексико-семантичного аналізу розкрито,

як лексичний вибір конструє та репрезентує порушення прав людини з метою інформування громадськості та просування правозахисної діяльності.

Спираючись на зміст текстів неурядових організацій, опублікованих Amnesty International та Human Rights Watch, авторка визначила основні та периферійні лексичні засоби, які використовуються для розгляду прав людини. Проаналізовано лексикографічні визначення ключових термінів дослідження: «права», «права людини» та окреслено їх роль у риторичі, що використовується неурядовими організаціями. Зосереджено увагу на лексемах, що виражають нехтування (нерівність, жорстоке поводження тощо), порушення (репресії, переслідування, зловживання тощо), основні групи (жертви та правопорушники). Проаналізовано окремі лексичні одиниці, зокрема «драконівський», «апартеїд», «маргіналізація», що активно функціонують у цьому дискурсі, розширюючи сферу вербалізації ПРАВ ЛЮДИНИ. Авторка вказала різницю в репрезентації концепту в офіційному юридичному дискурсі, який, зазвичай, є нейтральним та абстрактним, та у звітах неурядових організацій, що використовують емоційно забарвлену лексику для розуміння прав людини. У висновку узагальнено результати дослідження та окреслено потенційну педагогічну доцільність використання опрацьованих матеріалів на заняттях з англійської мови за професійним спрямуванням.

**Ключові слова:** права людини, дискурс-аналіз, аналітичні звіти, мовна репрезентація, аргументативні стратегії.

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