Mediatisation and the on-field language tracking of sports people

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Over the last decade, the growth in sports analytics and player tracking technology has seen many innovative developments in high performance training, sports science and sports pedagogy (Alamar 2013). While these innovations provide some insight into on-field communication, such as spatial interactions and leadership dynamics, there is no research to date that has utilized this technology to specifically track the on-field language practices of sports people. The one exception however is the mainstream media. In the context of the National Basketball Association (NBA) for example, the language of players and coaches is recorded during games, providing viewers with access to the linguistic practices of the real-time sporting contest.

This mediatisation of sports discourse presents an exciting opportunity for linguists to not only explore an uncharted discourse domain, but to also play an integral role in sports analytics, high performance training and sports pedagogy. This paper will begin by presenting examples of on-field language tracking from several professional sports. It will then consider the role of linguistic research in the context of on-field language tracking. By way of illustration, findings from a small-scale pilot study which documents the on-field language practices of Australian Aboriginal elite athletes will be presented. Ultimately, this paper is exploratory in its approach, highlighting the potential role of language-tracking, and mediatisation in sport more generally, as a productive space for applied linguistic research.

Constructing media counter-narratives in online sportscasting

Jan Chovanec, Masaryk University, Czech Republic

The technological and participatory affordances of the online environment have resulted in some innovative media formats that draw – quite creatively – on established genres of print and broadcast journalism. In the area of sportscasting, live text commentary (LTC) has developed as a new narrative format for the online coverage of sports events in real time. This presentation documents how LTC journalists and readers use references to spoken TV broadcasts in order to disalign themselves from TV commentators and construct an oppositional base for their own counter-narratives and story-telling.

The role of mental and verbal activity in football commentaries

Ben Clarke, University of Portsmouth, UK

A survey of transitivity process-types (Halliday, 1994; Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 1997: ch. 4) in radio and TV football sports commentaries (Clarke, 2016) finds, perhaps unsurprisingly, mental and verbal actions to be infrequent relative to the occurrence of material and relational process-types. Where they do occur, however, mental and verbal process-types enter into other patterned behaviour. They more often than not occur in periods of rest in the game – when play is not in action owing to the ball going out play, a substitution being made, or the like.

(1) A: [Cisé] just looking to get a bit more involved here is just slightly lifeless I think have you seen his hair (1.0) it looks like it’s been tattooed or something like he’s got a black scorpion at the back of his head= (.)

B: = yeah

A: (. ) right here comes Pirlo who’s suddenly much more involved

The language produced by commentators is sensitive to this distinction; in these moments of ‘rest’, commentator talk often moves away from construing the material action of protagonists central in the second-order social-action (Halliday, 1978) being reported on, and towards considerations relative to the
thoughts and feelings of the wider participation framework (Goffman, 1979) of the wider communicative event.

(2) A: I’m rushing to the bookies (.) don’t worry (1.0) no I’m not (.) I’m not going to leave this game (.) Barcelona with the throw in level with the edge of the Chelsea penalty area (.)

Mood-type choice shifts often coincide with this shift. The vast majority of the clauses in both commentary types are ‘declarative’ in mood. However, the majority of mental and verbal process-types in the commentaries are non-declarative in type. This paper explores these patterns and others and reasons them from the perspective of semantics and context (cf. Halliday, 1979; 1996; Barthes, 1977: 87). Their consequence for theorising language-context relations in Hallidayan linguistics (cf. Hasan’s 1985 contextual configuration) is briefly considered at the paper’s end.

**Interviewer alignment strategies by German and English post-match media interviewers: a contrastive analysis**

Kieran File, University of Warwick, UK (& Antje Wilton, University of Siegen, Germany)

This presentation reports on a pilot study exploring interview alignment strategies in post-match football interviews in two different national cultures: Germany and England. The post-match interview has always been a core part of the televised broadcast of a football match (Schaffrath 2002) and appears to involve participants evaluating match outcomes and performances for the benefit of an overhearing audience of sports fans (File, 2013). Recent research into the linguistic and interactional strategies employed by interviewers and interviewees to accomplish those functions shows that the post-match interview is designed as a conciliatory and cooperative media format (File 2012). Such cooperation is achieved by the employment of alignment strategies reflected, for instance, in the design of the interviewer’s turn as “doing questioning”.

However, despite some recent research exploring the post-match interview discourse in German (Wilton 2016), most of this research has been conducted in English contexts. Little research has explored the extent to which the strategies employed by post-match interviewers are reflective of the genre more globally, or of English-speaking cultures deployment of it more locally. In this study, we aim to conduct a cross-cultural analysis of interviewer strategies in German and English football post-match interviews. A data set of approximately 20 German and 20 English interviews taken during the Champions League in 2014 and 2015 was collected for this comparative analysis. Drawing on a conversation analytic approach, we investigate the similarities and differences in the alignment strategies used by German and English interviewers. In particular, we explore the emerging hypothesis that interviewers, regardless of national culture, appear to use language in post-match interviews to set the scene for the interviewee’s preferred reply by offering a credible evaluation of the match, by taking an appropriate epistemic stance towards the interviewee and by providing lexical material the interviewee can exploit in his/her answer (Wilton 2016). The findings are discussed in relation to existing research into the post-match interview and other media interview genres, and, more broadly, in relation to current debates regarding the (g)localised nature of media interview formats (Hauser & Luginbühl, 2012).

**The reception of live football broadcasting: Appropriating media discourse in everyday life**

Cornelia Gerhardt, Universität des Saarlandes, Germany

This paper will give an overview of the findings from the ATTAC corpus, a collection of video-recordings of football fans watching the FIFA men's World Cup live on television. Methodologies employed range from discourse analysis, conversation analysis, studies into the multimodality of embodied interaction as well as sociolinguistic notions like identity construction. For instance, we will look at the very specific use of the pronoun ‘that’ in the football reception situation, or the idea of "Englishness" as discussed by the viewers of the, together with the Olympics, most important international sports event.
Live-genres in football. Corpus based perspectives on the mediatized performance of liveness

Stefan Hauser, Pädagogische Hochschule Zug, Switzerland & Simon Meier, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany

While the “classic” live-coverage of football games in radio and TV have been the object of extensive research in linguistics as well as media and communication studies, much less is known about the more recent genres of internet-based live-broadcasting such as live ticker, live blogs, live tweets. Those new live-genres show a variety of characteristics worth looking at in greater detail. What makes them especially interesting is that they can be approached by corpus linguistic methods.

In our presentation we will discuss linguistic and semiotic means by which writers may express various aspects of live broadcasting usually associated with orality (e.g. expression of emotional involvement, indexicality etc.) and how they are shaped by the affordances of writing in computer-mediated environments. Based on a large corpus of live ticker data (approx. 11 million words) and twitter data (approx. 100,000 tweets) we will show how the mediatized performance of liveness is reflected on different linguistic layers: typographically, lexically, syntactically, but also with respect to narrational aspects.

Finally, we will discuss new developments of actor-specific manifestations in the collaborative staging of liveness. On twitter as well as on recent live ticker apps not only professional journalists but also users can act as commentators and can thereby take part in a kind of collaborative coverage with manifold intertextual references to more traditional forms of live commentaries.

The mediatisation of emotional distress in elite sport

John Jureidini, University of Adelaide, Australia & John Walsh, University of Adelaide, Australia

Not infrequently elite sportsmen, either active or recently retired, come to media attention because they are said to have developed a mental disorder. Such events are often accompanied by pleas for decreased stigmatisation and increased recognition of mental illness in young men. Media narratives often favour biological explanations for the sportsman’s incapacity.

This paper will describe a language analysis of print media reporting in one city in the month following the revelation that an elite professional Australian rules footballer was suffering from “depression”. The analysis will explore to what extent mediatisation of complex changes in personal and interpersonal functioning results in oversimplification; and how it might contribute to the related process of medicalisation of ordinary human suffering.

What professional rugby union referees do and say in matches and what commentators and reporters say/write about that - linguistic and communication issues in the sport/media nexus

Elaine W. Vine, University of Wellington, New Zealand

Professional sport is very visible in many societies, and while there is a considerable literature on some social aspects of professional sport, and recently more interest in language and sport, one group of participants has attracted little research attention from a linguistic perspective. These are the match officials who take responsibility for controlling the enactment of professional sport on the field.

This paper has two parts, one focuses on professional rugby union refereeing and the other focuses on media perspectives on that refereeing.

The first part takes an interactional sociolinguistic approach to understanding an activity which is not usually seen as a linguistic one: refereeing rugby union matches. The study investigates when and how one group of match officials, referees in rugby union, explain their decisions during professional matches, and which decisions they choose to explain.
The data are video-recordings (for television) of professional rugby union matches from competitions which involve New Zealand, Australian and South African teams and referees. The soundtrack is taken from microphones worn by match referees. Although they are engaged in energetic physical activity: keeping up with the play, professional rugby union referees also engage in a considerable amount of talk on the field during a match. The referees use some of that talk to explain their on-field decisions to players, and to assistant referees and overhearing commentators and public audience. The explaining they do is part of ‘doing being accountable’ for their work. Analysis presented in this paper shows which decisions they choose to explain, when they explain those decisions and how they explain them.

The second part investigates what commentators and reporters say/write about referee on-field activity, and whether/how they address referees’ explanations of their decisions. The data are television commentaries which accompany the video-recordings drawn on in the first part of this paper, and articles from New Zealand newspapers which mention professional rugby union referees and refereeing.

The paper concludes with comment on how on-field talk during matches and media comment during and after matches mediate the culture of playing professional rugby union.

Language in sport: a perspective from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)
John Walsh, University of Adelaide, Australia & Jon Jureidini, University of Adelaide, Australia

This paper attempts to conceptualise communication in sport, using linguistics as a framework. Actual physical participation in professional sport is limited to a small number of elite athletes. Others take part by attending and directly experiencing these professional sporting events. A far larger number of participants engage in sport symbolically or more specifically semiotically, their experience being mediated by interaction, commentary and/or media analysis.

We propose a model with a specific sporting event or match at the centre of a series of communication events each of which we analyse and interpret as semiotic participation. Conceptually, we describe a series of concentric circles of these communicative events, with the players at the centre, then the coaching staff, other officials, media correspondents with privileged access, those at the match (participating by cheering and chanting), those watching live at home, having their experience mediated by commentary, and finally those reading reportage etc…. Information ‘ripples’ outward from the match through these circles. Each circle has progressively less access to direct experience, and each has a specific context that shapes the meanings made and the language choices of its participants. Each layer is increasingly more distant in time and/or space from the match with different participants with differing roles and relationships engaging for different purposes and using different modes of communication.

At every level, communicative participation in elite sport draws on semiotic, predominantly language resources. We have previously analysed the language of the coaching team in one sporting code and their semiotically based attempts to change the course of the event. Beyond this we describe a methodology to look beyond this inner circle and in particular to consider the increasing engagement of media and its construal and reconstrual of the event. Key to that approach will be the application of the system of Appraisal within SFL in each ‘ripple’. Fans, coaches, commentators, pundits, writers, board members all evaluate individual players, teams, specific moments, segments or whole matches as their means of participation.

The post-match football interview as a media ritual: Repetitions and formulaic language use
Antje Wilton, University of Siegen, Germany

This contribution presents a conversation analytic study investigating the interactional function of formulaic expressions and (their) repetition in post-match football (soccer) interviews. Post-match interviews are an established element of a full broadcast of a football match and are frequently criticised or even mocked for their lack of content and inept language use. In many cases, these deficiencies are attributed to the lack of skill in both interviewer and player. It has been shown that post-match interviews as a dialogic media format fulfill different media social functions than the political or the news (Caldwell 2009, File 2012, Wilton
This contribution investigates the occurrence and the interactional functions of formulaic expressions and repetitions that contribute to the character of the post-match interview as a media ritual and thus contribute to the essential functions of the post-match interview of reporting, evaluating and collectivising. The study is based on a data set of television and internet videos and their transcripts of the members of a German football club (FC Bayern München). The data set includes interviews in the players’ native language as well as some interviews in their L2. The analysis shows that the use of formulaic expressions and/or repetitive expressions serve a number of functions such as signalling participation and involvement in the joint activity of the interview, thus facilitating such participation and making the interview recognisable as having a ritualistic and therefore predictable character. The use of an L2 as the language of the interview leads to an enhancement of those functions.