

ON SOME MICRO- AND MACROLINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the language of football sportcasting, a genre with increasing discursive importance. Football commentary is relevant, since its linguistic features have been studied to a certain extent. Football and sportcasting in general is a highly distinctive English genre with heavy reliance on extralinguistic components of the communicative situation, in particular, the phase of the play, channel of transmission, characteristics of the announcer and his/ her erudition. Commentator's talk mainly describes the actual happenings, simultaneously fulfilling the foregrounding and entertaining functions. This brings into play macro-discursive and microlinguistic or subtextual features to sustain the viewers' attention and the rapport between the announcer and the unseen audience.

Key words: sportcasting, foregrounding, framing of participants, descriptive, interpretative and evaluative discourse, entertaining function, cognitive metaphor, heavy modifier, high rises, inversions, fluctuations of loudness, rhythm and speech rate.

РЕЗЮМЕ

МИКРО- И МАКРОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ФУТБОЛЬНОГО КОММЕНТАРИЯ В АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

В статье рассматривается жанр футбольного комментария, который привлекает пристальное внимание лингвистов. Спортивный и, в частности, футбольный комментарий, в английском имеет устойчивое языковое выражение. Он находится в тесной зависимости от экстралингвистических компонентов коммуникативной ситуации, в частности, от отрезка игры, от канала передачи, от личных характеристик комментатора и его профессионализма. Жанр футбольного комментария выполняет основную функцию передачи происходящего на поле, а также вспомогательную функцию поддержания

внимания и развлечения зрителя посредством микро- и макролингвистических свойств.

Ключевые слова: жанр спортивного комментария, форграундинг, фрейминг участников, описательный, интерпретативный и оценочный дискурс, развлекательная функция, когнитивная метафора, эпитеты, высоко восходящий тон, инверсия, изменения интенсивности, ритма и скорости речи.

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

ՖՈՒՏԲՈՒԼԱՅԻՆ ՄԵԿՆԱԲԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՄԻԿՐՈ- և ՄԱԿՐՈՀԱՏԿԱՆԻՇՆԵՐԸ ԱՆԳԼԵՐԵՆՈՒՄ

Հոդվածում դիտարկվում է ֆուտբոլի ժանրը, որը լեզվաբանության մեջ հետզհետե առավել սևերուն ուշադրություն է գրավում: Ֆուտբոլային մեկնաբանությունը անգլերենում հստակ լեզվաբանական բնութագիր ունի: Այն սերտորեն պայմանավորված է հաղորդակցական իրադրության արտալեզվական բաղադրիչներով՝ խաղի փուլով, փոխանցման ձևով, մեկնաբանի անհատականությամբ և իրազեկությամբ: Ֆուտբոլային մեկնաբանության ժանրը առավելապես նկարագրում է դաշտում տեղի ունեցողը՝ միաժամանակ իրականացնելով ունկնդրին զվարճացնելու և նրա ուշադրությունը գրավելու գործառույթը: Սրան են ծառայում սպորտային մեկնաբանության միկրո- և մակրոլեզվական հատկանիշները:

Բանալի բառեր՝ սպորտային մեկնաբանության ժանր, առաջամղում, հաղորդակցվողների ֆրեյմինգ, նկարագրական, մեկնողական և գնահատողական խոսույթ, զվարճացման գործառույթ, ճանաչողական փոխաբերություն, մակրոիր բարձր վերընթացստ, շրջադասություն, ծայնի բարձրության, ռիթմի ու արագության փափանդումներ:

The 21st century has been dubbed the century of sport, since it meets basic social-biological, psychological-conflicting and informational needs. It has growing and globalizing role in popular culture, entertainment, business, mass media and journalism. The significance of sport is enhanced by sweeping advances in broadcasting and internet technologies. This has firmly

positioned sport and football, in particular, in the focus of the linguistic agenda. The use of sportcasting in English has been defined as a highly distinctive and institutionalized variety of spoken English, since there is a common core in the speech of different sport announcers, despite their individual differences. It is “a monolog or a dialog-on-stage” that is aimed at an “unknown, unseen, heterogeneous audience” (Ferguson, 1983: 150). Sportcasting is “unscripted, spontaneous talk aiming to capture the on-going excitement of the event” (Beard, 1998).

Sport discourse is directed to the public and is a subvariety of publicistic style, having audio-visual/ television, audio/ radio and written/ online comment or newspaper format. It reports on the players and the game, comments on their background or his/ her own stance, makes predictions and evaluations, performing informative-persuasive function. The informative function dominates, since it places heavy reliance on the actual happenings on the pitch - extralinguistic components of the communicative situation. The extralinguistic situation defines the subgenres of sport, differentiating between the language of hockey and football, and for instance, the language of horseracing and billiards. A growing function of sportcasting are the entertaining or amusing and the phatic functions, aimed at keeping contact with the audience and maintaining their attention. Entertaining and phatic functions may draw in expressive devices of poetic function.

The informative-persuasive function of announcer's talk takes the discursive forms of

1. description - time critical specification of what is going on the ground and the crowd at the time of the play, motives of the players, occurring in the most exciting part of the game. Descriptive narration is objective, being the main purpose of the sportcaster, occurs in the present tense. It occurs in *play-by-play (PP) commentary*, as the announcer outlines the ongoing events.

2. Explanation provides supplementary information about the players and the game.

3. Evaluation or giving opinion, analysis, summing ups and predictions is subjective. It is performed by an experienced journalist with deep knowledge of the topic.

Explanations and evaluations are more subjective and often marked with the change of commentator. They are called the *color commentary* (CC) and come in the form of *pre-event background*, *post-event evaluation*, and *within-event interpretation*. It is syntactically complex and has the past form (Crystal and Davy, 1969; Ferguson, 1983; Delin, 2000; Müller, 2007).

CC prevails on TV due to shared knowledge of the action that speak for itself. While PP is more present in radio talk, where listener is not exposed to happenings and needs vivid descriptions, with CC occurring during breaks. Radio commentary also has higher word counts and radio commentators can hardly allow themselves a break.

The structure of sportcasting is well-structured and recognized. It distinguishes greeting, presentation of the interlocutor, color and play-by-play commentary, mini-interviews with athletes and the coaches, announcement of the following events and leave-taking. Sport discourse may also include press conferences by athletes, and the interchange between the trainers, athletes and the physicians.

The participants of sportcasting were considered the announcer (Frame 1), who is unidirectionally addressing to the unseen audience (Frame 2) (Goffman, 2011). This model has been extended to encompass the frame of the crowd and the players (Frame 1), then live TV commentator talk (Frame 2), online written comments (Frame 3), receiving audience (Frame 4). The horizontal or within-frame communication occurs in parallel with vertical across-frame communication. TV live commenter (Frame 3) is perceived directly by frame 4 or is simultaneously combined with visual written channel of frame 3. The passive perceivers of online comment may become producers of communication via posts and e-mails of online written commentary or live blogs, changing the roles of receivers of information to the role of information producers. There may be shift in the addressivity of

the commentators: instead of addressing mass audience, announcers may comment on real or fictitious utterances by spectators or players, or else online comments may address and criticize the TV commentator or pundit (Chovanec, 2009).

Live announcer's talk depends on his/ her personal involvement, the importance of the event and the temperament and know-how of the commentator. His/ her is to cover not only rules and history of sport, but also political, doping scandals.

The inherent characteristics of the announcer's talk are non-stop or fluent character. Fluent speech aims to activate and hold the attention of the audience. To this end, the reporter keeps up an unbroken flow of speech, relying on a script or notes, reciting from memory or talking about a well-known topic. Fluent speech of an announcer is void of voiced hesitation and is connected with intonation tones into lengthy chunks, connected with fall-rise, low-rise, high narrow fall with grammatically loosely linked sentences (Crystal and Davy, 1969). Announcer's turns are finalized with extra-low or extra-wide falling tones.

Fluency runs hand in hand with fluctuations, arising from speedy actions of athletes, the attempts to explain the actions appreciated by judges. These fluctuations include slips of the tongue, stylistic mistakes, high incidence of minor or grammatically incomplete independent sentences without a subject or a predicate, or less important parts of sentences, often accompanied by an adverbial elements, proper nouns (Lapteva, 2003). However, fluctuations may shift the attention from happenings to the speech, and are therefore not to exceed the acceptable threshold.

Fluency is coupled with foregrounding, that is manner of presentation, that introduces elements of informality and interaction, relating to the audience on a more personal and interactive basis and sustain their attention (Fowler, 1991). This is done with macrolinguistic strategy of personalization and implicit dialogue, informal style that can project 'images of familiarity, cooperativeness and friendliness' (Bell, 1991; Fowler, 1996).

The macrostrategy of foregrounding, fluency, descriptive, interpretive and evaluative structured discourse are macrostrategies of sportcasting.

It is combined with microlinguistic features of announcer's talk on the subdiscursive level. It includes vocabulary, formulaic and expressive means of sportcasting.

Sportcasting employs general vocabulary that serves background for technical words, phrases and idioms that are not familiar to "uninitiated audience"(Crystal and Davy, 1969; Kuiper, 1996). Sport-specific vocabulary prescribes strict rules for each sport and are recursive. This results in stereotyped expressions to adequately portray evolving situation during a live broadcast. Example may serve *play-off* - additional period in gate to decide the winner or break a tie. Formulaic expressions simplify the task of reporting. These are expressions selected from a wide range of choices: *long pass, shot, goal, he has the ball, he in possession, the ball's with his foot, here's he, it's he* (Chovanec, 2009).

Sportcasting is rich in vivid vocabulary - *heavy modifiers adjectives, adverbs, adjectival intensifiers, appositions*. Heavy modifiers name a characteristics of a player, their previous performance, position played or an occasional nickname. It is of wide occurrence in football with downtime to fill the play. They are often adjectives and adverbial intensifiers - *most ungraceful little jab, rather buoyant bouncing run, etc*. Specific sport vocabulary may include slang expressions (*cracker* - game without a missed goal about the goalkeeper; *scuffle* - field players), namely pejoration (*brick* meaning bad shot) (Ferguson, 1983).

Sportcommentary also enriches the language's word stock by developing new meanings for the existing ones. This results in homonymy and polysemy: grounding has acquired the meaning of to throw a ball on the ground.

Sport idioms include *front-runner* - a person expected to win, *blind-sided* - to see something coming, *neck and neck* - contest between two groups, *the home stretch* - close to the end, *give a red card*.

Expressive means of sportcasting most frequently include *cognitive metaphors* that explain happenings on the pitch with terms extrapolated from the source domains of

- *physical fight* - players recover from physical blows, one team wrestles the title off another, first blood goes to one team, teams pummel each other. These target domain of football stems from the source domain of duel.
- *Military conflict* - a player can be under fire, a team makes a last stand. The cognitive structure is that of source domain of army, extrapolated to the target domain of teams.
- *Animal behaviour/ animal hunt* - a team comes flying out of the traps, a manager has attacking instincts. The team is driven from the source concept of animals or from the conception of opponent as an object.

The structural instances of sport metaphors may occasionally be coupled with *orientational* metaphors, that shows non-material happenings with spatial relationships - up-down, front-back (*victory is forwards*). Less common ontological metaphors view *football is a substance and football is an entity* (football flowed beautifully, the improbable nature of the football).

Metaphors are markers of football announcer's talk together with metonymies. metonymy employs the logical connection of the part and the whole: *England scores, nervous stomachs, gold goes to Williams*. Sport expressive devices also include *hyperbole* to create the viewers suspense (Lopez, 2018).

Expressiveness of style is directed to foregrounding along with other stylistic devices of alliteration, assonance (fairytale final), rhyming (double trouble), parallelism's, foreignisms, nonce words, allusions and punning, Expressive devices maintain the listeners attention by drawing the viewer's attention by to the form or by fulfilling entertaining function for humour purposes (Chovanec, 2009).

Grammatical sportcasting features include

- *simplification*, realized by a. omission of a sentence part, that is easily recoverable (*Arsenal (is) struggling here in midfield. (It is) a lucky break as the ball drops to Arteta. Campbell (has the ball now)*) or b. substitution - replacing of certain words by pronouns - using *it* instead of the ball: *Wiel heads it away*.
- *Inversions, left or right dislocation* and *passive constructions* which provide the commentator with time to identify a happening or a player (*In goes Rhijn., Here goes Fowler again.*). Dislocations or tags are quite common in sportcasting: *They are all over the shop at the moment*, Tottenham. Passive constructions are also frequent here (*Positive thinking from the players*).
- *Result expressions* state a purpose (*for a goal kick , to keep it alive*).
- *Tense usage* - the most frequently used tense is Present Progressive to describe unexpected situations. Present perfect is used to indicate a recurring event, while past events are dealt with Past Simple and Present Perfect. However, past tense is more common than the perfect tense, especially in PP and in replay, since it describes or evaluates a completed action. While Present Perfect prevails in CC, also in the speech of sportcasters who report in a very general way. Therefore, the most frequent tenses are Past Simple and the Present Progressive.
- *Questions and irony*, irony is often used to ridicule the opponent: *A soccer team played American football?* Questions here may be addressed to the second commentator for advise or may fill a break.

The dynamics of the sport activity is reflected in the phonetic structure of sportcaster's delivery. It may vary in terms of tone, pitch, loudness, speed and voice quality with their maximal values accompanying. Both tempo and loudness vary from their lowest to highest range. The voice quality can be qualified as *husky*, *tremulous*, and *giggling*. The melody of sportcasting has scales and tones: broken scales, descending scales and level scales, high-falling, high-rising, falling-rising, rising-falling, rising-falling-rising and level

tones. There is high-level tail on commenting on completed actions. Sport commentary has many high-rises that are mostly typical to conversation, repeated questions and emphatic denials.

Rhythm of sport greatly fluctuates, rhythmic units contain from one to twenty syllables. The length of rhythmic units is manipulated by the commentator to avoid monotony, evoke interest and introduce conversational casualness.

Pauses also are of different length and occur in different position. Mostly syntactic and hesitation pauses come along with pragmatic pause to evoke emphasis.

In transmitting amusing information the length of the stressed syllables increases. Stressed syllables can also be drawled for further emphasis: syllables are articulated with the beginning of articulation delayed, reminding of upcoming speeding up. Length of syllables, thus, provide the commentator with further opportunities for sounding interesting (Crystal and Davy, 1999).

Thus, sportcasting is an increasingly important register with a highly distinctive linguistic expression. Its flow and language heavily relies on the extralinguistic happenings. The primary intention of commentator to report and explain the immediate events on the pitch is combined with the intention to keep contact and entertain the audience. Eventually the play-by-play narration is interwoven with colour comment, occurring by descriptive, interpretative and evaluative discourse. Its main discursive features are fluency and foregrounding that help to relate to the audience on personal level and bridge the gap between him/ herself and the diffuse audience.

As opposed to the macrolinguistic features that are perceived in their integrity, microlinguistic features attract the attention to their form or attract narrow focus. They are formulaic vocabulary, idioms, heavy modifiers on lexical level, as well as inversions, tags, questions, use of Past Simple and Present Continuous on grammatical level. Prosodic parameters of the comment increase proportionally with the intensification of play dynamics. It also imparts emphasis with length of syllables, pauses and rhythmic units with higher proportion of high and special rises.

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