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Analysing team sports discourse: From interaction to identity

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1 Introduction

The theme of this special issue is the analysis of language used to do and describe team sport. This runs from the micro-analysis of interactional features found in intra-team talk and commentary, to the construction of identity in online discussions about sport. All of the papers in this special issue address the construction of meaning in interaction, and there are thematic links between many of the papers, such as masculinities, humour and the use of in-group terminology as a marker of identity. All of the papers take a broadly sociolinguistic perspective, and the idea for this collection stems from a colloquium on sports discourse held at the 2018 Sociolinguistics Symposium, at the University of Auckland.

1.1 Why research language use in Sport?

Firstly, there is the anthropological view of sport: as a cultural artefact (Kuiper, 2010, personal communication). Language encodes culture, and as such an examination of the different ways in which sport is 'done' through language can show how the culture of sport is interpreted and renegotiated by the participants in the sport (Meân & Halone, 2010). This view can be applied to a range of linguistic domains. For instance, why research academic language? Why research media language? Why research the language of politics? The anthropological view is that domains such as sport should be researched because the way in which people use language to participate in these domains is dependent on the cultural norms that surround them, and this in turn can inform a wider socio-cultural analysis of a society. It follows that researching the language of sport is research on the creation of a culture that has meaning in the lives of all people who participate in sport. Furthermore, the wide use of sporting idioms in many languages and the use of sport as a referent in daily interactions highlights its cultural pervasiveness. Thus, we have the first reason why sport should be of interest to sociolinguists. If nothing else, it is at least as valid to research sporting language as it is to research academic language or media language as a particular domain or genre of language.

Secondly, there is the sociological (critical) view of sport as an institution that has the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity as its *raison d'être* (Anderson, 2009; Connell, 2005; Nauright, 1996). Sports sociologists suggest that sport was created in order to preserve masculinity from "going soft" in the face of a society in which men were predominantly raised by women (Anderson, 2009, p. 25). While this point is highly contentious, researching the language of sport can thus show how participants discursively construct their gender identity in the face of the hegemonic nature of sport.

Thirdly, there is the applied linguistic aspect of sports research. Professional sports players and coaches require a range of communication skills. They need to be able to communicate effectively with both each other and the media (File & Wilson, 2017). Increasingly, they also need to communicate directly with fans via social media (Ross & Rivers, 2020). Due to its international reach, sport is frequently a site for multilingual interaction and professional sports players are often called upon to work in a language that is new to them (Lavric & Steiner, 2017; Lavric & Steiner, 2018).

The three reasons outlined above demonstrate some of the motivations for researching the language used in and about sport, but to get a better sense of the diversity of topics and languages that have been investigated by researchers in this field, we need to look at the wider literature. In the section that follows a brief literature survey is described before previewing the contents of this special issue on team sports discourse.

1.2 *Growing interest in the study of sports linguistics*

Over the past ten years, current publications suggest that research on language use in sport is on the increase. A search of the *Linguistics and Language Behaviour Abstracts* (LLBA) database using the search string *ab(sport OR rugby OR football OR soccer OR hockey OR basketball OR baseball) AND ab(discourse OR sociolinguistic OR interaction)* yields 142 peer-reviewed publications in the period 2000-2021. After checking these for duplicates and omitting any that focus purely on sports metaphors in other domains or on the description of a sport as a language pathology tool, this leaves 56 peer-reviewed journal articles that analyse language used in or about sport. In order to show the breadth of topics that have been covered in these 56 articles, a list is provided at the end of this section. It is also notable that the number of articles on discourse, interaction and language use in sports has grown steadily over the past ten years, as illustrated in Figure 1.

This increase in publication may represent a greater connectivity between scholars working on sports discourse, further demonstrated by the establishment of the AILA Research Network on the Applied Linguistics of Sport, the formation of the Sports Culture and Communication Research Collective at the University of Warwick, the continued activities of the Innsbruck Football Research Group, and the publication of recent edited collections and special issues on the topic, such as Caldwell et al. (2017), Ross and Rivers (2020), and File and Schnurr (forthcoming).

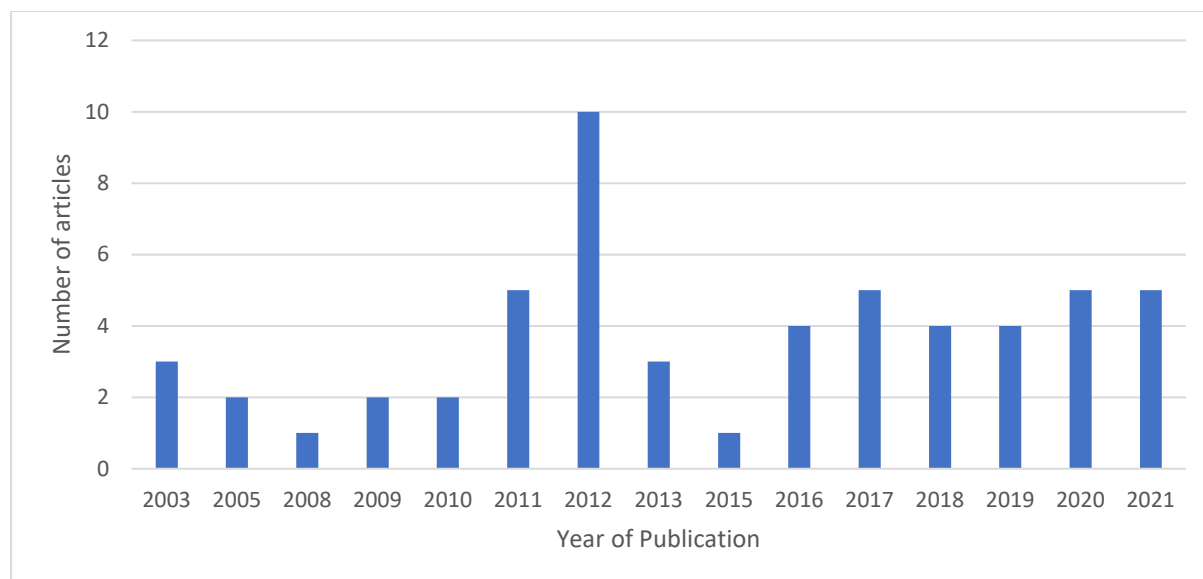


Figure 1. Sports articles in LLBA by year

The list of articles represents a very broad-brush attempt to capture the current state of the field, and there are obvious limitations in using just one database of abstracts, such as limitation in journal coverage. For example, the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* is excluded from the database, as are journals that focus on communication, notably *Communication and Sport* which as its title suggests, contains many articles of relevance to researchers in sports discourse. Nonetheless the 56 articles extracted from the LLBA show a range of journals and topics demonstrating the diversity of approaches in using sport as a context for (socio)linguistic research. Many of the articles focus on the representation of sport in the media, while others use sports discourse as a source for language data in order to analyse particular constructions. The third approach, however, is the one most strongly represented in the articles in this volume and that is in the way in which social identity is forged through talking about and during sport.

2 This Special Issue

Building on the literature referred in the Appendix, the current special issue includes four papers, covering three different sports and set in three different countries. The first paper, by **Fergus O'Dwyer**, explores the way in which humour is used in a Gaelic Football team in Dublin, Ireland. It builds on theories of politeness, humour and the construction of masculinities. In a similar theme, but looking at a different sport, **Nicholas Hugman** investigates banter in the context of the football (soccer) locker-room in a New Zealand team. These two papers examine both humour and dressing room banter but take somewhat different views of what might constitute banter. While Hugman contends that dressing room banter includes any kind of interactionally accomplished humour in a sports team, O'Dwyer does not seek to define the type of humour in the Gaelic Football team in such specific terms, preferring to see humour as being an expression and construction of the players' masculinity that is set against local (Irish) norms of interaction. What unites both papers is the ethnographic approach to data collection that has been used, and the insights that this provides for analysis.

Hugman's research is similar to the paper that follows it, in that it looks at a university football team. **Daniel Clayton's** research, aside from a shift to the UK, has a very different

focus to Hugman's in taking a more critical analysis of the discourses within a university football team, this time in England. All three articles, however, consider the construction of masculinities in team sport. The final paper in the collection steps beyond the locker room, but returns to a New Zealand context to look at the interactional structure of rugby commentary, comparing the differences between British and New Zealand commentaries of a rugby match between the All Blacks and the British and Irish Lions.

A common thread of these papers is a focus on how identities are constructed through discourse and how speakers index multiple levels of societal context, from the relationship between the individual and the team, to the gender norms associated with team sports, to the national identity that is bound up with international sports matches. As has been noted, sports teams are fruitful sites for the analysis of identity performance. One of the major shortcomings of this and many other collections is a preponderance of research on male sports teams, and it is thus heartening to see new research coming through that addresses this imbalance (e.g. File & Schnurr, forthcoming), but there is still much to be done.

Appendix A. Publications on the linguistics of sport

	Article	Title	Journal
1.	(van Sterkenburg & Knoppers 2012)	How do audiences of televised English football construct difference based on race/ethnicity?	Language and Intercultural Communication
2.	(Chovanec 2021)	Saving one's face from unintended humour: Impression management in follow-up sports interviews	Journal of Pragmatics
3.	(Reham El Shazly & Mai El Falaki 2021)	Homogeneous or hegemonic? A cultural reading of the <i>Sports Illustrated</i> swimsuit issue burkini	Language and Intercultural Communication
4.	(Zhang & Caple 2021)	The newsworthiness of Li Na—A critical comparative analysis of Chinese and international news media	Language & Communication
5.	(Schnurr et al. 2021)	Exploring the processes of emergent leadership in a netball team: Providing empirical evidence through discourse analysis	Discourse & Communication
6.	(Park Innhwa & Kline 2020)	Incomplete utterances as critical assessments	Discourse Studies
7.	(McGlashan 2020)	Collective identity and discourse practice in the followership of the Football Lads Alliance on Twitter	Discourse & Society
8.	(Jamie Shinhee Lee 2020)	Sports, Instagram, and conflict talk in Englishes	World Englishes
9.	(Bergh & Ohlander 2020)	From National to Global Obsession: Football and Football English in the Superdiverse 21st Century	Nordic Journal of English Studies
10.	(Wilton 2020)	“We have a grandios saison gespielt” – English as a lingua franca in media sports interviews	Journal of English as a Lingua Franca
11.	(Pérez-Sabater & Moffo 2019)	Managing identity in football communities on Facebook: Language preference and language mixing strategies	Lingua
12.	(Sliashynskaya 2019)	'One nation, two languages': representations of official languages on multilingual news websites in Belarus	Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development
13.	(Abas & Kaur 2019)	Theologising the Discourse of Representation through 'Faith' and Religion in Football News	3L, Language, Linguistics, Literature
14.	(Aguirre & Bell 2019)	Crossing the <i>gain line</i> : Migration, sport and national belonging on Facebook	Discourse & Society
15.	(Balteiro 2018)	Oh wait: English pragmatic markers in Spanish football chatspeak	Journal of Pragmatics
16.	(File 2018)	“You're Manchester United manager, you can't say things like that”: Impression management and identity performance by professional football managers in the media	Journal of Pragmatics

17.	(Callaghan, Moore & Simpson 2018)	Coordinated action, communication, and creativity in basketball in superdiversity	Language and Intercultural Communication
18.	(Gillen 2018)	Cricket bats, #riotcleanup, and rhubarb: Everyday creativity in Twitter interactions around Test Match Special	Language Sciences
19.	(Evans & Fitzgerald 2017)	The categorial and sequential work of 'embodied mapping' in basketball coaching	Journal of Pragmatics
20.	(Bergh & Ohlander 2017)	Loan translations versus direct loans: The impact of English on European football lexis	Nordic Journal of Linguistics
21.	(Wolfers, File & Schnurr 2017)	"Just because he's black": Identity construction and racial humour in a German U-19 football team	Journal of Pragmatics
22.	(Rothoni 2017)	The interplay of global forms of pop culture and media in teenagers' 'interest-driven' everyday literacy practices with English in Greece	Linguistics and Education
23.	(Abbas Ali Ahangar, Taki & Rahimi 2017)	Identity: a cohesive device in some Persian live sport radio and TV talks	Acta Scientiarum. Language and Culture
24.	(Raffaelli & Katunar 2016)	A discourse approach to conceptual metaphors: a corpus-based analysis of sports discourse in Croatian	Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis
25.	(Strahan & Stirling 2016)	"What the hell was in that wine?"	Narrative Inquiry : NI
26.	(Rodríguez-Medina 2016)	An approach to the study of the use of English in the activities of Spanish gyms	Spanish in Context
27.	(Gong 2016)	Online discourse of masculinities in transnational football fandom: Chinese Arsenal fans' talk around 'gaofushuai' and 'diaosi'	Discourse & Society
28.	(Gavins & Simpson 2015)	Regina v John Terry: The discursive construction of an alleged racist event	Discourse & Society
29.	(Zabihi, Ghadiri & Dastjerdi 2013)	The sport discourse in the Iranian context: 'Ye Tup Daram Ghelghelieh (I have a round ball)	Journal of Multicultural Discourses
30.	(Adetunji 2013)	A discursive construction of teasing in football fandom: The context of the South-Western Nigerian viewing center	Discourse & Society
31.	(Ojwang 2013)	Semantic extension: Idiomaticity and analogy in soccer discourse among Dholuo speakers of Kenya	Language Matters
32.	(McKerrell 2012)	Hearing sectarianism: understanding Scottish sectarianism as song	Critical Discourse Studies

33.	(McDonald 2012)	Thinking through sport, analyzing whiteness	Journal of Multicultural Discourses
34.	(van Sterkenburg & Knoppers 2012)	Sport as a contested racial/ethnic discourse: Processes of racialization in Dutch sport media and sport policy	Journal of Multicultural Discourses
35.	(Mean 2012)	Discourses, discursive processes, intertextuality, and identities	Journal of Multicultural Discourses
36.	(Leonard 2012)	Never just a game: The language of sport on and off the court	Journal of Multicultural Discourses
37.	(Gully 2012)	It's Only a Flaming Game: A Case Study of Arabic Computer-Mediated Communication	British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies
38.	(Glenwright 2012)	The Discourse of Amateur Cricket: A Linguistic Examination of Pre-match Team Bulletins	Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics
39.	(Musolff 2012)	From Teamchef Arminius to Hermann Junior: glocalised discourses about a national foundation myth	Language and Intercultural Communication
40.	(Cashman 2012)	Homophobic slurs and public apologies: The discursive struggle over fag/maricon in public discourse	Multilingua
41.	(Sauntson & Morrish 2012)	How gay is football this year? Identity and intersubjectivity in a women's sports team	Journal of Language and Sexuality
42.	(Hurtel & Lacassagne 2011)	Parents' Perceptions of Their Involvement in Their Child's Sport Activity: A Propositional Analysis of Discourse	Journal of Language and Social Psychology
43.	(McDowell & Schaffner 2011)	Football, it's a man's game: Insult and gendered discourse in The Gender Bowl	Discourse & Society
44.	(Tavakoli & Ghadiri 2011)	An investigation into the argumentation in dialogic media genres: The case of sport talk show interviews	Discourse & Communication
45.	(McCormack 2011)	Mapping the Terrain of Homosexually-Themed Language	Journal of Homosexuality
46.	(Heaney)	'Steve, you must feel pig sick!': Streamed Video Interactions between Premier League Managers and Sports Journalists as Semi-scripted Performances	Hermes
47.	(Adams, Anderson & McCormack 2010)	Establishing and Challenging Masculinity: The Influence of Gendered Discourses in Organized Sport	Journal of Language and Social Psychology

48.	(Adetunji 2013)	Nicknaming soccer players: The case of Nigerian supporters of English Premier League clubsides	California Linguistic Notes
49.	(Caldwell 2009)	'Working Your Words' Appraisal in the AFL Post-Match Interview	Australian Review of Applied Linguistics
50.	(Wilson 2009)	The Discourse of Deputies: Communicating Co-Leadership in a Rugby Club	Te Reo
51.	(Wagner 2008)	A lesson to be learned or 'Take a walk on the wild side'	Visual Communication
52.	(Gieve 2005)	Selling Shares in Cool	Revista de Documentacao de Estudos em Linguistica Teorica e Aplicada (D.E.L.T.A.)
53.	(Brandt & Carstens 2005)	The Discourse of the Male Gaze: A Critical Analysis of the Feature Section 'The Beauty of Sport' in SA Sports Illustrated	Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
54.	(Kuo 2003)	Involvement vs Detachment: Gender Differences in the Use of Personal Pronouns in Televised Sports in Taiwan	Discourse Studies
55.	(Reaser 2003)	A Quantitative Approach to (Sub)registers: The Case of 'Sports Announcer Talk'	Discourse Studies
56.	(Xiang 2003)	Multiplicity of Self in Public Discourse: The Use of Personal References in Two Radio Sports Shows	Language Sciences

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