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*“We help ourselves out. That’s a team. That’s how we roll”*: Turn-taking and the co-construction of radio rugby union commentary

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***“We help ourselves out. That’s a team. That’s how we roll”: Turn-taking and the co-construction of radio rugby union commentary***

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**Abstract**

This study is of the commentaries provided by two different radio sports commentary teams of the same two international rugby football test matches. The matches were played between the British and Irish Lions and the New Zealand All Blacks. The commentary teams were a British team and a New Zealand team. The commentaries are analysed for how the members of the team co-construct the commentary by having both institutionalised roles and exercising these roles in institutionalised tasks. The results of this analysis show that there is considerable variation in the way in which the members of each commentary team exercise their roles and contribute to creating a coherent commentary. This variability depends on who is performing each role and how their practice interrelates with that of the others in their team.

**Keywords**

rugby commentary; turn-taking; New Zealand; radio broadcast; media language

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**1 Introduction**

This study looks at the ways in which culturally-fixed roles are allocated in two teams of radio rugby football commentators, the ways in which the two different teams provide commentary of the same matches, the way in which their designated roles play out in the commentary and the consequent turn-taking which results from these different roles. Notwithstanding the fixed allocation of a commentator’s designated role, the ways in which such roles play out in practice are variable.

**2 Sports commentary speech**

Sports reporting is found in a number of media: print, in the form of on-line blog commentaries (Chovanec, 2018; Pérez-Sabater, Pena-Martinez, Turney, & Montero-Fleta, 2008), radio and television (Kuiper & Lewis, 2013; Reaser, 2003). For a thorough review of the literature

dealing with the linguistics of sports commentary see Chovanec (2018, pp. 33-52). This study deals with live radio commentary broadcasts. We define sports commentary for the purposes of this study as talk which begins when the game begins and stops when the game is finished excluding preliminary discussion, half time discussion and post-match discussion. The reason for this is that in none of these latter periods is there play-by-play commentary which is an essential element in the subsequent analysis.

The broadcasts are of the first and second matches in the international test series between the British and Irish Lions, and the New Zealand All Blacks, played in New Zealand between June and July of 2017. The commentary is provided by a British commentary team accompanying the tour employed by talkSPORT in the United Kingdom and a New Zealand commentary team from RadioNZ Sport.

When sport commentary is provided by more than one commentator those providing the commentary are allocated various roles. These have been subdivided since (Ferguson, 1983) into play-by-play and colour. Play-by-play commentators conventionally relate the events of the game as it happens, i.e. they produce an instant narrative, while colour commentators conventionally do not. If the latter do produce a narrative then it is usually of events which have already taken place. For example they speak at times when play is paused. In the data to be analysed here colour commentator roles can be subdivided into expert commentators and side-line commentators. The expert commentators are in the commentary box with the play-by-play commentator while the side-line commentator ranges along the side-line providing a perspective from that vantage point.

Sports commentators learn their craft by means of oral traditions (*The singer of tales*, 1960) and develop it through an apprenticeship system. Teams of commentators evolve as small communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Wilson, 2011) largely independently of other such teams.

The commentary itself can be analysed in terms of whether a particular commentary utterance is of a current event (i.e. a play) or not. Not every utterance provided by a play-by-play commentator is of a current event. See the extended example in section 5. Occasionally colour commentators provide commentary of a current event (see Table 2).

For the first test the play-by-play commentators were Andrew McKenna for talkSPORT and Nigel Yalden for RadioNZ Sport. The expert colour commentators were Ben Kay, Shane Williams and James Haskell for talkSPORT and Ant Strachan for RadioNZ Sport, with the side-line commentators Russ Hargreaves for talkSPORT and Eliot Smith for RadioNZ Sport. For the second test the play-by-play commentators were again MacKenna and Yaldon. The English expert colour commentators and side-line commentators were the same except for the absence of James Haskell. For RadioNZ the expert colour commentator in the second test Ross Bond replaced Ant Strachan with Daniel McHardy on the side-line.

As a whole, commentaries are co-constructed by the members of each commentary team. Many studies of turn-taking have used conversations as their data source (Levinson, 2016; Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1978; Stivers et al., 2009). In these studies turn-taking is intimately connected with the co-construction of narrative. Many other studies of the co-constructing of narratives have been devoted to therapeutic discourse (Garro & Mattingly, 2000; Lieblich, McAdams, & Josselson, 2004) and mothers and their children co-constructing narratives (Gini, Oppenheim, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2007).

In the case of commentary co-construction, during the production of a narrative in play-by-play mode, the other commentators are listeners to the play-by-play. When play ceases, they and the play-by-play commentator then comment on the events which have just been recounted taking their turns in the commentary until the play starts again. When they comment, a range of topics is covered by colour commentary. These topics include recalling the immediately preceding action often as a result of replays on the TV monitors, reviewing a player's or team's

immediately preceding performance, recounting historically related events, making predictions of future events, indicating the current location of a play and the current time to play, giving score summaries, assessing a player's injuries and giving advice to players and coaches. Radio listeners are attending to the commentary as it is spoken. They are intended overhearers like the audience in a play or film (Bubel, 2008). In some cases, listeners become active communicators by text message with the commentary team. They may even receive spoken replies to their texts within the commentary, as seen in the following extract:

*It's amazing  
where people listen to these commentaries.  
There is a family in Tuscany at the moment  
who are listening.  
To Juliette, happy 60<sup>th</sup> birthday.  
Hope you are having a lovely day.  
I hope  
(C1: couple of reds)  
the crew are taking care of you over there.  
Hi Nick.  
Hope you are well too.  
Hope you are enjoying this game.*

(ll. 444-454, NZ Commentary of test 2,  
Commentators: Nigel Yalden, Ross Bond is  
C1.)

Audience participation in commentary similarly takes place in on-line blog commentaries (Chovanec, 2018; Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008).

This study investigates how turn-taking takes place in such sequences of narrative and non-narrative talk. It also asks whether the teams of commentators providing commentary on the same match co-construct their commentaries in more or less the same way, i.e. allocating stretches of talk in a similar manner and using the same handover techniques to cue the next speaker's turn.

### **3 Method**

#### *3.1 The data set*

The data on which this study is based consists of four transcribed radio commentaries. While the games themselves have a running time of 80 minutes, breaks in play when the clock is stopped mean that the commentaries run for just over two hours.

The transcripts of the four commentaries were verbatim but without recording prosodic annotation such as pausing, the rationale being that this transcription contained sufficient detail to illustrate the factors germane to this study. The transcripts were subdivided into clauses and, where there was no clause in an utterance, phrases, for ease of later data coding and analysis. Each verb-based construction was given a separate cell as were small clauses

(Williams, 1975) where the verb was ‘understood’ from context, as were clauses without subjects where the subject was ‘understood’. Noun phrases such as the names of players, where they were not part of a clause, and interjections such as *Jee*, *Yea* and *Ooh* were each given a separate cell. The numbers and percentages in the tables are in terms of these units of analysis. Each match yielded around 3,500 units of analysis per commentary. These units were used since they allow for the length of each turn to be counted and also for the total contribution of each commentator to be quantified. Transcripts and coding were cross-checked by the authors.

Each segment of the transcript was coded for the speaker who produced it. Turns were coded according to which speaker handed over to the following. For each turn, coding noted if the following speaker’s name was used, or the current speaker asked a question. The naming of the next speaker and asking a question for the next speaker to answer are clear handover signals in the transcripts. While other turn-taking signals might have been used (such as slowed down speech at the end of a turn or a rising intonation contour) these are not as clear and are more subject to interpretation by different transcribers. There may also have been gestural handover signals but these are not available in a radio commentary. Unmarked handovers therefore include such possibilities as well as self-selection by the next speaker.

Below is the coding list with examples of handovers below.

1. Co-construction partners: PP/C1, PP/C2, PP/C3 etc

PP is the play-by-play commentator.

For the UK team C1, 2, (3), are the expert colour commentators in the commentary box with PP. C3 or 4 is the side-line commentator.

Note, the NZ team has only one colour commentator in the commentary box and one side-line commentator.

2. Examples of handover signals:

Name, e.g. *Just a general warning to both the props on this side of the field, Nigel.*

*Ben Kay, your early thoughts.*

Question, e.g. *And also for the players getting a feel?*

*Is there a knock on?*

The total number of handovers can be taken to summarise the pattern of turn-taking interaction by each commentary team, allowing them to be tested statistically. A chi-square test of independence was conducted to test the hypothesis that the four commentaries were significantly different from each other. To meet the assumption of this test that the expected frequencies not be below five, the contingency table for the analysis was constructed from the totals of the following categories by each team: *Question*, used to handover a turn, *Name*, used to handover a turn and *Unmarked*, where neither question nor name were used. The effect size was calculated using Cramér’s V ( $\phi_c$ ).

## 4 Results

As a preliminary note to the results of this study given in tables 4 and following, it has been shown, using data from the second test (Kuiper & Leaper, to appear), that the action that is

provided with play-by-play commentary constitutes a third of the commentary, as seen in Table 1. Note all percentages in this table and those following are in terms of the clausal units of analysis.

**Table 1** Play-by-play vs colour

	<b>Play-by-play</b>	<b>Colour commentary</b>
<b>NZ team</b>	33.8%	65.1%
<b>UK team</b>	35.7%	64.3%

Second, as Tables 2 and 3 show, different members of the two commentary teams play significantly different roles in co-constructing the commentary. The play-by-play commentator not only provides the narrative when the action is on-going, he also plays a major role as speaker (as well as through directing topic selection) in the colour section of the commentary. Occasionally a colour commentator may also provide play-by-play commentary.

**Table 2** Co-construction of New Zealand rugby commentary

	<b>Play-by-play commentator Nigel Yalden</b>	<b>Expert commentator Ross Bond</b>	<b>Sideline commentator Daniel McHardy</b>
<b>Play-by-Play</b>	32.9%	0.5%	2.2%
<b>Colour</b>	32.3%	13.1%	19%

**Table 3** Co-construction of United Kingdom rugby commentary

	<b>Play-by-Play Andrew MacKenna</b>	<b>Expert 1 Ben Kay</b>	<b>Expert 2 Shane Williams</b>	<b>Expert 3 James Haskell</b>	<b>Sideline Russell Hargreaves</b>
<b>Play-by-Play</b>	35.6%	0.1%	0%	0%	0%
<b>Colour</b>	26.5%	14.1%	9.1%	12.0%	2.7%

These tables from the commentaries of the second test also show the participation rates of each team of commentators. The participation rates appear to be a result of the size of the commentary team. In the New Zealand team Nigel Yalden plays a greater part in the colour commentary than Andrew MacKenna does in the UK because he has only one expert commentator and a side-line commentator whereas Andrew MacKenna having four colour commentators plays a lesser role giving each of the expert commentators a role about the same size as that of Ross Bond.

What these tables do not represent is how the co-construction of the commentary takes place in terms of who hands over to whom, and how each handover is signalled. For the above two games, as indicated above, the two teams of commentators are of different size. The British commentary team has two or three expert commentators and one

side-line commentator; whereas the New Zealand team has only one expert commentator and one side-line commentator for both games.

The following tables using data from both tests show the number of analysis units spoken by the NZ commentators (Table 4) and the UK commentators (Table 5).

**Table 4** Clauses spoken by NZ commentary teams in Test 1 and Test 2

Role	Game 1 Commentators	Clauses	%	Game 2 Commentators	Clauses	%
PP	Nigel Yalden	2746	74.8%	Nigel Yalden	2336	65.1%
C1	Ant Strachan	753	20.5%	Ross Bond	488	13.6%
C2*	Elliot Smith	173	4.7%	Daniel McHardy	762	21.2%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3672</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>3586</b>	

\*sideline commentator

Both the expert commentator and sideline commentator of the New Zealand team changed from game 1 to game 2. The two teams clearly show different participation rates by the commentators. In the first game, the speaking was dominated by exchanges between the play-by-play commentator (Nigel Yalden) and the expert commentator (Ant Strachan), with the sideline commentator (Elliot Smith) playing a minor role. The second game sees the sideline commentator, (Daniel McHardy), speaking more than the expert commentator (Ross Bond) and the play-by-play commentator not dominating to the extent he did in the first game.

**Table 5** Clauses spoken by UK commentary teams in Test 1 and Test 2

Role	Game 1 Commentators	Clauses	%	Game 2 Commentators	Clauses	%
PP	Andrew McKenna	1964	62.1%	Andrew McKenna	1876	67.1%
C1	Ben Kay	450	14.2%	Ben Kay	526	18.8%
C2	Shane Williams	287	9.1%	Shane Williams	351	12.6%
C3	James Haskell	380	12.0%	*Russ Hargreaves	42	1.5%
C4*	Russ Hargreaves	84	2.7%			
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3165</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>2795</b>	

\* sideline commentator

The UK team had only one change between the first and second games: the first game employed a guest commentator, James Haskell. His presence led to reduced speaking time for the other two expert commentators, Ben Kay and Shane Williams in the first game when compared with the second. The sideline commentator (Russ Hargreaves) had a minor role in both games.

Note that the differences between the proportions in which the respective play-by-play commentators spoke in the two games was not likely to have been a result of the games themselves since in game 1 Nigel Yalden spoke more than in game 2 while the reverse was the case for Andrew McKenna.

Tables 6 and 7 present the counts of name, question and unmarked handovers by the NZ and UK commentary teams respectively, broken down by the team members involved in

each handover. The result of the chi-square test of independence was significant:  $\chi^2(6) = 44.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , with a medium effect size of  $\phi_c = 0.31$ . That shows that the pattern of turn-taking in terms of the commentary teams' uses of name, question or unmarked for handing over to the next speaker differed significantly from one game to the other, resulting for each game in a unique blend of handover functions in the commentary.

Examining the detail of the commentaries, notable features that lead to these differences may be discerned. The patterns of hand-overs in the NZ commentary in Table 6 show considerably more variation over the two games than for the UK team (Table 7).

**Table 6** Turn-taking for the NZ commentary team

	Game 1				Game 2			
Role	Name Hand-over	Question Hand-over	Unmark'd Hand-over	Total	Name Hand-over	Question Hand-over	Unmark'd Hand-over	Total
PP/C1	18	11	49	<b>75</b>	6	2	32	<b>39</b>
PP/C2	6	5	4	<b>12</b>	18	11	65	<b>88</b>
C1/PP	0	0	62	<b>71</b>	4	0	36	<b>40</b>
C2/PP	0	0	16	<b>18</b>	9	3	75	<b>86</b>
C1/C2	4	5	10	<b>10</b>	12	1	20	<b>32</b>
C2/C1	0	2	4	<b>4</b>	15	2	18	<b>34</b>
<b>Total</b>				<b>19</b>				
	28	23	145	<b>0</b>	64	19	246	<b>319</b>

**Table 7** Turn-taking for the UK commentary team

	Game 1				Game 2			
Role	Name Hand-over	Question Hand-over	Unmark'd Hand-over	Total	Name Hand-over	Question Hand-over	Unmark'd Hand-over	Total
PP>C1	18	2	15	<b>36</b>	8	3	52	<b>62</b>
PP>C2	14	1	0	<b>14</b>	8	7	17	<b>28</b>
PP>C3	15	4	2	<b>19</b>	3	2	0	<b>4</b>
PP>C4	7	0	0	<b>7</b>				
C1>PP	0	0	29	<b>33</b>	0	1	62	<b>63</b>
C2>PP	0	1	17	<b>18</b>	0	0	27	<b>27</b>
C3>PP	0	0	18	<b>18</b>	0	0	4	<b>4</b>
C4>PP	0	0	7	<b>7</b>				
C1>C2	0	0	3	<b>3</b>	2	0	7	<b>9</b>
C2>C1	0	0	1	<b>1</b>	0	0	11	<b>11</b>
C1>C3	0	0	3	<b>3</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
C3>C1	0	0	2	<b>2</b>	0	0	0	<b>0</b>



C3>C2	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>99</b>	<b><u>163</u></b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>180</b>	<b><u>208</u></b>

This follows from the observation that the only person in common for the New Zealand commentary teams for the two tests was the play-by-play commentator, Nigel Yalden. The interaction in the first game had longer turns and nearly half as many handovers as in the second game, due to the more active participation of the two colour commentators in the second game. In the first game speaking was dominated by the interaction between the play-by-play commentator and the first expert commentator (Ant Strachan), with the side-line commentator (Elliot Smith) playing a much more peripheral role than the side-line commentator (Daniel McHardy) did in the second game. This can be seen in the use of names in handovers: in the first game only the play-by-play commentator and the expert commentator use names, and tellingly, the expert commentator uses the name of the side-line commentator, but the side-line commentator never does, perhaps reflecting the higher status of the expert commentator, whereas, in the second game, the more equal status shared by the commentary team can be seen by the spread of the use of names by all members.

A feature of the UK commentary data (Table 7) is that despite having fewer total handovers in the first game, names are used in the handover more than twice as often compared to the second game. A likely explanation for this is the presence of a fourth expert commentator in the first game, James Haskill (C3 in Game 1). In the first game Haskill, a non-playing member of the Lions (UK) team, was brought in to give a player's perspective, and thus a novice commentator. Having a guest who is not a professional commentator probably necessitated the more frequent use of names cueing who should speak next. The data for unmarked handovers affirms this as the play-by-play commentator used unmarked handovers only 17 times in game 1, but 69 times in game 2.

Apart from this, the general pattern shown by the handovers in these two games is similar. The exchanges are controlled by the play-by-play commentator whose control is shown by his being the only one who directs commentary by using names in the first game, and with two exceptions, in the second game as well. It is the same with the question handovers, as in both games he asks all but one of these.

The speaking hierarchy is also revealed by who does the naming and who is called on to speak. Ben Kay is C1, and his 'seniority' is reflected in his being the first and most frequent expert for Andrew MacKenna, the play-by-play commentator, to turn to for an opinion (36 turns following on from MacKenna in game 1 and 62 in game 2). Following Ben Kay is the second expert, Shane Williams (C2) (14 turns following on from MacKenna in game 1 and 14 in game 2). His 'status' is also shown in game 1 where the guest commentator (James Haskill, C3) is called upon more frequently than he is. In game 2 with Haskill not in the commentary box game 2, Ben Kay uses his name to call upon him to speak while Shane Williams himself never uses a name to hand over. The lowest rung in the hierarchy is the sideline commentator, Russ Hargreaves (C4 in Game 1, C3 in Game 2), who is almost invariably called upon by name by the play-by-play commentator. This may be because he is on the side-line away from the other members of the team. However, the New Zealand side-line commentators are not overtly cued much of the time. Being on the sideline is therefore not a determinant for the use an overt handover signal.

The most frequent pattern of interaction in the Lions commentary team in both games is one in which the play-by-play commentator (Andrew MacKenna) hands over a turn to his C1 by name or unmarked, and when the turn finishes, MacKenna either continues with the play-by-play or colour commentary or less frequently brings in one of the other commentators.

Occasional variation occurs during longer breaks in play when the second or third commentator will pick up where the C1 left off before it comes back to Andrew McKenna.

## 5 Illustration

The above phenomena can be illustrated with an extended example using commentary from both commentary teams.

The events which receive commentary are these. Anthony Watson of the Lions team has the ball. He is tackled and while holding the ball and being tackled, Sonny Bill Williams of the All Blacks shoulder charges him in the head. This is a serious offence and, after consultation with the other officials, the referee shows Williams a red card after which he walks slowly off the field. The episode takes around 3 minutes.

The commentary from the UK SPORTtalk team is as follows.

<b>Line</b>	<b>Speaker</b>	<b>Clause</b>
1.	RH	I've just got
2.		to quickly mention Anthony Watson.
3.		He's down.
4.		There's a big boo going around on the Stadium from the big screen
5.		But Watson is having his neck checked by one official
6.		and he's looking a little bit groggy.
7.		He's down on one knee right in front of me.
8.		Anthony Watson is having the HIA check,
9.		I think, on the field.
10.		We'll see if he's ok.
11.		but urr he's not looking great.
12.		
13.	AMcK	And I'll tell you
14.		why they're booing, Russ,
15.		because we've just seen the replay.
16.		Sonny Bill Williams comes in right shoulder straight into Anthony Watson face.
17.		That is easily a red card.
18.		
19.	BK	It's gotta be a red card.
20.		He's out of control.
21.		They look at three things.
22.		
23.	AMcK	Let's hang on.
24.		Jerome Garces has just said red card.

25. Let's wait  
26. to hear this discussion.  
27. Jerome Garces, Romain Poite, Jaco Peyper,  
28.  
29. BK They're trying  
30. to talk him out of it.  
31.  
32. AMcK The three on field officials have said  
33. we need  
34. to look at this  
35. and then Jaco Peyper says  
36. shall we get George  
37. to check it?  
38. Jerome Garces clearly said red card.  
39. We are going  
40. to take another look at it.  
41. Anthony Watson's being tackled by Naholo.  
42. Sonny Bill Williams comes in.  
43. There is no arms.  
44. There is no attempt  
45. to wrap  
46. and that is a right shoulder straight into the forehead of Anthony  
Watson.  
47.  
48. BK Clear - I can't believe  
49. they're even reconsidering it.  
50. It's a clear red card.  
51.  
52. AMcK Well Jack Nowell is going  
53. to come onto the field for Anthony Watson for the time being  
54. and let's listen.  
55. Red card shown to Sonny Bill Williams.  
56. 24 and a half minutes played.  
57. Jerome Garces says  
58. I have  
59. to protect the player.  
60. There was no arms in it.  
61. There are boos around the Westpac.  
62. Those are the most one-eyed of New Zealand supporters,

63. I'm afraid,  
 64. who maybe haven't seen that replay as detailed  
 65. as we have.  
 66. There can be absolutely no arguments.  
 67. Now is this the moment  
 68. that ignites the British and Irish Lions  
 69. and keeps the series alive?  
 70. Sonny Bill Williams is making the walk of shame  
 71. slowly as anyone I have ever seen  
 72. He's still 30 m away from the corner flag  
 73. where the dressing rooms are  
 74. New Zealand will play with 14 for the rest of this game

The episode begins with Russ Hargreaves noting from his position of the side line that an English player has been injured with a head knock. He is in the best position to have seen the infringement and provides a detailed account of it. He does not provide any commentary thereafter. The rest of the commentary is a dialogue between the play-by-play commentator, Andrew McKenna, and the highest-ranking expert commentator, Ben Kay. There is no play-by-play commentary. There are eight turns. No turns are cued by a question or the naming of the next speaker.

The commentary by the Radio NZ Sport team is as follows.

Line	Speaker	Clause
1.	NY	Taken by Watson
2.		Anthony
3.		They get him
4.		Driven back
5.		Who went flying in there?
6.		
7.	DMcH	Sonny Bill Williams.
8.		Not too sure.
9.		There were so many arms in there.
10.		
11.	NY	They want to have a look at it.
12.		It's under advantage.
13.		Away it comes.
14.		Jones,
15.		Alan Wynn head down driving
16.		Rolls
17.		and presents.
18.		All Blacks in the way here.
19.		They're getting pushed back in there
20.		Trying

21. to get out of the way  
 22. They get pushed back in  
 23. Here's Murray  
 24. Waiting  
 25. They are going  
 26. to have a look at this  
 27. And let's see  
 28. whether or not the All Blacks are going  
 29. to be a man down for ten minutes.  
 30.  
 31. DMcH I think  
 32. it was Naholo and Sonny Bill Williams from my angle  
 33. somewhat impeded.  
 34. I think  
 35. Sonny Bill Williams will be the one  
 36. who will be the one under suspicion here.  
 37.  
 38. RB Caused eh ah excitement from Farrell,  
 39. didn't it,  
 40. who went racing over to the assistant referee on your side, Daniel?  
 41.  
 42. NY Let's have a look.  
 43. So Naholo is taking it down.  
 44. Sonny is going to sit down for ten  
 45. and deservedly so  
 46. 'coz that is flat out dumb.  
 47.  
 48. DMcH Reckless contact with the head, Nigel  
 49.  
 50. NY Yes actually.  
 51. Very good point, Daniel McHardy  
 52.  
 53. DMcH There's been a couple of instances in super rugby  
 54. where it's not been yellow, Nigel.  
 55. It's been the other.  
 56.  
 57. NY And I would have no issue with that.  
 58. I got no problem with that.  
 59. If that's a red card,  
 60. I got no problem  
 61. with that whatsoever.  
 62.  
 63. DMcH Yea

64. no he's gone.  
 65. He's gone  
 66. and deservedly so.  
 67.  
 68. NY It's dumb rugby.  
 69.  
 70. DMcH Real dumb rugby.  
 71. It's your decision.  
 72.  
 73. NY There are four international referees.  
 74.  
 75. DMcH There should not be a decision.  
 76. Who's the actual referee?  
 77.  
 78. NY It would be Jerome Garces.  
 79.  
 80. DMcH Why is he letting Jaco Peyper  
 81. There is no one.  
 82. Shoulder to the head.  
 83. It's a red card.  
 84. It is a red card.  
 85.  
 86. RB Yea.  
 87. Bad from that angle,  
 88. isn't it?  
 89. There shouldn't be a decision here.  
 90. It's an easy one.  
 91.  
 92. DMcH The red is out in the hand, gentlemen.  
 93. Yep, he's gone.  
 94. Here it comes.  
 95. Here we go then.  
 96. Yep  
 97. Not since the late 60's, Nigel.  
 98.  
 99. NY Sonny Bill Williams  
 100. sent off in the second test  
 101. with the clock showing 24 minutes and 37 seconds.  
 102. And he's getting a send-off from the Lions.  
 103. He looks perplexed.  
 104. He won't be.  
 105.  
 106. DMcH He looks shattered

107.  
108. NY He's getting a send off  
109. as I look down towards the north-western end.  
110. They're giving him the wave.  
111. He's gone  
112. and the All Blacks, 14 men for the remainder of this contest.

In the New Zealand commentary there are 22 turns and most of the dialogue is between Nigel Yaldon, the play-by-play commentator and Daniel McHardy on the side-line, with only two contributions by expert commentator Ross Bond. Note that between lines 13 and 24 Yaldon is in play-by-play mode since there is on-going action, while, for the same section of play, Andrew McKenna remains in colour mode. There are four non-rhetorical questions and four namings to cue the next speaker.

After line 24, the New Zealand commentary has, as a result of these turn-taking features, a more conversational feel with its rapid exchanges and frequent cuing while the English commentary maintains a more formal commentary style.

## 6 Discussion

Radio rugby union commentary operates in a particular social niche. There are a significant number of social factors which determine the parameters that circumscribe that niche. There are many such situational constraints (Crystal & Davy, 1969; Biber, 1994). The 'level' of the sport is a factor. International games are more likely to receive commentary than junior games. The sport's social status in the community is a factor. By way of comparison, major cycle races receive commentary in Europe but usually not elsewhere. Such factors determine whether there is commentary at all.

The medium plays a role. Radio places different pressures on commentators than does television. Longer pausing is possible in television commentary than in radio commentary, as the audience can see the action for themselves.

The question then arises to what extent do such constraints determine what happens in a specific commentary. Clearly, they do determine some aspects of a commentary. The commentary teams whose discourse we have examined speak English because they are English speakers and have English-speaking listeners. They fulfil the roles assigned to them as play-by-play, expert and sideline commentator since these are the roles assigned for the radio commentary of rugby football internationals. Because they are broadcasting on radio they do not pause for long between turns or within a turn. The fact that there is more than one commentator and that they have the roles they have, makes co-construction of the commentary and therefore turn-taking inevitable. The role of play-by-play commentator determines that that commentator speaks while the play is ongoing.

But such deterministic factors do not assist greatly in understanding the dynamics of speaker interaction and co-operative performance. They are also self-evident providing only a basic understanding of the dynamics of speaker interaction.

This study by contrast has looked at one variable feature of the way in which two sports commentary teams produce a commentary of the same two games, focusing on how commentary team members take turns and co-construct the commentary. When the play is not on-going, turn-taking, as the above data shows, is much less predictable. It appears to depend on the way in which a particular commentary team has evolved its own way of producing co-

operative, co-constructed talk. The conclusion to be drawn is that there are likely to be many details of what happens in commentary talk which are variable and determined by the specific commentators in specific teams producing the commentary.

Why is that? As noted above, discourse varieties like radio rugby commentary are learned and practiced in small teams independent of other such teams. Consequently, they evolve their own ways of saying, given that they are the result of close, on-going social relationships. The external social exigencies which drive commentary speech may be the same but the ways in which the performers perform and the ways in which they exploit the possibilities available to them may be quite different. This is clear from the analysis of the way the New Zealand commentators perform the commentary of the two games. While Nigel Yalden is a member of both commentary teams, his co-commentators in the two different teams and he manifestly interact and perform in two distinct ways. They are thus clearly members of two distinct communities of practice.

## **7 Conclusion**

This study has shown that radio rugby union commentary, whilst being subject to relatively uniform high-level situational constraints in terms of how, when, where and why the talk takes place, has different turn-taking properties when it is performed by different commentary teams. These differences result from teams having evolved different ways of performing through their membership of different micro communities of practice evolved through oral traditions.



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