# THE DISCOURSE OF DEPUTIES: COMMUNICATING CO-LEADERSHIP IN A RUGBY CLUB

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## Abstract

This paper examines leadership discourse in a small, non-commercial organisation with a hierarchical structure, a rugby club. The focus of the research is the captain of the club and the way in which he discursively constructs his identity as a deputy leader. The notion of covert leadership (Mintzberg 1998) is explored and extended by linking it to the concept of Relational Practice. The analysis demonstrates how, using covert leadership strategies, the captain accomplishes both relational and task-oriented leadership. Using an interactional sociolinguistics framework, three extracts of the captain's discourse are analysed in detail. These extracts were part of a larger corpus of data gathered from six months participant observation of a rugby club in Edinburgh, Scotland. The extracts show how the captain, as a deputy, helps the coach to provide effective leadership during the team in training sessions, and how he constructs different identities in order to achieve this.

 

## 1. Introduction

Over the past few years, discursive leadership has become a focus of interest not just for sociolinguists, but for scholars of leadership psychology and management studies (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Fairhurst 2008; Holmes, Schnurr, Chan, and Chiles 2003; Svennevig 2008; Vine, Holmes, Marra, Pfeifer, and Jackson 2008). Although much research has focused on sole leaders, it is now recognised that a wider view is useful and the discourse of the management team should be examined. Specifically of interest is the discourse of the second-in-command or co-leader (Heenan and Bennis 1999) who often plays a vital role in the running of an organisation.

This paper will examine the discourse of the deputy in a small, non-commercial organisation with a hierarchical structure, a rugby club. The focus of the research is the captain of the club and the way in which he discursively constructs his identity as a deputy leader and how, by means of covert leadership (Mintzberg 1998) he carries out both relational and task-oriented leadership. To achieve this, three extracts will be analysed that are representative of the captain's discourse, and which are part of a larger corpus of data gathered from six months participant observation and recording of a rugby club in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The discourse presented in this paper will be analysed using the theoretical frameworks of interactional sociolinguistics and communities of practice and will be interpreted from a social-constructionist stance. This allows the ethnographic insights gathered from the fieldwork to be used in contextualising the data, thus providing an informed view of the captain's discursive behaviour within the club.

In Section 2, existing research on the topics relevant to this paper will be briefly outlined, namely: the use of ethnography, discourse in sport, leadership, and identity. Section 3 outlines the composition and structure of the rugby club in order to provide a context in which to present the data this is built upon further with a description of a typical training session. Section 4 presents two extracts which show how the captain constructs two identities in order to perform as a leader, while Section 5 examines the relationship between the captain and the coach, the captain's immediate superior. Section 6 compares the extracts to one another and draws on ethnographic information to discuss the ways in which the captain performs as a deputy.

## 2. Literature Review

### *2.1. Interactional Sociolinguistics and the need for Ethnographic Research*

Interactional sociolinguistics (IS) is a form of discourse analysis that has become popular in the examination of workplace discourse (e.g. Holmes 2006; Holmes and Marra 2004b; Kendall 2004; Vine et al. 2008). IS draws on contextual and socio-cultural information to assist in the analysis of discourse (Gumperz 1999; Stubbe et al. 2003) and examines the way in which interactants interpret each others' utterances, at least as far as this is evident in their reactions (Gumperz 1999). The contextually informed analysis offered by IS contrasts with the approach favoured by practitioners of Conversation Analysis (CA); who base their analyses of discourse only on what is contained within the boundaries of a conversation (Geyer 2008; Stubbs 1983). Furthermore, the need for the contextual information that can be provided by ethnography has been remarked upon not only by Interactional Sociolinguists (Gumperz 1999; Stubbe et al. 2003; Vine et al. 2008) but also by Discursive Psychologists (Fairhurst 2008). IS also fits well with the Community of Practice (CofP) model (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999; Meyerhoff 2001; Wenger 1998), into which the rugby club fits, as described in Section 3.

Ethnographic fieldwork is often used in conjunction with recording in an IS approach (Boxer 2002; Bucholtz and Hall 2005; Gumperz 1999; Stubbe et al. 2003). In the case of the research detailed in this paper, ethnographic fieldwork enabled access to record the interactions between rugby players and coaches. This approach also yielded to me, as the ethnographer, insights about social norms and the characteristics of the participants that were invaluable when subsequently analysing the interactions that were recorded. What enhanced this was, rather than simply being an ethnographic observer, I fully engaged in participant observation by becoming a playing member of the rugby club (Bolton 2003; Eckert 2000; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Milroy and Gordon 2003). This methodology is more fully detailed in section 3.1. This aided my subsequent interpretation of the recorded speech as I had already interpreted the events once as a player, and thus had an insight into how the other players may have interpreted them.

### *2.2 Discourse in Sport*

There has been very little in the way of research on sports discourse, and even less on rugby. The only example of sociolinguistic research on rugby is the

study by Kuiper (1991) of locker room insults. Widening the focus to other sports, there is some research on soccer players (Clayton and Humberstone 2006; Corder 2004; Meân 2001), but without including research on media representations of sport (e.g. Messner, Duncan, and Jensen 1993; Wright and Clarke 1999), it is hard to find any other studies that look at the use of language in sport. Sociology on the other hand has a wealth of research on various sociological topics within sport and occasionally these touch on discourse, usually in an examination of gender in sport (c.f. Harris 2007; Markula and Pringle 2006; Messner 1990; Pringle 2001) and often in terms of "capital D" discourse (Gee 2008).

Sport should be of interest to sociolinguists for many of the same reasons that it is of interest to sociologists. Sports teams provide an excellent site for recording real interactions within a community of practice (Holmes and Meyerhoff 1999) as this paper shows. Furthermore as coaches of team sports are keen to stress, communication is key within these sports, and as such the sports themselves can only benefit from an analysis of the communication features which characterise them. Nonetheless, few sociolinguistics have utilised this rich resource of spoken interaction However, as sports teams constitute organisations that function in some ways like workplaces, existing workplace discourse research can be used when analysing the discourse of sport. This is exemplified by the comparisons that can be drawn between a rugby training session and a business meeting, both of which have a chairperson (the coach), who dictates the order of business and performs formal opening and closing acts along with talk that occurs outside of these boundaries (Chan 2007; Holmes and Marra 2004a; Mirivel and Tracy 2005; Richards 2006). Workplace discourse research thus provides a useful background for my study.

### *2.3 Leadership and Identity*

There is a sizeable amount of existing research on the discursive practices of leaders (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Fairhurst 2008; Holmes 2005; Holmes and Marra 2004a; Holmes et al. 2003) but most of these spotlight a person in charge, rather than the other members of their leadership team. However, an aspect of leadership that has become a focus of interest of late is that of co-leadership (Heenan and Bennis 1999; Vine et al. 2008). Co-leadership is the process of jointly performing leadership, although normally there is a senior member of a co-leadership group (Heenan and Bennis 1999). This is the case here, as the captain of the rugby club is the second in command to the coach, and this paper aims to show that while he is a leader, his role as

a deputy is influential on the discursive strategies that he employs to carry out his leadership duties.

An effective leader (or deputy) will balance the discursive styles that they use to construct their leadership identity, and these styles are often described as being relatively masculine (authoritative, unyielding) or feminine (supportive, relational), with a good leader able to use both . One of the tools that leaders, both male and female, have been shown to use is Relational Practice (RP), which tends to characterise the relations between leaders and subordinates (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003; Holmes et al. 2003; Ling 2008; Vine et al. 2008).

In the examples that are presented in this paper the captain performs RP as a way of performing leadership duties covertly, acting as a halfway house between the coach and the players. By using RP and by underplaying his own leadership status the captain performs *covert leadership*, a term coined by Mintzberg (1998) to describe the leadership style exhibited by an orchestral conductor, which I now apply to an aspect of the captain's discursive leadership.

This paper makes use of the term *identity* when describing the two leadership styles of the captain, however, this is not intended to suggest that these are the only identities that the captain constructs, they are simply two identities, or even categories of identity, that are effective for him in carrying out leadership in the rugby club. The captain has many identities available to use, some of which can be considered covert leadership identities and some which can be considered overt leadership identities. The use of the term leadership identity to describe the different leadership styles is a reference to the way in which the captain's leadership is negotiated with the team. While he draws his status from the club hierarchy, the captain constructs his identity *with* the team, not *for* the team. As Bucholtz & Hall (2005: 606) explain:

> Any given construction of identity may be in part deliberate and intentional, in part habitual and hence often less than fully conscious, in part an outcome of interactional negotiation and contestation, in part an outcome of others' perceptions and representations, and in part an effect of larger ideological processes and material structures that may become relevant to interaction. It is therefore constantly shifting both as interaction unfolds and across discourse contexts.

The idea that the process of identity construction is dependent on the perception

of others sits well with Watts' (2003) concept of *politic behaviour*, which is defined as "that behaviour, linguistic and non-linguistic, which the participants construct as being appropriate to the ongoing social interaction" (Watts 2003: 20). Thus, it is with respect to appropriateness that the captain constructs his identities. He uses his past experience of the team and his knowledge of the norms of the team to construct an identity for the situation that is likely to be judged appropriate by the team. Furthermore it would seem that even if the interactants concerned are fully conscious of their social identities, they do not have full control over them; in fact it is the social group (or groups) to which they belong that ratifiies their social identities. While the captain may lay the foundations of his leadership identity through his discourse; the construction of an identity is only successful if accepted by the players, which is shown in their discourse, thus the players co-construct the captain's leadership identity, as has been shown by other leadership research (Holmes and Marra 2004a; Kendall 2004). .

The next section will describe the ethnographic research that has been used to understand the composition of the rugby club, describe the relationship between the different levels of the hierarchy and the captain's place in this.

## 3. Ethnographic Information

### *3.1 Fieldwork Methodology*

The current paper uses extracts and ethnographic information gathered during fieldwork for my MSc by Research Thesis, which addressed some wider research questions, firstly, the way that leaders emerge in the rugby club and secondly, how they use relational practice to maintain their leadership status. This paper builds upon that work.

The choice of a rugby club as a research site was influenced by my own personal experience of playing rugby as a teenager. Although at the time of embarking upon this fieldwork I had not played rugby for some years, I was familiar enough with the way in which a rugby team operated to join a local club as a player. I spent three months as a player, taking notes after training sessions and matches. At this stage the team was unaware of my status as a researcher. Once I felt I had been accepted into the team and had learned all I could in this manner, I outlined my research intentions and gained permission to record the training sessions. Using a recording device worn by the coach for some sessions and the captain for others, I successfully recorded nine

training sessions, totalling approximately twelve hours of recorded material. I continued to play for the club for the rest of the season and at the season's end phased out my involvement with the team.

Prior to engaging in this fieldwork I had no contact with the club or any members of the team so my ethnographic work was carried out from the dual viewpoint of a new player learning to be accepted by the other team members and as a researcher learning how the social structure of the club functions. What follows is a brief explanation of that structure.

### *3.2 The Structure of the Rugby Club*

In Scotland rugby is predominantly a middle/upper class pursuit (Donnelly and Young 1985; Nauright 1996). It is rare to find working class rugby players, perhaps due to the dominance of soccer as Scotland's "national sport". Edinburgh is a melting pot for many nationalities, with a high student population as well as many backpackers. Therefore it is not surprising that the rugby club that was studied was comprised of mostly middle class players and a mixture of Scots, English, Welsh, Irish and South Africans (and one Peruvian). The age of the players ranged from eighteen to forty-two, with the majority of players being in their late twenties.

During participant observation it was noted that within the club there exists not only a hierarchy but a division between playing and non-playing members of the club as illustrated in Figure 1. The playing members constitute the two teams, the first and second fifteens (sometimes referred to within the club as

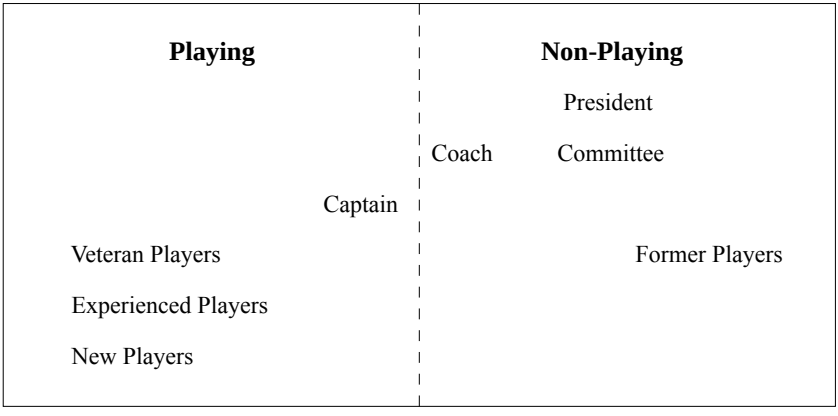


**Figure 1: Club hierarchy and division between playing and non-playing.**

*the ones* and *the twos*), and the non-playing members are people that have an official role or an affiliation with the club. This paper will focus only on the playing members and the coach, but it is necessary to mention that this divide exists as it is important in contextualising the relationship between the coach and the captain.

The playing and non-playing sections of the club could be thought of as separate CofPs that are linked but do not necessarily make up one larger CofP as there is no mutual engagement between the two. In fact as outlined, the only real contact between the two CofPs is through the captain and coach since they are members of both CofPs. Therefore, the coach and especially the captain may be regarded as brokers (Eckert and Wenger 2005), as they constitute the overlap between the CofPs.

For the purposes of this description, the playing members have been split between three categories based on their level of integration within the club (excluding the captain): veterans, experienced and new. These categories are fairly self explanatory but a little clarification is required. Veterans are players that have played for the club for several seasons and are active socially in the club, in other words, they will always go to the clubhouse after matches and participate in typical rugby club behaviour, usually involving copious amounts of alcohol and ritual humiliation of other players (Donnelly and Young 1985; Sheard and Dunning 1973). Interestingly the club has a website that includes a message board and the majority of the posts tend to be from veteran players. It seems that to be fully integrated in the club requires on-line interaction as well as face to face. The veterans generally know all of the non-playing members. The veterans are the core members of the playing section and as such have the greatest influence on the way in which the player's group identity is constructed. Experienced players are players that have played for the club for at least one prior season. They participate socially but will often not be involved quite as much as the veterans. New players are players in their first season for the club and this was the category that I fell into during the fieldwork. The new players are the peripheral members of the playing CofP. Social involvement is encouraged for them, as this is one way of becoming more deeply integrated into the CofP, but it is not mandatory, and it was quite easy for me to maintain a bit of distance in this regard. This helped me to remain an observer while still being an accepted member of the group.

### *3.3 Speaker Background*

Before examining how the coach and captain interact with each other and

the players, a little background information may help in interpreting their discourse.

The coach is from Edinburgh and is in his early thirties. He is a professional rugby coach and is employed by the club committee of which he becomes a de facto member through his employment. The captain is from Yorkshire, although he has lived in Edinburgh for approximately ten years. He is in his late thirties. He works within the financial industry and has played for the club for several years. The captain is chosen each year by a player vote following nominations by the committee.

In order to provide the context of the examples that will be presented later I will describe the format of a typical training session. This is important as the history of a group, and any repeated order of events, is vital to understanding the interactions within the group, since it helps to establish the accepted practice or "politic behaviour" (Watts 2003) that becomes part of the group's identity (Holmes and Marra 2002a; Richards 2006). .

### *3.4 A typical training session*

When the captain arrives at training, he chats to whichever players are already there. Once the coach arrives the captain talks with the coach whereas the rest of the players start playing a game of touch rugby to warm up and to pass the time while the rest of the players arrive. The captain then calls the players over to lead them in the "official" warm-up, which is a set routine called *dynamics* by the team. Sometimes, the captain engages in small talk with the other players during stretching. This may be considered an example of the captain performing RP, which has been observed to be a useful leadership tool (Holmes and Marra 2004b).

Once the warm-up is finished the coach calls the players over for a pre-training talk in which the goals for the week are established and that night's training explained. The rest of the training session consists of several training exercises, which are each explained in detail by the coach. The last exercise is generally a "fun" exercise often taking the form of a mini-game and there is usually some form of punishment for the losers such as sit-ups or running round the pitch. The coach then gives a closing talk during which he sometimes defers to the captain, notably when it comes to reading out the team sheet (as the list of players who have been selected to play for the first fifteen is referred to within the club). The purpose of the talk is to set out what is going to happen at the next session or match, and to check if any of the players are not available to train or play.

From this brief summary of a typical training session, the coach clearly leads the players since he tells them what to do. In the next section I will show how the captain plays a crucial role in smoothing the way for the coach by utilising his position in the club's hierarchy and performing covert leadership.

## 4. The Identities of the Captain

The captain occupies a unique position within the rugby club. He is at the same time one of the players and has a place on the selection panel. He performs the same tasks as the other players, yet also some official or administrative tasks. The captain can be viewed as both "us" as well as "them". This duality of identity is evident in his discourse, which changes depending on the type of leadership that the situation calls for, demonstrating that identity is "an interactionally constructed representation that serves our social needs" (Richards 2006: 37)

The captain's leadership is enacted through a combination of his identity as a veteran player and the identity that is created through his discourse in situations which call for formal leadership. Such formal situations include reading out the team sheet, in-game motivational team-talks and speeches given at formal social events such as club dinners. The captain tends to use his player identity to carry out relational leadership, and his overt leader identity to carry out more transactional tasks. However, the overt leader identity is more than simply an alternative identity; its existence co-constructs the covert identity. The performance of the overt leadership identity asserts the captain's status as a leader and indexes his institutional power. When the captain subsequently performs RP and other non-task related discursive behaviour allows the players' memory of the captain's overt leader identity allows him to use his player identity to perform leadership. If it were not for the occasional displays of the overt leader identity, covert leadership may not be as effective a leadership strategy for the captain. The distinction between the overt and covert leadership identities can be compared to Fletcher's (1999) "disappearing acts", which describe the process of avoiding problems not being seen as "real" work, and performance of RP not perceived as useful. By performing RP the captain effectively "disappears" (to use Fletcher's terminology) his overt leadership identity while continuing to influence what the players do.

These points are exemplified in examples 1 and 2. In Example 1 the captain engages in some quite subtle background leadership using the player identity, while in Example 2 the captain switches between his two identities.

### *4.1 Covert leadership*

The captain identifies himself with the players in Example 1, primarily by his admission of confusion about the task. This example takes place near the start of a training session. It is the second training exercise in the session, so the players should all be suitably focused and warmed up. The coach is fully in his coaching role/leadership identity and on the surface the captain appears to be performing purely as one of the players.

**Example 1: Confusing training drill**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Coach: | Okay if we get the two teams over here please. |
| 2. | | (20.1) ((wind noise)) |
| 3. | Coach: | Okay quickly, we're going to number the cones, |
| 4. | | the yellows are one, the greens are two, the |
| 5. | | whites are three, and the blues are four. |
| 6. | | Okay, now, I'm going to call out a series of |
| 7. | | numbers so I might call one, two, three. If I |
| 8. | | call one, two, three, you hit the cones in |
| 9. | | order between each uh- cone you've got to hit |
| 10. | | the white line you're standing on. Okay, after |
| 11. | | you've done that you can take off (?) |
| 12. | | (16.2) ((wind noise)) |
| 13. | Captain: | What's it one, two (?) |
| 14. | Coach: | One two, three, go! |
| 15. | | (10.4) |
| 16. | Coach: | You don't need to wait for me to say go. Three |
| 17. | | and four! |
| 18. | | ((Captain runs. Captain then returns to group)) |
| 19. | Captain: | Which is one again?= |
| 20. | Player 1: | =(This is fucking hard.) |
| 21. | | ((general laughter from players)) |
| 22. | Coach: | One two. |
| 23. | Captain: | I had no idea what I was doing out there. (9.5) |
| 24. | | Depending on what number he calls, you've to go |
| 25. | | to the cone and back. So what's one again? |
| 26. | Player 2: | That's three. |
| 27. | Player 3: | That's two. |
| 28. | Captain: | One, two, three, four. So you got to touch the |
| 29. | | cones in order and then come back here. One, |
| 30. | | two, three (here we go) (4.2) |
| 31. | Coach: | One two one. |

First of all the coach explains the details of the exercise that he wants the players to carry out. It is quite complex and very few of the players really understand what they are doing. The main problem is that the coach only numbered the cones by colour once, very quickly, and perhaps not everybody was paying attention. The action of the captain is a prime example of him performing covertly as a leader. There is a problematic situation and he solves it using humour (Holmes and Marra 2002a, 2002b; Holmes and Schnurr 2005), and in a way that allows the players to believe that it was a cooperative effort (maybe it was), and which is not critical of the coach for not explaining the exercise properly. By solving the problem in this way, using RP as a leadership strategy that pays attention to everyone's face needs (Geyer 2008; Goffman 1967; Holmes and Schnurr 2005) the captain enables the drill to continue with minimum disruption to the training session. Thus he effectively performs task-oriented relational leadership.

In lines 19 to 25 the captain tries to help both his own understanding and the team's. He starts off with an admission of confusion, which helps to assert that he is simply acting as any other player and thus aligns his identity with the team (Goffman 1958: 57). He then acts as though he doesn't know what he is supposed to be doing (line 25), but note that he immediately then states what the objective is (lines 28 - 29). It seems that the captain does know what is supposed to be happening in this drill but the problem is that he can't remember the numbers. By asserting the main goal of the exercise before asking, "So what's one again?" (line 25) he appears to interpret the coach's instructions to the players, and either makes a genuine request for information or tests that the other players know what they're doing.

The ambiguity that is present in the captain's statement at lines 23 to 25 allows the captain to lead the group in the problem solving or group memory task that works out which number is assigned to each cone, without compromising his solidarity with the team, and without threatening the overt leadership identity that the coach is performing. As the request for information can be interpreted in either of the two ways mentioned above (even if the captain's motivation is to test the team's knowledge), it is likely that the players will act as though it is the captain, as a fellow player, who requires the information. Therefore, the players are led without being aware of it. This is skilful covert leadership on the part of the captain.

In order to maintain the subterfuge and further construct his player identity, it doesn't hurt for the captain to appear to be fallible as this maintains his closeness to the team. Therefore the admission, "I had no idea what I was

doing out there" (line 23), although potentially damaging to the captain's face, cements his alignment to the team in this situation. He seems to be saying, "I am just like any of you", and thus reduces the social distance between himself and the players. However he then demonstrates that he does in fact know what he is supposed to be doing, which is where the ambiguity creeps in and thus is evidence of the captain using relational work to perform background leadership.

In this example the captain uses his identity as a player to carry out his job as a leader, and by indirectly (Kiesling 2005) guiding the players through the problem, he accomplishes this covertly. The captain's leadership necessarily takes place in the background because the coach has the floor as leader in this situation. The captain's covert leadership helps to untangle a confusing situation without criticising either the coach or the players. It thus maintains the face of both and protects the coach's identity as the leader in this situation.

The next section illustrates how the captain performs his formal leadership identity when the situation dictates it, and how his identity changes with the conversational situation.

### *4.2 Organisational and relational leadership*

Example 2 shows the captain performing organisational tasks: finding out why certain players are not present and the introduction of a new player. This organisational talk (Mirivel and Tracy 2005) develops into small talk in the form of gossip which is instigated by a player's response to the questions about attendance.

The captain is leading the players in the warm-up at the start of the session (immediately before the coach's opening team talk) and the coach is out of earshot on the other side of the pitch. As mentioned, this segment of the session is outside of the "official" training session and thus it falls outside of the coach's realm. As such it may be said that this excerpt constitutes pre-meeting talk, and the captain accomplishes both organisational and relational goals in the way he subtly performs team leadership in this situation (Mirivel and Tracy 2005). The way in which the captain enacts both organisational and relational leadership in this example shows him constructing a leadership identity that is aligned with the players but still able to "do power" (Holmes, Stubbe, and Vine 1999).

**Example 2: Warm-up**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Captain: | Right come on guys, let's go! |
| 2. | | (01:13.6)((Captain and players run round |
| 3. | | pitch)) |
| 4. | Captain: | Okay, have a good stretch. |
| 5. | | (4.6) |
| 6. | Captain: | We're not gonna bother with the dynamic stuff |
| 7. | | tonight we've done enough with that touch game |
| 8. | | I think. So— |
| 9. | | (6.9) |
| 10. | Captain: | Everyone introduce themselves to Andy[1]. |
| 11. | | (20.9) |
| 12. | Captain: | A few notable absences. Anyone heard from any |
| 13. | | of the guys that aren't here? Dave Williams |
| 14. | | said he couldn't make it, Danny's hurt his |
| 15. | Gavin: | knee. Saw Steve on Sunday, he said he'd be |
| 16. | | here. |
| 17. | | (6.3) |
| 18. | Captain: | He did? He got man of the match as well. |
| 19. | Gavin: | And he got a broken nose— got a broken nose. |
| 20. | Captain: | Aye[2]. He's like, 'I broke my nose, look'. |
| 21. | Gavin: | Still ugly though. |
| 22. | Captain: | Hah, well done. (I said) 'It's a tiny little |
| 23. | | bit of blood'. What? |
| 24. | John: | (He) (?) |
| 25. | Captain: | I know. He says, 'it's broken', and I went 'Uh |
| 26. | | huh'. |
| 27. | | (7.5) |
| 28. | Captain: | So who else [ is missing? |
| 29. | Gavin: | [ Pulled a nice one on Saturday |
| 30. | | night from what I heard. |
| 31. | Captain: | What? |
| 32. | Gavin: | Pulled a nice one on Saturday night from what I |
| 33. | | heard. |
| 34. | Captain: | Who did? |
| 35. | Gavin: | Uh— Steve. |
| 36. | Captain: | Did he? |
| 37. | Gavin: | Went to uh— Scrubway. |
| 38. | Captain: | Wonder how Danny was getting on. |
| 39. | Gavin: | (?) |
| 40. | Captain: | Danny had a bottle of whisky with him, on the |
| 41. | | bus on the way home. |
| 42. | | (7.2) |

43. Captain: I woke up the ne— I woke up on Sunday I could,
44. taste and smell— I kept getting
45. wafts of it.

In line 1 the captain rounds up the team to go for a jog round the pitch as a start to their formal warm-up. The warm-up is normally a set routine that starts with a jog round the pitch, followed by some stretching and then what is known as *dynamics*. These are a set of running exercises such as running with high knees for twenty metres in a line of four players and these eventually progress to exercises that include passing the ball along the line. However, on this occasion, the captain has decided that these *dynamics* are not necessary (line 6). Although transactional leadership is required at this stage as the captain is leading this pre-training situation, and has organisational tasks to carry out, he has diverted from the normal pattern of the warm-up. He doubly hedges his decision by giving a reason: "we've done enough with that touch game" (line 7), and then tagging on "I think" (line 8). Alternatively, the captain could be hedging the decision he has made not to do the dynamics in order to minimise the damage to his face if one of the players disputes the decision, thus implying that he may not be altogether certain that this was the correct decision.

At line 10 we have an example of a bald, on-record command or instruction with "everyone introduce themselves to Andy". This accomplishes an organisational goal and therefore the captain is able to exercise power which helps to construct his identity as the leader of this situation. This is developed further in the next few lines which take the form of a list with pauses to separate the items. This gives the impression that the captain knows he has several tasks to get through. Given that the main task is finding out reasons for non-attendance the captain appears to be performing organisational duties that may be (and were) reported back to the coach. As these duties are linked to the "official" training, the captain is able to construct an identity as an overt leader in this situation.

The question that the captain asks at line 12/13, "anyone heard from any of the guys that aren't here?" appears to be partially rhetorical as the captain goes on to answer it himself, perhaps in order to encourage the players to contribute. The captain goes into detail and singles out individual players about attendance at training, but once he gets a response and then starts talking about one player (Steve, an experienced player), his leader identity is dropped in order to participate in gossip about what happened at and after the match on Saturday.

By portraying Steve as exaggerating his injury, the captain asserts his own "orthodox masculinity", a gender stereotype often associated with male players of team sports (Anderson 2005 p. 87). It is seen as the normative gender identity for male rugby players and is characterised by down-play of pain, assertions of heterosexuality, and a love of drinking, much like the "Southern Man" stereotype in New Zealand (Law 1997). In this reinforcement of the behavioural norms of the team he is assisted by Gavin (a veteran player), whose comment at line 21 is acknowledged by the captain as a worthwhile contribution. It is also Gavin who then persists with the gossip about Steve when the captain attempts to return to his overt leader identity and continue the investigation into the low attendance. The captain, having lost the floor in this identity switches to his player identity and successfully regains the floor by introducing a new element of gossip at line 38. In doing this he is still performing leadership, but subtly. Gossip about the people who are not present at training could be regarded as conveying the message to the other players that if they choose not to turn up then they will be gossiped about, perhaps a way of solving the low attendance problem. There had been a problem with low attendance at training for a number of weeks at this stage and as such it was a topic that the coach also addressed in his opening team talk at this session.

The gossip in this example is performed by both Gavin and the captain using narrative which constructs the identity of the player in question as lacking in some regard. In the case of Steve, he is portrayed by the captain as exaggerating his injury or having a low pain threshold, both of which may detract from his orthodox masculinity. However, Gavin constructs a new identity for Steve: that he is a bit of a "ladies' man", even with a broken nose. This is seen to be a good thing in the orthodox masculinity of the rugby club (Anderson 2005; Schacht 1996; Sheard and Dunning 1973).

The next player about whom the captain talks is Danny, he has already been mentioned as not being present but with good reason: he has hurt his knee. The captain has therefore legitimised Danny's injury in contrast to the doubt he placed on Steve's. The captain then constructs an identity for Danny as a big drinker, which he then links himself with through narrative (Schiffrin 1996). By doing this the captain constructs his identity as being "one of the boys" and thus reminds the players that although at the start of the warm up he had performed overt leadership, he is still a player. The construction of both identities in such a short period of time may serve to reinforce the fact that the captain is the coach's deputy, and the link between the players and the coach.

The next section examines how the captain and coach use each other to

their mutual benefit, and how their relationship benefits from their respective identity alignments.

## 5. The captain as second-in-command

The examples presented above have shown how the captain reinterprets the coach's instructions for the team and how the captain and coach complement each-other's discursive style. Example 2 demonstrated how the captain behaves as the coach's deputy when addressing players, and the way in which he acts as the link between the coach and the players. This section will focus on the relationship between the coach and captain and show how they interact when there is no audience present.

In Example 3 the captain and coach are talking at the start of a training session before all of the players have arrived. The dialogue takes place while the coach is collecting the equipment he needs for the first training drill from the storage locker and the captain's comment "Same again is it?" (line 3) refers to the fact that the same equipment (the poles) was used at the previous training session, two days before.

**Example 3: Setting up**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Coach: | Right, get these fuckers out. More fun with |
| 2. | | poles. |
| 3. | Captain: | Same again is it? |
| 4. | Coach: | Just a variation on a theme. |
| 5. | | (5.1) |
| 6. | Captain: | Hightower's not available (?)Johnny's— he's |
| 7. | | available but, surprise surprise he's not down |
| 8. | | tonight— |
| 9. | | (5.6) |
| 10. | | ((Coach drops poles)) |
| 11. | Coach: | Fucking cunt. |
| 12. | | (3.2) |
| 13. | Coach: | One, two, three, four, five, six. |
| 14. | | (15.2) |
| 15. | Captain: | Who should we send to have a look at the |
| 16. | | pitch? |
| 17. | Coach: | Have a look at the pitch? |
| 18. | Captain: | Aye, Jim wanted us to go over and have a look |
| 19. | | at it. (1.8) For the twos. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 20. | Coach: | Aw fuck. I wouldn't've said there was any |
| 21. | | point in looking at it today. It's supposed to |
| 22. | | be dry tonight, and a little bit showery |
| 23. | | tomorrow. So surely you're looking to check it |
| 24. | | tomorrow rather than tonight, I mean, but, |
| 25. | | send one of the boys that are going to be |
| 26. | | fucking playing on it= |
| 27. | Captain: | =Ah= |
| 28. | Coach: | =somebody who knows it as well= |
| 29. | Captain: | =Aye. |

The first three lines are in essence small talk; they announce the captain's presence as the coach is busy when he arrives; in line 1 it is quite possible that he is talking to himself. The captain then waits until he thinks the coach is ready and launches into what appears to be a roll call. Given that in Example 2 the captain tried to establish the reasons for non-attendance at training, it does indeed seem that this is a duty that has been allocated to him. In many ways the behaviour of the captain in this example is that of a second-in-command reporting to a superior. He defers to the coach by asking who should be sent to inspect the pitch (line 15), but at the same time creates a shared leadership identity by saying "we".

This is further referenced in line 18 when the captain uses "us". In Scotland "us" is often used to mean "me" (Dictionary of the Scots Language 2005). Although the captain is not Scottish he does use various Scots words in his discourse such as "aye", and in fact this occurs in this same line (18). Whether this is a result of the length of time he has lived in Scotland, accommodation towards the coach, or a part of his rugby identity is difficult to say. But it is interesting to see him using such linguistic features when he is attempting to construct a joint identity with the coach, who is Scottish. Regardless of whether the captain is using "us" in the singular (Scots) or the plural (solidarity) sense, the effect on the identity construction is the same, it positions the captain in a group with the coach and this is further developed by reference to *others* (Holmes and Marra 2002b).

"Other" is first used to refer to the club president, Jim, by the captain which positions the captain and coach in a subordinate group to the president (line 18). However, the coach constructs the team as other by referring to them as "the boys" (line 25). While not contradicting the captain's construction of a co-leadership identity, the coach nevertheless defines his role within this group as the dominant position, by telling the captain how he should carry out the task

of getting the pitch inspected. The coach keeps the instruction informal and hence maintains the pseudo-equality between them by his use of "surely" (line 23) which makes the instruction sound more like a suggestion. It may also be that the coach is acting as the captain's mentor (Holmes 2005), and by doing so implies his seniority in the relationship between them.

Throughout this example we also see the coach's use of expletives (lines 1, 11, 20 and 26), all variations on "fuck". This may be a way in which the coach co-constructs a co-leadership identity by creating solidarity with the captain (c.f. Daly, Holmes, Newton, and Stubbe 2004). It should be noted that in the rugby club this is perfectly normal language and would be considered unremarkable. In fact, it is likely that the use of language which would be frowned upon outside of the club is another way in which the members of the club construct their orthodox masculinity (De Klerk 1997).

As the analyses demonstrate, the relationship between the coach and captain is a complex one. When carrying out their leadership tasks with the team they perform complementary leadership identities, which are given credence by the team's acceptance of them. These identities could be said to be facets of the co-leadership identity that is constructed both by the complementary ways in which they perform, and by the discourse that is used when they interact with each other. The next section examines further the captain's leadership identities and discusses the need for multiple leadership identities.

## 6. Discussion

So how does the captain accomplish his role as a deputy? In Example 1 the captain performed leadership in the background. He got the players to work together and help themselves by asking them to help him. In Example 2 the captain asserted his orthodox masculinity as well as constructing the identity of an absent player as less masculine. Although in Example 2 the captain begins in an overt leadership identity, the majority of the work that he accomplishes uses covert leadership.

Covert leadership is a vital weapon in the deputy's discursive armoury; it allows him to fulfil both relational and transactional goals without impinging upon his superior's leadership status. The relationship between the captain and the coach, as shown in Example 3, perhaps explains why the captain may be reluctant to step on the coach's toes as far as overt leadership is concerned. The power dynamic between the two is evident in their discourse. Furthermore, if

two overt leadership identities were present in the same situation this could lead to conflict between the leaders and confusion among their subordinates (the players).

It thus seems that the leadership identity performed by the coach co-constructs the identity of the captain and vice versa (Mieroop 2008). When the coach is not involved in a situation the captain is free to use whichever identity is most appropriate or both, as in Example 2. In the training session, when both coach and captain are present it appears that the coach will always take the overt role, as leading the training session is his job, hence constructing the captain as subordinate. This also echoes the relationship between the two that is displayed in the discourse between them. However, an aspect of the captain's leadership which this paper has not been able to exemplify, due to recording limitations, is his behaviour during matches. This is where ethnographic research is crucial to fill a gap. The captain's job in matches is to continually motivate the players and to make match-related decisions. In doing this he must act quickly, in what is often an unpredictable and dangerous sport, and as such there is rarely time to pay attention to any face needs. In matches the coach's input is restricted to before the match, after, and at half-time. The match is the environment when the captain fully realises his overt leader identity.

The captain's leadership identity is also undoubtedly constructed at training sessions and in post-match socialising, and it is perhaps because the captain engages in RP in these, private, closed situations that he is able to "do power" so effectively in public, on the pitch. Therefore the captain's leadership identity is "constructed *backstage* and represented *frontstage*[3]" (Richards 2006: 11).

It appears that in order to fulfil his role as a deputy, the captain must be capable of constructing a different kind of identity in response to the context. The examples in this paper suggest that the captain chooses to construct the appropriate identity for the situation. It is the ability to judge the situation that makes the captain an effective deputy and it is possible that this comes from his in-between position in the hierarchy of the club and a broker between the playing and non-playing CofPs. Of course, it is only the players' CofP that has been analysed here. Whether or not the coach and captain act in this way in the non-playing CofP (such as in a selection meeting) cannot be addressed without further data. However, on the basis of participant observation I can say that when the coach and captain are in club-related social situations, the captain constructs his leadership identity overtly by conducting the players in drinking games, fining players (for tardiness or improper attire) along with

other activities which constitute the social culture of a rugby club. The coach on the other hand fades into the background and associates with the non-players, often in a different room of the clubhouse. On one occasion I witnessed the coach attempting to admonish a player in the clubhouse for interrupting him while he was giving a speech. This met with laughter from the other players, and this further shows how the leadership identities of both the captain and coach are context-specific and conditional upon the acceptance of the players.

## 7. Conclusions

This paper has examined the way in which the captain of a rugby team constructs his identity as a deputy leader. Using extracts from recordings of team training sessions, it has been shown how the captain constructs two main identities and that these are contextually dependent. The captain's unique position in the club enables him to construct identities that straddle the boundary between "us" and "other" and this, coupled with the RP and covert leadership that he performs, is what makes him an effective deputy.

By examining the relationship between the coach and captain I have suggested that the captain forms a co-leadership group with the coach in which the coach is the dominant partner. The captain attempts to construct a group identity for the coach and himself through his referral to the players as "other". The coach's apparent acceptance of this indicates that he accepts this construction and his assertion of dominance in the relationship, along with the captain's more submissive discursive style, highlight the fact that the captain is the coach's deputy and generally seeks approval from the coach about his own leadership actions.

The background work that the captain does as a deputy can be regarded as what glues the team together and enables the coach to get on with running the training session effectively. It also serves as the groundwork for the captain to perform a more authoritative leadership identity in matches by establishing a bond with the players during training through RP that will be used in matches when there is no time for RP.

This paper has established that in the rugby club the discourse of the deputy constructs two identities which are used in different ways. The overt leader identity is used in situations when the captain must be authoritative but it also supports the player identity when it is used to perform leadership covertly.

This allows the captain to perform both relational and transactional tasks while maintaining his status as deputy leader. The examples that have been provided have shown that the captain is a skilful practitioner of covert leadership and quick at reacting to changing contexts with a change in identity. The role of the other participants has been examined and it has been shown that they help to co-construct the identities that the captain uses by their acceptance or rejection of the identity that he performs. Overall, the captain's use of covert leadership to perform his job as a deputy is a strategy that not only works well for him but also helps the coach, the senior partner in the leadership team, carry out leadership.

Whether the captain described in this paper is unusual in his approach to leadership or indicative of how co-leadership works in sport can only be established with further research into the discourse of sports teams. Further study could also be made of the effectiveness of this and other discursive leadership strategies by analysing the reactions of subordinates to leader requests to see if the use of relational practice, especially from a deputy, makes them more likely to comply. It could be useful to team sports players to have access to analysis of their discourse as a way to improve their leadership skills. This would parallel the way that many players have access to information about their playing performance .and is something that I intend to address in future research.

This paper has described in terms of identity and discourse a strategy for accomplishing co-leadership that is applicable in any hierarchical organisation with a leader. It is a particularly useful strategy for sports leadership as it draws upon both the power dynamics of the player/coach relationship and the solidarity of the players. In summary, the way that discursive leadership is performed in the rugby club shows that leadership is not necessarily a solo effort performed by the head of an organisation. It can be a practice constructed through the discursive behaviour of a leadership team, with each member playing to their strengths.

## Transcription Conventions

| | |
|---|---|
| = | Contiguous utterances |
| [<br>[ | Simultaneous/overlapping speech. |
| (1.6) | Pause |
| ‘ ’ | Reported speech eg. ‘uh-huh’ |

| | |
|---|---|
| — | Sound cut off e.g. I woke up the ne— |
| (??) | Unable to transcribe. |
| (word) | Unsure transcription. |
| (( )) | Other details e.g. ((players running)) |

## Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms and are consistent as the same players are referred to more than once.
2. "Aye" means "yes" in Scotland and is generally pronounced [ai]. "Aye" is the accepted Scots spelling.
3. For a full description of the terms frontstage and backstage see Sarangi and Roberts (1999) and Goffman (1958).

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