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SIMULATION OF SPOKEN INTERACTION IN WRITTEN ONLINE MEDIA TEXTS

Abstract

The article deals with the features of spoken language in the written discourse of live text commentary, a modern genre of online journalism. After locating the new genre at the intersection of spoken live commentary, computer-mediated communication and everyday conversation, it identifies some of the features conveying spokenness on the phonological/graphological, lexical, syntactic and pragmatic levels. Based on data from recent sports reports, the article argues that orality represents an unstated norm in the interactive subtype of LTC found, for instance, in the online British newspaper the *Guardian*. Spoken features and the pseudo-conversational structure of the reports are devices whereby the authors of the texts create a sense of immediacy in their reports, on the one hand, and construct and enhance the illusion of an interpersonal speech event, on the other. The linguistic characteristics of LTC, which reflect the hybrid nature of the genre, can be seen as serving the purpose of social bonding within the virtual group of readers.

Key words

Spoken and written language; orality; dialogism; hybrid genres; synthetic personalisation; computer-mediated communication; live text commentary

1. Live text commentary

Live text commentary (“LTC”; also known in various media as ‘minute-by-minute’, ‘text commentary’, ‘live match report’, etc.) is a relatively recent and so far under-researched genre (cf. Jucker 2006, Chovanec 2006, Pérez-Sabater et al. 2008). The online commentary is ‘live’ because it is made available on the Internet almost in real time, i.e., contemporaneous with the event that it describes,

yet it is in the written mode, hence the attribute 'text' that distinguishes it from 'spoken' commentary (cf. Jucker 2006). It is precisely this hybrid nature of LTC that lends it some of its typical characteristics and also provides the genre with the models on which it draws.

LTC is a new genre of online journalism that has come into existence thanks to modern information and communication technologies which allow the almost instantaneous production and dissemination of textual reports to broad audiences. It is distinct from blogging in that LTC is an institutionalized genre of journalism rather than a personal account of events: the texts are written by professional journalists and are presented online on the web pages of established newspapers, usually in the news or sports sections. Moreover, the commentary is produced at the same time as the extralinguistic events which the LTC describes, allowing for only the minimal time-lag necessary for the physical production of the written message and its posting online. Needless to say, LTC may – similar to weblogs – contain a degree of subjectivity and lack the impersonality of presentation preferred in other kinds of journalism; this property is taken to be connected with the impression of immediacy which LTC tries to recreate in the written text.

Not surprisingly, LTC now appears widely in various newspapers because it can bring readers the most topical information imaginable – the events are reported on while they are still unfolding, i.e., '*in medias res*'. The live news report then develops in an incremental fashion, reflecting the actual developing event. It follows a temporal framework with (ir)regular updates on the latest developments.

LTC is suitable particularly for those events that can be scheduled in advance, so that journalists can either be present at the scene or follow some mediated coverage of the events in real time, e.g. on TV. Parliamentary inquiries, presidential inaugurations, national elections and other major political and social events can be easily prescheduled and are covered by the media in the form of live text commentaries.

Nevertheless, the area that is most widely covered in the media by means of LTC is sports reporting. This is hardly surprising: sports events have a fixed temporal structure and a clear culmination in the final result, which provides a natural focus for the reporting as well as the motivation for the readers to keep on reading.

In terms of its textual and information structures, LTC has several distinct types. First, there is LTC that reports on the extralinguistic events. The orientation to the information-providing function makes this the 'purest' kind of journalism among the different kinds of LTC (cf. the analysis of this text type by Jucker 2006). The journalist's account can be solely factual, though it can include evaluative comments. Second, there is live text commentary that incorporates reader feedback (cf. Chovanec 2006, Pérez-Sabater et al 2008). In this case, the journalist includes textual segments from the readers' emails or other kinds of messages, often responding to them. As a result, the live text commentary becomes interactive and heteroglossic, i.e., consisting of several distinct voices. Finally, there are

some other kinds of LTC, most notably where the text of the commentary is a monologic, referential account of the events while the relevant web page simultaneously provides space for unregulated chat communication between members of the audience (cf. Chovanec *forthc.*-b).

The interactive kind of LTC, which incorporates reader feedback, can be analysed on two levels which exist parallel to each other: the temporally-organized description of the game and the topically-organized debate between the journalist and the readers (cf. Chovanec 2008a, 2010).

2. Live text commentary as a subgenre of sports reporting

As mentioned above, LTC has become very common in the area of sports reporting. Such reporting provides one of the genre models – in the form of ‘unscripted commentary’ (Crystal and Davy 1969), ‘sports announcer talk’ (Ferguson 1983) or live spoken sports commentary in general. While register-oriented studies tend to define varieties on the basis of linguistic features, genres are defined non-linguistically (Biber 1989: 39) as systematic and predictable variations in language use, sometimes with respect to their central purpose, prototypical form and content, and recognition within the community (Swales 1990). Genres describe recurrent patterns of language use. They are dynamic in the sense that they do not exist as some independent entities; speakers/writers use them to achieve their own communicative goals and to develop and sustain personal relations with others.

As mentioned above, LTC is an instance of mass media communication, with sports commentary as one of its models (due to the lack of visual input, the model is radio rather than TV broadcast). LTC, as a subgenre of sports reporting, is a mass media speech event, produced by professional commentators in real time for the benefit of mutually anonymous mass audience consuming the commentary in a split spatial context, i.e., in numerous locations different from its place of production. As Ferguson (1983: 156) points out, the register of ‘sports announcer talk’ shares a crucial element with other forms of broadcasting talk: it “is a monologue or dialog-on-stage directed at an unknown, unseen, heterogeneous mass media audience who voluntarily choose to listen, do not see the activity being reported, and provide no feedback to the speaker”.

However, sports reporting, as noted in the pioneering study by Crystal and Davy (1969), differs from some other types of mass media communication by creating the impression of conversational casualness. According to their findings, this effect is conveyed by the skillful use of both grammatical structures and lexical items. The sense of casualness is, for instance, achieved on the syntactic level by the loose stringing of sentences by means of the conjunction ‘and’. As to lexis, the impression of casual conversation and spontaneity is signalled by the choice of informal vocabulary.

In comparison to canonical types of sports commentary, online live text commentary displays several similarities and differences. It is, likewise, an institu-

tionalized instance of mass media communication, since it is created by professional commentators working for online versions of national daily newspapers, such as the *Guardian Unlimited* website, which has provided material for analysis in this article.

Yet, LTC differs from traditional sports commentaries on TV and radio in two important respects: (1) the medium (i.e. the mode) of the text and (2) its time of production. Unlike real-time commentaries, live text commentaries are written for the internet and are read online by their audience. In addition, there is a brief time delay between the occurrence of an event in the field and its transformation into a written verbal commentary, which removes some of the immediacy of real-time spoken commentary (and occasionally also real-time spoken speculation over the facts of some less obvious event happening on the pitch and requiring a replay in slow motion, for instance).

Although LTCs are, thus, substantially different from traditional types of sports reporting, they nevertheless aim to create much the same effect of casualness and spontaneity. The authors of online LTCs skillfully manipulate various linguistic structures and strategies in order to create a communicative event which combines information about the game with interpersonal gossip unrelated to the game itself, thus constructing a text that operates on two levels of narration. As a result, the interactive type of LTC can be approached in terms of a primary layer of narration, i.e., the commentary on the game itself (be it in the form of a relatively factual provision/reporting of information or a highly subjective and evaluative commentary), and a secondary layer (the “gossip layer”). In addition, to further complicate the narrative structure, the latter may become fragmented into several parallel thematic lines pursuing their own topics (cf. Chovanec 2009, 2010).

The presence of the secondary layer has significant implications for the genre characteristics of LTC because it provides additional genre models. Thanks to the presence of interpersonal quasi-interactions and the conversational structuring, LTC can also draw on the norms of casual conversation and computer-mediated communication, mainly asynchronous online chat (cf. Herring 1996, 1999, Crystal 2001). As a result, the interactive type of LTC can be characterised as a hybrid genre (or even a generic hybrid).

3. Interaction and interactiveness

Due to the above-mentioned distance between the producers of media messages and their audiences, the media try to compensate for the lack of personal contact. There are essentially three ways of achieving this effect by laying emphasis on (1) interpersonal interaction, (2) verbal and visual interactiveness, and (3) a combination of both. Some media (typically broadcast and online) can draw on various modern technologies to engage the audience members in direct interactions (e.g. by means of phone-ins, text messages, email communication, Facebook groups, etc.). As a result, select individuals are allowed to contribute in a spoken

or written way to the mass media speech event – by posing questions or offering personal opinions. Though the interaction is mediated in order to overcome the separation of contexts (cf. Talbot 2007: 84), it is dialogical.

The other way of compensating for the lack of personal contact is to focus on interactiveness, which is a matter of the presentation of the communicated content (cf. Leitner 1997). This occurs in mediated quasi-interactions (Thompson 1995), such as watching television, listening to the radio or reading (Talbot 2007: 84). What defines such quasi-interactions is the lack of reciprocity: the communication is one-way and monological. Yet, such quasi-interactions can contain dialogical and conversational features and structures – either as traces of other real interactions (which, however, exclude the audience or the recipients of the messages from direct participation) or as staged, mock interactions with the physically absent audience or with other non-present persons and personas. In this connection, Conboy (2006: 20–22) mentions the “rhetoric of dialogue” in which some tabloid media (such as *The Sun*) frequently engage, while Talbot (2007) describes this phenomenon as “simulated interaction”.

There are numerous strategies for enhancing the impression of personal contact in simulated interactions. They include, among others, synthetic personalisation and heteroglossia, which typically result in the strategic use of various phenomena connected with the spoken mode. Informality and conversationalism, thus, contribute to the impression that the speaker/writer knows the audience members personally.

Synthetic personalization is defined as “a compensatory strategy to give the impression of treating each of the people ‘handled’ en masse as an individual” (Fairclough 1989: 62). It is used to simulate the atmosphere of friendliness between strangers and in mass media contexts. For instance, Talbot (1995) notes that in women’s magazines, it constructs what she calls “syntentic sitherhoods” – groups of readers whose members offer each other intimacy, emotional support, confidentiality and advice. In men’s magazines, it introduces elements of rivalry, humour, language play and self-irony (cf. Benwell 2001).

In live text commentary, the readers are treated (and themselves behave) as members of a virtual group of sports fans which has a shared group identity. This is manifested by their reliance on shared contexts (cultural, linguistic, etc.) as well as on background knowledge, e.g. about famous matches from the past, the progression of various sports championships, the personal histories of sportsmen, the pursuits of individuals and teams, etc. Since not every reader will be able to understand all assumptions, it may be hypothesized that ‘degrees of membership’ exist on the part of the audience, with some members being more ‘core’ than others on account of their broader knowledge. This seems to be supported by some evidence from the readers’ emailed comments and the journalists’ reactions to them, cf. such pseudo-dialogical exchanges as the following:

- (1) **Shambling prediction** [...] If France win we have the most romantic farewell imaginable for Zizou, the greatest ever player since Maradona

(personally I think Ronaldinho and Des Lyttle are better but they need to do it over an entire career), [...] (Ita-Fra, introduction)

[...]

Is Zidane rubbish? [...] People don't put Zidane up with Pele and Maradona, do they? High in the second tier, but below the Pele/Maradona/Collymore types, seems fair to me. (Ita-Fra, half-time)

[...]

51 mins "Are you a fan of the great Forrest team of the mid 90s?" says Richard Beniston. "Two references to Collymore and the mighty Des "Bruno" Lyttle in a minute by minute during the World Cup Final indicates you have some love for Frank Clarke's boys." And the mis-spelling of Frank Clark suggest you don't, Richard. (Ita-Fra, 51 mins)

The example shows a reader (Richard Beniston, addressed by the journalist in a familiar way as 'Richard') who reacts by email to the names of two local football players, mentioned by the sports commentator at the very beginning of the live text commentary and during the half-time. The incongruity of including such local players among the top international football stars may be seen as humorous; however, in order to appreciate the journalist's humour and obvious exaggeration, readers have to be able to perceive the incongruity, i.e., they must share some background knowledge of what football players are – and are not – among the most famous ones on the international level.

However, the reader – whose email is cited in minute 51 of the LTC – goes even further: he is able to place the two lesser-known players with a particular local team, and provide some additional details about the time of their activity as well as the team's manager. By being able to supply all these details, the reader indeed proves himself to be a 'core' member who knows a lot about football history and, hence, shares substantial background knowledge with the journalist.

His claim to 'coreness' within the virtual group, however, is denied by the journalist, who corrects the reader's spelling (interestingly, also the name of the team is misspelt as *Forrest* instead of *Forest*) and openly challenges the reader's knowledgeability. The journalist seemingly makes a face-threatening act by correcting the reader and actually putting him down. However, what might seem as a verbal act of aggression and even exclusion from the virtual group of 'those in the know' is actually almost the opposite: the journalist adheres here to the unstated norms and rules of a discursive game between himself and his readers. Based on the pattern of foregoing pseudo-dialogical exchanges, it is understood that the journalist (in his role of the gate-keeper) always has the last word and reacts in a critical or humorous way to the preceding comment voiced by a reader.

The local norm for such pseudo-interactions within live text commentaries, thus, includes verbal competitiveness (cf. Chovanec 2006). Such a verbal contest (or 'duelling') has been known from other contexts for a long time (Labov 1997[1972]). It can have an almost ritualistic function: as Benwell (2001) notes, it can be good-natured and actually serve for the construction and enactment of

one's identity (even in gendered terms through so-called 'male gossip'). What appears as a face-threatening act from the perspective of everyday conversation can, then, actually be seen as an instance of politic behaviour (cf. Watts 2003), i.e., behaviour that is not marked for politeness or impoliteness and adheres to the local discourse norms appropriate for a relevant 'community of practice' (cf. Wenger 1998, Ferenčík 2009).

The example above illustrates two additional issues. First, it shows the heteroglossia resulting from the presence of multiple voices in the text, in this particular case through a direct citation from a reader's email. As mentioned above, the interaction is not real: it is staged by the journalist who chooses what segment of the reader's verbal contribution to include (or exclude) and how to structure it with respect to his own comments that may either precede or follow.

Second, the example shows a phenomenon that is the subject of this article: namely the presence, in a written text, of some elements of spoken interaction, which lends the entire speech event informality and conversational style. In addition to the dialogical juxtaposition of the two voices, the brief example above also includes a direct form of address (*Richard*), ellipsis (*seems fair to me*), interpolation (i.e., the comment about two football players inserted in brackets and supplied almost as an afterthought to modify what had been mentioned before: *Personally, I think Ronaldinho and Des Lyttle are better but they need to do it over an entire career*), etc., i.e., linguistic features typical or evocative of the spoken mode.

4. Spoken features in live text commentary

So far, live text commentary has not been subject to much systematic attention in terms of linguistic analysis. However, the few authors who have dealt with this specific kind of computer-mediated communication (CMC) do note its hybrid character and point out its reliance on the various spoken models of communication, most notably live spoken reporting, though they also mention the affinity of the genre with other kinds of CMC.

As regards the spoken features in LTC, Jucker (2006) focuses on what he refers to as the 'parlando' style, tracing several features of orality that are used in written texts. In his view, live text commentary stands at the intersection of orality and literacy. The analysis shows that live text commentary, rather than occupying some intermediary position between conversation and fiction on the one hand and news reporting and academic writing on the other (as far as the analytical categories used by Biber et al. 1999 are concerned), is a new form of communication which exhibits some highly specific characteristics. Similarly, Pérez-Sabater et al. (2008) note that written online sports commentary draws on traditional oral genres and follows the shift towards orality in written (and public) discourse. They consider several linguistic traits identified as markers of orality and perform a comparative analysis in English, French, and Spanish live text commentaries.

They conclude that “the British newspapers, while cultivating an informal, oral style, consistently avoid traditional CMC markers of prosody”, which, it is argued, are more common in Spanish online newspapers.

The findings confirm the general trend, noticed by a number of authors, towards an increased conversationalization and informalisation of the media. Fairclough (1995: 66), for instance, argues that conversationalization is connected with entertainment in “public-colloquial discourse style”. Similar observations are made by Tolson (2006) and O’Keeffe (2006) for various kinds of spoken media, as well as Montgomery (2007), who points out a tendency towards informality in delivery in TV news broadcast. Biber et al. (1999: 1098–9) note that the same holds true for modern conversation, where “a general drift towards the casualization of everyday speech” is detectable.

The actual manifestation of the hybrid nature of LTC as regards spoken/oral/conversational features and informal ways of expression is apparent on all levels of linguistic analysis – phonological/morphological, lexical, syntactic, as well as discursual/pragmatic. The present article does not aim to provide an exhaustive list or a classification of the spoken features occurring in the written text; rather, it shows how the mixing of the spoken and written modes comes to constitute the implicit norm of the genre and how it is used as a strategy of synthetic personalisation.

4.1. Graphology and prosody

In the written mode, graphology takes over some of the functions which fall within the scope of phonology or prosody in the spoken mode. This concerns both the actual representation of sounds and the conventional indication of certain suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress, etc.

Features evocative of the spoken mode are thus realized, among others, as the emphatic lengthening of written representations of sounds (e.g., *Peep! Peep! Peeeeeep!! It’s all over.*; Ger-Tur, end of game) and the excessive use of multiple punctuation marks and capital letters (cf. Jucker 2006: 125). This is a stock strategy shared with other types of computer-mediated communication, such as email or online chatting (cf. Crystal 2001: 34, Herring 1996, 1999).

In LTC, such emphatic lengthening imitating the genuine emotionality of speech in the written mode typically occurs in the reporting of crucial moments of matches, as in the following example when a goal is scored: *GOLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLLL! England 1 Brazil 1* (Diego 90+2, Eng-Bra, 90 mins). A similar function of indicating an increased degree of emotionality is sometimes performed as a result of the segmentation of clauses and phrases into independent units, cf. *GOAL! France 1 Italy 0 (Zidane 7 pen) Oh. My. God.* (Ita-Fra, 7 mins).

Other features include the conventional indication of emphasis by means of changing the font (*I really hope he’s being sarcastic [...]* (Por-Gre, half-time)), the inclusion of various hesitation sounds and fillers (*Diarra is booked for, erm,*

he's booked for, erm, very little in fact. (Ita-Fra, 76 mins)), as well as the written representation of other paralinguistic phenomena, such as pauses ([...] by winning the ball, going on a surging run down the left flank and then ... losing it again. (Gre-Cze, 46 mins)).

4.2. Lexical level

On the lexical level, markers of informality and cues to the spoken mode are particularly frequent. Some of the most prominent ones include (for others, see Chovanec 2008a and 2008b):

Colloquial/slang vocabulary, e.g.:

- (2) Ballack [...] is covered in blood. He's taken a whack to his left eye. Oh dear. (Ger-Spa, 38 mins)
 This is hotting up. (Ger-Spa, 64 mins)
 And they've got a brilliant, if slightly bonkers manager (have a gander at Scott Anthony's blog [...]) (Ger-Tur, pre-match)
 Ballack pings a ball forward [...] (Ger-Spa, 2 mins)
 Lehman claws brilliantly away for a corner [...] (Ger-Spa, 14 mins)
 Pavlyuchenko volleys wide, but he was parallel with the near post, so it's no biggie. (Hol-Rus, 64 mins)
 Heitinger has a wee cut on his chin. (Hol-Rus, 67 mins)

Shortening (of lexemes as well as phrases and compounds), e.g.:

- (3) [...] and the ref does bugger all. (Ger-Spa, 64 mins)
 The Czechs attack and win a free. (Gre-Cze, 52 mins)

Expletives, e.g.:

- (4) Good God this is dull (Por-Ger, 44 min);
 The presentation ceremony: They want to bloody well get on with it, is what I'm suggesting. (Ger-Spa, end of game)
 Semshov is off for (oh, Jesus) B-I-L-Y-A-L-E-T-D-I-N-O-V. (Hol-Rus, 69 mins)

Vulgarity, e.g.:

- (5) Then suddenly a total cock-up by Sergio Ramos (Germany-Spain, Euro 2008 Final, 2 min)
 [...] it was Podolski who injected the heat into the situation in the first place by standing in his opponent's face inviting bother. Common sense prevails and the ref does bugger all. (Ger-Spa, 64 mins)

Written representation of non-standard (and possibly regional) pronunciations. E.g.:

- (6) The Foreign Referee Wot Sent Wayne Off rightly gives Italy a free kick (Ita-Fra, 35 mins)
Clears for the Czechs – giddit? (Gre-Cze, 49 min)
The Czech players are not getting a second to settle on the ball and they don't like it up 'em (Gre-Cze, 62 mins)

The last example illustrates phenomena which are again located at the intersection of phonology in the spoken mode, graphology in the written mode, as well as lexicology and pragmatics, since written representations of such non-standard pronunciations can be used for the stereotypical characterisation of the speakers and even for humorous purposes, i.e., as a specific discursive strategy adopted by the author.

Spoken language phenomena on the lexical level also include interjections and verbal representations of sounds, e.g.:

- (7) Full time – extra time beckons. Hurrah! (Gre-Cze, 90 mins)

Interjections are also occasionally used in unusual syntactic functions, e.g. as verbs or as components of various ad-hoc utterances and nonce-words, as in the following examples where the author shows his linguistic creativity through describing the spectators' reactions:

- (8) Spain are dominating possession, and their supporters are cockily ole-ole-oleing! every pass. "It's early days for oles," warns the Guardian's David Pleat (Rus-Spa, 59 mins)
Touch-ole!-touch-ole!-touch-ole!-touch-ole! Spain are playing keepball and Russia can't get hold of it. (Rus-Spa, 80 mins)

Some other lexical devices with similar functions include:

Allusions to taboos, e.g.:

- (9) A quiet start to the half again, and yet again the Germans begin by seeing more of the ball. They are doing eff all with it, mind. (Ger-Spa, 48 mins)

Metaphorical language, e.g.:

- (10) Marchena hoofs Klose right in the trousers. That's a fair old Newton's Cradle clack. Poor guy. (Ger-Spa, 50 min)
The Spain midfielder takes a swipe; the daisycutter was going just wide left but Lehmann fingertips it out anyway. (Ger-Spa, 53 mins)

Code-mixing (regardless of whether the forms are correct or not), e.g.:

- (11) Jaaa! Michael Ballack spielt!!! [...] Jaaa! David Villa ist mit der thigh-knack!!!! (Ger– Spa, pre-match)

Lexical repetitions (cf. Culpeper and Kytö 2006: 70), e.g.:

- (12) “Enjoy your cakes, mate! writes David Wachter, who either emailed before my second cake-related post, or is a cruel, cruel man. (Cro-Tur, ET 2 mins)

Most of the lexical items in the list above communicate extra meanings beyond their denotative meanings: they add the writer’s positive or negative emotions and evaluations, conveying a range of meanings that can be classified as stylistic, connotative, etc. (cf. *whack*; *ref*; *cock-up*). Some of the items have little referential meaning in themselves, serving solely or mostly as markers of positive or negative emotion (cf. expletives such as *bloody*; *Oh Jesus*; etc.). Still others are relatively neutral (e.g., the adjective *cruel*), but they can be used in ways that indicate the author’s evaluative stance (cf. the repetition *a cruel, cruel man* in the last example where the connotation of orality is conveyed by means of the writer’s text-forming strategies rather than the systematic organization of the lexicon as in some of the other examples).

The highly colloquial and informal tenor of many of the lexical categories identified above shows an overlap with the characteristic style of the popular press with its ‘tabloid rhetoric’. The overall effect of these expressions rests in the creation of an atmosphere in which the readers may feel at ease: they are addressed in a code which is casual and informal, and, thus, more personal than what is typically the norm for such institutional contexts as the traditional print media (at least in the broadsheet press of which the *Guardian* is a representative). Such expressions as expletives and taboo words help to bring down barriers existing in official and impersonal communication – the public merges with the private. This conclusion is in harmony with Lewis (2003: 102), who notes that “[o]nline, boundaries blur between mass and personal communication, between the published and the unpublished, between news and information, and the geographically-defined communities and peer-defined communities.”

4.3. Syntactic level

On the syntactic level, there is, again, a whole host of devices and structures whose informality and spokenness contribute towards the synthetic personality of LTC. Jucker (2006: 122) shows that the proportion of clausal and non-clausal units in LTC is almost identical to AmE and BrE conversation (as based on the data in Biber et al. 1999). As regards sentence types, statements satisfying the referential function of information-provision are complemented with exclamatives, directives and interrogatives with their expressive (emotive) and conative functions. This means that the focus is no longer exclusively on the message but

also, to a significant degree, on the actual discourse participants. This focus can be both other-oriented (as in directives and questions) and self-oriented (as in exclamatives), cf. the following examples:

- (13) **Preamble.** Shut up. Stand up. Whatever you're doing, stop it. Shut up. Take a moment to salute this historic occasion – the return of international football to the Greatest Football Stadium in the Entire World/North West London/The HA9 Postal District/Whatever. (Eng-Bra, preamble)

Shock! Horror! Greece are actually mounting a few dangerous looking attacks, mainly down the left. (Por-Gre, 31 mins)

Exclamatives – as in the last example above – often serve the function of emotive and involved commentary on the progress of the game. The same holds true for interrogatives, such as *Shouldn't that be a penalty?* (Por-Gre, 67 mins), where the negative polarity of the question indicates its rhetorical and evaluative character, in that it presupposes a particular (i.e. a positive) answer.

Once again, the role of questions in creating a more interactive feeling in LTC is noted by Jucker (2006: 125). His material, however, is based on the informative type of LTC: questions asked by the journalist that really cannot be answered by the audience who lack the possibility of providing feedback. In the interactive type of LTC that is analyzed here, some questions (and imperatives) do not have merely such a rhetorical function but operate as part of the textual interaction between the journalist and the readers (regardless of whether the interaction is seen as real or staged, see below).

In the interactive type of LTC, exclamatives and interrogatives are not limited to the primary layer of game description, i.e., as the journalist's evaluative and personalized commentary. Characteristically, they also occur in the secondary layer (within the various parallel thematic lines) as part of the gossip exchanged between the writer and his audience. In this case, they can be quite unrelated to the primary layer, i.e., the running match commentary. Cf. the following examples, which react to two comments made by readers in their emails – one about the 'Fantasy Football' game and the other about the obligation to work on the day of the match:

- (14) Fantasy Football? Gah! Don't any of you blokes have girlfriends? Incidentally, your man is playing, except the wires have spelt his name Haristeads. (Gre-Cze, 18 mins)

Working on Independence Day? Bah, humbug! (Por-Gre, 29 mins)

Questions such as these may actually stimulate the readers to write emails and become actively involved in the co-construction of the text of the live text commentary. That is the case with the latter question, which is not a genuine interrogative, although

it is addressed by the journalist to a particular reader as a way of expressing mock disbelief (actually echoing the reader's prior words and thus acting rhetorically rather than inviting some answer – cf. the rest of the utterance with the interjection and the evaluative exclamative *Bah, humbug!*). Yet, this sparked the reaction of another reader, who informs the journalist of his presence in an office:

- (15) No changes in the second half, which Portugal get underway. Meanwhile in Hong Kong, Benny Wong, eh, writes: “I am having an over-night shift in office tonight alone, again,” he confesses, bringing a tear to your minute-by-minute reporter's eye. “I am a football fan and want to thank you guys for reporting the Euro matches on line.” The pleasure is all mine, Benny. Never mind the rest of the guys – they're all ham-fisted dilletante ingrates. (Por-Gre, 45 mins)

4.4. *The level of discourse organization and pragmatics*

A closer analysis of the last example requires a concentration on higher levels of analysis. What we can see in terms of discourse organization is that an utterance from the primary layer of the match commentary (*No changes in the second half, which Portugal get underway*) is followed by a quote from a reader's email on the circumstances in which he reads the text, i.e., an utterance from the secondary layer. This piece of gossip is then reacted to by the commentator's ironic self-reference in the second person (...*bringing a tear to your minute-by-minute reporter's eye*). The exchange of personal compliments, accompanied by a first-name reference to the reader, is followed by a humorous put-down of the journalist's other male colleagues (cf. *guys*).

This is a pseudo-dialogue (constructed by the journalist through the juxtaposition of the cited voice of the reader and the commentator's own comment) that is staged for the benefit and amusement of the other members of the audience. It is a semi-private pseudo-conversation aired in public in the presence of anonymous mass audiences. Clearly, this phenomenon goes beyond the mere syntactic patterning of the utterances; it is a matter of structuration on the discourse level.

As the use of the first-name address (cf. *The pleasure is mine, Benny*) in the short pseudo-dialogic exchange above indicates, it is also personal deixis that contributes to the formation of the friendly and relaxed atmosphere of LTC. Although this is obviously most frequent within the secondary layer of narration, familiar forms of personal names also occur in the primary layer of the commentary itself, e.g. in reference to football players or referees, as in the following example: *German referee Markus “Merky” Merk leads out his funky bunch of linesmen and both teams* (Por-Gre, pre-match).

A similar familiarising technique is used in the text below, where the nickname *Motty* has its antecedent in the full name of a famous BBC commentator mentioned in the preceding verbal context:

- (16) On BBC, John Motson makes his first gratuitous mention of David Beckham's free-kick against Greece in that do-or-die World Cup qualifier – an incident that's as irrelevant tonight as Motty's mention was inevitable. (Por-Gre, 34 mins)

Occasionally, personal deixis may even be manipulated in a more creative way for the purpose of achieving humorous effects. In such instances, referential precision may be sacrificed for the benefit of strategic vagueness or genericity of expression. This is the case of the following comment on a substitution in the game:

- (17) Greece substitution: Angelos Basinas for Giannakopoulos. Thanks for that, Mr Greek manager. Thanks a bunch. Basinas was a nice handy one to type. Why couldn't you take off Costas Katsouranis or Yourkas Seitraidis? (Gre-Cze, 69 mins)

The quote also documents another phenomenon for promoting the sense of orality: the commentator directs his utterances at various individuals (players, coaches, referees, etc.) who are not present or involved in the communicative event, who cannot be the actual addressees of the message, and who obviously will not – unlike the readers – react to it in any way. The ironic and pseudo-dialogic expression of thanks in the example above (with the repetition in the next sentence – *Thanks for that, Mr Greek manager. Thanks a bunch.*) reveals the commentator's attempt at being humorous with the aim of entertaining his audience.

Such direct utterances may also represent direct comments addressed to the players on the field (or even other commentators in other media), sometimes combined with ironic, humorous, or familiar forms of address, resulting in staged pseudo-dialogical interactions, as in the following instances:

- (18) Milan Baros shoots from the edge of the penalty area, stinging the palms of Antonis Nikopolidis. Good effort, sir. (Gre-Cze, ET 1)

Camera cuts to a fairly beautiful French lady in the crowd. [...], Clive Tyldesley [an ITV sports commentator] announces: "some need make-up more than others". Say what you see, Clive. (Ita-Fra, 41 mins)

Not only are these third persons 'talked to' in this fictitious way, but they are also given voices in the commentary. This concerns the entirely fictitious utterances ascribed to various persons (typically football players), which take the form of made-up direct speech reactions in which the commentator is actually putting words in the players' mouths, cf.:

- (19) He sits on the ground looking bewildered, as if to say: "What the hell do we have to do to get past you pair?" (Por-Gre, 82 mins)

Spokenness in LTC is further conveyed through characteristic sentence and clause structures, and numerous other phenomena more common in speech than in writing. In terms of sentence and clause structure, repetitions and incomplete sentences with ellipsis of subjects and verbs, characteristically occurring at the highpoints of the game, tend to convey a marked degree of immediacy and conversationalism in the written text. Many of the utterances manifest features that represent the constructional principles of spoken grammar (cf. Biber et al. 1999), such as prefaces and tags, non-clausal inserts, syntactic non-clausal units, and ellipsis in clausal units.

Inserts, for instance, constitute an interesting phenomenon whereby utterances can be expanded. Inserts can function as interactive devices that contribute towards increasing the dialogism of monologic texts. This concerns, above all, so-called interpolations (cf. Talbot 1995), which serve to interrupt the clause structure by means of inserting an explanatory or evaluative comment (or some other kind of a reader-oriented utterance, such as a rhetorical question). Such reader-oriented inserts, used as interactive interpolations of one's own voice, occur in the following examples:

- (20) Unbelievable. Absolutely unbelievable. From a corner, Greece nab a winner when a missed header at the front post by – who else? – Vladimir Smicer allows Traianos Dellas to head it home from a few feet. (Gre-Cze, ET 15)

Much hilarity in the ITV commentary box as the linesman, you'll like this, loses his flag! Ho ho ho! Tuncay ferries a replacement across the pitch. (Tur-Cze, 65 mins)

Moreover, the various means of establishing an informal atmosphere, achieved thanks to the linguistic recreation of the impression of orality, operate simultaneously as an interplay rather than in isolation. Thus, for instance, the imperative addressed to the commentator by a reader in example (21) below (*Leave Ger alone*) is supplemented with a humorous foreignism (*Au contraire*); discourse markers with a personal orientation (*I say, I think*); a colloquialism (*Ger's got*); and a personal address by means of a first name (*Kieran*):

- (21) [...] Leave Ger alone, for a while, I say," writes Kieran Conway. Au contraire, I think Ger's got a very sympathetic response tonight, Kieran. (Gre-Cze, 54 mins)

Informality and spokenness are, in addition, accompanied by other discourse phenomena and strategies, such as frequent self-references by the commentators, the use of first and second person pronouns as features of involvement (cf. Chafe 1982, Kuo 2003), the reliance on presuppositions, background knowledge and shared contexts, etc.

5. Conclusion

As noted above, live text commentary is a hybrid genre that draws on the genres of spoken sports reporting and computer-mediated communication. It comes as little surprise then that LTC is marked by the orality, spokenness, conversationalism and informality noted in other genres of CMC as well (cf. Crystal 2001). What makes LTC unique, however, is the nature of the interpersonal interaction in one of the types of this new genre, the interactive LTC. It is here that the most diverse representations of spoken features can be found – as regards not only the interactiveness of the language but also the structuration of the utterances into pseudo-dialogical heteroglossic exchanges between the journalist and a host of other, external voices.

While diverse formal features of the spoken mode appear on all language levels, these traits of orality in the written text can be interpreted in several ways. As mentioned above, some of them are used as strategies of synthetic personalization with the intention of addressing the readers on a more individual basis, thus overcoming a major barrier in mass media communication contexts. This concerns particularly some of the lexical and syntactic phenomena, such as informal colloquial lexis, vocatives, imperatives, questions and inserts (cf., e.g., Fairclough 1995, Talbot 1995, and Urbanová 2006 for similar traits in other types of mass media). These, as well as other related phenomena, reinforce the casual and informal tenor of LTC. In connection with the structuration of the interactive type of LTC along the two layers of narration and the presence of frequent pseudo-dialogical exchanges, segments of LTC resemble informal conversations reminiscent of online chat. It is here that the spoken features can be seen as instantiations of the genre of gossip (cf. Eggins and Slade 1997), with its sociolinguistic function of enhancing the bond between the discourse participants.

That appears to be, in fact, one of the main functions of LTC: it is meant not only to provide information about a currently played sports match, but also to help construct the virtual group of readers and contribute to their virtual social bonding in the online environment. It is not accidental that this function, to which the features of spoken language in LTC ultimately contribute, is particularly strong in the case of sports reporting: the connection between sports talk and social cohesion has been pointed out before, even in gendered terms (cf. Johnson and Finlay 1997 on men's football talk on TV, and Kuo 2003 on sports reporting). As a result, we can see a further blurring of the lines separating the public and the private (cf. Kuo 2003: 492, who notes that "male sports reporters attempt to imitate, in the public arena, their talk in the private sphere").

The mixing of modes in the context of modern communication media also leads to the consideration of the traditional characteristics assigned to the two modes. Written and spoken language have been described with such contrasts as permanent/ephemeral, planned/unplanned, integrated/fragmented, and solitary/social and (Vachek 1959, Ochs 1979, Chafe 1982, Tannen 1982, Milroy and Milroy 1999), whose mutual combinations can be used to characterise such situations as 'spoken to be written', 'written to be spoken', etc.

In LTC, as a genre of mass media communication, the use of linguistic features connected with orality and casualness also combine with the topicality of the events covered or discussed. This is because the spoken language provides an immediate, though ephemeral, reaction to the events. While ephemerality is not an issue in written online media (since the written mode guarantees preservability), the immediacy connected with the spoken mode is retained. Spoken features on whatever level – phonological, lexical, syntactic, pragmatic – may then help to convey the impression that the events are being covered in as topical a manner as possible. Since the events are, of course, being reported almost in real time anyway, the choice of the various linguistic features characteristic of spoken – rather than written – language becomes a symbolic simulation of the immediacy of the events.

Sources

The text uses material from live text commentaries (minute-by-minute match reports) from guardian.co.uk; the online version of the British daily newspaper the *Guardian* – full texts are available online at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/football/>. The data cited in this article appeared in the sports section from 2004 to 2008. They are all live text commentaries written by professional journalists on high-priority international football matches.

Abbreviations

ET:	Extra time
Cro-Tur:	Croatia v. Turkey (1-1, 1-3 pen), Euro 2008 Quarter Finals, 20 June 2008, report by John Ashdown
Eng-Bra:	England v. Brazil (1-1), a friendly match, 1 June 2007, report by Rob Smyth
Ger-Spa:	Germany v. Spain (0-1), Euro 2008 Final, 29 June 2008, report by Scott Murray
Ger-Tur:	Germany v. Turkey (3-2), Euro 2008 Semi Finals, 25 June 2008, report by John Ashdown
Gre-Cze:	Greece v. Czech Republic (1-0), Euro 2004 Semi Finals, 1 July 2004, report by Barry Glendenning
Hol-Rus:	Holland v. Russia (1-3), Euro 2008 Quarter Finals, 21 June 2008, report by Tom Lutz
Ita-Fra:	Italy v. France (1-1, 5-3 pen), Football World Cup Final, 9 July 2006, report by Rob Smyth
Por-Gre:	Portugal v. Greece (0-1), Euro 2004 Final, 4 July 2004, report by Barry Glendenning
Rus-Spa:	Russia v. Spain (0-3), Euro 2008 Semi Finals, 26 June 2008, report by Sean Ingle

Tur-Cze: Turkey v. Czech Republic (3-2), Euro 2008 Group A match, 15 June 2008, report by John Ashdown

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