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ARNAUD RICHARD

**TELEVISED FOOTBALL COMMENTARIES: DESCRIPTIONS,
NARRATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS OF A NON-VICTORY.
THE EUROPEAN CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL 1976 (BAYERN MUNICH
VS AS SAINT-ÉTIENNE)**

May, 12th, 1976, in Glasgow, nearly thirty years after the end of the Second World War, two of the most renowned soccer team from France and Germany faced each other in the final of the European clubs championship. International sports events provide great evidence of the way national cultures frame their view of other nationalities. I will seek through various examples to point out links between the operation of media sports discourse and the possible interests of countries as they occur in practice. This is examined through qualitative discourse examples from the transcription of the French television broadcast. Past and present issues of identity politics between France and Germany can be illuminated through this analysis. Attention is paid to whether national stereotyping, I/we images, established/outsider identities/relations were evident in the direct broadcast of this soccer game. I will examine how television has transformed sport as a form of popular culture, focusing on sport as a form of political ritual and sport as an arena in which representations of nation and nationhood are continually being worked through.

1. Introduction

The theoretical basis of this work is Critical Discourse Analysis, with an emphasis on grammar and rhetoric, through the use of the concept of dialogism.¹ Starting from the assumption that language is never neutral, I will consider the point that language privileges certain realities and conceals others. With language we actively create our identities and our social worlds.²

Sport is generally considered to be a scene where hegemony is fully represented. Masculinity is one of the figures well studied and documented (Miller 2001; McKay et al. 2000). I will describe this work, along with research on forms of discrimination. I will focus on another part of the identity: nationality and nationhood. This topic has also been documented (Bass 2005; Bishop / Jaworski, 2003; Wenner 1998; Blain et al. 1993; Chandler 1988). I would now like to offer another approach, thanks to the theoretical angle of dialogism.

I will examine how television has transformed sport as a form of popular culture, focusing on sports as a form of ritual and sports as an arena in which representations of nation and nationhood are continually being worked out. One specific genre will be treated, namely television broadcast commentaries. One game, broadcast on a French national television channel, will be analyzed.

¹ This study is part of a PhD thesis, started three years ago with Professor Claire Kramsch for the University of California, Berkeley, and Professor Paul Sibold of the University of Montpellier 3. I would also like to address special thanks to Professor Bres for his interesting comments on my research.

² See Van Dijk 1992; Fairclough / Wodak 1997, Wodak / Meyer 2001 for examples.

First of all, I will present briefly the data and methods that I have used for this research, then I will deal with the social considerations regarding sports and football in particular. I will emphasize the particularities of the linguistic elements in the genre of television commentaries. Finally, I will present an analysis in three stages: from the rhetorical account of the non-victory (not: defeat!), to the more generalized assumption of dialogism with some markers (like *aussi/also*, for example) and then more precise expressions using double negation.

2. Data and method

2.1. Data

May, 12th, 1976, in Glasgow, nearly thirty years after the end of the Second World War, two of the most renowned soccer teams from France and Germany faced each other in the final of the European clubs championship. This game was a huge event all over France, covered extensively by the country's media.

After the game, despite the defeat, the French players were received in Paris like national heroes. They walked down the Champs Élysées in Paris, as the French military troops had done in 1944 (and as the national team were to do in 1998 after winning the World Cup). Those elements are important when we consider the symbolic impact of that game. So much material was analyzable, but I decided to focus on one aspect in particular, the event itself and the television live broadcast.

Only a part of a single soccer game is the focus of this analysis here: one game, but an important one: the final of the European Championship.³ One game, but between two famous clubs from two major European countries: Germany and France.

The game was broadcast nationally in France, on the only national public channel (at the time). Commercials were not included in the live broadcast. Only few replays in slow motion were presented, probably because of the few video cameras and less advanced technology in general, compared to now.

The recording of the game led to a complete transcript, but for my analysis, only the last ten minutes were chosen because of the degree of tension mounting towards the end. The only goal of the game had already been scored and the final outcome was slowly but surely emerging.

Two journalists commentated on the game. Bernard Père (BP in the transcription) is the sports specialist, and Thierry Roland (TR in the transcription) is the prime commentator. Their roles are different. Père has more an analytic role; Roland is more descriptive and his duration of speaking is twice as long as his colleague's. During his career Thierry Roland has been noted several times for making comments close to racism or discrimination in general. At the time of the game, he was at the beginning of his career and Père was his first fellow-commentator.

³ However, I was not interested in the analysis of the representations and interactions of different European stereotypes.

2.2. Method

A real mythology has sprung up around this game. This football game is perhaps the one in France that has been the most widely discussed in history. VHS recorders were barely appearing on the market, so relatively few recorded copies of the match were available. Surprisingly, a recording of this final has never been commercialized in France, probably because of the defeat and the grief felt by most of Saint-Étienne's supporters.

The first approach was a purely quantitative one. I registered the names of each player and team, and counted the number of mentions for each. Then, the naming of each participant was documented. After that came the transcription of the game. Looking carefully at all these discursive elements, I finally picked those that seemed relevant and original for this study.

3. Soccer and TV comments

3.1. Soccer and its social implications

International sports events provide interesting examples of the way any culture frames its view of other nationalities. If the expression 'opium of the masses' has been applied to sports and football in particular, it's because it can reveal unconscious dimensions of identity. Sadly, football has also been a field of violence. It has sparked off tragic events sometimes not really covered by the media. For example, in 1969, after a football game between the two national teams of EL Salvador and Honduras, a real war spread from the pitch between players to the rest of the stadium and then to the armies and the whole countries.

Issues of past and present identities between France and Germany can be illustrated through this analysis. Attention is paid to whether national stereotyping, I/we images, established/outsider identities/relations and national codes of social conduct were evident in the live broadcast of this football game.⁴ Drawing attention to stereotypes on a national basis as a result of the description of a single player also draws attention to general stereotypes and considerations of the country itself. It reflects the relations and possible tensions between two parts: the commentators and what is described.

3.2. Televised comments as a genre

We invariably speak in a specific genre. Each linguistic product belongs at least to one genre.

We speak only in definite speech genres [...] We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, which we master fluently long before we begin to study grammar [...] The forms of language and the typical forms of utterances, that is, speech genres, enter our experience and our consciousness together, and in close connection with one another. (Bakhtine 1986: 78)

⁴ See Bruce 2004, for another complete analysis.

The humanities and social sciences show an increasing interest in sports and the study of ‘sports announcer talk’ (Reaser 2003; Ferguson 1983). This research deals with sports announcer talk as a certain (sub)register or genre. Reaser makes a quantitative analysis of some of its specificities. Four different criteria are considered:

- (1) Subject simplification e.g.: *[He] dribbles into the lane.*
- (2) Copula absence e.g.: *The rebound [is] pulled by Damian Wilkins.*
- (3) Subject action inversion
 - (3a) e.g.: *Ball is knocked out-of-bounds by Anthony Grundy.*
 - (3b) to be compared with a non-inverted example
e.g.: *Anthony Grundy knocks the ball out-of-bounds.*
- (4) Use of heavy modifiers e.g.: *Tap is controlled by big jelly, Nigel Dixon.*

It seems also that a particular sport, through its specificities (its ‘rhythm’), can influence the genre. The matching of the speed of speech to the action is one of the elements. However, Reaser’s study remains focused on two combined approaches, i.e. rhetoric and grammar, whereas I shall take into account these specificities of the genre he points out, but will try to go beyond.

4. Rhetoric and grammar

4.1. Individualization of victory and sympathy in defeat

On first looking at the material, it seems that a real dialectic is present. On the one hand, there is individualization of the victory (emphasis of the scorer for Bayern Munich, for example). On the other hand, there appears sympathy for the defeated team of AS Saint-Étienne.

- *Individualization of the victory*

The team of Bayern Munich won this game, but it never really just appeared as a simple victory. Precise details tend to illustrate this win by ‘diluting’ it:⁵

1. [TR11]⁶ *Monsieur Palotai siffle la fin du match qui se termine j’ai envie de dire [β]contre le cours du jeu par [A] la victoire du Bayern mais que voulez-vous [δ] seul le résultat compte dans ces matchs de football et [μ] grâce à un but de Roth marqué sur coup franc à la 58ème minute [B] le Bayern remporte sa 3ème coupe d’Europe et [ω] surtout l’autorisation de pouvoir la défendre l’an prochain alors que les Allemands ne seront sans doute pas champions de leur pays*

⁵ Letters between square brackets are used to point at certain moments of the comment.

⁶ There are two commentators: BP is Bernard Père, TR is Thierry Roland. The numbers after these names refer chronologically to the turn in the overall commentary dialogue.

= Mister Palotai whistles the end of the match that ends I would like to say [β] against the flow of the game [A] with Bayern's victory but what do you expect [δ] only the result matters in such football games and [μ] thanks to a goal by Roth scored from a free-kick in the 58th minute [B] the Bayern wins its third European cup and [ω] above all the opportunity to defend it next year although the Germans will probably not be champions in their country

According to Grice and the theory of maxims he developed, quantity is important. Having enough information is necessary, but not too much. The commentary picks up on who scored. But it also focuses on the exact nature of the action, the uniqueness of the free-kick, showing by extension the particularity of the goal. Bayern Munich won by the smallest difference possible and thanks to the individual skill of Roth. The precision of the exact timing of the goal is given, but there is no indication of the quality or excellence of the kick.

This information needs to be added, for it is directly relevant. Instead of a positive comment on the German team or players, the two commentators focus on a negative aspect to undermine them. Their role as journalists is to give information, and they are supposed to be neutral. However, in an 'international' confrontation like this one, the presence of a French team leads them to show some preference. Sometimes the line between analysis and critical evaluation is thin, although they should balance this equally between the two teams. Critical evaluation needs to be justified and not always directed at a single team.

At [ω], Thierry Roland emphasizes with *surtout* that 'above all' the German team has the right to compete in the tournament next year; as if the winning of the trophy was not the most important aspect at the time. Projecting the consequence of the win, he passes over the actual moment of victory. He seems to reject present reality as being perhaps too painful to realize.

Looking at the phases of the commentary, there is clearly an alternation between negative and positive arguments:

[β -], [A, +], [δ -], [B, +], [ω -]

Moreover, the initial and final arguments both disfavour the German team. It's not only the fact that a positive comment needs to be balanced with a negative one. Positive evaluation is hedged by two negative remarks. The ratio between positive and negative comments is unbalanced. In the same process of individualizing victory, another one is also at work: sympathy for the defeated team.

- *Sympathy for the defeated team*

2. [BP1] *alors que St-Étienne est mené par 1 but à 0*
= while St-Étienne is down by 1 goal to 0
3. [BP2] *et si les stéphanois sont éliminés ils auront beaucoup de regrets*
= and if the Stephanois are eliminated, they will have a lot to regret

The French team (2 and 3) is placed in the passive in French. Bayern Munich is rarely the active subject. The commentators most of the time speak from the French team's point of view.

4. [BP3] *et là aussi on aura des regrets, on se dira et si Rocheteau avait joué la première mi-temps de ce match Saramagna à gauche qui faisait ce qu'il voulait enfin n'ayons pas de regrets, ces stéphanois ont fait quoi qu'il arrive une très belle rencontre*

From 3 to 4, the commentator slides from *ils* ('they') to *on* ('we'). In view of an impending defeat, he includes himself in the imaginary group of people who are going to have regrets. He adopts the attitude of a faithful fan. Rejecting the loser is less important than nationalistic identification. Boundaries are not fluid here.

5. [TR4] *si on regarde le match que nous venons de vivre*
= *if we look at the match we have just experienced*

In this final expression, there is clearly identification with the team. Here emotions are involved. The identification is, like the language, dynamic, while '*ces stéphanois*' (4) is a step back to the position of neutral commentator. Even so, some commentators become personally and even emotionally involved, letting 'their heart speak'.

4.2. Dialogism: a victory in defeat

Dialogism is a concept inherited from M. Bakhtine and his studies on literature in particular. This concept has been readapted by some linguists (Ducrot, Nølke, etc.), and has been renamed either polyphony or intertextuality.

Each word presents a miniature arena where social accents possessing contradictory orientations meet and do battle. In the individual's mouth, the word proves to be the product of the interaction between living social forces. (Bakhtine 1977 [1929]: 67)

Three particularities, sometimes specific marks, will be discussed in this sub-section. The common interest remains to show in detail the importance of different linguistic elements.

- *Extraction*

The general definition of extraction in grammar is: "any syntactic process by which something is moved from within a clause or other unit to a position outside" (Matthews 1997: 124). In French this is realized through 'stratégies de mise en relief' ('emphasizing strategies') like *c'est...qui/que*:

6. [TR12] *ils ont manqué ce petit quelque chose pour faire la différence mais c'est cette réussite qu'il faut saluer les saluer*
= *they missed this little something to make the difference but it is this success that has to be saluted*

Here the proposition *c'est cette réussite qu'* is extracted for a specific reason. The speaker wants to emphasize the achievement but not the victory. To recognize the victory is to recognize a fact. He substitutes this fact for a more relative recognition. He highlights the difference by talking about 'a little something' that the French team 'missed'. Moreover, he qualifies the outcome of the game as a 'réussite' ('success'). But 'réussite' can also include the dimension of chance. Finally, St-Étienne did lose, but not for lack of trying.

- *Dialogism because of the negative particles*

7. [*] *pas gagné ≠ perdu*
 not won ≠ lost

'Not won' is not the same as 'lost'. Anytime you deny something – put it in the negative form – you are presupposing that the corresponding affirmative has been considered or said before. It's also a common expression of regret.

Among Trujillo's research, an interesting one is the one done on sports victory related to the American dream, taking as an example the American football team of the Dallas Cowboys. Vande Berg / Trujillo show how "[s]ports discourse can constrain and liberate readers by enriching or restricting interpretations of sports reality for readers" (1989: 219).

Starting from one and the same reality, different words can shape our representations in totally different ways. One of the criteria of these conscious and unconscious choices when we speak is the criterion of listeners' expectations, which are partly accommodated by the commentator. The notion of dialogism (an imaginary dialogue between speaker and listener) integrates this principle.

8. [TR12] *finalement ils avaient fait tout ce qu'on attendait d'eux et même plus en venant ici en finale, ils n'ont pas gagné, là gagner ça aurait été le supplément*
 = *finally they had done all we expected them to do and even more coming here in final, they didn't win, winning it would have been a supplement*

The expression of the unwanted anticipated loss is visible throughout the game. From the optimistic start to the positive descriptions at the end, the commentators are never criticising anything. The expectations have changed and ultimately just reaching the final was already a victory. The victory is characterized as a supplement, an extra, as if at the end it did not matter who has won...

- *A typical marker: aussi [= 'also/too']*

The concept of dialogism has sometimes been criticized because of a lack of formal linguistic evidence. Some linguists (like Bres 1999) have tried to work upon markers, in order to show marks of dialogism in a text. *Aussi* [= 'also/too'] is one of these markers.

One point here would be to distinguish anaphora from dialogism. Anaphora would be a reformulation of something which has already been said (where the initial speaker is still visible: *Pierre m'a dit que X: Peter told me that X*), while in dialogism,

there is no trace left of this initial speaker, whose utterance is completely integrated into the new discourse (*Pierre aussi est venu: Peter came too*).

Aussi can be related to the verb, but also to the noun. That means it can have different and complex relations with different parts of the sentence. Example 9 is a ‘typical’ one:

9. [BP11] *les 25 000 spectateurs stéphanois qui sont ici crient « les Verts » car eux aussi ils ont le sentiment que les Stéphanois méritaient cette victoire*
 = the 25 000 spectators from St. Étienne who are here are screaming “les Verts” because they too have the feeling that the Stéphanois (would have) deserved this victory
10. [BP11] *d'accord le Bayern a gagné sur ce coup franc de Roth, ils méritent aussi peut-être aussi cette victoire mais les stéphanois ont fait un match en tous points remarquable*
 = It's true that Bayern has won on Roth's free kick, they too deserve maybe this victory too but the Stéphanois have played a game which was in all points remarkable

In (10), *aussi* is interestingly combined with *peut-être* (‘maybe’), which reduces the meaning admitted by *aussi*. ‘Maybe’ plays down the victory. The commentator mitigates his personal disappointment by sharing it with the audience. In this particular case, *peut-être* (‘maybe’) is surrounded by *aussi* (‘also/too’) as if *peut-être* (‘maybe’) was too much agreement and recognition of this victory.

4.3. Double negation

The last aspect analyzed in this paper is double negation. It was the first striking specificity in my data that inspired me to undertake the research. See the following two sentences from the same long comment:

11. [TR10] *Ah ils ne sont pas malheureux ces joueurs du Bayern.*
 = Ah they are not unhappy these Bayern players
12. [TR10] *Monsieur Kitakian ne leur avait pas été défavorable...*
 Mr. Kitakian had not been against them...

In a literary analysis, this figure could be described as a litotes (see Matthews 1997):

Term in rhetoric for understatement, especially by ‘ironic’ use of a negative, e.g. ‘That wasn’t at all a bad dinner’, meaning it was a good one. (Matthews 1997: 211)

As the commentator is trying to reduce the impact of the German victory, the described process is fully relevant here. In a dynamic view of language production, I would even use the term ‘*euphemistication*’ to traduce the idea that discourse is created actively. While euphemism can be defined as a “word, etc., used in place of one avoided, e.g. ‘Girls’ for ‘Prostitutes’,” (Matthews 1997: 119), the concept of litotes refers more to a syntactic structure (negation), which is the case here.

In the two examples, the structure is the same: negative particles (*ne* and *pas*)⁷ + negative prefix on the adjective (*mal-* and *dé-*). The double negation in that case

⁷ It is well known that they always come in pairs in standard French.

conveys overall a positive meaning.⁸ Roland is not saying bluntly: *'they are happy'* or *'the referee is in their favour'* (which is a classic complaint in sport), but he is expressing quite the same with more sophisticated means.

In examples 11 and 12, the positive equivalent (with the same subject) would convey a different evaluation. Doing as he does, the commentator denies something which, in fact, is highly improbable. The benefit is that there is no direct evaluation but an indirect one, like a rectification of something, as if someone had asserted *'they are unhappy'* or *'he was against them'*. It's a reactive utterance and not an evaluative one. This procedure can be classified as a linguistic *'detour'* because it can be understood thanks to a fictive utterance (*'they are unhappy'* or *'he was against them'*), which it seems to react to.

5. Conclusion

This is work in progress, and the same data (as well as some comparable ones) might be analysed from a different angle. One interesting theory to apply to them would be the notion of face developed by Goffman, for example. The commentators should have tacit neutrality, and have to keep a positive face. But their use of personal pronouns creates a totally different story:

All discourse is heterogeneous, meaning it contains many references to other discourse, other subjects, other opinions, other social classes, and other languages. Each use of 'I' is haunted by the image and the discourse of 'you' and of 'he/she/they'. (Bres 1988, cité dans Barbéris et al. 2003: 10)

I would like to end with the assumption I presented in the introduction: language is never neutral. I hope this analysis has revealed the social meanings embedded in any kind of discourse, and especially in sports announcer talk.

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⁸ However, this is not always the case in French, see: *il n'a jamais rien fait* (*'he has never done anything'*, literally: *'he has never done nothing'*), where the double negation remains negative semantically. (A special thank to Eva Lavric for her remarks that emphasize even more the complexity of negation itself.)

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