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Cornelia Gerhardt

“Upff, Yellow Card, Surely” – Applying the Rules of the Game in Talk

*Introduction*¹

In contrast to most of the papers in this volume, my contribution will focus less on the rules of the game as such, and will concentrate on the interpretation of these rules by people in an everyday context. The study is based on the ATTAC-corpus which consists of transcribed video recordings of English football fans watching the World Cup 2002 Japan/Korea on television. It is grounded in interactional sociolinguistics and represents an endeavour in media reception studies.

The aim of this paper is twofold. In line with the overall conference theme “Playing by the rules of the game – Jouer selon les règles du jeu,” it will first focus on how football fans in the corpus make use of their knowledge of ‘the rules of the game’.² The verbal behaviour of the television audience, i. e. the viewers’ application of those rules to specific scenes in the match will be described as a way of negotiating identities and social relations. In accordance with the overarching interests of *Transcultura*, a second part will deal with the localisation of the global media product World Cup: the way in which the specific nature of British commentary reflects on the reception of the fans will be examined. Hence, this paper will focus on two different verbal behaviours found in the ATTAC-corpus, the application of the rules of football, and the process of making the television party to the talk at home.

¹ This paper is partly an extended and revised version of Gerhardt, Cornelia (2006a). I would like to thank Karina Schröder for translating the abstract into French.

² FIFA (Fédération internationale de football association) calls the rules of football ‘laws of the game’ and ‘lois du jeu’ in English and French respectively. However, ‘Spielregeln’, i. e. ‘rules of the game’, is used in the official German version. In keeping to the title of the conference and in line with everyday usage, I will use the term ‘rules’ in this paper.

Background

Interactional sociolinguistics (Goffman 1974, Gumperz 1982, Schiffrin 1994, da Fina et al. 2006) is a qualitative approach in linguistics which unites methods of anthropological ethnography (Hymes 1974, Saville-Troike 1989), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967) and conversation analysis (Sacks; Schegloff; Jefferson 1974 and Schegloff; Sacks 1973). Interactional sociolinguistics proposes that social order is constructed and that meaning is negotiated in everyday encounters by people in their interactions. It is through everyday conversation, the routinised behaviour and linguistic strategies of the participants, that social roles, identity, and communities emerge and are sustained. Talk then is not depicted as surrounded by context, shaped by different situations and by the different roles that people assume, but it is viewed as perpetually creating context for the following talk. Context is thus a product of the participants' activities so "that the objective reality of social facts [is seen] *as* an ongoing accomplishment of the concerted activities of daily life." (Garfinkel 1967: iiv)

On the one hand, local identities such as "I am the one who does the talking" are negotiated by speakers in their daily interactions and in turn feed into the "transportable identities" (Zimmerman 1998) of the interactants like ethnicity or gender. In other words, micro-identities in discourse with a small 'd' feed into the creation of macro-identities in Discourse with a capital 'D' (Gee 2005). On the other hand, local identities draw on the pre-existent social ones by evoking or recreating them in situated talk. Hence, local and social roles are inextricably interconnected and there is no 'natural' or essential 'self' that people possess. Instead, language plays a fundamental role in the establishment and recreation of the multiple roles people take on in their lives.

The media reception situation is of interest to scholars of Interactional sociolinguistics as the setting is located at the hinge between mass media and personal interaction. Media reception studies (Staiger 2005) grounded in British Cultural Studies (Hall 1980, Morley 1980) seeks to explore the ways in which people appropriate media and media discourses in their

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daily lives.³ By empirically studying the actual communicative behaviour of real groups of television viewers, a window on the appropriation of media discourses is opened (cf. Holly et al. 2001, Hepp 1998, Klemm 2000 on German families). By using the methods of Interactional sociolinguistics in this field, an attempt is made to reduce a gap lamented by Scollon: “there have been virtually no studies of the social practices by which the discourses of the media are appropriated in common face-to-face interactions.” (1998: vii) Hence, in this paper the process of media reception is studied as social interaction and media users are understood as active participants of a meaning-making process. During the reception situation, one can witness people using media texts as a resource in their lives with which they negotiate their place in the world. The specific case of the communicative practices of Britons watching World Cup football on television is thus one example of the localized reception and appropriation of media discourse.⁴

The dataset

To give the background of the stretches of talk that will be presented in the analytical part of this paper and thus to allow the reader to trace their larger contexts, the data will be described in detail in the following. For the ATTAC (Analysing The Television Audience’s Conversation) corpus, natural conversation among home viewers of televised football games was recorded on video. To make the intrusion of the researcher and her camera into the lives of the families as unobtrusive as possible, the camera was either given to the families so that they could get acquainted with the idea and record themselves during a longer stretch of time, or the researcher installed the technical equipment prior to television viewing and left the house.⁵ The talk recorded was later transcribed using the conventions at the

³ The terms ‘discourse’ and ‘text’ are used interchangeably in this paper. They mean to encompass all modes of communication – be it visual, aural, verbal, spoken or written.

⁴ For studies on the reception of football in German families, see Klemm, Schulte 2001; Hepp 1998, Püschel 1993.

⁵ For a discussion of the use of recording equipment in research, see Labov 1972, Goodwin 1981.

end of the paper. The recorded persons are all middle-class British English speakers of non-immigrant parentage. Some of them live together and others met solely for the purpose of watching a game. They generally side for the same team. The games recorded are all internationals which were part of the World Cup 2002 in Japan/Korea.

The data differ along two parameters. As is obvious to any sports *aficionado*, the first is the game itself: the later in the tournament, the more excitement there is. As the advancement of the teams is immediately at stake, games at the knock-out stage are generally viewed with more emotion and involvement than those at the beginning of the group stage. Also, the pairings play an important role. Games with England and, to a lesser extent, other great football nations (e. g. Brazil, Germany) are, from the outset, greeted with more interest than, e. g., Japan versus Russia. However, any game may turn out to be exciting and acquire significance through the events in the game itself (e. g. remarkable goals, doubtful refereeing decisions, etc.). The second parameter is the viewers' relationship to each other. The data suggest that there is much more talk between interlocutors who have been especially invited to watch football together than between the families who live together.

A short account of the games and groups of people which are used as examples in this paper will be given in the following. With the help of the abbreviations (such as BB1R) the readers can trace the extralinguistic context of the conversations. AE2C, representing the 2nd half of the Argentina – England game, was recorded at the home of a former referee named Henry. He invited one of his earlier colleagues, Darrell, and both are later joined by Henry's wife Wilma. All three are over 70 years of age. The game was part of the group stage and England won 0:1. EB2R, the 2nd half of England – Brazil, was a quarter final and represents one of the most noted games of the World Cup. England lost 1:2. In BB1R, the 1st half of Brazil – Belgium, Brazil won 2:0 and progressed to the quarterfinal. Both EB2R and BB1R are recordings of a family comprising Gerard, Jodie, and their teenage son Benjamin.

Applying the Rules of Football

In the following, I will argue that football fans in this setting display their knowledge of the rules of football to become accepted in their role as experts in this field and to signal their membership to this domain. In order to achieve this, they interpret the rules of the game and apply them to specific scenes in the match.

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Goodwin, in an article about a group of people talking about car racing, argues that the display of ‘precise independent knowledge’ in the appropriate form makes participants part of “a domain of expertise and knowledge, indeed a small culture in its own right”, while creating that domain at the same time (1986: 289). The expertise has to be ratified by the others present to make such a move by a participant felicitous.

As we will see, the specific setting in the corpus allows for constant display of that kind of knowledge due to the regulated nature of the game. The referee and the linesmen continuously assign a status to the game: either fair game or foul play. If they do not do anything, it means that the players are following the rules of the game. In cases of fouls or misconduct, the referee acts. As there is no room for a middle ground and every act (or lack of an act) by the referee is directly accessible to the spectators, a game is potentially debatable at any time. To be able to dispute a referee’s decision or, in general, to voice an opinion about a scene in a match, ‘precise independent knowledge’ is a prerequisite. Viewers have to know more about football and its rules than what is discernible from the scene, i. e. their knowledge has to be ‘independent’ of the immediate context.

Example 1: AE2C foul by Butt

1	Comm	Zanetti,
2		to Aimar.
3		(0.8)
4		challenged by [Butt,]
5	IS	[{whistles}]
6	Darrell	[oh] he's [clob]bered.
7	Comm	[foul.]
8		(0.4) (11.1tv)
9	Henry	I think this s-
10		Aimar the substitute is more,
11		(0.7)
12		an attacking player than Veron [I think.]
13	Darrell	[yeah.]
14	Henry	they had realized they would need something.
15		(3.1)
16	Comm	Pochettino,

Lines 4-6, here, mark the beginning of a passage that is triggered by Butt’s foul. The commentator’s “Butt”, the referee’s whistling and Darrell’s “oh”

overlap with the foul in the game, i. e. they all happen at the same time as depicted by the square brackets ([]). Darrell continues his turn with a comment “he’s clobbered”; clobbering, i. e., “hitting someone very hard” (LDOCE, 2005), implies that the player committed a foul. This very same assessment is given simultaneously (note the overlap line 7) by the commentator: “foul”. All in all, lines 4-7 demonstrate perfect synchronicity between the game on television, its commentary and Darrell’s talk. Darrell spots the foul concurrently with the referee and the commentator. Also, he labels it as such at the same time as the commentator (the referee having indicated the foul by whistling). In doing so, Darrell displays independent knowledge: he identifies a situation as outside of the rules of football and he labels it appropriately. His claim to expertise is immediately ratified both by the commentator and by the game/referee. So, in this specific speech situation, not only co-interlocutors but also, exogenously, the television can ratify statements and thus expert identities. The ensuing talk shows that Darrell’s claim to expertise is not challenged by his co-viewer Henry who then starts talking about the recent substitution.⁶ Hence, to summarise, by applying the rules of the game to a specific scene in a match, Darrell has successfully managed to move into the expert role with the help of his verbal behaviour. He thus shows that he is a member of the community of football fans and a valid partner in ‘talking football’.

This display of independent knowledge i. e. the application of the rules of football often consists simply of the seemingly superfluous assignment of technical terms to scenes. A favourite in this respect is ‘offside’. Quantitatively, ‘offside’ is the single most frequent comment in the ATTAC-corpus. The concept ‘offside’ is mildly challenging and seems to lend itself well to separate expert statements from laypersons. Also, it seems the least transparent in that, I assume, this rule can most probably not be deduced from the game even with prolonged watching. Hence, the knowledge of this rule is distinctly ‘independent’ of its application in actual context.

⁶ For the ‘next turn proof procedure’, see Sacks et al. 1974: 729.

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Example 2: BB1R offside

1	Comm	Roberto Carlos.
2		here is Edmilson.
4		(1.9)
3	Gerard	offside.
5		(1.5)
6	Comm	he tripped one into the path of Juninho

In this prototypical display of independent knowledge, Gerard claims expertise by labelling a situation in the game directly when it occurs. It is characteristic that no ‘information’ is given. Gerard, being with other football fans, seems to state the obvious, so his utterance has to be interpreted on the interpersonal plane. He is thus mainly negotiating his standing vis-à-vis the media text and his co-interlocutors. The ensuing actions by the protagonists on the pitch directly assert or disavow his reading of the scene. Again, ratification is exogenously established through the television by the game itself. As there is no controversy between the interpretation of the audience, here Gerard, and the interpretation presented on television, one word is sufficient in this context to negotiate an expert identity. Again, the other fans present do not challenge Gerard’s opinion. An asymmetry of the class ‘expert’/‘layperson’ has not been created (Drew 1991). Instead, several experts seem to tolerate each other’s roles (Gerhardt 2006b).

On the other hand, spectators also offer interpretations which contradict the decisions on television. In the following case, example 3, the commentator or referee, i. e. the televised text, applies a different rule (here: ‘free kick’) than the viewer(s) at home (here: ‘yellow card’). Doing this is potentially more face-threatening for the speaker him-/herself than consenting with the opinion on television (cf. Brown; Levinson 1987). Whereas asserting the media text often leads to exogenous ratification of expert identity, voicing a contradiction i. e. applying a different rule, could easily result in a loss of face if a co-interlocutor chooses to team up with the protagonists on TV. His or her opinion could then be ratified exogenously by the media text. The result would be an asymmetrical situation with two comple-

mentary identities: an exogenously ratified expert and a layperson in the wrong.⁷

In order to accomplish the extra work of distancing themselves from the media text, participants generally make their turns longer and accompany them with gestures.

Example 3: EB2R yellow card surely

1	Comm	free kick to England.
2		(2.6)
3		David Beckham will-
4		presumably uh,
5		(1.6tv)
6	Gerard	upff {points at screen}
7		yellow [card
8		surely]
9	Comm	[float this across]

In the excerpt above, Gerard first makes a derogatory sound as a preface to signal his disapproval (l. 6). At the same time, he points at the screen. Only then does he forward his opposing reading, namely that it should have been a yellow card and not a free kick (l. 7). Another intonation unit (Cruttenden 1986) prolongs his turn even further with the intensifier “surely” (l. 8). The lack of feedback by the other viewers, however, leaves it unclear whether his claim is ratified by the other football fans. Also, Gerard’s comments are not ratified by the television, i. e. neither by the protagonists on the pitch and their actions nor by the commentators and their talk.

Goffman describes speech situations similar to the one in front of the television as an ‘open state of talk’: “participants have the right but not the obligation to initiate a little flurry of talk, then relapse back into silence” (1981: 134f). Hence, the significance of silence is unclear in this setting. As the participants met especially to watch television, the fact that they do not comment could signify silent protest or tacit agreement. Also, it could have no significance at all. In conversation in general, silence is often

⁷ Unless, of course, the viewer who is assigned layperson status chooses to uphold his opinion, which would result in conflict talk.

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meaningful, i. e. it is interpreted by the co-conversationalist as significant if a conversationalist simply stops contributing (Jaworski 1997). This can be demonstrated by analysing the subsequent turns of the co-conversationalists. However, as the silence of Gerard's co-viewers after his protest is not referred to in the subsequent talk by the participants, its meaning remains unclear.

In the following passage, disagreement with a scene in the match is subsequently ratified by the co-conversationalist (and the game). In contrast to the earlier examples, here the display of expertise is not based on the verbal application of the rules to a specific scene in the match. Instead, it illustrates how a spectator displays his knowledge about the tactics of the game which in turn develop out of the rules.

Example 4: EB2R he should hit

1	Comm	Sheringham.
2		(3.2)
3	Gerard	he should hit,
4		(1.5)
5	Comm	all the way back to Sol [Camp]bell
6	Gerard	[kh] {shakes his head}
7	Jodie	{tsk}
8		they don't know what to do with it
9		the players
10		(0.8)
11	Comm	[he's lost it]
12	Gerard	[{shakes head, quickly raises arms to let fall on knees}]
13	Comm	and BRAZIL HAVE GOT [THREE AGAINST] TWO HERE
14	Gerard	[damn,
15		man.]

Gerard here states what he thinks is appropriate at this specific moment in the game (l. 3). In doing so he again contextualises his independent knowledge in a specific scene. The player, however, does not follow Gerard's suggestion (l. 5). This is greeted by deprecatory interjections both by him (l. 6) and his wife (l. 7), mirroring their communal stance. Gerard's comment is subsequently ratified by his wife (ll. 8-9) and, exogenously, by the game itself (ll. 11 and 13). His swearing (ll. 14-15) not only reflects his emotional involvement, but also underlines his expert status: if only they had listened to him!

The example demonstrates how this couple creates a sense of community while watching football. By negotiating a common standpoint vis-à-vis the media text, they delimit their little community, 'us' versus 'the others', they create a sense of belonging and agreement with the values and beliefs of the community. The emotional manner in which they voice their views about the foolishness of the player(s) seems to mirror the intensity of their socialisation endeavours.

To sum up, one strategy with which interlocutors claim expertise is by applying the rules of the game to the match they are watching. However, only the subsequent ratification either by the television or by the interlocutors displays (for the claimant, the other viewers and the analyst) whether an expert identity has been successfully (re)established. When the game itself ratifies the expert status, not much talk ensues in this corpus. In contrast, when opposing views are voiced, the participants use the opportunity to negotiate their standing vis-à-vis each other and the media text.

The Television as Party to the Conversation

Global media events such as the football World Cup are adapted by local media catering for their audiences. Hence, the World Cup is not a monolith, but it is 'glocalized' (Robertson 1995), i. e. different media use different pictures, sounds, music, formats, protagonists, etc. to modify the event and make it meaningful in the local context. To use the live coverage of the games under scrutiny here as an example: the pictures themselves are global in that they are all obtained from one Swiss production company (HBS Host Broadcasting Service). On the other hand, during the live coverage of the games, local media stations have the choice between 15 different feeds (e. g. the stadium feed, player feed, permanent highlight feed, bench feed, permanent beauty shot feed) to produce a programme adapted to local needs. Furthermore, different commentators, different languages, and different styles of commentating are used during the live coverage.

In the following, the paper will demonstrate one conspicuous feature – conspicuous especially from a conversation analytic point of view – of talk during the reception, talk based on the specific local adaptation of the World Cup games. We will see that that the television, in the British context, is at times treated as party to the talk at home so that the two strands of speech, the commentary and the interaction between the viewers, mingle to form a single, coherent conversation. This strategy is based on the dyadic English commentary with its conversational style which allows the

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audience to move closer to the ‘spectacle’ they are witnessing as ‘watchers’ (Scollon 1998). Classical German commentary, for example, does not allow for these kinds of construction as it consists of a monologue by one commentator only.

Often, the television in households is assigned a similar communicative function as wall paper: “as unanalysed and unattended background decoration” (Scollon 1998: 151). The television is switched on, but people follow their mundane household routines, not paying attention to it. However, in the ATTAC-corpus the participants gathered primarily for the purpose of watching television. Still, instances of this mingling of talk are only found when the viewers concentrate fully on the television programme and not on other matters at hand. Mainly, it is during unusual, particularly exciting or frustrating scenes in the games that their attention is fully taken.

To come to the first example, the transcription below is part of a longer stretch of talk in which replays are shown, as it is unclear what happened on the pitch. The particularity of this excerpt is that Gerard, at home, answers a question (l. 4) asked by the expert on television (l. 2).⁸

Example 5: EB2R is it Gilberto Silva?

1	Expert	looks like (?)
2		is it Gilberto Silva?
3		(2.0)
4	Gerard	I don’t know, {shakes his head}
5		(1.1)
6	Comm	the referee,
7		(0.5)
8		flashed a card.
9		(1.3)
10		and I’m just wondering [here],=
11	Benjamin	[yeah?]

Levinson writes about adjacency pairs like the question-answer sequence of the example (l. 2 and 4): “Having produced a first part of some pair, current speaker must stop speaking, and next speaker *must* produce at that

⁸ See also Horton and Wohl (1956) for a first account of ‘parasocial interaction.’

point a second part to the same pair. Adjacency pairs seem to be a fundamental unit of conversational organization” (Levinson 1983: 304, my italics). In example 5, this “fundamental unit” is constructed by the commentator on television formulating the first part and by a viewer at home producing the second part.

Note that the viewer can only link his answer because of the conversational style on television. If there were no two commentators, a request for information could not be formulated on the screen. To use the German case again as a counter-example, first parts of adjacency pairs cannot be found there as they categorically, *per definitionem*, demand a second part from another speaker. Rhetorical questions, for example, are not first parts precisely because they do not open a slot for another speaker to fill (Schegloff; Sacks 1973).

Incidentally, the question (l. 2) is never answered by the other commentator, so that the two conversations here synchronize completely to form one single conversation in which everybody, both the viewers at home and the journalists, expresses their mutual puzzlement (see also the overlap ll. 10-11).

To sum up, this stretch of talk resembles a conversation with four participants. Because of unidirectionality (Klemm 2000) i. e. the participants at home can hear the people on television, but not *vice versa*, the television itself cannot negotiate its role in the talk at home. The conversational style on British football commentary can be viewed as an invitation for the viewers to join in the meaning-making process of reading the game. However, it is the conversationalists at home who mutually negotiate amongst themselves the status of the television in their talk. They may ignore the talk on TV, or they may, as in the example above, jointly construct the role of a co-participant for the television.

Twelve seconds later in the game, again the two strands of conversation come together:⁹

⁹ The intervening twelve seconds contain too many incomprehensible parts to be used for analysis.

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Example 6: EB2R he showed the red Trevor

1	Comm	and-
2		u- unless I'm very much mistaken,
3		he showed [the red] Trevor.
4	Gerard	[yes,]
5		(0.8)
6		yes.=
7	Expert	=well at the moment,
8		there's no movement.
9		but he's shown it,
10		he's gotta go.
11		(2.0)
12	Comm	well there is the Brazilian coach,
13		he looks equally mystified.
14	Benjamin	look at that.
15		(1.5)
16		yeah,=
17	Gerard	=that's what it is,

The commentator is still not completely sure what happened in the game signalling it with the cutoff in line 1 “and-,” the hesitation at the beginning of line 2 “u-”, and the epistemic phrase “unless I’m very much mistaken”. After expressing his uncertainty and vagueness as to the truth-value of his proposition, in line 3, he finally states: “he showed the red Trevor”. The term of address, Trevor, is used by the current speaker (the commentator) to select the next speaker, Trevor, the expert (Sacks et al. 1974: 704). In using the term of address and uttering it within the same intonation unit (still line 3), i. e. within one information unit (Chafe; Danielewicz, 1987), the incertitude of the commentator is again underlined. He seems to beckon for the co-commentator to confirm his statement. However, the co-commentator does not come forth with the desired confirmation and again Gerard stands in, corroborating the commentator’s view (ll. 4-6). Hence, once more, a fundamental unit of conversation is constructed between a viewer at home and a person on television.

Furthermore, in line 14, once the commentator has signalled the end of his turn with final falling intonation, Benjamin selects himself as next speaker (Sacks et al. 1974: 700) and continues the commentary. Although the scene Benjamin refers to with “look at that” is already running when the commentator still finishes his turn (in line 13), no overlap between the

talk on television and the talk at home occurs. The viewers at home respect the commentators' turns and wait to take the floor as if the journalists were present in the living room. Hence, just like in example 5, the participants in front of the television manage to weave their conversation into the ongoing talk between the commentator and the expert, so that a single conversation emerges.

This seamlessness appears to be favoured by the general agreement between all four participants: they are all uncertain about what happened (even the Brazilian coach looks equally mystified) and they are trying to work it out while watching the replays.

In the following, however, there are contrasting views on how a scene should be interpreted.

Example 7: EB2R I don't think so

1	Comm	Rivaldo,
2		(1.0)
3	IS	{whistle}
4	Comm	free kick to Brazil.
5	Gerard	I don't think so.
6		(0.6)
7	Comm	Campbell and Scholes,
8		both made the challenge.

In this stretch of talk, in line 5 Gerard directly contradicts the decision on television (either by the commentator or by the whistling of the referee). Again, Gerard manages to insert his protest smoothly with no overlap. Also, the commentator seems to answer him by giving the reason for the decision (ll. 7-8).

Surprisingly often, the spectators seem to be able to forecast accurately pauses in the talk of the commentators on television. This allows them to insert their talk in the gaps left by the commentators. Having internalized the rules of football commentary during countless hours of watching games, they seem to be able to read the game and the accompanying talk. Two examples from a different game shall suffice to illustrate that the

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smooth execution of this verbal behaviour is not an idiosyncrasy in Gerard's family.¹⁰

Wilma, Henry's wife, has only just arrived; it would be impolite not to talk to her. On the other hand, the talk on television needs to be oriented to at the same time.

Example 8: AE2C wanna sit down

1	Comm	but it was Ashley Cole covered.=
2	Henry	=wanna sit down? {to Wilma}
3		[maybe] have lunch afterwards?= [Aimar,]
4	Comm	[Aimar,]
5		=Ortega,= =yeah yeah
6	Wilma	=yeah yeah
7		(5.0)

Besides one overlap (ll. 3 and 4), Henry and Wilma's talk is squeezed into the gaps left by the television commentary. Like pieces of a puzzle that touch, the two strands latch on to each other. Although here no single conversation is produced as both parties talk about different subjects, the effect of the conversationalists striving to respect the turns by the commentator is visible.

To summarise, the excerpts from the corpus suggest that the television, in the form of the commentators, is at times treated like any other interlocutor. The participants construct adjacency pairs together with the journalists. In addition, the viewers at home respect the turns taken by the journalists. They manage to project possible completion points of the commentators' turns (both from their knowledge about talk in general, football, and football commentary in particular), allowing for such co-construction of talk.

This verbal behaviour has to be mutually negotiated by the viewers present in order to underline their identity as football fans and create a community of football fans who watch television. It is by doing so that they

¹⁰ The following stretch of talk is conspicuous by its number of latching. 'Latching' annotated by = indicates a lack of interval between the end of the prior and the beginning of the next utterance unit.

become part of this community, thus reinforcing the rules of what is to be done at the same time.

These practices are possible because of the conversational style in British football commentary. Different local adaptations of a global product like the World Cup necessarily lead to different appropriations so that the World Cup for the world-wide audiences is in actual fact different local football world cups.

Conclusion

This paper showed how sports viewers interpret “Playing by the rules of the game – Jouer selon les règles du jeu.” The participants demonstrate their knowledge about football and its rules by commenting on the matches on TV. This behaviour is based on the rule-governed nature of football which makes comments possible at any point in the game. In applying strategies such as ‘signalling independent knowledge’, the viewers construct their identity as experts in the fields of football. Moreover, with the help of these comments, the fans manage to position themselves against the media text to build a feeling of comradeship and belonging within the group of viewers.

Furthermore, one effect of the localisation of the global product football World Cup has been illustrated. By intertwining their language with the language on television, the viewers make their experience of football commentary manifest. The conversational style in British TV commentary makes co-constructions possible which allow the fans to move closer to the spectacle trying to become a part of it.¹¹

Further studies comparing different reception situations are desirable. For example, in Germany, the new consortium which will be transmitting the *Bundesliga* games in the future recently decided to have two channels for every match, one for the fans of each team. Hence, it would be interesting to see in what way this open on-record subjectivity reflects on the verbal behaviour of the fans (cf. Hansen 1999 for a discussion of partisan commentary). A comparison of both the football commentary and the

¹¹ Other strategies typical for this setting which could not be mentioned in this paper include the direct addressing of persons on television. Also, the airing of emotions while watching is an integral part of being a fan (Gerhardt 2006a).

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talk of fans in other countries and other languages would comprise a valid addition to the topics raised in this paper.

Being accepted as a ‘football expert’ or as a ‘football fan’ may not have the same importance as gender or ethnic identities (even though football hooliganism shows how even these kinds of roles can be taken to extremes). Nonetheless, they allow the work that participants put into the everyday negotiation of their own and others’ identity construction to be traced. Other identities may have more important consequences, however, these “‘minor identities’ [...] contribute significantly to our sense of ourselves: who we are, how competent we are, who our friends are or should be, whom we admire or disdain” (Lakoff 2006 on practices around food).

Transcription conventions

she's out.	falling tone in the preceding element; suggesting finality
oh yeah?	rising tone in the preceding element; cf. yes-no question intonation
so,	level, continuing intonation; suggesting non-finality
bu- but	a cutoff or truncated intonation unit
DAMN	high pitch and a rise in volume.
(2.0)	timed pauses in seconds (^{tv} on television)
[and so-]	overlapping talk
[WHY] her?	
and=	latching (immediate onset of subsequent speaker)
=then	
(?)	incomprehensible parts
{laughs}	para- and non-verbal behaviour and contextual information
IS	(short for ‘international sound’) the noise in the stadium

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