

# The discourse of online sportscasting

Constructing meaning and interaction in live text  
commentary

Jan Chovanec

Brno, 2015



## **Habilitační spis**

Autor: Mgr. Jan Chovanec, Ph.D.  
Pracoviště: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky  
Filozofická fakulta Masarykovy Univerzity v Brně  
Datum: 12.10.2015

## **Habilitation Thesis**

Submitted at: Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno

Author: Mgr. Jan Chovanec, Ph.D.  
Affiliation: Department of English and American Studies  
Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno  
Date: 12 October 2015

Declaration of originality:  
I declare that the thesis submitted is an original research work.

Brno, 12 October 2015

Jan Chovanec



*“For those of you watching in black and white, Spurs are playing in yellow.”*

John ‘Motty’ Motson,  
an English football commentator for the BBC, 1977

***Peep!** We’re off! Chile in red, white and blue, Switzerland in their white away strip.*

John Ashdown,  
an English live text commentator for the Guardian, 2010



---

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Transcription conventions</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>List of figures</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>List of tables</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>1 Introduction</b>	<b>21</b>
1.1 Setting the scene: news on the go	
1.2 Locating sites of interaction	
1.3 Aims of the work	
1.4 Points of departure and points of contact	
<i>A discourse pragmatic perspective</i>	
<i>A genre perspective</i>	
<i>A CMC/TMC &amp; media discourse analysis perspective</i>	
<i>Points of contact – temporality and time deixis</i>	
<i>Points of contact – recipient focus</i>	
<i>Levels of analysis</i>	
1.5 Overview of chapters	
<b>PART I Locating LTC</b>	
<b>2 Conventionalized patterns of language variation</b>	<b>39</b>
2.1 Genre, structures and social interaction	
2.2 Registers and systemic functional linguistics	
2.3 Register variation and text types	
2.4 From register to genre – theory of context and generic structures	
2.5 Genres as non-linguistically defined constructs	
2.6 Genre as interaction	
2.7 Genre discreteness and variability	
2.8 Concluding remarks	

---

<b>3</b>	<b>The linguistics of sports commentary</b>	<b>57</b>
3.1	Unscripted commentary	
3.2	Sports announcer talk	
3.3	Unplanned spoken language – on-line description	
3.4	Levels of commentary	
3.5	Concluding remarks	
<b>4</b>	<b>Live texts, blogging and journalism</b>	<b>79</b>
4.1	Basic characteristics of blogs	
4.2	Live blogs and interactive journalism	
4.3	Live blog as a framing text	
4.4	Live blog as a discourse colony	
4.5	From text/discourse colony to colony of genres	
4.6	Referring to (live) blogs in the data	
4.7	Naming live text commentaries	
	<i>Event tracker</i>	
	<i>Matchcast</i>	
	<i>Score tracker</i>	
	<i>Live ticker</i>	
	<i>Live commentary</i>	
	<i>Minute-by-minute</i>	
	<i>Live text commentary</i>	
4.8	Concluding remarks	
<b>PART II</b>	<b>Analysing LTC</b>	
<b>5</b>	<b>Material and characterization of data</b>	<b>115</b>
5.1	Material for analysis	
5.2	Composition of the corpus	
5.3	General characterization of the data	
5.4	LTC between blogs and news reports	
5.5	Previous research	
5.6	Types of live text commentaries	
	<i>Type 1: LTC as one-way information streaming</i>	
	<i>Type 2: LTC with parallel audience participation</i>	
	<i>Type 3: LTC with integrated audience participation</i>	
5.7	Concluding remarks	



---

<b>6</b>	<b>Structuring the LTC: The event and liveness</b>	<b>135</b>
6.1	Nested structures	
6.2	Structural organization of the entire LTC	
	1. <i>Source</i>	
	2. <i>Event name</i>	
	3. <i>Event specification</i>	
	4. <i>Hyperlinks</i>	
	5. <i>Sports event information</i>	
	6. <i>Interactive and participatory elements</i>	
	7. <i>Image and text commentary</i>	
6.3	Linear structure of the textual part of LTC	
	<i>Post openings</i>	
6.4	Temporal organization: The liveness of the event	
	<i>Clock-time v. game-time deixis</i>	
	<i>Liveness – the event and the text</i>	
	<i>Liveness, temporal deixis and deictic centres</i>	
	<i>(In)felicitous liveness</i>	
6.5	Concluding remarks	
<b>7</b>	<b>Segmentation of live text commentary</b>	<b>159</b>
7.1	The pre-match commentary: Laying the ground	
	<i>Live temporal orientation</i>	
	<i>Retrospective temporal orientation</i>	
	<i>Prospective temporal orientation</i>	
7.2	The match (play-by-play) commentary: Describing the real thing	
	<i>Opening the match commentary</i>	
7.3	The post-match commentary: Summarizing and trailing off	
	<i>The limited extent of post-match commentary</i>	
	<i>Terminating the commentary</i>	
	<i>Shifting temporal deixis in and around boundary points</i>	
	<i>The boundary post and temporal transitioning</i>	
7.4	Concluding remarks	
<b>8</b>	<b>Managing event discontinuities in half-time commentary</b>	<b>185</b>
8.1	Event discontinuities	
8.2	Temporal organization of LTC at half time	
8.3	Posts at half time	
8.4	Marking boundaries in half-time commentary	

- 
- 8.5 Formulating transitions in boundary posts
  - 8.6 Formulating game resumption after half-time
  - 8.7 Multiple encodings of boundary points
  - 8.8 Signing off from commentary at half time
  - 8.9 Concluding remarks

### **PART III Interacting through LTC**

## **9 Creating co-presence 211**

- 9.1 Articulating immediacy
  - 9.1.1 Interactiveness and quasi-interaction
  - 9.1.2 Spoken features in LTC
- 9.2. Features of spoken broadcast commentary
  - 9.3.1 Usage of tenses
  - 9.3.2 Simplification and ellipsis
  - 9.3.3 Inversion
  - 9.3.4 Routines
  - 9.3.5 Heavy modifiers
  - 9.3.6 Other: Summarizing formulations
- 9.4 General features of spoken language
  - 9.4.1 Graphology and prosody
    - Emphatic lengthening of written representations of sounds*
    - Multiple punctuation marks*
    - Capital letters*
    - Graphological emphasis*
    - Abbreviations*
    - Representation of non-standard pronunciations*
    - Hesitation sounds*
    - Interjections*
    - Pauses*
    - Strikethrough*
    - Asterisked comments*
    - Hyperlinking*
    - Replication*
  - 9.4.2 Lexical phenomena
    - Informal words, colloquialisms, contracted verb forms*
    - Shortenings*
    - Repetitions*
    - Lexical innovations and other ad-hoc creations*
    - Metaphorical language*
    - (Mild) expletives*

- 
- 9.4.3 Syntactic phenomena
    - Exclamatives*
    - Questions*
    - Non-finite sentences (noun phrases)*
    - Imperatives*
    - Sentence dislocation – tails (tag position)*
    - Repetition*
    - Multiple coordination*
    - Subject ellipsis*
    - Constructional principles of spoken language: self-corrections*
  - 9.4.4 Pragmatic features
    - Discourse and pragmatic markers*
    - Demonstratives as intensifiers*
    - Demonstratives for common knowledge*
    - Metareferences*
    - Inferential evaluation*
    - (Colloquial) address forms*
  - 9.4.5 Rhetorical devices
    - Exaggeration*
    - Simile*
    - Metaphor*
  - 9.4.6 Dialogic features
    - Heteroglossia*
    - (Pseudo-)dialogicality*
  - 9.5 Constructing shared space
    - 9.5.1 The temporal (non-spatial) ‘here’
    - 9.5.2 Reference to a (current) point of the event
    - 9.5.3 Unspecified physical location
    - 9.5.4 Commentator’s unspecified non-physical location
    - 9.5.5 Recipients’ specified physical location
    - 9.5.6 Explicit marker of hypertextuality
    - 9.5.7 Marker of text-external content – hypertextuality
    - 9.5.8 Marker of discourse deixis
    - 9.5.9 Self-referential ‘here’
    - 9.5.10 Authorial self-reference
  - 9.6 Concluding remarks
- 10 Threading and narrative layers: From interactivity to interaction**
- 10.1 Triggering participation

---

	<i>Verbal triggers</i>	
	<i>Implicit verbal triggers</i>	
	<i>Visual triggers</i>	
10.2	Patterns of interaction – threading	
	<i>Conversational threading</i>	
	<i>Discursive management of topic threads</i>	
10.3	Dialogic structuration of voices	
	<i>Heteroglossic dialogism</i>	
	<i>Heteroglossia – dialogic juxtaposition of voices</i>	
	<i>Heteroglossia without dialogic interaction</i>	
	<i>Heteroglossic dialogism as quasi-conversation</i>	
	<i>Discourse structure of quasi-dialogues</i>	
	<i>Winning a voice: getting quoted</i>	
	<i>Gary Naylor and ventriloquized voice</i>	
10.4	Narrative layers	
	<i>Male gossip and bonding</i>	
	<i>Journalist-audience interaction in a ‘virtual pub’: the fourth space</i>	
10.5	Concluding remarks	
<b>11</b>	<b>Participation frameworks</b>	<b>309</b>
11.1	Frames of interaction	
	<i>First frame – mediating interaction in the field</i>	
	<i>Second frame – embedded TV broadcast commentary</i>	
	<i>Third frame – the production of LTC</i>	
	<i>Fourth frame – audience reception of LTC</i>	
11.2	Across-the-frame interactions	
11.3	Concluding remarks	
<b>12</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>323</b>
12.1	Research questions revisited	
12.2	Discussion and outlooks	
	<i>Media text production</i>	
	<i>Networked reception</i>	
	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>329</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>333</b>

## Acknowledgements

The main part of this text was written between 2010 and 2012, based on my earlier research into the pragmalinguistic features of live text commentary over the past ten years. The research presented here is original and previously unpublished.

I would like to thank the Department of English and American Studies of my home university for enabling me to present the partial findings of my research at a number of international conferences, which provided the much needed stimulation to develop my thinking on the whole issue. Linking with colleagues abroad was also enabled thanks to the EU-funded Erasmus teacher exchange programme. This allowed me to visit several partner universities abroad, where I was able to share and discuss various aspects of my research. Apart from that, the research presented in this book did not receive any funding from grant agencies or other public bodies.

I would like to thank my academic mentor professor Ludmila Urbanová for her encouragement, help and long-time belief in the merits of my work.

The biggest thanks, however, go to my family for their endless patience and for bearing with me throughout the many years spent on this project. Without their support and understanding, I would hardly have been able to bring the whole project to its meaningful end.

## Abbreviations

CA	conversation analysis
CMC	computer-mediated communication
CMD	computer-mediated discourse
ESP	English for Specific Purposes
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association (International Federation of Association Football)
LTC	live text commentary
MBM	minute-by-minute
SAT	sports announcer talk
TMC	technology-mediated communication
TMD	technology-mediated discourse
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations

## Transcription conventions

<b>bold</b>	bold in examples indicates a caption opening that is conventionally used for all posts
<b>bold</b>	bold in examples highlights a linguistic phenomenon under discussion
<u>underlining</u>	underlining in examples indicates a hyperlink to external content in the original or original underlining used by the journalist

---

## List of figures

- Figure 1.1** Most viewed articles. The Guardian, 11 April 2010  
**Figure 1.2** The top five articles viewed over a 24-hour period. The Guardian, 13 March 2010  
**Figure 1.3** Most viewed articles over a 7-day period. The Guardian, 13 March 2010
- Figure 2.1** Components of registers (Biber 1995: 10)  
**Figure 2.2** The realization of genre (Martin and Rose 2007: 309)  
**Figure 2.3** Elements of genre
- Figure 3.1** Levels of commentary  
**Figure 3.2** The nature of the relation between commentary and action
- Figure 4.1** The hybrid nature of weblogs (Herring et al., 2004: 10)  
**Figure 4.2** Live blogs among the top five stories on an ordinary day  
**Figure 4.3** A framing blog for a series of live blogs (The Guardian, retrieved on 20 March 2012)  
**Figure 4.4** A blog framing other related texts (blogs and non-blogs) (The Guardian, retrieved on 20 March 2012)  
**Figure 4.5** The framing use of blogs  
**Figure 4.6** Live commentary/play-by-play (www.fifa.com, 2014 FIFA world cup)  
**Figure 4.7** ‘Score tracker’ for cricket (www.espnstar.com)
- Figure 5.1** The main differences between news reports and LTCs  
**Figure 5.2** Comparison of personal narratives and LTC (Jucker 2010: 74)  
**Figure 5.3** Live text commentary – simple text (Watford v. Crystal Palace, 26 September 2015, www.bbc.com)  
**Figure 5.4** Live text commentary (Watford v. Crystal Palace, 26 September 2015, The Independent)  
**Figure 5.5** Range of styles in the ‘live ticker’ subtype of LTC  
**Figure 5.6** Independent chat discussion appended to LTC (Chovanec 2010a)
- Figure 6.1** The nesting of structural components  
**Figure 6.2** Basic structural segments of LTC  
**Figure 6.3** A modernized version of the LTC page

- 
- Figure 6.4** Types of post openings: (a) time stamp with clock time; (b) time stamp with game time; (c) textual introduction; (d) a combination of time stamp and textual introduction
- Figure 6.5** Three structural component parts of sports live text commentary
- Figure 6.6** Contemporaneity as a prerequisite for live commentary
- Figure 6.7** Temporal relations between commentary and event
- Figure 6.8** Deictic simultaneity between the event, text production and text reception (triple deictic centre simultaneity)
- Figure 6.9** Deictic centre non-simultaneity in non-live texts (and repeated live broadcasts)
- Figure 7.1** Dual indication of temporal deixis
- Figure 7.2** Triple indication of temporal deixis
- Figure 8.1** Location of boundary posts in LTC (in bold)
- Figure 10.1** Witty caption as a trigger of play frame (Philipp Lahm is so small he uses half a broken eggshell for a coracle on his holidays)
- Figure 10.2** Witty caption as a trigger of play frame (ITALIAN WORLD CUP NIGHTMARE (No 374 in a series of 2,387): Italy and Chile get the battle fever on in Santiago, 1962)
- Figure 10.3** Visual trigger of play frame (A Japanese straight-shooter. The *only* Japanese straight-shooter)
- Figure 10.4** Visual trigger of play frame (Diego Maradona: a man who knows how to holiday)
- Figure 10.5** Visual metaphor
- Figure 10.6** Literal visual representation of an image caption (The Dutch imploding)
- Figure 10.7** A photoshopped visual trigger (Diego's Argentinian Grill Photograph)
- Figure 10.8** Word play and irony (The atmosphere is electric over in Baaaaaa-sle)
- Figure 10.9** Extended set-up of the play frame: 'visual-ornithological punnery'
- Figure 10.10** Topic drift in natural conversation (1) and the development and existence of parallel topics in LTC/chat (2)
- Figure 10.11** Parallel existence of multiple topic threads
- Figure 10.12** Features of quasi-conversations compared to natural and fictional conversations
- Figure 10.13** Intertwining of primary and secondary layers of narration in LTC



---

**Figure 10.14** Key characteristics of primary and secondary layers

**Figure 11.1** A generic representation of the dual frames of interaction in media broadcasts (Chovanec 2015: 71)

**Figure 11.2** Recursiveness of the interactional frames in live text commentary (Chovanec 2015: 74)

**Figure 11.3** Across-the-frame interaction in LTC (red arrows)

## List of tables

- Table 3.1** Levels of commentary in live sports reporting
- Table 4.1** Frequency of occurrence of the expressions *blog* and *MBM* (*minute-by-minute*)
- Table 5.1** Composition of subset A (Euro 2008)  
**Table 5.2** Composition of subset B (World Cup 2010)  
**Table 5.3** Composition of the corpus according to structural features
- Table 7.1** Length of post-match commentary (number of posts following the boundary post)
- Appendix 1** Subset A (Euro 2008) – list of matches and commentators
- Appendix 2** Subset B (World Cup 2010) – list of matches and commentators

## Preface

It is an inevitable truism to state that modern technologies have brought about sweeping changes in many areas of the society. Over the past thirty years, computer technology has resulted in an unprecedented compression of space and time. Instant technology-mediated contact has become the rule not only in interpersonal communication but also in various public domains, such as journalism. The internet has revolutionized the way people can exchange information and communicate with each other. Being online and communicating, or simply being involved through various social networks or mobile-phone applications that have lately been gaining popularity has become one of the most recent developments in the area of technology-mediated communication.

Not surprisingly, the advent of technology-mediated communication (i.e., computer-mediated and other forms of machine-assisted communication) has had an immense impact on human verbal interaction. New forms of communication appeared, followed by new discourses, genres and styles. Some of the technical innovations – emailing, texting and online chat, to name just a few – have quickly become so indispensable for personal and professional communication that it is nowadays almost inconceivable to imagine the world without them. Others, such as tweeting, are arguably less central, though they enjoy an immense popularity with many.

The new possibilities offered by the technology have led to the emergence of new patterns of interaction, as well as new genres. Traditional media, for instance, have been forced to adapt to the new situation. Most established newspapers went online in the 1990s and started producing electronic versions of their news reports. While they initially exploited the potential of the medium as regards its hypertextuality, i.e. linking a given news report into a complex network of related texts, they gradually moved towards experimenting with new styles of bringing news to their audiences. One of the most innovative news formats is live online reporting – events are reported as they unfold, almost in real time, and updates on the story are brought within the space of minutes. Live blogging, as the format is sometimes known, has now become the predominant way of breaking news, and has seen the emergence of live text, i.e. a verbal description produced in the written mode almost contemporaneously with the events described.

The present book is one of the first systematic investigations into the emerging genre of live text commentary (LTC) from a pragma-linguistic perspective. It describes the structural properties of the genre and focuses on the ways LTC can enhance interaction between the news producers and the

audience. Analysing a corpus of online sports commentaries, the study notes how the discourse of live text commentaries has emerged as a hybrid genre, combining elements of live spoken broadcasting, informal spoken conversation as well as online chat. Since the audience are allowed to make limited textual contributions, the resulting texts emerge as heteroglossic encounters replete with pseudo-dialogical exchanges. The interaction between the participants results in the fragmentation of the factual content, giving rise to multi-linearity manifested through the existence of several intertwined topical threads, and a complex narrative structure consisting of two relatively independent layers. It is argued that this emergent genre results in the need to reconsider traditional participation frameworks for media discourse, since the technology allows for readers' direct involvement in across-the-frame verbal interactions and their co-construction of the entertainment which the genre provides.

Adopting a broad pragmatic perspective, this work is a contribution to the analysis of media discourse that is inspired by genre analysis. It reflects some of the changes arising in the media landscape as a result of participatory journalism and the modern trend towards a greater involvement of readers. While the present book addresses a mainstream media genre that is already becoming institutionalized, there are new communicative situations that are constantly emerging out of the novel patterns of the audience's reception, mediation and participation in media texts, such as the tendency towards the simultaneous reception of information from multiple official and unofficial channels. Though some aspects of such 'second screen' reception situations are considered with respect to LTC as well, it is inevitable that there is much research waiting to be done to deal with the fascinating new realities of texts, discourses and communicative situations found at the interface between the official media, the diverse means of technology-mediated communication, and the communicatively empowered discourse participants.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

This work deals with the pragmatics of modern media communication, focusing on live news reporting in mainstream online news sites. It aims to contribute to the understanding of the complexity of technology-mediated communication, which is marked by a changed dynamism of participation frameworks emerging from novel forms of institutionalized communication. The new formats and genres increasingly incorporate diverse aspects of the participants' private lives, enacting them in the public sphere and, thus, blurring the boundary between private and public, production and reception, and news and entertainment.

### 1.1 Setting the scene: news on the go

Let us consider three independent examples from the same newspaper, the British daily paper the Guardian, to point out what kind of text the present study focuses on.

On 10 April 2010, the airplane with the Polish president Lech Kaczyński and a numerous delegation of Polish politicians crashed shortly before landing at Smolensk airport, killing all 96 people on board. The event was newsworthy on many counts – because of its unexpectedness, negativity, intensity, as well as the historical reminiscences of the locality. Thus, the event instantly became front page news in print newspapers and news servers worldwide. However, there are indications that after breaking the initial information about the crash, the importance of the event for the readers receded quickly into the background. Despite the continued attention given to it by the media, the story was replaced by other topics and news events that the readers considered as (comparatively more) relevant. Figure 1.1 provides the list of the most viewed articles in the online version of the Guardian one day after the crash, i.e. on Sunday 11 April 2010. The list clearly indicates the shift in the readers' interest to issues other than the aircraft crash:

- 
- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Real Madrid v Barcelona – as it happened (Rob Smyth), 10 Apr 2010</li> <li>2. Grand National 2010 – as it happened (Chris Cook and James Dart), 10 Apr 2010</li> <li>3. Tottenham v Portsmouth – as it happened (Simon Burton) 11 Apr 2010</li> <li>4. Aston Villa v Chelsea – as it happened (Rob Smyth), 10 Apr 2010</li> <li>5. Blackburn 0-0 Manchester United – as it happened, 11 Apr 2010</li> <li>6. Polish president Lech Kaczynski killed in plane crash, 10 Apr 2010</li> <li>7. Polish president and leading advisers among victims of Smolensk plane crash, 10 Apr 2010</li> <li>8. Jonathan Ross: Can I be honest with you?, 9 Apr 2010</li> <li>9. Disgusted Sir Alex Ferguson claims press is blinded by ‘mist of venom’, 9 Apr 2010</li> <li>10. Exclusive: Inquiry over Vanessa Perroncel phone-tapping allegations, 10 Apr 2010</li> </ol> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Figure 1.1.** Most viewed articles. The Guardian, 11 April 2010

The plane crash occurred on early Saturday morning and it was immediately covered in the media. From the point of view of news production, it thus clearly became the main news of the day right from the start. However, the event found a strong competitor in football because Saturday (and Sunday, for that matter) is the traditional day when many matches of the British Premier Championship League (as well as other European leagues) are played. Figure 1.1 shows that readers, on the whole, were interested in the match results rather than the tragic news of the day, with the top five articles being reports of football matches. Arguably, sports provide a lot of news input over the weekend, partly due to the absence of pre-scheduled political and business events. But still, the dominance of football – with view to what might be considered as one of the most serious and important pieces of international news for several months – is truly staggering.<sup>1</sup>

A closer inspection reveals another feature that the five sports reports share: all of them are commentaries on football matches and all of them are live. This is attested by the phrase ‘as it happened’, which conventionally identifies this genre of texts in the Guardian and the *Independent* newspapers<sup>2</sup> In other words, the readers of these reports are

---

<sup>1</sup> Arguably, the readers’ shifting interest from the news story on the airplane disaster to football also reflects the difference in the nature of the news events. The plane crash is a one-off event with a high initial intensity and no equally newsworthy development during the day (save for speculations about the causes and for the verbal comments of various news actors). By contrast, sports events provide readers with staple newsworthy content for a limited duration of time, culminating in the eventual result.

<sup>2</sup> This label is somewhat misleading since it connotes a retrospective account of the match; for a more detailed discussion, see Section 4.7.

---

interested in more than the result (i.e., what is technically referred to as ‘the main event’ within the cognitive structure of a news report, cf. Ungerer 2000). These reports enable readers to follow the progress of the matches as they are developing in real time.

This situation is in no way unusual. Figures 1.2 and 1.3 give two more lists of the most viewed articles on the Guardian website, which were obtained by means of chance sampling. The dominance of sport – and live reporting – clearly emerges in the data once again, even though the newspaper does not provide any precise data about the actual numbers of readers accessing these texts, cf.:

- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. <a href="#">Hull City v Arsenal – as it happened</a></li><li>2. <a href="#">Bangladesh v England – day one as it happened   Rob Smyth</a></li><li>3. <a href="#">Obesity: The killer combination of salt, fat and sugar   David A Kessler</a></li><li>4. <a href="#">Internet agog for Lady Gaga’s provocative video to Telephone</a></li><li>5. <a href="#">Saturday clockwatch – as it happened   Alan Gardner</a></li></ol> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Figure 1.2.** The top five articles viewed over a 24-hour period. The Guardian, 13 March 2010.

The top two positions are held by live text commentaries of sports events – a Premier League football match and an international game of cricket. The third article is a lifestyle feature and the fourth a piece of celebrity news. The fifth most frequently read article was another live text commentary (*Saturday clockwatch*) – this time a running commentary composed of six (!) Premier League football matches played at the same time on a Saturday afternoon.

It may be objected that the data is somewhat skewed on account of the diverse distribution of different types of newsworthy events throughout the week and the generally greater availability of sports events over the weekend. That is true – sports live text commentaries are typically not produced by the media on a daily basis. Instead, they tend to concentrate on those days that coincide with major sporting events, such as the weekend or Wednesdays (the traditional day on which European soccer matches are played out). Consequently, it is less common to find a live sports match report among the top five news reports on weekdays, at least if the frequency of access to the articles is calculated on the basis of the 24-hour period. The statistics aggregated over a period of time, e.g. the past seven days, give a more balanced perspective – cf. Figure 1.3, which lists the most frequently read articles in the Guardian over the period of one week:

- 
- |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <a href="#"><u>Inside the world of Obama's secret-service bodyguards</u></a></li> <li>2. <a href="#"><u>Get up earlier, Germans tell Greeks</u></a></li> <li>3. <a href="#"><u>Oscars 2010 liveblog: the 82nd Academy Awards as it happened</u></a></li> <li>4. <a href="#"><u>Arsenal 5-0 Porto (agg: 6-2) – as it happened   Champions League   Paul Doyle</u></a></li> <li>5. <a href="#"><u>James Bulger killer Jon Venables confessed real identity to strangers as mental state crumbled</u></a></li> </ol> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

**Figure 1.3.** Most viewed articles over a 7-day period. The Guardian, 13 March 2010.

While the two most-read articles are hard news stories, the third and fourth most frequently accessed items are live news. The third most viewed article is a live text coverage of the Oscar 2010 ceremony, lasting over five hours of real time. This is followed by a Champions League soccer match between Arsenal and Porto. Both events concern elite news actors and both rank high in terms of their newsworthiness (cf. Bell 1991; Harcup and O'Neill 2001; Bednarek and Caple 2012; 2014). For the sake of completeness, let us state that within this particular week, there were two more football matches among the top ten articles accessed over a 7-day period (*Manchester United v Milan - as it happened | Champions League | Paul Doyle*, ranking 8<sup>th</sup>, and *Football: Wolves 0-1 Man Utd – as it happened | Rob Smyth*, ranking 9<sup>th</sup>). The fact that four out of ten of the most viewed articles in a single week are live text commentaries indicates that this genre is far from some marginal phenomenon of modern journalism.

The diagnostic tools that are increasingly incorporated by Internet media to measure user behaviour reveal that the patterns of readers' engagement with news texts are changing. Instead of engaging with 'dead' editorial content, represented by more traditional news reports, readers are very actively seeking out texts that are 'live' – i.e. existing in an unfinished state, presenting the event in its development, and coming with the suspense derived from experiencing the event before its ultimate outcome becomes known. The implication is evident: while live texts may be proportionately much less frequent in online media than traditional news texts, they attract a disproportionate amount of attention from the readers. Consequently, live news texts are likely to play a much more central role in the news reception and news consumption processes on online news sites than has hitherto been acknowledged by researchers. With respect to journalistic practices, this is clear evidence of the shift towards instant, online journalism: news production is no longer only about writing reports of recent events but, increasingly, about mediating the events in real time and making them textually available to readers in unfinished and constantly updated news texts (or minimalist 'text-bites', as is increasingly the case).



As regards textual and pragmatic analysis, this shift marks a major change in how news texts are formed, presented and received. The readers deal with unfinished textual forms, engaging with them and creating meaning in sometimes unexpected intertextual and interdiscursive situations.

## 1.2 Locating sites of interaction

The format of live news, which I will refer to as live text commentary (LTC), offers a promising new potential for pragmatically oriented linguistic analysis. As argued in this work, live text commentary has established itself as a new genre of communication that addresses some very specific communicative needs by bringing together the producer and the recipient(s) of the news text in real time. As such, the phenomena that call for our attention range from the typical (i.e. conventionalized) formal, structural and stylistic features of this genre on the one hand to the innovative patterns of communication (participation frameworks) enabled by means of modern communication technologies on the other. Consequently, live text commentaries are more than textual mediators of news content: they are sites of interaction in which various discourse participants enact their diverse identities, both in cooperation and in conflict with other participants. Reverberating with multiple voices, live news texts are potentially open to other participants to be shaped and developed further according to their motivations and preferences.

Let us consider three examples in order to outline what I mean by these textual sites of interaction, since these phenomena will inform the dimensions of analysis entertained in the analytical part of this work.

When reading live text commentaries from sports matches, the following will be found among the characteristic utterances encountered in the reports:

**81 min:** Alonso slips the ball inside from the left to Iniesta, who turns through 180 degrees and nips into the box. For a second, he's got a look at goal, but can't get his shot away before Sneijder comes across to make a very well-timed tackle. Great play all round. More of this, please! (B-62, Holland-Spain)

The extract contains some linguistic features of what is known as 'online description', i.e. the formulation of descriptions of events as they are unfolding. This places live text commentary in a clear connection with spoken commentary, as broadcast on radio and TV. A conventional stylistic analysis reveals the role of the present tense as a way of linguistically

encoding the liveness of the event and creating the semblance of co-presence between the description and the event.

The next example shows another formal feature found in live commentaries, namely colloquial forms of expression, cf.:

**31 min:** Podolski grapples with Tevez, 25 yards out, just about level with the right-hand edge of the German area. Messi takes a whack, hitting a ball that ain't ever comin' back down. (B-57, Argentina-Germany)

This feature is already more interesting in that the text producer is consciously creating a particular effect on the recipients: he reconstructs some of the phonological features of speech in order to create the impression of spoken language. However, there is no actual speech to represent: there is no discourse mediation since the utterance is made entirely in the journalist's own authorial voice.

The situation becomes even more complicated in the following extract:

**54 min:** This is all Uruguay now, a few minutes' worth of passing in the German half. Ozil tries to relieve some pressure by rolling a ball towards Jansen down the inside left, but Lugano is quickly over to stroke the ball away to safety. Meanwhile Tobi Baur is flabbergasted at Butt's tinder-dry barnet. "It's pouring in Port Elizabeth, how does Butt manage to have dry hair?" he splutters. "Hiding under the crossbar? Or did he blow dry his hair at halftime?" (B-61, Uruguay-Germany)

In this example, the post becomes a site for actual interaction between the journalist and one of his readers. Evidently, the short quote in direct speech takes the whole speech event beyond the journalistic genre of sports commentary, since a host of new phenomena appear as a result of the reader's participation in the text. As I show in the main part of the work, the heteroglossic presence of external voices gives rise to quasi-conversations that are threaded throughout the LTC. They form complex narratives co-constructed by the journalist and the readers. The existence of posts like this then calls for the need to reconsider the participation framework of this media genre.

### 1.3 Aims of the work

This study has three primary aims, which can be formulated in terms of three basic research questions as follows:

1. What is the status of live text commentary as an emerging genre of online media communication, particularly with respect to other types of sports commentary and the practice of ‘live blogging’?
2. What is the generic structure of live text commentary, based on the interactive type of commentary found in the Guardian newspaper?
3. What is the effect of audience involvement through various participatory practices on the genre and on the construction of meaning by the discourse participants?

By way of addressing the three questions, it will be necessary to deal with a number of functional, formal and pragmatic considerations, approaching the data from a qualitative, interpretative perspective. The individual research questions may be broken down into the following steps:

#### *Re 1: Live text commentary as a distinct genre*

In order to deal with this issue, LTC will be subject to a functional analysis in terms of the communicative goals it serves. It will be delimited from other media genres and properly positioned with respect to other outcomes of institutionalized and personalized news production processes, such as blogging. While the argument for generic integrity of LTC will reflect the unique constellation of the genre’s contextual and linguistic variables, it will also be pointed out that LTC is an internally heterogeneous genre that takes over many of its textual and structural features from other genres, thus being representative of a genre hybrid, particularly with respect to its primary reference genre of (spoken) sports commentary. At the same time, there is some variability in the actual instantiations of this genre, allowing us to isolate several distinct subtypes of the genre.

#### *Re 2: Generic structure of live text commentary*

To deal with this issue, two main structural components will be discussed: the online format of LTC web pages and the inherently time-based structure of the commentaries. Particular attention will be paid to recurrent patterns

because they are indicative of the conventionalized form that is expected by the texts' recipients. It is argued that while chronological sequencing provides the fundamental framework for live text commentary, some forms of LTC contain a parallel textual organization in terms of topic threading found in such TMC-genres as online chat. This threading appears in conjunction with the dual narrative structure of these texts. Moreover, as a result of genre hybridity, the formal means that are found in LTC frequently appear as conventionalized representations of spoken language, with the written text drawing on similar means of creating/connoting liveliness as in spoken broadcasts. As a result, LTC recreates 'the spoken language in the written mode'.

### *Re 3: Audience involvement*

This is arguably the most exciting area of investigation that centres on my identification of the interactive subtype of LTC found in the Guardian newspaper, which has pioneered this most complex format of the genre. I will seek to deal with the issue of how audience involvement modifies the participation frameworks and what interactional work the participants are engaged in with respect to each other and with respect to the journalist acting as the moderator. While the polyphony of heterogeneous voices is masterminded by the journalist, the patterns of communication emerging from these texts may lead us to rethink the functional classification of the genre, with the ideational orientation being supplanted by the interpersonal one. By participating, the users are expressing their group identity as a virtual community of football fans.

As the brief overview indicates, my effort to understand the textual format and interactional patterns of LTC will, by necessity, be an interdisciplinary undertaking, being situated at the interface between media discourse analysis, genre analysis and pragmatics. I believe this combined perspective is needed in order to do justice to the complex picture of this genre that emerges when LTC becomes subjected to a multi-faceted linguistic analysis.

## **1.4 Points of departure and points of contact**

Given the nature of the topic and the aims of this study, my approach draws on several interdisciplinary perspectives. Paying regard to pragmatic phenomena, this work also incorporates analytical and theoretical insights from genre analysis and CMC-based media discourse analysis.

### *A discourse pragmatic perspective*

This study is grounded in the broad conception of linguistic pragmatics as a study of contextualized and patterned interpersonal communication in the broad sense of the word (cf. the ‘European’ approach to pragmatics exemplified by Verschueren 1999). This allows for the study of micropragmatic as well as macropragmatic issues (cf. Cap 2011), i.e. the analysis of specific instances of interactions as well as the drawing of more systematic generalizations. Describing the paradigm of ‘discourse pragmatics’, Barron and Schneider (2014) note that this vast field is characterized by a cross-fertilization of approaches that range from discourse analysis and conversation analysis to critical genre analysis and multimodal pragmatics. In this approach, interactional issues are under focus, which involves the “communicative functions, linguistic action and participant practices in social situations” (Barron and Schneider 2014: 3). This is the macro-level of analysis that needs to be complemented with a study on the level of ‘pragmatics of utterances’.

### *A genre perspective*

In harmony with Tardy and Swales (2014), I see genre analysis and pragmatics as related (despite the different histories and points of departures of the two disciplines) because they have a common focus on how individuals accomplish tasks through language. Genre analysis can thus be applied as “an important tool for research into the pragmatics of discourse” (Tardy and Swales 2014: 165) and should not be seen as an entirely different approach.

Genre can be internally heterogenous since speakers can adopt various strategies in responding to the purpose that a given text satisfies. Individual speakers are not ‘slaves’ to the convention: they are not obliged to follow a particular set of lexico-grammatical features in specific communicative contexts. On the contrary, they can operate within very broad bounds of a genre, even going beyond them in their attempts to creatively deploy diverse linguistic means to meet their communicative purposes. A text in a given genre, e.g. a written sports commentary, can be composed of segments that, when seen in isolation, qualify as instances of language use falling within the scope of other genres. This is where genre mixing and hybridity become involved.

### *A CMC/TMC & media discourse analysis perspective*

Since live text commentary is a textually hybrid form that is institutionally produced and then individually received in the online environment, the

analysis would not be complete without considering some of its overlaps with other forms of technology-mediated communication (TMC) and related media genres. The linguistics of TMC has developed into a broad discipline of its own (cf. Herring 1996). Various labels such as computer-mediated discourse (Scollon 1998: 6; Herring and Androutsopoulos 2015: 144), technology-mediated communication/discourse (Chovanec and Dynel 2015), electronic discourse, digital discourse, etc. (see Locher 2014 for an overview of some of these terms), the field has seen the development of such approaches as digital media sociolinguistics (Crystal 2001; Herring 1996; Androutsopoulos 2006; Danet and Herring 2007; Thurlow and Mroczek 2011) and pragmatics of computer-mediated communication (CMC; Yus 2011; Herring et al. 2013).

In terms of mass media analysis, online media have now claimed an equal position alongside the other media, i.e. print, radio, and TV (Deuze 2003: 206). Media theorists have proposed that we have moved to the stage of Web 2.0, when users increasingly create their own content and interact with each other (cf. Barton and Lee 2013). This results in a change of roles: former recipients are turning into active producers of content, marking a shift from 'usage to produsage' of the media (Bruns 2008).

### ***Points of contact – temporality and time deixis***

A common underlying topic in many TMC/CMC-oriented studies appears to be temporality. As observed by Marriott (2007: 49), "instantaneity – simultaneity or near-simultaneity of transmission and reception – is [...] an affordance of all forms of electronic communication". Of course, there are diverse synchronic/asynchronic forms of CMC/TMC that have given rise to new forms of public and private communication. This includes well-established formats such as email and online chat (Crystal 2001; Werry 1996), more innovative forms such as personal blogs and message boards (Hoffmann 2012; Arendholz 2013), as well as novel and emerging forms such as instant messaging, Facebook status updates (Lee 2011), tweets (Zappavigna 2012), YouTube comments and video responses (Adami 2015) etc.

Scholars working in the CMC paradigm tend to operate with the notion of 'synchronicity'. It has been noted that synchronicity in online communication may contribute towards a feeling of placelessness but also encourage immediacy and playfulness (Baym 2010). In CA-oriented analysis of broadcast media, the issue of temporality tends to be treated under the rubric of liveness (Montgomery 2007; Scannell 2014), as attested by the analysis of many live media genres (such as sports broadcasts, cf. Tolson 2006). In connection with liveness, Marriott (2007: 49) also talks about immediacy, which refers to the "simultaneity or near-simultaneity of

---

an event and its reception elsewhere”. Obviously, all these issues are of central importance for the understanding of the pragmatics of temporal deixis in live media texts, of which live text commentary is a good example.

### *Points of contact – recipient focus*

At the same time, media texts need to be related to their audiences since the latter play a central role in the way the texts are designed (cf. Bell 1984). Writing from a more sociolinguistic point of view, Georgakopoulou (2003, 2006), for instance, proposes that CMC-oriented research needs to address, among other, the blending of the spoken and written language, and replace the attention to ‘informational’ functions of CMC by considering the identity performances of the users.

On the level of pragmalinguistic analysis, this marks the shift from the focus of ‘micro-level’ phenomena, such as lexical forms, syntactic relations and style, to ‘macro-level’ and interactional elements. The latter include not only the textual dimension (coherence and discourse relations) but also interpersonal relations (identity and community building). The social dimension of language use fits into a pragmatically-oriented analysis because the attention to the interlocutors’ personal identity constructions (Benwell and Stokoe 2006) and group affiliations and practices (Wenger 1998; Fine and de Soucey 2005; Stommel 2008) can help to explain their covert motivations, tacit intensions and unexpressed goals that guide them in their communicative work and interactional performances.

Last but not least, the genre of live text commentary can also be related to the real-world domain in which it is so commonly found, namely sports and entertainment. Although live text commentary is an official media genre, its reception is also one of the many discursive practices that sports fans participate in. Recently, researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds have started turning their attention to the study of ‘soccer fandoms’, beyond the traditional face-to-face encounters between fans (cf. Weed 2007). It appears that online communication is increasingly involved in the construction of fan identities and communities, as shown by some studies of fan blogs (Sandvoss 2004; McCarthy 2014) and ethnographic analyses of communicative encounters in such environments as online football forums (Kytölä 2013). The analysis of how fans’ online interactions operate is crucial, for instance, for the understanding of how social identities are constructed and maintained in national contexts (Gibbons and Dixon 2010).

Arguably, the interactive type of LTC that allows (select) readers to contribute to the media text constitutes a communicative format in which fans can participate both actively as the text’s co-producers and passively as ‘lurking’ recipients. They can also re-mediate parts of live text

commentaries (or other media texts) via social networks and other communicative channels, even across national boundaries and language barriers (cf. Sandvoss 2004: 42). In this sense, LTC forms a part of the overall social ecology of fandom, where messages originating in the media are taken up and recycled elsewhere (cf. Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2015).

In their introduction to a volume on new forms of digital media, Thurlow and Mroczek (2011: xxi), referencing Androutsopoulos (2010), call for the need to shift from:

“a one-track interest in the formal features of new media language (e.g. spelling and orthography) and a preoccupation with delineating individual discourse genres; instead, greater attention should be paid to the *situated* practices of new media users (i.e., communicators) and the intertextuality and *heteroglossia* inherent in new media convergence” (original emphasis).

This is the direction that I set out to pursue in the present work. While my aims include the linguistic characterization of the genre of LTC and the identification of its salient linguistic features, I also deal with the recipients' interactions with the text. I argue that the heteroglossic text, in which the readers participate as co-creators in quasi-conversational interactions, is a specific situated practice of readers engaging with the media text and each other. This is a social practice that is aimed at creating, enacting and maintaining the readers perceived sense of their virtual group identity.

### ***Levels of analysis***

The linguistic analysis of live text commentary can proceed along two mutually opposite directions. The bottom-up approach starts by identifying and examining linguistic phenomena at the lower levels of analysis (lexical, syntactic), subsequently moving onto the higher levels of structural analysis and finally interpreting the findings with respect to the situational context and the purpose of the genre. The top-down approach proceeds in the opposite direction: first by describing the situational and functional aspects and then proceeding to the formal level. The present work adopts the latter perspective: the function is taken as the guiding principle in genre-oriented analysis.

The approach adopted here is motivated by the pragmatic levels of the model of integrative analysis proposed by Schneider and Barron (2008: 20–21). They propose the following five levels for the study of (spoken) discourse:



- 
- (a) formal level – this is concerned with linguistic forms or “form-to-function mappings”;
  - (b) actional level – this considers speech acts in terms of directness and politeness or “function-to-form mappings”;
  - (c) interactional level – this identifies sequential patterns and larger units of discourse, e.g. adjacency pairs, interchanges, interactional exchanges or phases;
  - (d) topic level – this is the level of the content, as expressed by the topics present. It includes both macro-propositions and conversational topics and deals with how topics are selected, developed, abandoned, etc.
  - (e) organisational level.

The model is inspiring mainly thanks to its specification of two intermediate levels of analysis, namely content and interaction, which are both at the core of my approach to LTC as well. The topic level is reflected in my perception of LTC as structured along two narrative layers. The interactional level appears in my interpretation of LTC as a quasi-dialogical genre on account of (a) the interactivity of its language, and (b) the pseudo-conversational structuration and juxtaposition of the various voices present. In my top-down approach to LTC adopted in this work, I approach the data from the vantage point of the following four levels: (1) organization; (2) content; (3) interaction; and (4) form. This perspective also reflects the conception of the semantic macro-functions common in the SFL tradition, namely the perception of language as text (the textual level), interaction (the interpersonal level), and content (the ideational level).

As regards the organizational level, the analysis of LTC sets out by considering the role of temporality in affecting the structural organization of the genre. It is noted that the textual organization of LTC as a sequence of time-stamped posts relies on the deictic anchorage of the textual segments to particular moments of the event under description. The mutual relationship between the event and its description also enables us to distinguish several distinct phases of commentary that also show some systematic differences on the formal level.

On the level of content, a topic analysis reveals that LTC is a genre with a complex internal structure that is built around two narrative layers and several thematic (topic) threads. Both layers and threads are intertwined and run parallel to each other throughout the entire text.

The level of content is linked to the level of interaction. This has two dimensions: both fictitious interaction that is manifested in the interactiveness of the language, and real interaction that is reflected through the texts’ dialogism. Content and interaction are also linked with one of the

key purposes of LTC and come together in the expression of humour, gossip and mutual entertainment.

Last but not least, issues concerning the linguistic form are not addressed in isolation but in conjunction with the higher levels of analysis. My attention to formal means is guided by the effort to understand their functional role in the genre; for that reason, I do not aim to provide an exhaustive account of the linguistic forms (e.g. lexical, syntactic, etc.) encountered in this genre.

## **1.5 Overview of chapters**

The present work is structured into three broad parts that correspond to the three main broad questions that guide the aims of the entire project.

The first part ('Locating LTC') sets out to describe live text commentary as an emerging genre of online journalism. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical background to language variation, with a focus on genre analysis and register analysis as the dominant approaches in functionally-oriented linguistics. The chapter offers an interactive definition of genre and specifies some of the linguistic properties of this form of patterned linguistic variation in specific discourse communities. Chapter 3 describes several approaches to the linguistic analysis of sports commentary because this is what serves as a genre model for LTC. The linguistic characteristics of unscripted commentary, sports announcer talk and unplanned spoken online description of events are complemented with a discussion of the different levels (styles) of commentary. Chapter 4 puts LTC into the context of blogging as a journalistic genre. It clarifies some terminological issue by pointing out the hierarchical organization of live text commentaries, since LTC can be embedded within up to two levels of framing live blogs. LTC and live blogs are then interpreted as discourse colonies on account of their internal structure consisting of a number of relatively independent lower-level units. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the name of the genre, based on labels used by various media, LTC producers and the LTC audience.

The second part ('Describing LTC') analyses the generic structure of live text commentary. Chapter 5 provides a characterization of the data and sums up previous linguistic research into live text commentaries. It points out that a common characteristic consists in the hybridity of the genre, i.e. the use of the model of spoken language (as found in broadcast sports commentary) in the written mode of the online environment. Chapter 6 outlines the textual organization of LTC in terms of its component parts. It notes the role of temporality as an organizing principle and the interplay between real-time deixis and game-time deixis. The property of 'liveness' is

explained as arising from the deictic simultaneity between the event, text production and text reception. Chapter 7 provides a comprehensive analysis of the pre-match and the post-match segments of LTC. It documents ways in which LTCs are started and terminated, pointing out how temporal deixis shifts around boundary points. Chapter 8 proceeds by looking into temporal deictic issues by analysing event discontinuities during half time and the discursive management of boundary points, transitions and game resumption.

The third part ('Interacting through LTC') explores audience involvement in the text of live text commentary and the discursive construction of a virtual community of fans. Chapter 9 focuses on ways of creating co-presence and immediacy. It notes the omnipresence of spoken features in LTC on all language levels and identifies some peculiarities on the syntactic level (tenses) as well as the presence of overly dialogic features. The chapter traces how shared space is constructed in LTC and what roles physical and virtual spaces play in the readers' contributions. Chapter 10 describes the dialogic structuration of posts and documents the widespread heteroglossia in LTC. The notion of quasi-conversation is proposed in order to capture the specific pattern of interaction between the journalist and the readers. Also, these interactions, which are commonly threaded across extensive stretches of text, are interpreted as constituting a specific narrative layer that enables the participants to engage in (male) gossip. In that sense, LTC enables the participants to affirm their sense of virtual community. Finally, Chapter 11 concludes by considering the impact that the heteroglossic composition of LTC has on the participation framework of the genre. LTC is described as a communicative event that forms a part of a series of mutually embedded frames of interaction. It enables the audience to communicate across the frame boundary with the journalist and, thus, to have their voice remediated – cited in the text of the LTC. In this way, the audience changes its participant status from recipients to active co-producers of the media text.

Altogether, the three parts of the thesis give a comprehensive account of the interactive type of live text commentary found in the sports section of the Guardian newspaper.



# **PART I**

## **Locating LTC**



## Chapter 2

# Conventionalized patterns of language variation

This chapter provides a theoretical introduction to the description of live text commentary as a distinct genre. After overviewing the major approaches to situation-based language variation, namely register analysis and genre theory, the chapter argues for a dynamic definition of genre as a conventionally structured form of interpersonal interaction, stressing the potentially heterogeneous nature of genre. In this view, a genre is defined on the basis of the following criteria: it is instrumental (goal-oriented), dynamic (arising in specific situations) and conventional (with a form and structure commonly accepted by a community). At the same time, genre is individualized (with individual speakers performing specific communicative acts through textual instantiations of a particular genre) and socially constitutive (helping to construct interpersonal relations). The chapter concludes by pointing out that interactionally conceived genres are fluid entities that involve genre variation, mixing and hybridity.

### 2.1 Genre, structures and social interaction

Setting the linguistic background for the study of LTC as a distinct genre, this section provides an overview of the major functionally-oriented approaches to use-related language variation, namely register and genre analysis. The aim of the section is to arrive at a working definition of genre that will not only capture the complexity of LTC as an emerging hybrid genre that stands at the intersection of such seemingly diverse genres as live journalism, sports commentary, live blog, online chat and interpersonal gossip, but will do so in harmony with the main motivation of genre analysis, i.e. to provide for a systematic analysis of purpose-oriented texts and discourses that show systematic and predictable patternings of linguistic structures and forms.

I adopt a dynamic definition of genre in order to account for the two crucial elements that are germane to the description of LTC: the textual properties and the social & interactive potential of the genre. As regards the former, the textual dimension of LTC consists of the structures, forms and patterns that have developed in order to meet certain communicative needs

of the community. All those textual elements are, to a great extent, conventional and predictable. Since they are expected by the members of the discourse community, they form a part of their general discursive competence and are culturally shared. With emerging genres, however, there may still be significant experimentation with certain features because the norms of those genres have not yet become fully established. The investigation of emerging genres is particularly exciting because it enables the analyst to trace how the members of a given community test the limits of the genre, experiment with the forms and gradually establish norms that are found to be functionally appropriate, with all of this happening before the appearance of discursive norms that are eventually communally affirmed and sanctioned.<sup>3</sup> This entails, of course, that aspects of language variation are located within the realm of the particular communicative situations and contexts rather than individual users. It is thus the tools of register and genre analysis that are called for to deal with such predictable and systematic variation in language that rests on social configurations of language use.

As regards the second dimension of LTC, namely its social and interactive potential, this is related to the conception of discourse as a social practice. The register and genre analysis of user-related variation are formed around the central assumption that units of discourse on the micro-level (i.e., lexical and grammatical choices) as well as on the macro-level (i.e., texts, genres, registers, text types) reflect the users' communicative purposes. In other words, the functional explanation relates forms and patterns to the goals of the discourse participants. This dimension, however, extends beyond the mere understanding of how the formal make-up of texts and genres reflects their functional motivations. Here, we can ask more general questions that point to the need for broader social explanations, such as 'What do speakers achieve by making certain utterances and producing certain texts?', 'How do the non-active participants get involved in the discourse and what symbolic benefits do they obtain from participating in the discourse?', etc. This means that the study of genres, which is in itself concerned with the 'broader picture' needs to be complemented with a more locally based analysis of particular communicative situations since most forms of interpersonal interaction generally have this dual dimension. Hence, the eventual need arises of dealing with specific occurrences of language use with reference to the methodologies of discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics (cf. Chapters 6–11)

---

<sup>3</sup> The emergent stage of genres, marked by the gradual normalization of forms, can be contrasted with those situations when the norms and limits of already existing genres are intentionally interfered with, e.g. for artistic purposes (cf. the tradition of literary foregrounding, originally established in the Prague School (Mukařovský 1964[1932], Fowler 1996).