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Report on the habilitation thesis by
Dr Jan Chovanec,
"The discourse of online sportscasting:
Constructing meaning and interaction in live text commentary"

The advent of the computer and the internet have created new forms of communication in recent years and decades. Dr Chovanec illustrates, analyzes and explains one specific form of such a new kind of communication, namely internet commentaries on sports events. To keep his material coherent, manageable and focused, he concentrates on football (soccer), and more specifically on the European Football Championship in 2008 and the Football World Championship in 2010. He analyses how it was reported in the internet, more precisely in Life Text Commentaries (LTCs).

LTCs appeal to people who for some reason or another cannot (or do not want to) watch the match, neither in the original nor on television nor on the radio, but who can follow it on their computer. With LTCs on the internet they are provided with a report that progresses minute by minute, as the play unfolds. LTCs on football matches are basically structured by the organization of the game, i.e. there are 90 minutes with an interval of 15 minutes after the first 45 minutes of the game. In LTCs, there are, however, often introductory comments before the match begins, comments during the interval, and comments after the match has finished (pre-match and post-match commentaries). And in many matches there are periods of heightened action (sometimes culminating in a goal) and periods where not much happens that is worthy of comment. But the journalist responsible has to bridge such periods as well, e.g. by making comments on the players and their previous performances, or on the country or city where the match takes place.

In traditional radio and television broadcasts the communication situation is normally one-sided, i.e. it is only the reporter (the journalist) who talks, and it is the audience who has to listen - i.e. there is a unidirectional flow of information from the sender to the receiver. In LTCs, on the other hand, there is a different communication situation, because there is (or can be) also audience participation: the readers can also send their commentaries and the journalist responsible can integrate them in his commentary and even start a kind of dialogue – the commentary thus acquires (at least) two layers (or strands), and multiple voices can be heard or rather read, namely the commentary given by the journalist on the one hand, and the commentaries sent in by the readers on the other hand. Dr Chovanec keeps stressing, however, that this kind of communication is nevertheless different from 'normal' conversation, because it is always the journalist who is in control of the entire procedure. He can choose which reader contributions he will show (and which ones not), and to which ones he will respond (and to which ones not); Dr Chovanec therefore calls this quasi-conversation. He even discusses the possibility that a frequent contributor to the discussions may be (or may have developed into) a fictitious character with a virtual identity (Gary Naylor; cf. pp. 293-296). He also points out that whereas in 'normal' conversation the participants usually move from one topic to the next, in LTCs several topics (or thematic threads) can be discussed and displayed simultaneously.

The readers also form a virtual community: They are usually in different places (e.g. in their homes), but their common interest is to read the LTC about a specific match and perhaps also to send in their comments. Within the comments by the journalist as well as by the readers a distinction can also be made between comments that actually deal with the match in progress and comments that are at best loosely connected to the match, e.g. the players' previous performances, or predictions about their future performances, or remarks about the city or country where the match takes place.

Dr Chovanec's thesis is structured into an introduction, three main parts and a conclusion; it takes up twelve chapters altogether. All chapters have several sub-chapters, and most of them end with a kind of chapter summary ("Concluding remarks"), which is, of course, very reader-friendly. The main parts and the chapters are: 1. Introduction; I) Locating LTC; 2. Conventionalized patterns of language variation; 3. The linguistics of sports commentary; 4. Live text, blogging and journalism; II) Analysing LTC; 5. Material and characterization of data; 6. Structuring the LTC: The event and liveness; 7. Segmentation of

live text commentary; 8. Managing event discontinuities in half-time commentary; III) Interacting through LTC; 9. Creating Co-presence; 10. Threading and narrative layers: From interactivity to interaction; 11. Participation frameworks; 12. Conclusion.

At the beginning there are Acknowledgements, Abbreviations, Transcription conventions, a List of figures, a List of tables, and a Preface; at the end there is an Appendix and a substantial bibliography ("References"). The thesis also contains many pictures, tables, and illustrative examples – the complete lists of matches played and covered by LTCs (from which all the examples have been taken), together with the names of the commentators (journalists) are given in the appendix. Dr Chovanec's habilitation thesis comes up with many interesting insights and results (as here briefly summarized in the introductory paragraphs above); it is also written in a very good and fluent English, and it reads well. There are very few typos. Thus Dr Chovanec's study even now looks almost like a completed book, and it should certainly be published.

The study by Dr Chovanec is an important and ground-breaking contribution to a relatively recent field of research, namely the analysis of LTCs. Dr Chovanec manages to elucidate this phenomenon even to readers who are not specialists in this area. He deals with linguistic aspects, e.g. in ch. 9, where he covers all the basic linguistic levels (especially graphology, lexicology, syntax), but he also discusses pragmatic, rhetorical and dialogic features, the use of humour in LTCs, the problem of assigning LTCs to a genre or text-type (he classifies it as a hybrid form), and the relation of text and images. In ch. 9.5, for example, he provides a detailed discussion of the meanings and shades of meaning of the adverb *here* (pp. 246-257, e.g. spatial meaning - the location of the match, the location of the journalist; the temporal meaning of *here*, the metalinguistic meaning, etc.; it might be interesting to compare this analysis with the analysis given by the *OED*). Moreover, throughout his study he analyzes the textual structure of LTCs, and their communicative aspects; thus his study is also a contribution to communication theory. On the whole he provides a comprehensive account of LTCs.

The study is very systematic, detailed and thorough, and it also shows Dr Chovanec's wide reading in a research field that is rapidly expanding. For example in ch. 4 Dr Chovanec gives a review of research and in particular he discusses terminological questions. He uses the term Live Text Commentary (LTC), but other terms have also been employed (e.g. Event

tracker, Matchcast, Live ticker, etc.). He finds those terms less convincing, and in each case he explains why, and he also distinguishes LTCs from blogs. That there are various terms for the same phenomenon (and conversely several meanings of the same term) is, of course, common in linguistics as well as in literary studies and other disciplines. He discusses various aspects of time, e.g. 'game time' and 'real time'. He introduces many technical terms, and usually explains or discusses them. Some are established terms, but they often take on a new shade of meaning when applied to LTCs, e.g. genre, register, text-type, deixis (personal, temporal, and spatial, and deictic centre); others are relatively new (at least to the present reviewer), e.g. heteroglossia (p. 191 etc.), multiple voices in the text, discourse colonies, on-line description.

On the whole, Dr Chovanec's study is very convincing, and I have only few critical remarks. In the Table of Contents page numbers should not only be given for the main chapters, but also for the various subchapters. In the Table of Contents it would also be better to give the full forms first (especially: Live Text Commentary), and the abbreviated form (LTC) only after the full form has been introduced. For the printed version, an index might be useful (although many of the terms used are mentioned in the Contents).

To sum up: In my view Dr Chovanec's habilitation thesis is a very good piece of scholarly work, which explores a relatively new phenomenon and which expands the frontiers of linguistics. The habilitation dissertation submitted by Jan Chovanec complies fully with the standard requirements in the given branch of study as well as the requirements placed on monographs within the international linguistic community. Therefore I unequivocally recommend the defence of the dissertation at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University, Brno.

(Prof. Dr. Hans Sauer)