

Jan Chovanec

Habilitation Thesis

The discourse of online sportscasting: Constructing meaning and interaction in live text commentary

This thesis is an impressive study of an apparently marginal genre that raises many issues relevant to debates in both discourse analysis and communication studies. It poses three questions, about defining the Live Text Commentary (LTC) as a genre, showing its generic structure, and showing how the commentaries can engage their audiences. It uses detailed analysis of texts to give thorough and well-supported answers to these questions.

The **data** may seem marginal because the focus of discourse analysis of media texts has been on genres with 'serious' subject matter, such as news, interviews, or political speeches. Similarly, studies of on-line journalism have focused on genres that deal with 'serious' news and commentary. Even cultural studies approaches are more likely to focus on broadcast genres, such as spoken football commentaries, or on more widely used platforms such as Twitter, rather than a hybrid genre like this one.

Dr. Chovanec focuses on LTCs, short messages posted on the on-line site of a newspaper through the course of a football game. The advantage of taking on this genre is that, as he shows, it is at the intersection of many key issues in studies of audiences, representations of events, and change. The texts are drawn from reports in the *Guardian* of two football competitions, in the European Championship in 2008 and the World Cup in 2010. Though the *Guardian* is not one of the biggest UK newspapers, it has been a pioneer of new digital genres, including this one, so it is an appropriate choice.

The **approaches** Dr. Chovanec takes to the data come from three main sources: discourse analysis, genre analysis, and computer-mediated communication / media studies (p. 29). In Chapters 2-4, he develops a framework based on the more general study of genres, the more general study of sports broadcasting, and the place of this study within journalism. One of the strengths of the study is the connections he makes between academic fields that are divided by institutions, terminology, and orientations.

The **analytical methods** draw first on genre analysis, when considering the place and structure of the LTCs, taking on such concepts as Michael Hoey's *Discourse Colonies*. He also draws on ideas of interaction and sequence from conversation analysis and studies of broadcast talk. But the central form of analysis involves detailed attention to linguistic choices, including deixis (including verb tense), pronouns, adverbs, and reported speech. The discourse analysis often leads to surprising insights; an example would be the extended treatment of the different uses of *here* in Chapter 9. Most of the analysis is qualitative, with examples or groups of examples presented to support each point made.

The description so far might make the study seem rather narrow. But Chovanec links this genre to a range of **wider issues** that are crucial in discourse analysis and media studies. These issues include:

- **The emergence of a new genre** in web 2.0, as different providers experiment with subtly different forms and affordances, and readers respond in sometimes unexpected ways. Traditional genres tend to be taken for granted; this study gives us the chance to look at new forms as they stabilise and find a place in the wider terrain of media practices.
- **The forms of engagement with audiences.** This has been a key issue in media studies for three decades, but in some ways it has been overtaken by the new ways of participation possible in Web 2.0. Dr. Chovanec stresses that the apparent openness of this new genre is based on processes that give the journalist complete control.
- **Ways of developing (pseudo)conversation.** Discourse analysts have been very suspicious of the ways media texts play on ordinary conversation. Dr. Chovanec has many exuberant and entertaining examples of the ways different voices can be integrated into a running text.
- **Liveness.** Studies of broadcasting have been concerned with the kind of transformation wrought by the technological capacity to report news live. In this study, following earlier work on sports commentary, the central issue is the use of time deixis to shift rapidly between different perspectives on emerging events.
- **Intertextuality and recontextualisation.** Some of Dr. Chovanec's most careful work is in picking apart the complex structures in which these short texts are embedded. The authors are adepts at recontextualising other texts, but their own texts are also recontextualised, as is apparent from the way readers turn to them even after the match has ended.

All these connections suggest the study will lead to productive discussions, even for researchers who have no interest in football or in this particular genre of Live Text Commentary.

The study also has insights, often in passing, into **other current issues** that are not central to the approach here, but do connect it with other studies.

- Almost every page has interesting examples of stance-taking, since the events are almost never reported without some form of evaluation.
- Dr. Chovanec is interested in frames, in particular in the cuing of the play frame that happens so often in his data.
- Metaphors (e.g., football as war) are often pointed out, even though they are not the central concern here.

The recurrence of these other issues, even where they aren't central, suggests the richness of the analysis.

I have examined many PhD theses, but this is the first time I have reviewed a Habilitation Thesis. So it is interesting to me to see how very much more is involved. Dr. Chovanec is a mid-career researcher who has done many studies of related media issues concerning liveness, broadcasting, metaphors, and cultural differences. But here he has put together just one line of work, so that it is tightly coherent. References to the academic literature are done with the confidence of someone who has been immersed in his discipline, and sees how his contribution fits in the wider landscape, not just to show he has read everything (which is sometimes the feeling one has with PhDs). It has a clear structure, and very clear presentation of the analysis.

The habilitation dissertation submitted by Jan Chovanec complies fully with the

standard requirements in discourse analysis and communication studies 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.

Greg Myers
Professor of Rhetoric and Communication
Department of Linguistics and English Language
Lancaster University
Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences