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AN IMPORTANT TYPE OF UNPLANNED SPOKEN LANGUAGE: A BRIEF HISTORY OF FOOTBALL COMMENTARY IN ENGLAND AND GERMANY

Abstract
The aim of this article is to find out whether linguists are justified in saying that a large part of English and German football commentary consists of description rather than the mere creation of drama. This applies particularly to radio football commentary. In order to answer this question, some other aspects of football commentary language need to be addressed as well. First of all, a theoretical framework for the analysis of radio football commentary, and more generally of spontaneous spoken language, is presented. Then the conditions are outlined under which commentary is normally produced and the linguistic output shaped. Football commentary, in both England and Germany, must also be evaluated against the background of its historical development. Finally, views of some of yesterday's and today's top-flight commentators from the two countries are presented, which will show that the desire to describe, and the desire to avoid creating unnecessary drama when there is none, is something that all top commentators share.

Key words
Spoken English language; spoken German language; history of commentary; commentators; description; elaboration

1. Recent studies on sport and football commentary

In recent years, a number of studies have been concerned with the language of sport in general, and that of football in particular. Studies on the language of football include Jürgens (1997a), (1997b) and (1999) on German commentary only. Krone (2003) and (2005), Müller (2007a), (2007b) and (2008) and Müller and Mayr (2007) detail German as well as English[1] commentary. Studies focussing on English football language can be found in, for example, Beard (1998) and Delin (2000).

Lavric, Pisek, Skinner and Stadler (2008) is a collection of international essays on many different aspects of language and football. Kuiper (1996), although dealing with New Zealand race calling (and also auctioneering) rather than football, is another publication on the language of sport that is worth mentioning. It investigates the relationship between formulaic language and commentary.

In recent years, several mainly autobiographical books by commentators and broadcasters have been published as well. These autobiographies also provide insights into the commentators' profession. For English commentators this includes Moore (1999), Green (2000) and Davies (2007); for German, Koch (2005), Kürten (2004) and Reif (2004) may be mentioned. Eggers (2004) is the biography of one of the most famous German sport (and football) commentators, Herbert Zimmermann. Other material focussing on the role of the commentators and published in recent years includes Schwarz (2000), Michel (1999) and Michel / Schwarz (2001). Müller (2007a, chapter 2.1) provides a detailed survey of linguistic (and related) studies of sports language.

It appears, however, that most academic work on the language of sports commentators tends to focus on a linguistic analysis of sports commentary with few first-hand insights from the commentators themselves. The commentators' publications, on the other hand, tend to provide an account from within the profession, with some insights into language, but without real analysis of linguistic phenomena. It is the aim of this modest contribution to bring together the writings of the commentators and those of linguists to further our understanding of how sports commentators use language and to advance our knowledge of spontaneous spoken language in general.

2. Do commentators really describe at all?

This article complements recent studies on unplanned spoken English and German I have published elsewhere (Müller 2007a, 2007b and 2008 and Müller / Mayr 2007). Müller (2007a) develops a detailed analytical tool for the analysis of spontaneously produced language. In this monograph I argue for a focus on intonation units as the basis for the analysis of spoken language, rather than a view which rests too much on syntactic dependencies.

The data used for all of the studies mentioned above consists of radio football commentary (both English and German), which is a special type of unplanned spoken language. The reasoning which led to using this text type was this: football commentators have to put into words what they see on the pitch without having much time to plan their linguistic output, since they can never be sure what happens next. Radio commentary was chosen because radio commentators are forced to speak much more than their TV counterparts, since they cannot rely on the pictures "doing the talking", as some commentators would put it. On the other hand, the game of football is stereotypical enough to identify frequently recurring situations or individual events, such as passes, free kicks or shots on

goal which commentators can expect to occur repeatedly during any game. Accordingly, commentators are in a position to develop strategies which might allow them to deal more readily with, say, the quick succession of events on, for example, a swift counterattack.

Müller (2007a) then proceeds to show that certain syntactic structures recur frequently within the identified intonation units. This monograph also shows that there are syntactic structures which even appear to be associated with the specific stereotypical extra-linguistic event types (i.e. "real-life" events such as shots or passes). Hence individual commentators appear to have developed syntactic and also lexical strategies which facilitate their commentating. But formulaic language in football commentary is a much more subtle affair than the frequently ridiculed clichés and gaffes. They occur when describing frequently recurring events, such as passing the ball around in midfield. BBC top radio commentator Alan Green's preferred strategy, for example, is the use of prepositional phrases (*back to Beckham*) for the verbalisation of passes, whereas his BBC colleague Mike Ingham tends to prefer finite verb constructions involving the verb *find* (*finds Beckham the captain*). Clichés of the type *it's a game of two halves* are very rare indeed in commentary.

Since events such as passes, free kicks or shots on goal are "real-life" events which exist independently of language (unlike, of course, speech acts such as *I apologise*, where the words themselves are the event), these events can be identified independently of language and so the "real" action on the pitch can be compared with the commentators' linguistic output – provided one uses the available TV pictures in conjunction with the radio commentary. Careful and exact editing of the radio commentary onto the corresponding TV pictures of the same match then allows one to determine (or at least to gain a fuller insight into) how the linguistic output was influenced or even shaped by the action on the pitch. This procedure represents a new methodology for linguistic analysis. It opens up new possibilities in the analysis of form-function relations by systematically integrating video material into the linguistic analysis. This technique has been very successfully applied in the studies mentioned at the beginning of this section: Müller (2007a) employs it for analysing the syntactic complexity of intonation units, Müller (2007b) for a functional analysis of tense forms in English and German, Müller (2008) investigates word order and pronoun use in German and Müller / Mayr (2007) is concerned with speech rate and fundamental frequency in English and German radio football commentary.

The systematic integration of video material into linguistic analysis crucially rests upon three main assumptions. Firstly, that the editing is precise. The modern digital age makes this possible and Müller (2007a) provides a detailed discussion of the editing process and potential margins of error. Secondly, the TV pictures should permit the reliable identification of as many individual events as possible. Again, Müller (2007a) includes a detailed discussion of how to identify events reliably and consistently. It is true that TV stations today use far more close-ups than, say, thirty years ago, simply because they also use far more cameras. But

even today for most of the time a large enough section of the pitch is visible to identify reliably individual events such as passing the ball from player A to player B. Although TV coverage certainly does not present an objective picture of a game, it definitely can give us a much better clue as to what may have prompted a commentator's verbal output than the verbal output alone. This view is supported by Tomlin (1983), who analyses North American ice-hockey commentary.

Another crucial distinction in Müller (2007a), which is further developed in Müller (2008), is between *description* and *elaboration*. The claim here is that a large proportion of football commentary consists of describing what happens on the pitch. Radio football commentators describe what they see – without much planning time – and their audience has to rely on the commentator's words because they themselves cannot see what is going on. So the third assumption this new methodology rests upon is that commentators, despite whatever else they may do, describe to a very large extent because otherwise the integration of video material would not make much sense.

The views expressed in Müller (2007a) and (2008), i.e. the distinction between description and elaboration, are supported by others who deal with football commentary. In an early study on German commentary, Rosenbaum (1969) distinguishes between two levels, one which describes the action and one which adds additional information (*Aktionstext* 'action text' vs. *Nachtragstext* 'adding information text'). This two-way distinction is maintained in Rosenbaum (1978), with a slightly modified terminology. Delin (2000) distinguishes between four different levels (she labels them *narrating*, *evaluating*, *elaborating*, and *summarizing*), but essentially one of them is a level of description (her *narrating*, therefore corresponding to my *description* and Rosenbaum's *Aktionstext*) and the others relate additional information (ultimately corresponding to what I call *elaboration* and Rosenbaum labels *Nachtragstext*).

These views need not necessarily be uncontroversial. It could easily be claimed that sports commentators are mainly there to provide drama, even if there is none. We might also say that they consciously side with one team and signal this by being deliberately biased.[2] They may often be supported by ex-footballers who used to play for one of the teams but not the other (in England, normally not in Germany), hence creating one-sided commentary right from the start. These so-called *expert summarisers* (these days the term *co-commentator* is often used; sometimes the term *colour commentator* can be found) are employed to provide insights from somebody who knows the game from "within", but their objectivity may, of course, be questioned. A case in point may be the football broadcasts on English local radio (this includes commercial radio stations as well as the BBC) but also nationwide broadcasts of international games.

Already in the 1970s, Bryant, Comisky and Zillmann (1977) and Comisky, Bryant and Zillmann (1977) pointed out that much of what sports commentators do is create drama. A case in point is, of course, South American commentary, which is almost entirely about entertainment and hence creating excitement (Jung 2008).

By contrast, let us consider this example from the 2002 World Cup game between England and Argentina, which involves BBC's Alan Green – according to his autobiography "sport's most outspoken commentator" (Green 2000). When he – in a vital game for England – praises the Italian referee Luigi Collina as the best referee in the world and as someone who rarely makes mistakes, he goes so far as to say:

(1) Alan Green:
and you know collina just he just spots everything+ (.)
tell you what+
if he makes a mistake+ (..)
you know we can always excuse him+ (..)
because he doesn't make many+(1.4)
(+ indicates the end of an intonation unit; (.) and (..) represent brief pauses and (1.4) a pause of 1.4 seconds in duration; lower case spelling, even for names, is used conventionally for spoken language transcription)

To be sure, his summariser Terry Butcher, a former England international, is not at all impressed and states clearly, albeit somewhat confusingly, that he is not willing to accept any mistakes, unless they are in England's favour. However, Green's remark in (1) suggests that he is indeed willing to accept and to point out when somebody provides a good performance. This may be the referee, but it may equally well be the opposing team. A position like this can hardly be described as biased and one-sided.

So there appear to be vast cultural differences between English (and German) commentary on the one hand and South American on the other. It is therefore absolutely vital to show, and to prove convincingly, that both German and English commentators have always (or, as we will see in the case of German commentary, with the possible exception of the very first commentary ever) seen description as their main task. This must be demonstrated in order to show that the systematic integration of video material into linguistic analysis can be fruitfully applied to football commentary and that this represents a powerful new methodological approach. This is why even a brief historical outline of English and German football commentary will now be presented, which will also include TV commentary. After all, radio and TV commentary have always had a mutual influence on each other and, as we will see, the approach TV commentators have is even similar to that of their colleagues from the radio: they all point out that the artificial creation of drama and excitement is something that should be avoided.

3. The conditions under which commentary is produced

Live commentary in general and live football commentary in particular represent unplanned spoken language. It may well be true that some commentators have

at their disposal certain prefabricated phrases, perhaps even longer ones, but by far the most part of live commentary is definitely spontaneous and not prepared in advance, since at the beginning of a game commentators cannot know what is going to happen.[3] On the other hand, commentators can at least expect some events (or event types) to occur repeatedly in a single game, and they will also know which of them are likely to occur more frequently than others (e.g. passes and challenges will certainly occur more often than, say, red cards or even shots on goal). This means that commentators can develop a strategy, consciously or not, of how to deal with these recurring events linguistically. Hence the language of sports commentators, and particularly of live commentators, differs from that used in everyday conversation in that it certainly requires a certain skill to verbalise effectively extra-linguistic events on the spot without much planning time.

Kuiper (2004) underlines that commentators are skilled speakers and he also emphasises that this is equally true of other people for whom speaking and speaking quickly and fluently is part of their profession. This is why he called his book on sports commentary, race calling and auctioneering *Smooth Talkers* (Kuiper 1996). Becoming a skilled commentator involves a learning process (Kuiper 2004), and this implies that commentary cannot simply be seen as a "natural" way of talking about football. But it is definitely no disadvantage to analyse the language of experienced speakers. It will give us the opportunity to uncover strategies of how to verbalise extra-linguistic events immediately, and it allows the identification of recurring formulations or syntactic patterns.

Whether this learning process is one of experience (see Green 2000: 208) or one that is taught explicitly, may be a different matter. The German radio commentator Manfred Breuckmann points out that when he was a young commentator, there was not much in terms of explicit teaching (Manfred Breuckmann in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999). Although today he passes on his skills to young commentators in special seminars (which are not a mandatory requirement for becoming a commentator, though), it still appears that commentators are more or less thrown in at the deep end. There still does not seem to be much of what could be called "formal training" in how to be a commentator, either in Germany, or in England.[4] Note that this does not invalidate Kuiper's view that becoming a skilled commentator involves a learning process, since younger colleagues will certainly listen to more experienced ones and thus look for ways of improving their own commentary technique. So a certain stylistic element is involved in commentating, and this means that the current style, or what is considered good or bad commentary – in short, the conventions – may differ from country to country and may change from time to time.

Despite all their skill, commentators are often subject to severe criticism. This applies perhaps mainly to silly metaphors, unfortunate comparisons or – on TV and especially in Germany – the inability of the commentator to remain silent for a while. Some of this criticism, of course, needs to be put into perspective. Rosenbaum (1978: 145) criticises football commentary as an impoverished language. At the same time he admits that because of the circumstances under which the

text is produced, commentators simply do not have the time, nor even the opportunity, to use hypotactic constructions and similar features of what he appears to consider "good" style. Unfortunately, the inability to apply his own conclusions makes Rosenberg's criticism seem somewhat pointless. This is not to deny that football commentators do indeed sometimes come up with odd formulations, but again we should remind ourselves that most of what is said is indeed formulated on the spot with no chance of editing.

4. Early English and German radio football commentary: description and the grid

The first BBC (radio) broadcast of a league football match was a First Division game between Arsenal and Sheffield United on 22 January 1927 at Highbury (see Adams 2002 and especially Murray 2007). In order to facilitate comprehension, early commentary employed a main commentator who was telling the listeners what was going on. The commentator of that first match in January 1927 was Henry Blythe Thornhill Wakelam, himself a former rugby player. He was aided by a second commentator who was announcing where the ball was. This was done by means of a very intriguing system. The producer of the programme, Lance Sieveking, had devised a plan on which a football pitch was divided into eight numbered squares.[5] This grid was distributed with the *Radio Times* so that all listeners could follow the game more easily by following the numbers on the grid (Adams 2002 and Murray 2007).[6] In-between the main commentary, one can hear on early footage the announcer shouting out the number of the squares (see *Back to Square One* 2006, a programme in late December 2006 on BBC Radio 5 Live to celebrate 80 years of English football commentary, where an excerpt of this type of early commentary is played). It is frequently claimed that a backpass to the goalkeeper meant that the ball went "back to square one" (Beard 1998: 78), "[a]n idiom that has remained in the language long after this form of commentary was abandoned." (1998: 78) It is very doubtful, though, whether this is really the origin of the phrase.

In summer 1927, German radio used a similar system, although the designation of the squares this time consisted of combinations of letters and numbers (Jenter 1997: 197 and Michel 1999: 575f.). The grid was again published in a newspaper, this time in Berlin's *Die Funkstunde*, for the final of the 1927 German football championship.[7] The commentator was Alfred Braun, who seems to have become discontent with the system even during the first broadcast in which he used it. So he abandoned it midway through the game and it was never used again on German radio (Michel 1999: 576). The English grid system, on the other hand, seems to have survived at least until the early 1930s (see Adams 2002 and Murray 2007: 25).[8]

So apparently the grid system was first used by the BBC and then used in Germany about half a year later. It remains unclear whether the Germans were

inspired by the BBC, though. Much earlier than the first BBC broadcast, in the autumn of 1925 (see *Radio-Fußballkarten* 1925), the German journal *Der deutsche Rundfunk* published a diagram of an American football field that, it was reported, was published by newspapers in the United States to facilitate American football broadcasts on the radio. The idea was to help the listeners follow matches more easily, and the papers even included a cut-out ball which could be placed on the diagram.

The upshot of all this is that right from the early days of broadcasting football matches the focus was very much on an accurate description of the game so that listeners could follow the action. In fact, the grid system underlines that radio broadcasters were not confident whether description alone could achieve this. As a consequence they devised additional means which would guarantee easy understanding.

At this point it is important to note two things: firstly, the focus on description seems to have been greater in England than in Germany. The grid system was used for several years by the BBC, but it was abandoned midway through its first and only use in Germany. It appears that the German listeners were happy with this decision.

The second important issue is this: the first broadcast of a German football game was **not** Braun's commentary in the summer of 1927. Braun probably broadcast his first game, without a grid, in early 1926 (see Jentner 1997: 197), thus predating the first English commentary. But even Braun was not the first. On 1 November 1925, Dr Bernhard Ernst became the first German to broadcast a football match (Preußen Münster vs. Arminia Bielefeld) (Michel 1999: 575). He was probably not only the first German, but, it would appear, the first European to do so. Ernst's broadcast was marred by a number of technical problems, and what is probably even more astonishing is that he was not positioned high up in the stands, but directly behind one of the goals (see Ernst 1925, his own account of what happened during that broadcast). He was more concerned with catching the atmosphere, so that listeners not so accustomed with the rules of the game could also get something out of it. Hence it would appear that Ernst was more interested in broadcasting an "event" than accurately detailing the events of the game. It seems that Alfred Braun's intentions were similar, and so in the early commentary days the focus on more accurate description appears to have been with the BBC. In Germany, despite an attempt to describe, precision was sacrificed somewhat for making the game accessible and attractive even to the lay person.

5. Developments after the grid system

After the Second World War, sports commentary in the two countries developed in rather different ways. TV broadcasts were increasingly popular and hence developments which started in TV commentary need to be outlined as well. On

German TV, for example, a typical requirement of the commentator, still today, is the ability to remain silent and let the pictures do the talking. Rudi Michel, one of the most famous commentators from the 1950s to the 1980s, maintains that pausing is very important, and the commentator should not be afraid of evaluations, comments or criticism, rather than a description of what viewers can see anyway (Rudi Michel in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999). Obviously, this view displays the fundamental difference between commentating on TV and radio. Michel's own style, though, was also crucially influenced by radio, as we will see presently.

Using fewer words does not appear to be popular at all on English TV. At least, this is the impression German commentator Werner Hansch (originally radio but now TV) gained during a visit, when he was watching a game on TV. The two commentators (presumably commentator and summariser), he claims, were virtually doing radio commentary on TV (Werner Hansch in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999). In fact, personal experience also tells me that most English sports fans find the often more subdued German way of commentating boring.

Why should German commentary (ultimately TV and radio) have developed a more subdued style if the original intention seems to have been to provide entertainment even for non-football fans? The main reason for this appears to be the most famous piece of German sports commentary, the live radio coverage of the 1954 Football World Cup final and radio commentator Herbert Zimmermann's excited and emotional outbursts. Today we are so used to thinking of Germany as three-times world champions that it is easy to overlook that the 1954 achievement was really comparable to Greece's surprise win at Euro 2004. The 1954 tournament had one favourite – the Hungarians, who had beaten England 6–3 and 7–1 in the build-up to the World Cup. The Germans were outsiders, had lost to Hungary 8–3 in the World Cup group phase and were 2–0 down in the final after less than ten minutes. So when they equalised and finally scored the winning goal, it is little wonder that Zimmermann could hardly believe what he was witnessing.

For modern English standards, the 1954 commentary is not at all unusual. But Zimmermann's excitement and emotion earned him much trouble. Nine years after the end of the Second World War, this was evidently not what the German broadcasting body was looking for. The effect it had was to change the style of German commentary. Rudi Michel had also been in Switzerland for the 1954 World Cup for German radio, and it is very likely that his friendship with Zimmermann and the criticism Zimmermann received after the World Cup influenced Michel's own style substantially. And while Zimmermann remained the main radio commentator until his death in 1966, Michel became Germany's most popular TV commentator. Since the 1954 World Cup produced yet another effect, an enormous increase of television sets in German households (Reif 1999: 583), this meant that Michel's more subdued style was becoming enormously influential, even having an effect on radio commentary. Michel's main TV commentary rival of the 1970s, Ernst Huberty, shared his views. Talking about some of his modern colleagues, Huberty says: "Oder aber, wenn sie wirklich zu viel

reden. Es ist ne Krankheit.“ (‘And when they really talk too much. It’s like a disease.’) (Ernst Huberty in *Herman & Tietjen* 2005).[9]

It is remarkable that Michel himself attributes his style to English influence. In fact, he points out that German commentators adopted a subdued style because this is how the English ones used to do it (Michel 2001b). In fact, the most famous English commentator of the 1960s, Kenneth Wolstenholme, who already broadcast England’s famous 6–3 defeat against Hungary in 1953, did pursue a quite subdued style of commentating. His standard goal celebration – “it’s a goal” – does not lend itself easily to the creation of drama and seems to go against more modern views like the one expressed by commentator Ian Payne in 2002. His words emphasise the modern desire for originality, but also the problem of stereotypicality: “[…] and how many ways can you describe a goal, so you’re always trying to think of metaphors or puns or something that will just take it away from being ‘Smith to Jones and he scores.’” (Ian Payne in *Word of Mouth* 2002).

But views were changing even in the 1960s. English commentators were aware that football broadcasts, even then, were at least to some degree also part of entertainment. In a passage relating to the late 1960s, Brian Moore, first at BBC radio, then ITV’s voice of football for several decades, has this to say: “Commentating, whatever the medium, is no more than finding the right balance between describing the action, imparting the information, and adding that dash of drama and urgency that draws it all towards the realms of entertainment” (Moore 1999: 75). The term *describing* also features in Moore’s quote, though.

So lack of emotion was clearly vanishing in the 1960s and 1970s. This is neatly demonstrated by another World Cup game involving Germany, this time the semi-final against Italy in 1970. In his book about the Mexico World Cup, Dawson (2001) provides a number of references to the commentary of BBC Television and ITV. Germany had just knocked England out and were now taking on Italy’s *cattenaccio*. Italy took an early lead and then tried to cling on to it while the Germans were pushing for an equaliser. It came in the very last minute of regular time, taking the game to extra-time, but in the end Italy won 4–3. Thus the following passage from Dawson (2001), it should be noted, makes reference to English commentary (this time for BBC TV) which does not even involve the English team! This is a far cry from the Anglo-German rivalry of the 1990s and complaints about “German efficiency”:

> The game wears on. It’s fever pitch stuff now. Riva nearly puts it beyond doubt on a swift break with a diving header. But the Germans continue to press. Joe Mercer and Don Revie, Coleman’s co-pilots, are gibbering wrecks. *Mercer has started referring to the Germans as ‘we’*. (Dawson 2001: 286f.; emphasis added, TM)

We have neglected radio commentary to some extent in this section, partly because many important influences emerged from TV commentary. It is thus fitting to finish the section with a look at the one radio commentator who is still today

frequently regarded as the best of all time: Peter Jones. Jones started commentating in the 1960s and remained the biggest name in English radio commentary until his death in 1990. He was certainly not one who went over the top too easily, and he was convinced that commentators had to be able to change gear, rather than always commentating in too dramatic a fashion ("light and shade", as BBC's Alan Green says Jones used to call this approach, see *Back to Square One* 2006). It is quite telling that English TV commentator Jon Champion characterises Jones as the best *describer* in radio commentary.[10]

6. Modern commentators and their views on description

Alan Green is seen as the most outspoken and opinionated of all the current commentators in England (although Green himself is from Northern Ireland). But even he makes it clear that much of what he does in his commentaries is description, even if the amount may decrease somewhat with experience. The following quote is instructive in terms of adding drama and learning the "art":

> Without digressing too much, let me tell you that the art of football commentary, if it is an art, is quite different in radio from the way it is in television. And someone who is good in one may not be as effective in the other. On radio, we must paint the whole picture, describing everything that the listeners would see for themselves if they were present. Not merely telling them what the score is, where the ball is and who's got it (though my advice to any aspiring radio commentator is to stick to those basics and let the 'embroidery' develop with experience), but also what the conditions are like, what's happening off the ball, and about that idiot in the row in front who's stood up trying to make an early exit to beat the traffic. You have to keep talking for most of the time while introducing breaths and pauses for dramatic effect. (Green 2000: 207f.)

Reading Green further, he almost sounds as if he is calling for subdued German commentators:

> Television requires a wholly different technique. Mostly, the action speaks for itself. The best television commentators, like Barry Davies, merely embellish the pictures with incisive background information or insight. They shouldn't talk for talk's sake. Unfortunately, there is a trend to do just that. (Green 2000: 208)

This almost sounds like Michel's views and, interestingly, they both use virtually the same words for describing in a nutshell what radio commentary is about: "painting pictures" (Green 2000: e.g. 16 and 82), "Bilder mit Worten zu schaffen" (literally 'to create pictures through words', Michel 1999: 575). The greatest skill

of a commentator, Michel adds, is being able to formulate freely, i.e. to be able to talk without a script (see Michel 1999: 575).

Mick Lowes from BBC Radio Newcastle puts it this way: "Antiquated as it might sound, it is still regarded as one of the great skills of commentary being able to tell people where the ball is, being able to paint pictures." (Mick Lowes in *Back to Square One* 2006). His words echo Green and Michel and are mirrored in the same programme by Barry Davies, one of the BBC's most popular TV commentators, who, talking about the difference between commentary on TV and radio, says a radio commentator must "follow where the ball is" and should be "painting word pictures" (Barry Davies in *Back to Square One* 2006).

German radio commentator Manfred Breuckmann points out that exaggeration or making a game sound better than it is is unnecessary. A dull game can still have a good commentary – ultimately the commentator can always resort to devices such as sarcasm (Manfred Breuckmann in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999). He concludes: "Ich laß mir doch von so einem miesen Spiel meine Reportage nicht kaputt machen." ('I am not having my commentary ruined by such a terrible game!', Manfred Breuckmann in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999). In the end, though, he makes it clear that commentary cannot stretch reality and that a commentator should not add drama where there is not any (Manfred Breuckmann in *Die lange Nacht der Sportreportage* 1999).

Finally, Rudi Michel underlines another vital skill of commentating on the radio: he points out that it is necessary to connect eye and mouth without a diversion via the brain: "Ein aneinander Reihen des Erlebnisses vom Auge über Kopf natürlich in den Mund unter Ausschaltung des Gedächtnisses." (literally: 'Adding experience after experience from eye via head to mouth by bypassing the brain.', Michel 2001a) This is an interesting view on processing language under time pressure, and it alludes again to developing certain linguistic strategies for how to deal with recurring event types. Precisely this preference for certain formulaic sequences, i.e. lexical or syntactic preferences, is what Müller (2007a) found for those commentators who were more easily capable of keeping up with the speed of a game as opposed to those who hadn't developed these strategies to the same degree. What is important to note is that these preferences are expressions which form part of *description* (*finds Beckham*, *long one to Danny Mills* etc.) and not tired clichés as part of *elaboration*, such as *it's a game of two halves*.

7. Conclusion

This contribution has demonstrated that radio commentators, old or modern, do see description as a vital part of their profession, and there does not seem to be any identifiable difference between the views of English and German commentators. They all emphasise the need to describe rather than simply to create drama. In fact, even a brief look at the history of football commentary in England and Germany shows that description has always played a significant role in com-

mentary. If at all, it was early German commentary that focussed more on entertainment. Although the skills required of a good radio commentator are different from those a good TV commentator should possess, TV commentators will also emphasise the need to avoid – rather than create – unnecessary drama and even to remain silent if this is required. Whether modern German commentary is comparatively dull or not may indeed have something to do with showing excitement more readily[11] (e.g. signalled by pitch or speech rate; but even in this department German commentators seem to be at least on a par with English ones, see Müller / Mayr 2007), but this article has shown that it is fully justified to distinguish a level of description from a level of elaboration for both English and German radio commentaries. Hence the methodological framework developed in Müller (2007a) and Müller (2008) is a sound one which can provide new and important insights into the analysis of form-function relations.

Notes

1 English in this context, and also in the context of this article, should be read as a shorthand term for 'English language commentary in England'. Obviously, there is English language commentary outside England as well, and not all commentators doing football commentary in England are English. One of the BBC's main radio commentators for English football, Alan Green, for example, is from Northern Ireland.

2 This is exploited by British commercial broadcaster Sky TV. So-called 'Fanzone' commentary has fans from the opposing sides deliver deliberate over-the-top commentary. The concept is not new. In the early 1980s, radio commentary on Carinthian ice-hockey (!) seems to have employed very much the same strategy, see Haslitzer (1982).

3 An example of a sports commentator who kept inserting some scripted phrases was BBC's Bryon Butler. However, Green (2000: 82f.) provides examples which show how the use of such scripted text caused Butler to produce a number of gaffes.

4 This emerged from a series of interviews with football commentators I performed together with London-based journalist Ben Dunnell. Our interviewees included Alan Green, Jon Champion, Peter Drury and Jacqui Oately for English commentary as well as Günter Koch, one of the most famous German commentators. Koch made it very clear that although certain training courses exist today, they are not a mandatory requirement at all. Green, Champion and Drury all said they were never taught how to commentate. Judging from what Jacqui Oately says, who is the youngest of the commentators we interviewed, it appears that in recent times, at least some feedback and advice is provided in England.

5 A picture of the original grid appears in Adams (2002) and in Murray (2007).

6 Adams (2002) writes that the broadcast "was arranged at very short notice, too late for proper billing in the Radio Times." She then goes on to say that a plan was devised "which was published in the Radio Times." Although it is not stated explicitly, this appears to suggest that the plan was nevertheless distributed for the first broadcast, but the information is confusing. These complications are not mentioned by Murray (2007).

7 Michel claims the game in question was Preußen Berlin vs. Hertha BSC Berlin (1999: 575f.) and that it took place in early 1926. He does not provide an exact date. In an article on Braun's influence on German radio, Jenter (1997: 197) states that Preußen vs. Hertha BSC was in fact Braun's first football broadcast, but he does not mention the grid system at all. In fact, it is

certain that Braun did not use the grid system for this match. It was used for the first (and only) time for the final of the German football championship in 1927 between 1. FC Nürnberg and Hertha BSC Berlin. A diagram of the German grid can be found in Michel (1999: 575).

8 ... and was revived for the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the first English commentary on 27 January 2007 when Arsenal played Manchester United in the English Premier League. In addition to BBC Radio 5 Live's main commentary, alternative commentary employing the squares was provided on BBC Radio 5 Live Extra. Commentator was John Murray, the squares were announced by James Alexander Gordon, and summarisers were former Arsenal goalkeeper Bob Wilson and singer David Gray.

9 Reif (2004) tells the story of how in his early days as a commentator, when he used to talk much more than today, a former colleague of his remarked rather sarcastically: "Der muss mit dem Arsch atmen, mit dem Mund jedenfalls nicht, denn er quatscht ja ständig." ('He must be breathing with his bum, since he can't breathe through his mouth if he is constantly talking', Reif 2004: 189).

10 These pieces of information are from interviews with Alan Green and Jon Champion which I performed together with journalist Ben Dunnell (see note 4).

11 There are indeed tendencies towards more emotion in German commentaries since the 1990s (see, for example, Schröder and Köster 2004: 30).

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