A SPOKEN GENRE GETS WRITTEN: ON-LINE FOOTBALL COMMENTARIES

IN ENGLISH, FRENCH AND SPANISH

A Spoken Genre Gets Written: On-Line Football Commentaries in English, French and

Spanish

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Abstract

Many recent studies on Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) have addressed the question of orality and literacy. This paper examines a relatively recent subgenre of CMC, that of written on-line sports commentary, which provides us with written CMC that is clearly based on firmly established oral genres, those of radio and television sports commentary. The examples analysed are from two English, two French and two Spanish on-line football (soccer) commentaries. The purpose of the study is to examine oral traits and genre-mixing in on-line football commentaries in the three languages as well as carryover from the spoken genres of radio and television commentaries to this developing genre, following Ferguson (1983). Special attention is paid to webpage design. The study reveals that form and content of on-line football commentaries are strongly affected by the style of the on-line newspaper.

Introduction

In this paper we examine a selection of written on-line newspaper commentaries of the 2006 Football World Cup. Football (soccer) commentaries are traditionally an oral genre of radio and television; the 2006 World Cup celebrated in Germany witnessed the international appearance of written on-line, or minute by minute (MBM), commentaries. The examples analysed here are from two English, two French and two Spanish newspapers on-line. The study forms part of an ongoing line of research centred on the presence of oral traits in written genres of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in English, Catalan, French and Spanish, as part of the current process of informalization of general discourse.

The shift towards orality in written and, more generally, public discourse in English is a well-documented phenomenon and seems to have a long history. Leech (1966) underlines the tendency towards "colloquialisation" in public discourse over the last 200 years and identifies "a popular style of communication which might be called *public-colloquial*" (p. 75). Similarly, Biber and Finegan (1989) describe the "general pattern of 'drift' towards more oral styles" (p. 487), in different genres of written English over the last four centuries. Haussamen (1994) has argued that over the past 400 years, in English, written sentences have tended to become shorter and more direct. Other scholars that have studied this phenomenon are Chafe and Danielewicz (1987), Baron (2000) and McWorther (2003).

Examining recent trends in English, Van Dijk (1999) speaks of the blurring of genres as a result of the new technologies and, within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, Fairclough (1995) has analyzed the process extensively. Fairclough (1995) has centred upon the processes of informalization/conversationalization and technologization of discourse, underlining that in modern discourse practices, there are

more and more "mixtures of formal and informal styles, technical and non-technical vocabularies, markers of authority and familiarity, more typically written and more typically spoken syntactic forms" (p. 75), as the distinctions between written and oral genres become blurred. Fairclough (1989) has also studied the impact on current discourse practices of discourse technologies, which involve the conscious application of social scientific knowledge to the production of texts. We have adopted a slightly different and broader definition of the term technologization to include discourse practices that have been transformed or rendered possible (which is not the same as determined) by new technologies. In this context there have been numerous studies associating CMC with markedly informal styles (Ferrara et al., 1991; Murray, 1991; Maynor, 1994; Yates, 1996; Baron, 1998, 2000; Crystal, 2001; Posteguillo, 2003; Pérez-Sabater, 2007).

This process of informalization seems to have deeper historical roots and to have been particularly rapid over the last thirty years in English, but it has also drawn the attention of some scholars in the languages related to this paper. Thus, the Catalan linguist Tuson (2006) points out that, thanks to the new technologies, and despite the informal style of writing, there has probably never been an epoch in which people, especially young people, have written so much. As for Spanish, Cervera (2001) underlines the drift towards orality in the written language. Similarly, Grijelmo (2001), from a prescriptive perspective, bemoans the informality of written Spanish on the Internet. Pires (2003) studies the informalization of public discourse in French journalism and advertising, and Armstrong (2004) compares the processes of variation and levelling in English and French.

In this context, we examine a relatively recent subgenre of CMC, that of written on-line or MBM sports commentary, as it provides us with written CMC that is clearly

based on firmly established oral genres, those of radio and television sports commentary (although probably influenced by written accounts of matches and sports discourse in general). Moreover, the passage from the oral to the written should also be influenced by the more general sociological and ideological phenomena that normally characterize sports discourse.

According to many scholars in CMC such as Ferrara et al. (1991), Murray (1991, 2000), Herring (1996, 2004), Werry (1996), Collot and Belmore (1996), Yates (1996, 2000), Baron (1998, 2000), Crystal (2001) and Posteguillo (2003), distinctive traits of what Crystal (2001) calls *netspeak* are: the use of colloquial and informal language, the use of rhetorical typography to simulate paralinguistic communication, short sentences, the use of first and second person pronouns and the frequency of spelling mistakes, among others. All these features have led a number of scholars to posit the hybrid nature of CMC, poised, as it were, between oral and written discourse. All of these studies have centred on English CMC.

Our previous research into oral features in written texts in general and in CMC in particular in English and Spanish has consistently shown that academic texts, on-line fora and emails are markedly more informal and include many more oral traits in English than in Spanish (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2001; Turney et al., 2003; Montero-Fleta et al., 2003; Pérez-Sabater et al., 2007). These results bear out the idea of scholars who have compared English CMC with other languages (Lan, 2000; Yongyan, 2000). Discourse studies on general writing have also underlined the difference of formality between English and Spanish (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 1996). The situation is well summed up in Machin and van Leeuwen's (2005) comments on media discourse in Spain:

In Spain there is still a reluctance to mix information and entertainment (…)
[and] there are well-patrolled boundaries between high culture and popular
culture…. seriousness is not only a matter of content, but also of style. In Spain
it is very important to show your level of culture and education through the way
you speak and write. Introducing elements of 'street language' in your speech is
not done. (pp. 142-143)

Although, we have not previously researched the presence of orality in written
genres in French, we have supposed that the case of French would be similar to that of
Spanish following Pires (2003) and Armstrong (2004).

Hypotheses

Early studies of CMC postulated it as a more or less homogeneous genre
incorporating important elements of orality into written language. Intercultural studies
of CMC suggested that the tendency towards orality was stronger in English than in
other languages. However, the evolution of the World Wide Web and the growing
presence of institutional and organizational webpages have changed the situation.
Institutions and organizations tend to try to establish a formal presence rooted in the
written tradition. This paper seeks to establish if linguistic features identified as markers
for orality in interactive CMC are also present in this new genre of on-line written
sports commentary, a genre which, on the one hand, depends on a newspaper, an
organization which is clearly placed in the written tradition and, on the other, is based
on the earlier oral genres of radio and TV spoken sports commentary. As far as we
know, this the first intercultural study of this new on-line genre.

In this context, our main initial hypotheses were that:

1) English CMC would show more oral traits and more evidence of genre-mixing than French or Spanish. That is to say, the mixtures of formal and informal styles, technical and non-technical vocabularies, written and spoken syntactic forms that we have seen that Fairclough identifies as typical of modern discourse practices.

2) Written commentaries in on-line newspapers would exhibit a significant carryover from the spoken genres of radio and television commentaries.

Materials

The data of this study consists of on-line or minute by minute (MBM) commentaries of football matches from the 2006 World Cup Competition, in English, French and Spanish (there were, unfortunately, no on-line commentaries in the Catalan press), comparing the MBM commentary of one football match, France vs. Spain, in four newspapers: two Spanish generalist newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo*, one French, *Le Monde* and one French sports newspaper, *L'Équipe*. For the British on-line newspapers, *The Times* and *The Guardian*[1], we have analyzed the match England vs. Portugal. We have chosen different matches because it seems interesting to study a match in which the newspaper's national team was involved to see if this influences the commentary as Beard (1998) suggests.

However, we have included an extract from each newspaper studied describing an incident of one game, between England and Portugal, in which the English player (Rooney) stamps on a Portuguese player's (Carvalho's) testicles and is sent off. This will give the reader of this paper an idea of what an MBM football commentary looks like and of the important differences in webpage design and to anticipate the way it may

impinge upon the language used. A table describing the typography of all the

newspapers can be found in Appendix A.

In *El País*, we find four columns: one to indicate the minute of play, another for

the icon, another for the name of the incident and the fourth with a description of the

incident.

Figure 1. *El País*

Thus, in minute 61:29, we find an icon for a red card, "Tarjeta" (*Card*) in the

third column and "Tarjeta roja a Rooney" (*Red card for Rooney*) in the fourth. In the

description of the incident itself (minute 60:59) there is no mention of how Rooney

fowled the Portuguese player: "Falta de Rooney, ha agredido a Ricardo Carvalho"

(*Fowl by Rooney, he attacked Ricardo Carvalho*).

In *El Mundo*, the layout is simple with two columns, one to indicate the minute

of play and another for the commentary. An icon is used to indicate the red card.

Figure 2. *El Mundo*

The incident merits two commentaries. There is an initial summary (minute 61) of the red card with the use of capital letters and bold type and the word "ATENCIÓN" (*Attention*) to draw the reader's attention. This is followed by a more detailed description explaining the principal consequence, England are left with ten players. The incident itself is in bold type and is at once hyperbolic and euphemistic (*The English forward **tramples on all Carvalho's most intimate parts***).

62 ⊡ Rooney est expulsé après un mauvais geste sur Ricardo Carvalho.

Figure 3. *L'Équipe*

To turn to the French newspapers, *L'Équipe*'s commentary is brief, but does not aspire to the laconic objectivity of *El País*, as can be appreciated here by the use of evaluative language (*Rooney is sent off after an ugly gesture towards Ricardo Carvalho*): the use of the euphemism "mauvais geste" is worth noting. The incident is accompanied by an icon indicating the red card.

Info Banc 63'
Et voilà l'Angleterre qui joue à 10...
ça change tout ! Mais on se
demande comment vont faire
Rooney et Ronaldo à la reprise à
Manchester United...

Carton rouge pour Wayne Rooney 61'
!!! C'est incroyable !! Petite
poussette sans gravité de Rooney
qui aurait mérité un carton jaune.
Cristiano Ronaldo vient réclamer
l'expulsion de son partenaire de club
à l'arbitre qui le fait immédiatement.

60' Les Portugais sont fatigué et n'ont
plus beaucoup d'énergie à donner...
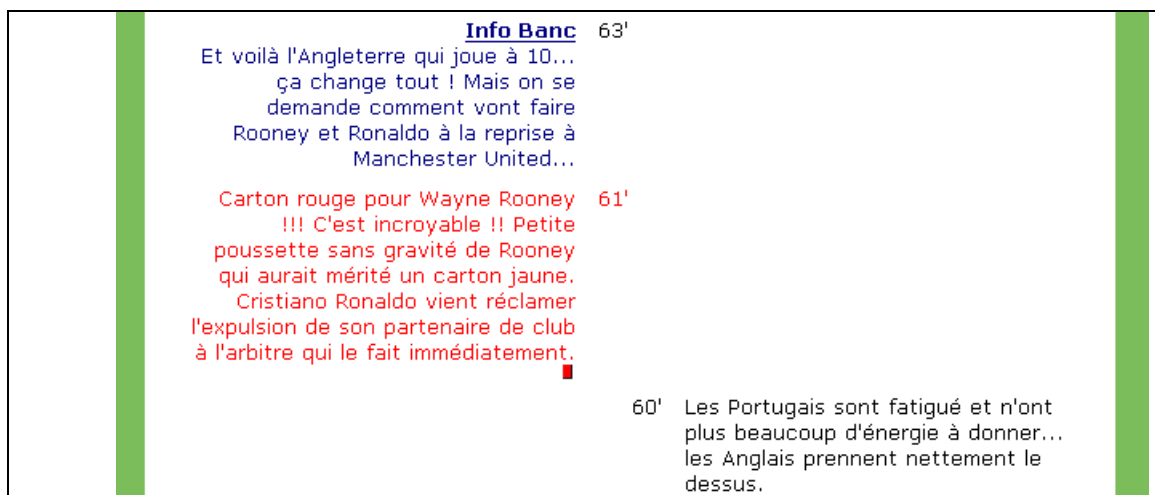les Anglais prennent nettement le
dessus.

Figure 4. *Le Monde*

Like *L'Équipe*, *Le Monde* uses different font colours to distinguish types of information but whereas we find 4 colours in *L'Équipe*, *Le Monde* uses a total of 7. Moreover, as can be appreciated in Figure 4, the commentary is divided into columns. The commentary appears in the right hand column when the centre of attention is the Portuguese team and in the left hand column when the attention is centred on the English team. Normally (but not always) the criterion as to which team is the centre of attention is which team is attacking, so the two column format reflects the physical division of the football pitch into two halves, affording a novel and creative example of the interplay of visual and verbal (Geisler et al., 2001).

63 mins: OK, England have no forwards. Owen injured, Rooney suspended until the end of time, Crouch coming on now, probably. England have ten men, no idea and there will be trouble tonight on the streets of this country, one suspects.

61 mins: RED CARD FOR ROONEY! What on earth was that!?! He's being manhandled by Carvahlo in the centre of the pitch and Rooney stamps on his groin. He's off! The England icon has flipped his lid and will now be out for the rest of the tournament. Violent conduct. England have lost the World Cup.

Figure 5. *The Times*

In both English newspapers the commentary appears in the centre of the browser window. Neither *The Times* nor *The Guardian* uses columns, each commentary begins with the minute of play in bold type followed by the incident. In both commentaries from *The Times*, there are indicators of orality in the informal language: "flipped his lid", "OK". The incident itself is described using a neutral word for Carvalho's body part: "Rooney stamps on his groin".

61 mins: Rooney sent off! He stamped on Carvalho's swingers. There was a right tussle with Carvalho for possession. He left his foot in. There has been a coiled, Gazza-91 feeling about Rooney all tournament - remember th tantrum v Sweden? - and you have to say that's been coming. I actually don't think the ref was going to send him until Portugal players came flying in - Ronaldo led the protests, an Rooney added to suspicions about them hating each other by shoving him - but ultimately he made a stamping motion, and he had to walk.

Figure 6. *The Guardian*

The Guardian too relates Rooney's sending in bold type and uses a vocabulary that is also markedly informal but, unlike the rather middle-class language of *The Times*, *The Guardian* uses words that would be considered taboo by many: "He stamped on Carvalho's swingers".

Methods

After examining the whole MBM commentary in each newspaper, the analysis has centred on the study of the parameters related to the linguistic characteristics of the commentary using the final 500 words of each MBM commentary. Following Biber (1988), we considered it more adequate to balance the corpus with the same number of words in each commentary.

In order to corroborate the first hypothesis, that English CMC would show more oral traits and more evidence of genre-mixing than French or Spanish, we have examined the last 500 words of each MBM for linguistic features identified as markers of orality by Baron (1998, 2000) and Crystal (2001) and the other specialists in CMC cited in the introduction. More specifically we have considered:

a) the average sentence length (Ferrara et al., 1991) and average commentary length (the commentaries are normally organized into discrete paragraphs);

b) non-conventional indicators of prosody and intonation typically used in CMC (Yus, 2001);

c) the amount of colloquial, evaluative and technical vocabulary (Angell & Heslop, 1994);

d) the number of fragmentary sentences (Murray, 2000) and

e) the use of first and second person pronouns (Werry, 1996).

Following Chafe & Danielewicz (1987), to evaluate lexis, each commentary has been coded by at least two of the authors of the paper.

To confirm the second hypothesis, that written commentaries in on-line newspapers would exhibit a significant carryover from the spoken genres of radio and television commentaries, we have followed Ferguson's article on spoken sports commentary "Sports announcer talk: syntactic aspects of register variation" (Ferguson, 1983). In this seminal study, Ferguson shows that oral sports commentary is characterized by prosody, sports lexis and a series of syntactic traits. As we examine prosody in our first hypothesis and the number of occurrences of lexis associated with sport and colloquial language, in the second hypothesis, we consider the following syntactic features that Ferguson identifies as characteristic of spoken sportscasting:

1) fragmentary or, in Ferguson's terms, simplified sentences;

2) the presence of heavy modifiers;

3) tense usage;

4) the use of routines;

5) the use of inversion, i.e. structures in which the predicate precedes the verb, and the use of result expressions.

Results and Discussion

Before entering into a detailed analysis of our data, it is worth pointing out two general features of the MBM commentaries. Firstly, in the examples of the webpages it can be seen that MBM football commentaries are anomalous written texts in that the overall textual structure is organized not endophorically but exophorically. All the

commentaries examined are organized by the minute of play, expressed in Arabic numerals and emphasized (normally in bold), followed by a commentary. Insofar as exophora is usually associated with spoken language, all texts can be said to have elements of orality. Moreover, unlike most written texts, they must be produced in real time. Another very general way some of the commentaries incorporate elements associated with orality is that of interactivity: three of the newspapers, *Le Monde*, *The Times* and *The Guardian*, allow readers to send in emails, which may be incorporated into the commentary. We have followed McQuail's (2005) definition of interactivity as "the ratio of response or initiative on the part of the user to the 'offer' of the source/sender" (p. 143).

Hypothesis 1

The first part of this section presents the results for each of the five linguistic traits that specialists have claimed to be markers for orality in CMC. The second part discusses to what extent orality and genre mixing can be associated with different languages in on-line MBMs.

Results

Average sentence length and average commentary length.

Table 1 shows the time covered by the last 500 words of each MBM, the average sentence length and the average commentary length.

Table 1

Average Sentence Length and Average Commentary Length

	Number of minutes	Number of sentences	Average sentence length in words	Number of commentaries	Average commentary length in words
Newspaper on-line					
El País	26	108	4.6 (7.6)*	48	11.6
El Mundo	21	72	6.9	19	26.3
L'Équipe	44	40	12.5	25	20.0
Le Monde	20	33	15.2	18	27.8

The Times	20	37	13.5	15	33.3
The Guardian	19	48	10.4	11	45.5

Note. The figure of 4.6 is calculated if we include the words in the third column of the commentary in the total number of words; if we include only the fourth column the sentence length is longer (7.6).

As regards the amount of time, the most salient feature is found in the commentary of the French sports newspaper, *L'Équipe*, as the 500 words analysed cover more or less twice as much time as the other commentaries. The commentary divides up into periods of no comment (up to five minutes), sudden quickly described plays and the description with comment of important moments in the game. This alternation of longer and shorter sentences may, at times, give the impression of a contrast between more linguistically elaborate language and more urgent, more oral language, but it probably reflects the difference between the language of play by play commentators and expert summarizers in oral radio and television commentaries.

As far as average sentence length is concerned, the most striking finding is that the Spanish newspapers use noticeably shorter sentences than the English or French newspapers.

The very short average sentence length (4.6 words per sentence) in *El País*'s MBM would seem to be the result of the newspaper's bid to achieve a purely denotational style. *El Mundo*, on the other hand, opts for a very colloquial style that clearly and consistently seeks to recreate oral commentary. The on-line commentary is made up of very short sentences (6.9 words per sentence) despite there being no justification for this in the layout. Many of these short sentences are verbless expressions of emotion: "QUÉ PENA, ESPAÑA ELIMINADA." (*What a shame, Spain eliminated.*) or imperatives of encouragement for the Spanish team including a spelling mistake: "VENGA ESPAÑA, VENGA. DALEM [sic] DALE." (*Come on Spain, come on. Go for it/them, Go for it/them.*).

Finally, as regards the average length of the commentaries, it is noteworthy that both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, which have very simple formats, the minute of the game in bold type and then a paragraph, have comparatively long average commentary lengths (33.3 words for *The Times*, 45.5 for *The Guardian*).

Non-conventional indicators of prosody and intonation, typically used in CMC.

Many scholars have underlined the importance of prosody in oral sports commentaries (Ferguson, 1983; Hoyle, 1989, 1991; Beard, 1998). It is obviously impossible for a writer to reflect the many prosodic features that characterize oral commentary in a written text. However, a number of conventions have developed in CMC which seek to recreate paralinguistic features. We have, therefore, analysed the written commentaries for instances of such conventions, centring upon the reduplication of letters and punctuation and the use of capitalisation. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Traditional CMC Indicators of Paralinguistic Features

	Reduplication of letters	Reduplication of punctuation	Words in capital letters
Newspaper on-line			
El País	0	0	5
El Mundo	3	0	348
L'Équipe	0	0	2
Le Monde	0	5	7
The Times	1	0	1
The Guardian	0	0	0

The most salient finding is that, in the Spanish newspaper, *El Mundo*, 348 of the 500 words (69.6%) are capitalized, despite the fact that according to Lynch & Horton (1999), on the computer screen capitalization is one of the "least effective methods for adding typographical emphasis … [it] is uncomfortable and significantly slows reading" (p. 91). The commentator has clearly chosen to seek to indicate the "intonational" features of oral commentary by means of capitalization, which is also accompanied by

reduplication of letters in narrating the two goals by France and a near miss by Spain, which is rendered by "FUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUUERA JOAQUÍN". (*Out Joaquín*, Joaquín being a Spanish player).

El Mundo then, clearly exploits CMC conventions taken from emails, chats and on-line fora to convey oral, paralinguistic features. This is in stark contrast with the other newspapers examined that make sparing or no use of such conventions.

Moreover, in context, the use of capitalization may be more naturally interpreted as a typographic convention than as some kind of shouting. This is certainly the case of *El País*: of the five words in capital letters, two correspond to announcing goals (in the third column, devoted to simply naming the play, and accompanied by an icon) and three signal the end of the game.

In *Le Monde*, by far the most sophisticated of all the newspaper commentaries examined, we find both reduplication of punctuation marks and capital letters. The use of capital letters is, in some cases, clearly a typographical convention, being used to write a player's second name in sections that give technical background information about players. In other cases, however, it is probably a marker of paralinguistic elements, as the reduplication of punctuation marks and a generous use of exclamation marks in general give a strong impression of orality. This sense of orality is all the keener by the contrast with sections of the commentary that rely on written, printed conventions. Thus, the complex conventions of its webpage allow the commentator to refer to both oral and printed traditions.

L'Équipe makes sparing use of capital letters, which are limited to announcing the two goals scored, as in the case of *El País*. Rather than an expression of paralinguistic features, it would seem more fitting to interpret this as a written,

typographical convention, an interpretation reinforced by the fact that the word appears in a different font colour together with an icon.

Both *The Times* and *The Guardian* have very simple format and both seem to reject the early CMC conventions to express paralinguistic features.

Amount of colloquial, evaluative and technical vocabulary.

In sportscasting involving the national team, the question of the amount of evaluative and colloquial vocabulary is interesting as evaluative lexis allows the commentator to side with his/her country's team, while colloquial vocabulary may be used to heighten the public's sense of national identity.

The following table shows the use of lexis in the different newspapers of this study.

Table 3

Amount of colloquial, evaluative and technical vocabulary

	Evaluative lexis	Technical lexis	Colloquial lexis
Newspaper on-line			
El País	0	161	0
El Mundo	12	63	25
L'Équipe	19	71	7
Le Monde	7	83	5
The Times	20	57	4
The Guardian	34	68	18

The most striking feature of Table 3 is the total absence of evaluative and colloquial vocabulary in *El País*. It overtly avoids any indication of national bias.

El Mundo's commentator, on the other hand, uses colloquial expressions in a clear attempt to recreate the oral genre of sports commentary and expresses his/her support for the Spanish team through evaluative language.

The French newspapers are not so aggressively biased towards the national team in their choice of lexis. Support for the French team is more subtly expressed by the

amount of time devoted to commenting French plays and the way the French team's goals are announced (with capitalisation and greater reduplication of punctuation marks).

The Times uses little colloquial language and it is usually rather dated and firmly within accepted, middle-class speech ("What on earth was that?", "Yikes"). *The Times* MBM is homogeneous linguistically and stylistically and, like oral sportscasters and sports writers in general, the commentator's persona clearly favours his/her country's team. *The Guardian* includes an important presence of the commentator's persona and s/he, uncharacteristically, supports the other country's team. In *The Guardian* we find a mixture of types of vocabulary, ranging from very modern slang and taboo words to highly educated lexis.

In the section analysed of *The Guardian*'s MBM commentary there is an important number of evaluative (34) and colloquial expressions (18). Unlike *The Times*, the colloquial expressions are clearly contemporary and clearly seek not to be representative of British, mainstream, middle-class culture. Indeed, *The Guardian* MBM introduces some abhorred shibboleths such as the use of "stood" instead of "standing" ("he was stood at the edge of the box"). While the demotic predominates, the hieratic is not absent: thus, we find archaisms like "dullard" to present the English team line up "Our Brave Dullards (4-5-1)", expressions that could be considered learned ("hubris", "nemesis", "epitome") and technical acronyms ("USP").

Fragmentary sentences.

We shall examine the use of fragmentary sentences more fully in the discussion of our second hypothesis on the carryover of spoken sports commentaries to written MBMs. In many widely studied genres of CMC (emails, on-line fora, chats etc.), fragmentary sentences are a clear marker of orality. According to Murray (2000) one of

the strategies that CMC users employ to reduce the time needed to write are "simplified

syntax, such as subject or modal deletion" (p. 402).

In the majority of MBMs, the interpretation of the presence of fragmentary

sentences depends on the overall design of the webpage and ultimately on the attitude

towards the event that the newspaper seeks to convey. The two Spanish newspapers

show the highest usage of fragmentary sentences. In the austere, stylized design of *El*

País, the fragmentary sentences are most naturally interpreted as examples of the

written register of block language (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 845), the laconic languages of

headlines and newsflashes. In *El Mundo*, the same linguistic phenomenon is clearly an

attempt to simulate the immediacy and urgency of spoken commentary. These non-

sentences sometimes use traditional CMC conventions to simulate prosody.

The use of first and second person pronouns.

Yates (1996) argues that the use of first and second person reference is

characteristic of interactive CMC. First and second person pronouns are generally

associated with oral language while third person pronouns are generally associated with

written language (Biber et al., 2002). As Table 4 shows, the vast majority of pronouns

are third person.

Table 4

Personal Pronouns

	1st person sing.	1st person plural	2nd person sing.	2nd person plural	3rd person sing.	3rd person plural
Newspaper on-line						
El País	0	0	0	0	45	0
El Mundo	0	8	0	0	69	9
L'Équipe	0	0	0	1	49	2
Le Monde	0	0	0	2	26	4
The Times	5	1	0	0	52	11
The Guardian	6	2	1	1	56	12

It is noteworthy that *El País* makes exclusive use of third person singular pronouns, reflecting its denotational reporting of discrete plays and placing it clearly in the written tradition. The eight uses of first person plural in *El Mundo* all enlist the commentator and the readers in the Spanish team's struggle and are often associated with traditional CMC indicators of orality like capitalization.

Another noteworthy feature of Table 4 is that, unlike the Spanish and the French newspapers, in the MBMs of both *The Times* and *The Guardian*, we find the use of the first person singular to signal the commentator's presence. For example, in both commentaries, at the end of ninety minutes, and before going into extra time, both commentators tell readers that they will take a short break: in *The Times*, the commentator says "I'm off to take up smoking for the first time in my life. But will be back", while *The Guardian*'s commentator informs us "So. It's extra-time, and I'm off for a really, really nervous No1".

This use of the first person singular is exclusive to the British MBM commentaries. It is essential to creating a conversational, oral style and merits comment. When we analyse the entire commentaries, we find that there is much more first person singular reference in *The Guardian* (47 instances, as against 13 in *The Times*). In *The Guardian*'s MBM, 8 of the occurrences (17%) were contained in readers' emails, while only 1 reader example (7.7%) is found in *The Times*. There is also an important difference between whether first person singular reference occurs while the game is being played or in the preview, half-time, etc. In *The Guardian*, 37 examples (78.7%) occurred with the game in play, while in *The Times*, there were only 6 (46.2%).

There is an important quantitative difference in the commentator's self reference, but the difference is also qualitative. Thus, whereas in the pre-match period,

the commentator from *The Times* associates his/her persona with the English team and presents the game as moment of national unity, the commentator from *The Guardian* takes a very different stance, feeling it necessary to warn his/her readers that s/he wants Portugal to win.

Discussion

Our first hypothesis needs to be nuanced significantly. We find that the presence of oral traits varies not so much with languages as with the overall stylistic approach to the MBM, which is reflected both in the language used and the design of the webpage. In relatively informal CMC genres, like personal emails and on-line fora, there is a greater informalization of discourse in English than in Romance languages. In on-line newspapers the situation is different as the presence of orality depends on the corporate image that the newspaper wishes to project. This bears out Moreno's (1997) claim with regard to the language of research articles (RA) that the writing conventions of the RA genre rather than the peculiarities of Spanish and English writing cultures govern the rhetorical strategies preferred by writers. In on-line newspapers, the newspaper decides the writing conventions that its journalists must follow. These conventions are mediated by the newspaper's choice of webpage design that ranges from a very simple, rudimentary design in the case of *El Mundo* and the British newspapers, through the highly organized and sophisticated conventions of the French newspapers, to the austere and stylized design of *El País*. It is probable that webpage design in turn is conditioned by broader ideological questions. Football as a tool to express national identity has been examined by many scholars (Hobsbawn, 1990; Baillette, 1996; Vázquez-Montalbán, 2005; Galeano, 2006; Hernández-Alonso, 2003).

As regards the phenomenon of genre mixing, we find that the two Spanish newspapers seem to configure coherent, homogenous subgenres of MBM on-line

commentary: the two subgenres can be distinguished on the basis of "formal and informal" styles with their concomitant values of "involvement and detachment" (Chafe, 1982, p. 45). Thus, *El Mundo* clearly seeks to recreate oral football commentaries, using the conventions of early CMC to express paralinguistic features (capitalization, the duplication of letters and punctuation), use of colloquial and evaluative expressions and of short, sometimes fragmentary, sentences. The commentator makes no attempt to be neutral and patently supports the Spanish team; this support is never expressed through the use of the first person singular, but through evaluative language, imperatives and the first person plural forms. *El País*, on the other hand, seeks to develop a purely written, detached style reducing commentary to objective facts, avoiding any use of evaluative and colloquial vocabulary and using exclusively third person singular pronouns. Thus, there is no mixing of technical and colloquial vocabulary that Fairclough associates with the informalization of discourse: *El País* maintains the "well-patrolled boundaries" between the technical and non-technical that Machin and van Leeuwen identify as a characteristic of media discourse in Spanish. The newspaper seeks towards a "*possible degree zero of expressivity*" (Hernández-Alonso, 2003), which excludes evaluative expressions or 'street language'.

As we have mentioned, the use of linguistic traits that CMCs studies have usually considered as markers of orality, like short sentences and capitalization, need to be judged within the overall context of the webpage. While in *El Mundo* these features do seek to evoke oral commentaries, the same features, in *El País*, seem to stem from the tradition of the printed word.

L'Équipe seems to steer a mid-course between the two options found in the Spanish MBMs. The web design of *Le Monde* is by far the most sophisticated, which allows its MBM to mix different styles and genres: together with objective information

organized in a way which clearly draws on written genres, we find elements of orality in its use of punctuation and some degree of interactivity with its readers.

We have seen that *The Times* MBM is homogeneous linguistically and stylistically. It has a limited presence of the first person singular forms and, like oral sportscasters and sports writers in general, the commentator's persona clearly favours his/her country's team. *The Guardian*, in contrast, includes an important presence of the commentator's persona and s/he uncharacteristically supports the other country's team. In *The Guardian* we also find a mixture of types of vocabulary, ranging from very modern slang and taboo words to highly educated lexis. As we have seen, neither newspaper makes relevant use of CMC conventions to express orality.

This rejection of traditional CMC conventions is all the more significant as both newspapers, together with *Le Monde*, introduce elements of interactivity. The presence of the first person pronouns is related to the fact that the French newspaper *Le Monde* and both British newspapers introduce elements of interactivity with the audience by allowing the audience to send in emails. At first sight, this could suggest that they share traits with other CMC genres like chats, emails or on-line fora.

However, the quantity and the kind of interactivity are very different and it seems to be modelled on radio and television genres. On the radio, and to a lesser extent, on the television, listener participation has existed since at least the 1940s. We may distinguish two kinds of oral interactivity in talk radio: indirect and direct. Indirect participation is when the listeners phone, for example, to request a record or to dedicate a song to someone else: the listener does not speak but is named by the programme's host. In direct participation, the listeners actually speak to the programme's host or guest. While call-in programmes are very popular, they are not normally associated with sports programmes. Interactivity in *The Times* is marginal, in *Le Monde* it is limited to

indirect participation, but in *The Guardian*, it approaches a one-to-many chat as the commentator answers many of the emails.

Hypothesis 2

Results

In order to corroborate the second hypothesis, that written commentaries in on-line newspapers would exhibit a significant carryover from the spoken genres of radio and television commentaries, we have centred on the study of Ferguson who analyses (radio) "sports announcer talk" as a genre and register, highlighting contrasts and similarities with everyday conversation such as the use of special prosody, lexis and syntactic characteristics. As we have already examined prosody and lexis in the first hypothesis, in this section we shall centre on the syntactic features typical of sports commentary, and following Ferguson (1983), we have examined: 1) fragmentary or, in Ferguson's terms, simplified sentences; 2) the presence of heavy modifiers; 3) tense usage; 4) the use of routines; 5) the use of inversion i.e. structures in which the predicate precedes the verb, and the use of result expressions. Table 5 shows the results for the first three syntactic traits studied.

Table 5

Syntactic Features: fragmentary sentences, heavy modifiers and tenses

	Fragmentary sentences	Heavy modifiers	Present simple	Present progressive	Past	Other
Newspaper on-line						
El País	75	54	38	0	0	13
El Mundo	23	34	41	1	10	14
L'Équipe	4	6	45	1	2	3
Le Monde	12	8	26	0	2	5
The Times	6	17	46	3	7	7
The Guardian	9	28	47	7	8	10

Fragmentary sentences.

Ferguson identifies prosiopesis as a typical syntactic feature of announcer or commentator talk and identifies three main types of simplification: omission of (a) a personal pronoun, subject of the immediately following verb, (b) a pronoun plus copula and (c) a copular verb. As sentence simplification is rather different in written language, we have analyzed all types of fragmentary sentences (Quirk et al., 1985).

We have found that fragmentary sentences are more common in the Spanish newspapers *El País* (75 out of a total of 108 sentences, 69.4%) and *El Mundo* (23/72, 31.9%). As we have already suggested, it is noteworthy that the use of fragmentary sentences has very different stylistic results in the two commentaries and responds, in part, to the different overall organization of the webpage. In *El País*, it is a consequence of decision to adopt a purely denotational approach to reporting, which tends to a telegraphic, ticker tape style. In *El Mundo*, it stems from the newspaper decision to recreate the oral genre; thus, we find a number of capitalized, fragmentary sentences formed by paratactically combined verbless clauses.

Of the two French newspapers, in *L'Équipe* we find 4/40 fragmentary sentences (10%) and in *Le Monde* 12/33 (36.4%). We have mentioned that *L'Équipe*'s MBM is more leisurely and much is taken up by background, expert commentary; this probably accounts for the few fragmentary sentences encountered. The fragmentary sentences of *Le Monde*'s MBM are clearly associated with orality, expressed by reduplication of punctuation marks and colloquial football slang.

In both *The Times* (6/37, 16.2%) and *The Guardian* (9/48, 18.8%), the fragmentary sentences correspond to verbless, heavy noun phrases.

Heavy modifiers.

All newspapers make an important use of heavy modifiers. This is particularly the case in the Spanish newspapers (*El País*, 54; *El Mundo*, 34). Again, the use of the

same syntactical device gives rise to very different styles in the two newspapers: in *El País*, the heavy noun phrases are technical names for plays in football or technical names followed by mention of the participants: "Penalty de Thuram por falta a Pablo Ibáñez" (*Penalty by Thuram for a foul on Pablo Ibañez*). We find more or less the same structure in *El Mundo*, but generally integrated into longer sentences that incorporate evaluative and oral elements: "Otro fuera de juego más de Henry, y ya van.... cinco del galgo francés" (a literal translation would be: *Another offside by Henry and that makes up ... five by the French greyhound*). Heavy noun phrases are probably so common because they are easily expandable (by means of postposed adjectives, in French and Spanish, relative clauses or prepositional phrases).

Tense usage.

Ferguson suggests that in English sportscasting we find basically three tenses: the present simple for actions taking place at the moment of speaking, the present progressive to describe actions of extended duration and the past for a rapid action regarded as having already happened. Ferguson also claims that the general divide between the two present tenses may be that the present simple is used for direct reporting, while the present progressive will be used for background reporting.

French and Spanish oral sports commentaries also make extensive use of the present simple to describe current actions. But there are two points of tense usage which contrast with English. We had supposed that as French, which lacks a present progressive, uses the verbal periphrasis *être en train de*, we would find only the present simple. In Spanish, reference to the past is rather different to English. In standard Castilian Spanish, the present perfect is used for recent past actions while the past is used for non-recent past actions. However, on the radio and television the past tense is often used for recent actions and this is the norm in sports commentary.

We have found that in the MBMs examined the most common tense is the present simple, making up 72.2% of all verb forms (67% in Spanish, 84.5% in French and 69% in English).

Of the two Spanish newspapers, *El País* uses only three tenses (present, 38 instances, perfect, 11, and the imperfect, 2). It is noteworthy that this MBM uses the perfect to describe recent past actions, in accordance with the normative rules of Castilian Spanish but at odds with tense usage in spoken commentaries. *El Mundo* makes 10 uses of the past to narrate recent actions and 5 uses of the perfect to refer to states that have extended over the whole game. It also makes one use of the present progressive to give background impressions. It therefore incorporates the convention of spoken commentary in Spanish. Of the 9 examples of the use of other tenses, 6 are imperatives of encouragement for the Spanish team or for individual Spanish players.

In French, all direct reporting uses the present simple and we find one use of the verbal periphrasis *être en train de* to describe what is happening on the coach's bench. The *passé composé* is only used after the match to address the readers. There are a number of uses of the future tense, which can be explained by the fact that they would go on to the next round of the competition.

Tense usage in the British newspapers broadly conforms to Ferguson's predictions. Almost all of the uses of the past tense refer to the sending off of the British player, Rooney, an incident that had happened before the section of commentary we have analysed. In *The Guardian*, more than half of the examples of the present simple (26 of the 47 in the whole commentary) are used not to describe play but to introduce readers' emails, another clear indicator of the importance of interaction with the public.

Routines.

In written commentaries, routines can be associated with the use of icons and with the use of set phrases for plays. *El País* makes abundant use of routines: apart from the icons used, the 47 names of play included in the third column contain only 8 different noun phrases describing the play. The French newspapers use both icons and font colour as kinds of routines. There are no routines in the British newspapers. This is probably because of the personal style the commentators wish to create.

Inversion and Result Expressions.

We have found no important use of inversion in full sentences or use of result expression in the MBMs.

Discussion

As we have seen, Ferguson claims that oral sports commentary can be identified as a genre by its use of expressive prosody, its technical lexis and a series of syntactic structures.

As regards prosodic elements, as we saw in hypothesis 1, the only newspaper that clearly and consistently uses traditional CMC conventions to recreate paralinguistic features is the Spanish newspaper, *El Mundo*, in a clear attempt to reproduce the atmosphere of oral commentary. *El País*, on the other hand, consistently avoids any recourse to the oral genre. In the French newspapers, the complex webpage design and the elaborate use of font styles and font colours open up the possibility of a range of styles. Thus, in *Le Monde*, we find the expression of background information firmly rooted in the print tradition together with a clearly rhetorical use of exclamation marks that evokes oral language. The British newspapers, while cultivating an informal, oral style, consistently avoid traditional CMC markers of prosody. As for vocabulary, there is a clear and unsurprising carryover of lexis associated with football.

As far as syntactic elements are concerned, we have found no carryover of inversion and the special use of result expressions that are characteristic of oral commentaries. This may be because, in written English at least, such uses have associations with literary genres.

The use of icons can be considered analogous to routines of oral commentary. Moreover the restricted code for commentary in *El País* makes this newspaper's MBM read like a series of routines, of names of plays in the third column and syntactically foreseeable expansions in the fourth. The British newspapers also avoid routines.

For the other syntactic features, fragmentary or simplified sentences, heavy noun phrases and tense usage, the predictions of Ferguson are largely confirmed by all MBMs. This confirmation over three languages may suggest that commentators in the three languages seek similar solutions to the problems posed by real time written commentary.

Concluding Remarks

The emergence of a new genre of CMC, on-line written newspaper sportscasting, has allowed us to examine two hypotheses related to the informalization of discourse in different languages and cultures. We have found that certain linguistic features of oral sportscasting carry over to written MBMs. The study has also established that commentators may follow very different strategies to introduce elements of orality into their written texts: only one newspaper has used the conventions associated with informal CMC genres like emails and on-line fora.

It is, therefore, clear that in written, on-line football commentaries, it is not possible to make a ranking of the presence of oral elements based on language or

culture. Our study has shown that the two Spanish newspapers adopt diametrically opposed positions to the presence of oral elements in the written commentaries. However, it is interesting to note that they are consistent in their styles which may reflect, as we mentioned above, Machin and van Leeuwen's (2005) idea about the existence of "well-patrolled boundaries" in discourse practices in Spanish: *El País* adopts a serious, detached stance, while *El Mundo* attempts to transmit the emotion of traditional, partisan oral commentaries of international sporting events. As a result, commentary in *El País* relates to the conventions of printing while *El Mundo* uses traditional CMC conventions to create a more immediate, oral atmosphere.

We have identified two essentially different ways of including orality into written discourse in this new CMC genre. At one extreme, we find *El Mundo*, which seeks to recreate oral commentary by means of conventions associated with early CMC genres: emails, discussion groups and chats. At the other extreme, we find *The Guardian* which uses none of these conventions, but where we encounter a powerful presence of the commentator's personality, interaction with readers and an important use of slang and taboo words.

Another salient point that has surfaced in our study and which requires further research is the likelihood that the stylistic features of each commentary are ultimately determined by the newspaper's ideological stance in general and towards football in particular. We have analyzed international games involving the newspaper's national team precisely to ascertain if the commentary transmits a nationalist ideology, which would, presumably, be absent from commentaries of domestic games or games between two foreign countries. Many scholars have pointed out that international sporting events are often vehicles for intense nationalist feelings. Hobsbawm (1990), for example, writes that "[t]he imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven

named people" (p. 143), or as Auster (1999) puts it: "[c]ountries now wage their battles on the soccer field with surrogate armies in short pants". Our study has identified very different ideological stances in the newspapers analysed. *El Mundo*'s support for the Spanish team can be considered chauvinistic. In *The Times*' we find a clear, though less aggressive, identification with England. The French newspapers attempt to be more impartial, but details such as the number of exclamation marks used to announce goals on the part of France and Spain seem to betray a partisan attitude. *El País* avoids any nationalist feeling in its commentary and the commentator in *The Guardian* manifests from the outset that s/he supports Portugal, the foreign team. Indeed, the writer makes clear that his/her commentary seeks to parody conventional sports commentaries (before the game, we find the following paragraph title: "Paragraph masquerading as a discussion of tactics and team news").

Our study also suggests that if ideology conditions the style of the commentary, it does so, in part, through the overall design of the webpage and, probably, through the underlying software. Thus, *El País*' austere, highly stylized webpage design seems to leave very limited stylistic choices to the commentator, in stark contrast to the British newspapers. The French newspapers' elaborate use of font styles and font colours limit stylistic variation in certain sections while leaving it open in others.

Thus, the study has highlighted the need for future research to examine the complex relationship between ways of introducing orality into on-line newspapers, on the one hand, and the newspapers' ideology and webpage design, on the other.

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Appendix A

Table 6 Fonts, Font Styles and Colours

Table 6

Fonts, Font Styles and Colours

Newspaper on-line	Font of the commentary	Font styles and colours
El País	Times New Roman	Bold type → minute, name of plays, announcement of goals (with grey shading) Capitalization → to announce the beginning and end of the game and goals Icons → cards, goals, penalties
El Mundo	Verdana	Bold type → minute of commentary Capitalization → to express emotion Icons → cards, goals, penalties
L'Équipe	Arial	Bold type → the minute of goals, goals Capitalization → to announce goals Blue → minute Red → a summary at the end of each time of play, to announce goals Green → to express important plays as a result of free kicks and corners (which are signalled by a green icon) Grey → substitutions Icons → cards, goals, penalties
Le Monde	Verdana	Bold type → end of match, titles, emphasis in background information Underlined text → titles Capitalization → for important plays, for players' second names in background information, to celebrate (although not to announce) one of France's goals Light blue → atmosphere of stadium Blue → goals Yellow → yellow card Red → titles of information about players Turquoise → statistics Green → state of the pitch and weather Violet → information about off pitch events (for example the trainer's bench)
The Times	Arial	Bold type → the minute and important actions Italics → for emphasis and for the remarks of the journalist at the stadium
The Guardian	Arial	Bold type → the minute and to announce the beginning and end of the game, important actions and in prematch commentary as paragraph titles

Acknowledgments

Footnotes

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[1] The Spanish newspaper *El País* is the largest selling generalist paid-for newspaper in Spain with a circulation of 457,675 issues every day. *El Mundo* is the second largest with 314,591. *Le Monde* is one of the leading national daily generalist newspapers of France selling 400,000 copies every day; *L'Équipe* has an average circulation of 340,000 issues. The second market leader for broadsheets in Britain is *The Times* with a circulation of 692,581 copies per day. *The Guardian's* circulation is 378,000 issues a day.