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**LANGUAGE OF SPORT IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNICATION
AND CULTURE**

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses various characteristics of the language of sport. First, it is presented as an expression of sport as a human activity in the form of well-defined sport jargon. The cultural origins of sport point to various human desires which had led to the emergence of sport in its substitutional, therapeutic, prophylactic and recreational functions. The language of sport possesses its characteristic lexicon, phraseology, morphology and phonology. Its vocabulary and social functions clearly indicate explicit references to military and warfare terms and patterns of behavior. An important question remains whether the language of modern sport can avoid the process of brutalization.

LANGUAGE AND SPORT

Language is an inherent part of our lives. It allows interpersonal communication through cognitive processes and constitutes an expression of our feelings, emotions and sensations [4, 5]. There are no human activities which can dispense with language. Language can be written or spoken; it can also assume non-verbal forms such as the Morse code, sign languages or any other systems of convention signals.

Each human activity affects its linguistic expression in terms of vocabulary, phonology, syntax and phraseology. Thus the language structure is not monolithic; it entails professional, environmental, stylistic and situational variations – each with its own characteristics [1, 2, 3]. Language variations associated with different professions, groups or trades are called jargons, e.g. legal jargon, medical jargon, prison jargon or youth slang. Analogically, there is also *sports jargon*,

which for some years has become an important area of research [6, 7].

The sport variation of language (sport jargon) has been developed by athletes and all other sports people in order to fulfill their needs of communication in the areas of their sports activities. The role of sport language is strictly related to the role of sport in man's life, and the function of linguistic expression in sport is associated with particular patterns of sport behavior of different individuals and groups. The language of sport should always be studied as firmly situated in and strictly related to its communication and cultural contexts. It is necessary that the discussion about its characteristics should commence with non-linguistic consideration of sport origins and involve both a diachronic and synchronic analysis of its structure and functions.

CULTURAL ORIGINS OF SPORT

Sport is a human activity aimed at one's self-fulfillment. It satisfies both psychological (biological) and social needs of an individual, which together constitute a spectrum of one's aspirations and motivations. The former consist of:

- pursuit of self-development, manifested by an increase in body strength and fitness, in order to achieve the most successful level of functioning within a group;
- need of affirmation of one's physical fitness in relation to other group members, ensuring one's good or better position in social hierarchy and security while confronting an opponent;
- attempts to relieve one's stress through intense kinetic activity (cf. neutralization of strong emotions such as anger, agitation, irritation or fury through rapid gesturing, stamping one's feet, tossing objects, fast walking, running or jumping).

The latter comprises fulfilling recreational and ludic needs, desire for rivalry, victory, recognition, social acceptance and integration and cooperation within a group. Sport has developed as a substitute for combat – as an attempt to channel and civilize man's atavistic aggression in his fight for survival and existence determined by his instinct of self-preservation. Sport therefore plays a substitutional role. It is a surrogate of real fight, and the joy of sport victory replaces the triumph of victory over a real enemy. Sport also possesses a set of educational qualities – it is a component of young man's upbringing, thus it is part of human culture. Sport has also gained other significant functions, for instance, exerting a therapeutic influence on the body of a physically passive young man. It compensates for the present-day sedentary lifestyle which has led to the lack of natural exercise due to the development of all the conveniences of modern civilization. The therapeutic function of sport is also associated with *prophylaxis*, i.e. prevention of civilization diseases and ailments resulting from an unhealthy lifestyle, through sport games and physical exercise. Social prevention and social therapy are also important aspects of sport as controlled physical activity can prevent and channel aggression into the psychological sphere of satisfaction with sports achievements and breaking sports records.

Sport is finally a form of relaxation and recovery from everyday stress. It satisfies the

natural need of entertainment and play in its ludic and recreational functions. People who have experienced failure in other areas of life can achieve success in sport, e.g. a physically able student who experiences learning difficulties can effectively fight his internally destructive, demoralizing and demobilizing inferiority complex by engaging in sports. Sport helps one regain one's high self-esteem, necessary for maintaining spiritual harmony and showing good will to others. It also helps prevent blame attribution to oneself or others.

THE LANGUAGE OF SPORT AS A VARIETY OF MODERN LANGUAGE

Sport as a component of culture possesses its own rituals which can be observed on a daily basis during training or on special occasions, for example, during numerous sports events. Sometimes sport rituals become huge celebrations, i.e. the Olympic Games; sometimes they take the form of gestures of conventional patterns of behavior, e.g. a handshake between athletes, swapping shirts, making a bow. As a social phenomenon sport is inherently linked to the process of communication realized in society through language. Practicing sport creates different communication situations, e.g. an individually coached training session, teamwork, competition, athletes resting together after competition or conversations about sport among athletes, referees and coaches. The interlocutors develop specific sport speech patterns. The communication is determined by the social roles of the sender and the receiver (athletes, referees, spectators, etc.) and their personality traits (temperament, knowledge, interests, emotionality, health condition, etc.). The subject and the aim of the communication process are also significant.

The language of sport is affected by the type of relationship between the interlocutors, which can take various forms. The first type is a relationship between an individual sender and individual receiver who directly communicate with each other. This relationship can be observed during an individual coaching session, or during collective training when an individual team member receives instructions directly from the coach. The second type of relationship exists between an individual sender (coach, sport instructor, P.E. teacher) and a collective receiver (group, team, class). The third type is the reversal of the second, i.e. a relationship

between a collective sender and an individual receiver, e.g. a player being cheered by a group of supporters. The fourth relationship exists between a collective sender and a collective receiver, e.g. a group of sport fans cheering their favorite team. The linguistic relationship can also be indirect, e.g. a sports fan watching a television sports broadcast reacts verbally to a situation during play, i.e. he or she fulfills the role of receiver of the athletes' behavior, and the role of sender, whose message, however, cannot reach the receiver due to technical obstacles.

The specificity of sport language is also affected by such factors as actions related to training and competition, outcomes of such actions, names of sport equipment and interpersonal relations between athletes. In this way the language of sport becomes *a trade and professional jargon*, similar to medical, legal, student and prison jargons. Its distinctive features include specific vocabulary: *sport terms* (e.g. *false start*, *rookie*, *pro*, *handicap*, etc.), names of individual sports and games (e.g. *tennis*, *luge*, *rugby*, *boxing*), names of sports actions (e.g. *dribble*, *front crawl*, *spike*) their outcomes (*downhill*, *snatch*, *jerk with split*), equipment (*trampoline*, *pommel horse*, *epee*, *tartan*) and sports venues (*track*, *stadium*, *court*, *floor*). A number of these names can be found in general lexicon; however, in sport discourses they often serve as the lexical core and function as neosemantisms in their 'professional' terminological meanings, e.g. *street corner* v. *corner* in football; *snatching* a purse v. *snatching* in weightlifting; *pitching* a tent vs. *pitching* a baseball; *riposte* (swift and clever reply) v. *riposte* as a counterattack in fencing.

An important part of sport vocabulary in all world languages are internationalisms, which originated from the English language, e.g. *surfing*, *football*, *training*, *foul*, *fair play*, *start*, *finish*, and have been accommodated into the syntactic and morphological structures of other languages. Internationalisms also include terms related to specific sports which are not translated into other languages, for instance, judo techniques (Japanese original terms are retained) or figure skating jumps (named for their originators). Certainly, there are also translations of terms characteristic of a given sport in different languages of the world. Sport terms function in the morphological structure of a given language, when they usually feature

a higher rate of derivation and back-formation than more general lexical items.

Characteristically, the language of sport includes a great number of vocabulary items related to military and warfare, e.g. *attack*, *offensive*, *defensive*, *shooting*, *surrender*, etc., as well as specific phrases and expression which are then often transferred into general lexicon, e.g. *below the belt*, *breasting the tape*, *hitting for six* or *jumping the gun*.

Sport discourses are also characterized by specific syntactic structures, particularly in the areas of sport performance, e.g. during PE classes. Single verbs in the imperative mood and exclamatory sentences are often used as substitutions for more elaborate clauses, e.g. *Shoot! Forward! Start! Go for it! Pass the ball!* They all reflect the fast pace of a sports game and the amount of stress on the field, and they possess a greater commanding power than declarative sentences.

The phonology of sport language includes expressive intonation, lengthening of some syllables or rising cadences.

THE FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE IN SPORTS COMMUNICATION

Sport as a cultural and social phenomenon plays a variety of concurrent roles, and the language of sport is an integral component in the process of fulfillment of these functions. A significant factor determining the aim and intention of communication in sport is a given sport situation which constantly involves the processes of sending and receiving information, e.g. training, competition, PE lesson, recovery after exercise. In the context of communication in sport the *pragmatic function* of a speech act can be distinguished, i.e. language is used to achieve a set goal, for instance, mobilization of an athlete or constructive feedback from the coach. This function – which can also be called *impressive* – is often realized with the use of exclamations such as *Higher!* or *Faster!* and interjections expressing both positive and negative emotions, e.g. *Bravo!* *Attaboy!* *Oh, no!* The constant and interchangeable use of such expressions places the supporters, players and trainers in the sender-receiver and receiver-sender settings.

The impressive function of language is usually accompanied by its *expressive function*, which is a manifestation of the sender's feelings and emotions by way of exclamations, interjections or even insults, e.g. *Are you blind! Idiot!*, hurled at players or – even more regrettably – at referees. It also involves some non-verbal means such as facial expressions, inarticulate sounds and humming enhancing the transferred message. The messages communicated in sport often fulfill the *ludic function*; they include humor, jokes, laughter and smile in the form of word play, puns or slang expressions.

The above communicative functions can be easily noted in the lexical sphere of language. And it is the sports lexicon, which, among all aspects of sports language, has been undergoing the most spectacular evolution.

FROM MOBILIZATION TO BRUTALIZATION

Any analysis of sport vocabulary reveals a great number of lexical items closely related to warfare and real combat rather than only to competitiveness in sport [8]. The observed semantic modification and transfer are two-stage processes. Thanks to the analogy and substitutiveness of sports actions the military and warfare terminology has been easily transferred to the language of sport and then to other discourses, becoming the basis for expressions of fight, rivalry, overcoming obstacles, pursuit of objectives and victory by means of tactics, strategy, attack or retreat, etc.

It may seem that the mentioned transfer indicates a decrease in the emotional output and commanding power of linguistic expressions originally marked with aggression. This is characteristic of general lexicon where the military origins of such lexical items as *campaign*, *surrender* or *onslaught* have become blurred in expressions like, for example, *advertising campaign* or *onslaught of a gale*. The observed assuagement of the aggressive meaning is mostly due to the fact that originally military vocabulary is often used metaphorically in general lexicon. It is quite different in sport where *fight* is still fight, *opponent* is opponent and *victory* is victory. The “warfare” vocabulary is a reflection of the sender's and receiver's desired attitudes. The patterns of behavior of individual and collective message

receivers are stimulated and regulated by coaches, teachers, teammates and supporters. Words feature a great commanding power and can trigger desired reactions. It can be thus concluded that the incessant discourse about overcoming and winning leads to development of aggressive attitudes. It is visible in professional and record-seeking sports, where the rules are tough and the opponent becomes a real adversary. Are we then facing the process of “re-militarization” of sport, which had evolved in the past as an alternative vent for biological aggression? If so, this would mean an intriguing phenomenon of defiance of culture, which instead of ameliorating nature, contradicts its own mission and produces brutality and hatred in the area of sport originally designed to neutralize such attitudes. It is still a hypothetical consideration resulting, however, from observations of real situations in sport. We witness stadiums being transformed into battlefields, where supporters of opposite teams engage in a struggle to physically destroy each other. Instead of inspiring rivalry we witness hateful enmity. There are numerous examples of brawls between supporters of opposing teams, between players and referees and between fans and athletes. Is it a form of cultural regression – a peculiar return to the roots? What are the causes of this phenomenon? What is the role of language? In the linguistic sphere we see intensification of the expressive function, manifested in insults, psychical humiliation of the opponent and eagerness to “kill with words.” We experience an explosion of profane, obscene and vulgar anger-provoking language. Emphatic expressions become swearwords, and humorous epithets become abuses. Sport and its language have not avoided the barbarousness of modern civilization, which has also affected communities known for their traditional ethos of competition. The excesses of English football hooligans have become tradition instead; the English principle of fair play is often contradicted. To stop this process, which in view of professionalization and commercialization of sport may be a harbinger of its twilight, we need education. Do we also need language education?

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