

Dr. Cornelia Gerhardt

c.gerhardt@mx.uni-saarland.de

SS 19 Sociolinguistics Symposium, 22. – 24. August 2012, Berlin

Is anything happening on the pitch? Constructing notability in talk

In my presentation, I will analyze the behaviour of television viewers while watching matches of the men's FIFA World Cup live on television. The main focus will be sudden unannounced shifts from focused talk-in-interaction between the participants to a complete orientation to the happenings on television.

I will start with a general account of the talk in this setting with its shifting 'contextual configurations' (Goodwin 2000) ranging from full orientation to the TV set to e.g. 'story telling frames' during which only 'view signs' (such as e.g. posture of the viewers, Scollon 1998) differentiate this talk from regular conversations. I will then propose the term 'notability' to account for sudden shifts in the data. When the viewers decide that the media text offers a 'notable' scene, they may shift frame without any prior interactional work. In other words, no pre-sequences, discourse markers or other means of signalling new agendas are used. These shifts are instantiated through interjections which function as contextualization cues indexing the relevance of the scene on television. Their indicative nature (Wilkins 1992) shows that a viewer is at that moment orienting to the media text and no longer to his/her co-viewer. These interjections do not represent 'pre-s' marking an upcoming action, but their employment signals that such a shift has happened. If the co-viewers ratify the 'notability' of a given scene in the match, no signs of dispreference or repair work can be found in the ensuing interaction. Even the highly marked case of other-interruption goes unnoticed. Since notability is negotiable, the interjections may be followed by evaluations accounting for the notability of the scene. The scalar nature of notability can be realized through a number of non-lexical modalities, such as increase in pitch and loudness, gaze, facial expressions, gesturing, or even jumping around are used by the viewers. The more modalities are used and the more different they are to the surrounding behaviour, the more a scene is interpreted and flagged as notable by the viewers.

In contrast to tellability which is concerned with the construction of past events in talk, notability strives to account for the construction of current events as they unfold at the same time as the talk produced by the viewers. Hence, instead of past events, it describes how to

make current events available through talk. For this reason, it is an important notion with regards to the linguistic behavior during televised live sports events.

Goodwin, C. 2000. Action and embodiment within situated human interaction. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32. 1489–1522.

Scollon, R. 1998. *Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction*. London: Longman.

Wilkins, D. 1992. Interjections as deictics. *Journal of Pragmatics* 18. 119-158.