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Negotiating the meaning of broader categories in talk-in-interaction: the case of patriotism

This paper illustrates how television viewers negotiate the meaning of an abstract field such as ‘patriotism’ as it is instantiated at the hinge between media texts and talk-in-interaction. It is based on the transcribed videos of football fans who are watching the World Cup on television.

The viewers use linguistic practices such as direct address of the players to signal, on the one hand, expertise in the game and, on the other hand, support of the English team. However, both identities may not always be compatible. What may be “meant” as a neutral reflection of a football expert may be interpreted as disalignment by the other viewers. The corpus allows the tracing of the interactional work needed to clarify such misinterpretations of each others utterances.

The commentators on television also index their more institutionally sanctioned version of patriotism. In the field of sports, the metaphorical equation /SPORT IS WAR/ is omnipresent. However, an example from Argentina versus England shows how the viewers resist being drawn into the reading of the game as an extension of the Falkland war (cf. the blurring *it's only a GA::ME.*)

Finally, the multimodal nature of the television text also comes into play. The broadcast pictures and the commentary may at times be interpreted by the viewers as “sending mixed messages.” This highlights the importance of multimodal issues in the construction of meaning in everyday talk-in-interaction.