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More than wallpaper: the television during football live matches

The television in people's living room has often been assigned a function similar to wallpaper: "unanalysed and unattended background decoration." (Scollon 1998:151) In the ATTAC-Corpus, however, the participants gathered explicitly for the purpose of watching football, and the television holds a central role in their interaction. Their talk is mainly "fernsehbegleitend" (Holly et al. 2001), i.e. it accompanies the television text. The paper will delimit verbal as well as para- and extra-verbal strategies which the television viewers at home use to negotiate meaning and identities in this particular setting.

One strategy moulded by the reception situation is to intertwine the talk at home with the football commentary on television. This allows the viewers to participate actively in the media text. Simple back-channelling as signals of consent to the commentators' opinion can serve this function. However, the participants also construct adjacency pairs together with the commentators by skilfully weaving their talk into the ongoing TV text. A coherent mutual conversation between the broadcasters and their audience is apparently constructed. This practice is based on the conversational style in the primary media text.

Another practice consists of the expression of feelings which mirror the stance of the viewers against the media text. The full array of human expressiveness comes to the fore here with verbal, para-verbal (e.g. increase in volume) and extra-verbal means (facial expressions, gestures, and body movements): the participants jump up and down, clap, shout, distort their faces, or make sounds (including those which are not part of the English phonetic inventory).

Furthermore, strategies like e.g. "conversational lecturing" (Kotthoff 1997) are employed by the participants to display their expertise in the field of football.

Finally, the gaze behaviour of the television viewers is also distinctive since it is affected by their position facing the television, instead of facing their co-interlocutors, as in conversation in general (according to Goodwin 1980.)

The study represents an inquiry into the media reception situation. It describes how a mass medium is appropriated in everyday talk-in-interaction by using methods of interactional sociolinguistics and conversation analysis. The analyses are based on transcriptions of the conversation of English families or groups of friends watching live football matches on television.

References

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