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**COMPARISON OF FOOTBALL COMMENTARIS IN ENGLISH AND
ESTONIAN
BA thesis**

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Abstract

This BA thesis looks at the language used during football matches by the commentators in English and Estonian. The paper was written out of personal interest in football and wish to study and explain sports commentaries. The aim of this BA thesis is to compare the language usage of football commentaries and find out if there are any differences or similarities in English and Estonian.

This study covers the aspects of sports commentaries. That is then followed by an analysis of football commentaries of the English Premier League. In order to study the language usage and linguistic features, in total four separate transcripts were made from two football games (two in English, two in Estonian). The analytical section of the study was supported by the transcripts as well as articles and books about sports commentaries and linguistics.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Introduction	4
1. Literature review	6
1.1. Language of sport	6
1.2. Register	7
1.3. Mediums of broadcasting.....	8
1.4. Tasks of commentators.....	10
1.4.1. Play-by-play commentators.....	10
1.4.2. Colour commentators and side-line commentators	11
1.5. Estonian media language.....	12
1.6. Previous studies of sports language.....	13
2. Empirical study.....	15
2.1. Choosing the matches and transcriptions of commentaries	15
2.2. English and Estonian match commentators.....	16
2.3. Analysis of linguistic features and structures.....	18
2.3.1. Verbs.....	18
2.3.2. Voice	21
2.3.3. Clauses.....	21
2.3.4. Run-on sentences	23
2.3.5. Minor sentences	24
2.3.6. Modifiers	25
2.3.7. Dislocation.....	26
2.4. Paralinguistics	28
2.4.1. Linguistic segmentation	29
2.5. Discussion.....	31
3. Conclusion	33
References.....	35
Primary sources.....	35
Secondary sources	35
Resümee.....	41

Introduction

Sport has been entertainment for people for a long while. Sport does not just mean actively participating on the field in it but also watching and/or listening to broadcasts of different sports. Possibly the most followed sport is football (Pumerantz, 2012; Das, 2021). Different countries have their own leagues and bigger leagues include teams from many countries or even the whole world, and many of them are broadcasted on television and radio. Since sports broadcasting is a huge element in the media, this in turn also has brought up the importance of the language of sport. The language of sport mostly concerns the commentaries. Commentaries can be written in the newspapers or blogs, auditory on the radio or television.

The Premier League is the strongest and highest league for football clubs in England. The 20 best teams of the country battle to be crowned the English Champions. The Premier League is the most watched league in the world – it is broadcasted in 188 countries. The league began in 1992, and in total 49 different clubs have played in it. (Premier League, 2018) The official broadcaster of the Premier League in the United Kingdom is currently BT Sports for television and Talksport for radio. In Estonia, the only licenced broadcaster is TV3 Sport.

The aim of this BA thesis is to compare the usage of language in English and Estonian during football matches of the Premier League. The research question of this thesis would be: Are there any grammatical or paralinguistic differences or similarities between football commentaries in English and Estonian? This approach was chosen because of personal interest in football. While the author of this thesis has followed broadcasts of games before, she has found some differences in the commentaries in different languages. The study first covers the background of language and linguistics of sports commentaries. For this, books and articles are used for reference. The second part of the study investigates more closely

the language used by football commentators in the matches between Leicester City and Chelsea, and Fulham and Manchester United.

Another reason for choosing this topic was that this kind of study – comparison of football commentaries in English and Estonian – has not been done before. A similar kind of study has been done in comparison of English and Chinese sports commentaries (Xi, 2014). Another study about sports commentaries compared football commentaries in English, French and Spanish (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008). Since both of these studies did not focus on the grammar of the commentaries, the grammatical aspects compared in this thesis were picked based on which could be found in the commentaries of the recorded games.

Audio recordings of two games in English and the same two games in Estonian were used for this thesis. These games took place on matchday 18 in January 2021. These games were chosen to have different teams for every game, and these were matches that had commentaries available both in English and Estonian.

1. Literature review

In this section of the thesis, the author gives an overview of the language of sport. In addition, the author talks about registers used in sport and different mediums of broadcasting.

1.1. Language of sport

Taborek (2014: 238) states that the most appropriate explanation for the term ‘language of sport’ would be ‘specialised language or terminology’, and the features of it can be seen on different linguistic levels. The language of sport does not contain only specific lexis and grammatical constructions but also the language of the media, athletes and coaches, supporters and many more. They all contribute to the development of the language of sport. Football language can be taken as one subcategory of the language of sport. Taborek (2014) concludes that the language of sport consists of multiple levels – lexis, phonetics, text, discourse, morpho-syntax.

In their article about the characteristics of the language in the broadcasting discourse, Laskova & Zinyakova (2016) propose that the language used by the commentator, or by the sports analysts, during the game helps to decrease the gap between the team and the spectators. The sportscasters use unique angles to engage the viewers. The most common ways for doing this is using their tone, the speed of talking and the vocabulary, but they can also engage the viewer by talking about interesting facts about the teams and their players. The tone and the speed of talking can attract the attention of the viewer if it has wandered elsewhere – if the speed and tone rise, it usually means that something exciting is happening, and the viewer focuses their attention back to the game and the information that the commentators are providing.

While the main focus of this thesis is on radio and television commentaries, the new form of commentaries – online commentaries – needs to be discussed too. Lewandowski

(2012) has investigated online commentaries. Not much work in this area has been done before since it is a quite new variety of online language. More researched areas of online languages would be social media, e-mails and other similar. Lewandowski (2012: 67) argues that both sports announcer talk and written sports commentary are subvarieties of the language of sport, and they have similarities and differences. Sports announcers' talk in radio or television is usually a dialogue, made up by two commentators – a play-by-play commentator (Ferguson, 1983) who tells the audience what is happening on the field and a colour commentator (Wroblewski, 2021), usually a former player or coach, who reflects on the game from their personal experience. Written sports commentaries can be seen as a written monologue between the author and the reader. While sports announcer talk is more like informal, everyday speech, then written sports commentaries are more formal and use more professional terms; therefore, it can be said that the purpose of written sports commentaries is, similarly to sports announcer talk, to offer the audience what is happening on the field, but with the benefit of hindsight (Lewandowski 2012: 67).

1.2. Register

The degree of formality used in written and spoken language is referred to as the language register. In the English language are five basic registers: formal, high formal, neutral, informal, vulgar. (Haines, 2020) Most commonly, sports commentators use both neutral and informal register. Since sports commentaries are mostly in a spoken form and have to be delivered fast to the audience, commentators do not control their use of language, and therefore, the language is related to both of the registers.

The register that an English-speaking person would use in his everyday life is an informal register. The informal language is simple, can be grammatically incorrect or incomplete, shows emotions, contains idioms and slang. Neutral register, on the other hand,

is the conventional language level used in transactional situations like in presentations and reports. (Haines, 2020) The neutral register is less emotional, more grammatically correct but still may use slang.

Ferguson (1983) explains in his article how different registers are used for different radio talks. He argues that the register in sports commentaries is so important of a feature that only by register it is possible to distinguish different radio talks from each other, and in the case of sports commentaries, it is possible to differentiate one sport from another by the register. The value why to study sports commentaries comes from a better understanding of language and its variation in general after the analysis of sports language.

Similarly to Ferguson, Humpolik (2014) emphasizes the importance of register. He explains what a commentary is and what the task and purpose of sports commentators are. He explains the difference between radio and television commentaries too. While television sportscasters can allow having some silence, radio sportscasters cannot. Football, like any other widespread and popular sport, has its own vocabulary. It is the job of the commentator to use the correct terminology – correct idioms, phrases and words to refer to certain aspects. This refers to, for example, knowing when and how to use phrases like ‘clean sheet’ (not conceding any goals in a game) or ‘false nine’ (player who plays the position of a centre forward but has a bit more withdrawn role than regular striker) (Kelly, 2020).

1.3. Mediums of broadcasting

In today’s world, sports commentaries are mostly in the form of television, radio/podcast and Internet commentaries. Of those, the Internet commentaries on different websites are usually straight to the point and without any additional information or emotions – they just describe what is happening on the field. Another term for this kind of commentaries is written sports commentaries (WSC). Radio and television commentaries –

a broader term to those is sports announcer talk (SAT) – are usually livelier. (Ferguson, 1983) The announcers can express their emotions there more freely. While there are some differences in how to communicate the comments about the game, there still exist similarities between different mediums too. They all have a similar overall sequence whether they appear on radio or television (or the Internet) – background information, occasion, teams, the game itself and additional information during it, results, comments from coaches or players and other elements. The main difference between radio and television commentaries is rooted in the fact that radio can only be heard, and therefore the commentators have to pass along the information about what is happening on the game field while television commentators can leave this part out since the viewers can see it themselves. In this paper, the main focus is on television and radio broadcast, internet broadcast is excluded.

Watching a football match on television is possibly the most common way for sports enthusiasts to acquire information and cheer on for their favourite team. Televised football match commentaries provide the viewer more information about the teams, players and actions that are happening on the field. With the additional information that the commentators provide – statistics about the league, history of the playing clubs, information about the players – the commentators are keeping the viewers entertained when there is nothing very interesting happening on the field that needs to be explained further to the viewers. While television broadcasts with announcers are the most common and the norm, announcer-less broadcasts are also possible.

Another way of keeping up with the football match is through radio commentaries. Chisholm (2015) describes how sports commentaries on the radio can create pictures that can make the listener believe that they are on the field. Like TV commentators, radio commentators have to find the right words to describe what is happening so that the listeners who cannot see the players, nor the ball, can understand the game. While television

commentators have more opportunities to talk about additional information about the players, clubs or stadiums, radio commentators' main focus is on describing the activities on the field. But in both television and radio commentaries, the main commentator talks about what is happening in the game, and the co-commentator provides additional remarks (Bowcher, 2003: 473).

While it has been noticed that the popularity of radio sports broadcasts is in decline because of other streaming platforms and radio is no longer the main way of providing commentaries to football matches, in England, the land where football was born, almost every important game is still broadcasted on the radio (Aghatise, 2020).

1.4. Tasks of commentators

In football, similarly to other sports that are broadcasted, there are different kinds of commentators. There are announcers, play-by-play commentators, colour commentators and side-line reporters. While their job may look similar – to talk about the sport – they all actually have specific tasks to follow. The tasks of commentators will be discussed here in reference to the empirical study of this thesis where the commentators' talk was analysed according to their job's task.

1.4.1. Play-by-play commentators

Play-by-play commentators are the ones people hear the most when they are watching or listening to a sporting event. Their main task is to provide a precise description of the game in action. Most commonly, they work for the local television or radio company in their country, and they provide commentaries for the games that happen in their home country. (Gresham, 2019) But it is also possible that the play-by-play commentators provide commentaries to the games that are not in action in their country.

A play-by-play commentator is not just somebody who states where the ball is and which player is where but he is also a conversation partner to the colour commentator. Miller (2019) says that building credibility with the audience is the most important aspect of being a play-by-play announcer. When the commentator lacks credibility and does not accurately cover the game nor keep the audience informed and entertained, he is of no use to the audience or the broadcasting station. When the play-by-play announcer is on the payroll of the local club whose game he is presenting, it can be excused if he is slightly biased because the people listening or watching the game are primarily the ones interested in the team – their fans. But when it comes to national games or play-by-play announcers who work for broadcasting service, being biased cannot be excused. Then the play-by-play commentary has to be larger in scope and more closely linked to the game in action since he has to provide information to the audience, amongst who are supporters of both teams. (Miller, 2019)

1.4.2. Colour commentators and side-line commentators

Colour commentators have a similar kind of task as play-by-play commentators. However, colour commentators' task is to enrich the audience's experience by telling additional information, jokes, statistics, stories about the teams and players on the playing field. The tradition is that the colour commentator is a retired player who knows the ins and outs of the game, players, coaches and playing strategies. (Wroblewski, 2021)

Of all the announcers, the side-line commentators work the closest to the action. They provide interviews with the players and coaches before, during and after the match and offer information based on what they see and hear on the playing field. The side-line reporter's job is now considered quite obsolete. They appear on air for only very few minutes, and their interviews are considered neither entertaining nor informative. (Craggs, 2012)

1.5. Estonian media language

While the main focus of this bachelor's thesis is on football commentaries and sports language, in order to see the differences between English and Estonian language of sports, we have to look at Estonian media language since the language of football commentaries has not been researched previously. The section about Estonian media language is necessary here because the author of this thesis could not find research on football commentaries in Estonian.

The term media language is an umbrella term used to explain how viewers read media texts by comprehending formal and conventional systems. Media literacy refers to our ability to read and write in this broader context of language. (AS Media, 2014) Since sports broadcasting is part of sports journalism, the rules of journalism language can be applied to commentaries as well. The language that the media uses is the language that people use (Kaasik, 2004). Similarly to English, Estonian also has different registers: informal, formal, secular and religious (Hennoste, 1997). The secular register can be seen as guarding over the informal and formal language. The religious register will not be discussed in this thesis.

Again, similarly to English language sports commentaries, Estonian sports commentaries are also part of the informal everyday language register. Best practice is that the overall media language in Estonian should not use informal language, especially slang (Hennoste, 2000). While football commentaries are part of media language, the advice not to use informal language cannot be followed there wholly. Commentaries need to be presented quickly, and therefore the commentators need to ignore some grammar rules of formal language and instead use informal language.

1.6. Previous studies of sports language

As mentioned above, there are some studies done before concerning researching sports commentaries in different languages and the language of sports in general – a study researching football commentaries in English, Spanish and French (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008) and a study researching sports commentaries in English and Chinese (Xi, 2014). Some studies about football language have been carried out in Estonia too (Kurve, 2004; Lomp, 2015; Lomp, 2017; Kaivoja, 2017).

In her paper, Kurve (2004) explains that while football is a popular sport in Estonia and books and textbooks about football terms have been published before, the trainers and players still use a lot of English terms and self-devised words. Kurve (2004) therefore compiled a small glossary of English-Estonian football terms. Other studies about football language were a bachelor's thesis about football language in Estonian newspapers (Lomp, 2015) and a master's thesis about football news in Estonian newspapers (Lomp, 2017) and another master's thesis about Estonian football language and football terminology (Kaivoja, 2017). In her bachelor's thesis, Lomp (2015) analysed metaphoric language in the headlines and lead paragraphs of football news in Estonian newspapers. In the master's thesis, Lomp (2017) analysed who are depicted in football news published in Estonia and what are their tasks. Kaivoja (2017) in her master's thesis, researched football jargon, synonyms and the impact of English on the Estonian football language. While these studies analyse football language, a comparison of football commentaries in English and Estonian has not been done before.

Xi (2014) studied the lexical aspects of impromptu sports commentaries in English and Chinese on the basis of basketball and more specifically, the 35 seconds of the game which is known as 'McGrady Time'. He found that the Chinese commentaries are more objective, they lack passion and enthusiasm in comparison to the English commentaries. He

also found that in English, there are more words that describe the mental processes than in Chinese.

Pérez-Sabater, Peña-Martínez, Turney and Montero-Fleta (2008) focused in their study on examining oral traits and genre mixing in football commentaries in English, French and Spanish on computer-mediated communication (CMC). They compared how different newspapers use minute-by-minute (MBM) commentaries and the linguistic characteristics of the commentaries. They found that some linguistic features of oral commentaries carry over to minute-by-minute written commentaries. The authors admit that some of their findings need further research – the likelihood that the newspaper's ideological stances, especially towards football, impact the stylistic features of commentaries. (Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008)

2. Empirical study

In this part of the BA thesis, the author discusses the findings of the analysis of the commentaries. The commentaries in both languages were analysed together. The main focus of this thesis will be on grammatical and paralinguistic aspects of football commentaries. By analysing these aspects and features, the author of this thesis is hoping to find out if there are any differences between football commentaries in English and Estonian.

2.1. Choosing the matches and transcriptions of commentaries

To analyse the commentaries of the football matches and the language used, audio recordings were made of two of the English Premier League games in English and Estonian. Both recordings were made of gameday 18 matches. Of gameday 18 matches on 19th January 2021 (2 games in total on that day), the match between Leicester City Football Club and Chelsea Football Club was chosen. From the two games that were played on 20th January 2021, the match between Fulham Football Club and Manchester United Football Club was chosen. Broadcasts of the games in English were radio broadcasts, while the broadcasts in Estonian were television broadcasts. Only audio was recorded of the Estonian matches. These matches were chosen because they were the ones that had commentaries available both in English and Estonian.

It is usual that during one gameday, there can be more than one game. During the busiest days, there can be even up to nine games. In previous years, usually, all the nine games happened on the same day, but because of the COVID-19 this football season, the games are more spread out, and matches that have the same gameday number can happen on different days.

The recordings in English were transcribed with a speech-to-text program Otter.ai that is available online. Mistakes made by the program were later fixed manually. The

recordings in Estonian were transcribed by hand. In both languages, the audio recordings of commentaries were listened twice – first to write down what the commentators were saying, and the second listening was for marking pauses and changes in commentators' tone. Pauses were marked in transcriptions with _____. If the commentator's voice rose, that part was written down in the upper case, and an arrow pointing up was added. If the voice fell, a downwards pointing arrow was added, and the part was written in lower case. The aim of those transcriptions was to provide insight into the linguistic features.

2.2. English and Estonian match commentators

As mentioned before, two recordings in English and two in Estonian were used for analysing the language. Both of the matches with English commentaries were introduced by play-by-play commentator Sam Matterface and colour commentator Dean Ashton. Sam Matterface and Dean Ashton are both native speakers of English. The matches in Estonian were both introduced by a commentator that could not be identified since his name was not provided anywhere, nor did he introduce himself. Since there was only one commentator for the Estonian broadcast, he acted both as a play-by-play and colour commentator.

Sam Matterface and Dean Ashton, who were the commentators of the matches in English, conversed together, reported the happenings on the field and analysed other important aspects of the games. Sam Matterface got more talking time since he was the play-by-play commentator and had to describe who had the ball and what the players were doing. Dean Ashton, as a colour commentator, added other relatable information about the rumours and news about the teams, players, stadiums and fans to Sam Matterface's comments.

- 1) Sam Matterface: *Hudson-Odoi and Pulisic flank Abraham in attack, on the bench: Kepa, Christensen, Jorginho, Werner, Zouma, Ziyech, Gilmore, Azpilicueta and Emerson and we're underway in around about eight minutes time.*

Dean Ashton: *Sam, thank you very much. Let's quickly hear from someone who's been enjoying a very good run in the Leicester team.*

The unidentified Estonian commentator acted both as a play-by-play commentator and colour commentator. Since he was commenting alone, more focus was turned on reporting the happenings on the field and less on other extra information.

- 2) Estonian commentator: *Teine nurgalöök kodumeeskonnale. Ja läheb Castagne suunas, aga sel vahel Abraham ja Albrighton. Kui uhkelt mängitud, aga lõppes üsna piinlikult olukord.*

‘Second corner kick to home team. And [the ball] goes toward Castagne but Abraham and Albrighton are there. How magnificently played but the situation ended quite embarrassingly.’

The English commentators conversed as friends. Their conversation was fun, they made jokes and remarks about each other, had a playful banter while still staying professional. It was clear that they enjoyed their work commenting the games.

- 3) Dean Ashton: *I have played and scored there.*

Sam Matterface: *↑HAVE YOU?! ↓Of course you have! I'm going there for my first ever visit on Saturday.*

Dean Ashton: *You'll like it, you'll like it. [laughs]*

Since the Estonian commentator was commenting alone, his commentary seemed more monotone than English commentary. His play-by-play comments were accompanied by some silence where he could have made some colour comments.

- 4) Estonian commentator: *Ja Albrighton üritab eemalt ____ Ja pannakse seal Mendy taas tööle.*

‘And Albrighton tries from afar ____ And Mandy is put to work again there.’

Based on previous experience, when two commentators were reporting the game, it can be deduced that having a fellow commentator livens up the broadcast.

It is an unwritten rule of the sportscaster's job to stay objective during commentating. While the commentator can have personal favourite teams and players, he must not be subjective when he is commenting on his favourites' game against other teams and players. Being overly subjective is a sign of a lack of professionalism.

All commentators, Estonian and English, exhibited professionalism and stayed objective during the broadcasts. The author of this thesis was expecting to hear more subjectivity from the English commentators. Especially since one of the commentators, Dean Ashton, was once a striker for different English clubs, and therefore it was expected of him to show his personal favourites and dislikes. Rivalries between different clubs, their players and fans are quite common in English football. The expectations were not met, and all commentators remained objective during all the games.

2.3. Analysis of linguistic features and structures

As mentioned above, football language, among other sports languages, does not have one definitive register. The language of football commentaries uses a combination of informal and neutral registers. The purpose of sports commentaries is to engage the audience to give them a better watching and listening experience. That is the main reason why the commentators are trying to engage the audience in a way that appeals to them.

This section of the thesis looks at more specific features of English and Estonian comments and how the sportscasters use language to convey commentaries. Aspects of this section were chosen based on which of them could be identified in the commentaries.

2.3.1. Verbs

Observed from the commentaries, the most common feature of the football commentaries were verbs' time, aspect and verb forms. The main tenses for verbs in English are past, present and future. While morphologically, English does not have a future tense, the tense realizes in the usage of auxiliary verb constructions. (Quirk et al., 1985: 213) In Estonian, the main tenses for verbs are past and present. Future in Estonian expressed

through present tense and by adding a time marker to the sentence (Erelt et al., 2007). In both languages, tense is given to a verb or verb phrase to know when an action takes place.

The job of a sportscaster is to report on the events on the ball ground at the moment of speaking. Therefore, the dominant tense in commentaries is the present tense. Examples of this in English commentaries:

- 5) Sam Matterface: *Evans, sending the ball into Justin who's **slaloming** over the halfway line, **finds** Madison.*

The commentators use both present simple and present continuous to talk about the actions that are happening on the field. Since the commentators are reporting what is happening at the moment of speaking, it is expected to use the continuous form. But from the comments show that sometimes commentators use a simple form where a continuous form would be used in other contexts:

- 6) Sam Matterface: *And Castagne, **takes** a couple of steps in field and **gives** it back to Tielemans.*
- 7) Sam Matterface: *Here is Rüdiger over the halfway line, **sends** a long angle ball out.*

One reason why commentator uses simple form instead of continuous is because that sentence in a simple form is easier to formulate quickly than a sentence in a continuous form. In Estonian, there is no continuous form, and therefore no example can be presented here.

But since the commentators, especially colour commentators, do not only speak about the action happening on the ball ground but talk about past actions and other relevant information, past tense is used quite often too. Examples of past tense used in commentaries:

- 8) Sam Matterface: *But that ball **went** in to Kai Havertz where it **looked** like they **were** on the counter attack.*

The usage of different tenses in a single sentence that could be found in the sportscaster's talk:

- 9) Sam Matterface: *The ball **was headed** into the air by Johnny Evans, but Mendy **will be collecting** this easily and **does**.*

‘*Was headed*’ is in the past while the rest of the sentence is in the future continuous ‘*will be collecting*’ and present tense ‘*does*’. The usage of multiple tenses in one sentence is the result of speaking fast, trying to cover the actions that have just happened, predicting what will happen and then stating the present result of the action.

Differently from English, where future can be expressed with the auxiliary ‘*will*’, in Estonian, future actions are presented by present tense and adding a time adverbial (e.g., *homme, hiljem, järgmine aasta*, etc.) that shows the time of the action. Continuous actions are also reported through the present tense (Erelt et al., 2007). This can be seen in the following examples of football commentaries in Estonian as well:

- 10) Estonian commentator: *Aga Leicesteril tõesti võimalus 38 punkti peale juba jõuda ja olla siis natuke seal tipus enne kui **tuleb** Manchester United **homme** ja saab siis oma vastuse anda.*

‘But Leicester does have a chance to rise to 38 points already and then stay at the top for a while before Manchester United comes tomorrow and gives his answer.’

- 11) Estonian commentator: *Pall **läheb** Castagne suunas, aga seal vahel Abraham ja Albrighton.*

‘The ball is going towards Castagne but Abraham and Albrighton are before him.’

Since in Estonian there is no progressive form, the actions happening at the moment of speaking are in a simple form. The closest to the progressive form in Estonian would be the usage of *-mas* form that would indicate that the action is happening at the moment of speaking. The *-mas* form was not found in Estonian commentaries, only present simple was used. These examples of Estonian comments are the most obvious differences that English and Estonian commentaries have.

2.3.2. Voice

In sports commentaries, the commentators use active voice in both languages. In passive, the action is done to the subject. Using the passive voice in football commentaries would make understanding who the commentator is speaking about very hard. While usually the commentators for football matches do not have seats next to the stadium and are usually somewhere higher from the ground, they, therefore, have a good view of the players and can easily identify the player. Thus, using the active voice is more common than passive voice.

12) Dean Ashton: *Maddison trying to swing the ball forward, but he's brought down.*

13) Sam Matterface: *Abraham screaming at James 'we're not releasing that ball into a channel' when both he and Hudson-Odoi had made runs into the box.*

In Estonian commentaries, the sportscasters used only active voice. The impersonal voice was not used.

14) Estonian commentator: *Maddison leidis Vardy.*
'Maddison found Vardy.'

As can be seen from these examples, all commentators use active voice when they are reporting the game to the audience. Usually, they start with the player and follow with the action.

2.3.3. Clauses

The clause is the second biggest grammatical unit after a complete sentence. It is a group of words that include a subject and a finite verb. A clause only has one subject and one verb. A clause's subject may be stated or obscured, but the verb must be visible and distinct. A simple sentence has only one clause, while a compound sentence has more than one clause. (Quirk et al., 1985: 49) In sports commentaries, especially football commentaries, sentences and clauses can vary a lot.

Clause structure and word order are essential aspects of any language as well as of sports commentaries. Through that, the commentators can give information to the audience about the player (subject), the action (verb) and the result (object). The basic word order in English is subject, verb, and object (SVO) that can be followed by adverbials of time, place, manner (Alexander, 1988). Although the word order in English is SVO, sports commentaries which are in informal and neutral registers, it can be expected that the word order may vary. The author of this thesis was expecting to find variation to a SVO word order because the commentaries were of informal and neutral register where other word orders besides SVO can occur. But from the English commentaries that were analysed for this thesis, no word order other than SVO was found.

In Estonian, the most common word order is subject-verb-object, but other combinations are possible and common too (Erelt et al., 2007). Instances, when there is no verb in a sentence, can be found in Estonian football commentaries.

15) Estonian commentator: *Kai Havertz palliga.*

‘Kai Havertz with the ball.’

16) Estonian commentator: *Pall kiirelt mängu tagasi.*

‘Ball quickly back to play.’

Sentences with no verb present occurred in English commentaries as well.

17) Sam Matterface: *Kovacic. Kovacic along to Pulisic.*

18) Sam Matterface: *Pulisic down the left.*

Most commonly, commentators in both languages start the sentence with a noun (player’s name) or a pronoun (if the name has been mentioned moments before). It is not uncommon for football commentaries that the whole sentence only contains the name of the player.

19) Estonian commentator: *Cavani. Pogbale.*

‘Cavani. To Pogba.’

20) Dean Ashton: *Mason Mount. Kovacic. And to Kai Havertz.*

In radio commentaries, the sportscasters are required to say more than just the name of the player since the audience cannot see what the player is doing themselves.

2.3.4. Run-on sentences

Run-on sentences, or fused sentences, are sentences that have two or more independent clauses that are written one after another without punctuation or coordinating conjunctions (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). They can be seen as faulty compound sentences since they are fused together without coordinating conjunction. Compound sentences have more than one main clause, and the clauses are joined by coordination. The clauses have equal grammatical value and meaning. The most common coordinators are ‘and’, ‘or’, ‘but’. (Quirk et al., 1985)

The main function of conjunctions is to connect clauses. Why in football commentaries sportscasters may start their sentence with a conjunction is mostly because he has to report what is currently happening on the playing ground.

21) Sam Matterface: ***And** Vardy for example, had a great period where he scored so many goals and then has just had a little bit of a dip.*

22) Dean Ashton: ***But** I just keep looking at that midfield area and I just I'm not sure Mount or Kovacic are really suited to making sure that they're constantly on the half turn to look at Madison.*

Starting a sentence with a conjunction is not very unusual in Estonian. The reason for this is usually the same as in English – the commentator changes the topic.

23) Estonian commentator: ***Aga** ei ole midagi üleliia ohtikku veel tekitatud.*
‘But they have not caused anything overly dangerous yet.’

24) Estonian commentator: ***Aga** usaldab Lampard ameeriklast ja viimasel ajal hakanud usaldama palju ka Callum Hudson-Odoi'd.*

‘But Lampard trusts the American and lately has started to trust a lot Callum Husdon-Odoi too.’

In both examples, ‘*and*’ and ‘*but*’ are used to start a new sentence. From these examples can be sensed that the commentator was talking about something else before he started that sentence and needed to use a conjunction in the first place to change the topic.

In the commentaries provided in English coordination sometimes was covert. This is mainly caused by the fact that the sportscasters have to report the actions and players quickly.

25) Sam Matterface: *Timothy Castagne in the right back, Fofana, Jonny Evans and James Justin make up back four.*

26) Sam Matterface: *Wesley Fofana showing his speed, his reading of the game, comes across, unhooks the boat away from the byline, out for throw it on this near side.*

27) Dean Ashton: *Chelsea managed to get it clear up to halfway, Kai Havertz in to Reece James, then James all the way back to Rüdiger, who this time manages to get the right amount of pressure behind the ball.*

In Estonian commentaries, zero coordination could not be found.

2.3.5. Minor sentences

A minor sentence is a word, phrase, or clause that functions as a sentence and has the intonation of a sentence in speech and full meaning but lacks the grammatical completeness and independence of a full sentence (Kline & Memering, 1977). Minor sentences are more common in televised football match commentaries since the viewers can see themselves the actions, but they can be found in radio commentaries as well.

28) Sam Matterface: ***Foul!*** *Mason Mount's getting a little bit frustrated.*

29) Sam Matterface: ***Yellow card!*** *For Kovacic!*

From these examples can be seen that the commentator is reporting what is happening on the field. The minor sentence is followed by a complete sentence that explains it further.

In Estonian commentaries, minor sentences are common too.

30) Estonian commentator: **Kollane kaart!** *Tielemans taas palli juures, Justin ka jalutab siin.*

‘Yellow card! Tielemans again on the ball, Justin walking around here too.’

31) Estonian commentator: **Viga!** *Lõpuks tehakse siin ka viga ja siin mitmete mängijate näost juba väljendub juba korralik kogus frustratsiooni.*

‘Foul! Finally, they make a foul here and from the faces of many players can be seen a fair share of frustration.’

In both of the languages, the minor sentences are mainly the names of players, callouts, expressions, moves and so on.

2.3.6. Modifiers

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that modifies (i.e., provides information about) another word in the same sentence – they add information to the head. Adverbs (modify verbs) and adjectives (modify nouns) can function as modifiers. Premodifiers precede the head – they modify the words that come after them in a sentence. Normally adjectives are inserted before nouns in formal sentences, and therefore the majority of the adjectives are premodifiers. Modifiers that come after the head are postmodifiers. Adverbs are usually used after verbs to modify them. (Quirk et al., 1985)

When it comes to the language of sports commentaries, modifiers are an essential part of it. Their main role is to provide information about the noun or a pronoun which denotes the player. While it can be expected that the colour commentator is going to use more modifiers since his job is to provide additional information to the play-by-play commentator, no such tendency was noted.

32) Sam Matterface: *The long ball is chested down by **the fast American** Pulisic.*

33) Sam Matterface: *Rüdiger, **the 28-year-old German defender**, switches the play.*

The same can be found in Estonian commentaries as well:

34) Estonian commentator: *Ilm ka justkui valib sobiva režiimi välja, võtmaks väljakul vastu Timo Weneri, **25aastase sakslase**.*

‘The weather seems to pick the right mode to welcome Timo Werner, the 25-year-old German.’

35) Estonian commentator: *Saint Etienne’s ju eelnevalt Fofana ja William Saliba, **kaks vägevat noort ja andekat keskkaitajat**, koos mängisid.*

‘Fofana and William Saliba, the two great young and talented centre backs, used to play together in Saint Etienne.’

The function of the modifiers in both languages was to provide additional information about the players. Both English and Estonian commentators mentioned the age and the nationality of the players the most. The examples presented here were some of the few that commentators used.

2.3.7. Dislocation

Dislocation construction (also known as a detachment construction) is ‘a sentence structure in which a referential constituent occurs beyond the boundaries of the clause containing the predicate, either to its left (left dislocation) or to its right (right dislocation). Dislocation sentences have the same semantic structure as canonical equivalents or the same truth conditions; however, they are subject to different appropriateness conditions, i.e., they do not exist in the same discourse environments.’ (Lambrecht, 2001: 1050) Left dislocation, which is also known as a preface, can precede the declarative and interrogative clauses, and thus is always on the left side of the clause (Lambrecht, 2001:1050). Example of left dislocation in the English commentary:

36) Sam Matterface: ***Fofana**, he manages to clear and Leicester City is scrambling away.*

Example of left dislocation in Estonian commentary:

37) Estonian commentator: **Hudson-Odoi**, *ta on hästi spurtimas keskelt, aga ei tule söötu tema suunas.*

‘Hudson-Odoi, he is nicely sprinting from the middle but the pass does not come his way.’

In both of the examples, it can be seen that the left dislocation precedes the following sentence that is targeted at the dislocation. The phrases, or in the case of these examples, the names, have been dislocated from the syntactically complete sentence and doubled by a pronoun. Without left dislocation, the sentences would have been: ‘Fofana manages to clear, and Leicester City is scrambling away.’ and ‘Hudson-Odoi on hästi spurtimas keskelt, aga ei tule söötu tema suunas.’ The names have been dislocated to the left of the sentence, and in the sentence, they have been replaced by a pronoun.

Right dislocation, which is also known as tag, is a sentence-final position where dislocated noun phrase corresponds to a pronoun (Kamada, 2015). The right dislocation appears on the right side of the clause. Examples of this in the English commentaries would be:

38) Dean Ashton: ***He’s** done some sloppy defending today, **Harvey Barnes**.*

39) Sam Matterface: *There’s merit in that, there’s merit in that, but **they** look together, don’t they, **Leicester City**?*

Example of right dislocation in Estonian commentaries:

40) Estonian commentator: *Esimest korda täna said **nad** palli liini taha, **Chelsea**.*
‘First time today got the ball behind the line Chelsea.’

From both of the examples of right dislocation, it can be seen that it gives the audience an idea of who or what the discussion was about. Without right dislocation the sentences would have been: ‘Harvey Barnes’s done some sloppy defending today.’, ‘There’s merit in that, there’s merit in that, but Leicester City looks together, don’t they?’ and ‘Esimest korda täna sai Chelsea palli liini taha.’

It is hard to say which type of dislocation is more common in football commentaries. It can be said that dislocations are more common in English than they are in Estonian. The examples presented here were some of the few that could be found.

2.4. Paralinguistics

Paralinguistics is the analysis of vocal signals used by speakers to convey meaning. Paralanguage is defined by Poyatos (1984: 307) as 'co-occurring voice modifications or alternating isolated sounds of perfect lexical meaning'. Paralinguistic characteristics include body language, hand gestures, facial expressions, sound, and pitch of speech. Paralanguage is part of the language of sports commentaries since the sportscasters must report sporting events in a manner that makes the audience want to keep on watching or listening to the thoughts and opinions of the commentator.

Non-verbal communication is a quite usual occurrence in the commentaries. It is a good way to express emotions. While body language, hand gestures and facial expressions are one part of the paralinguistic, they cannot be observed during most of the football broadcasts since the focus is on only the field, and sportscasters stay behind the scenes. What can be observed are the sound and pitch of speech of the presenters.

Due to the fact that the audience of televised football broadcast has the same viewing experience as the commentators, the paralinguistic features are not so much of importance as they are in radio broadcast where the audience cannot see what is happening on the ball pitch. Sportscasters most commonly use extra-linguistic attributes like screaming, laughing, crying, etc. These extra-linguistic features have verbalised in football commentaries such as:

41) Dean Ashton: *Umm, no it wasn't. It ↑WASN'T! (continues in frustrated tone) All he needed to do stand up and catch. Put his arms above his head!*

The commentator was getting frustrated because the player was not doing his job.

42) Estonian commentator: ↑OSSAA! (*laughter*) (*in amused tone*) Vedaš vanameistril! (*in faster pace*) AGA OLUKORD POLE SELLELE VAATAMATA VEEL LÕPPENUD!

‘Wow! Old-timer got lucky! But nevertheless, the situation has not ended yet!’

In this case the commentator was expressing his emotions to show the audience his enthusiasm for his work.

2.4.1. Linguistic segmentation

In this thesis, linguistic segmentation focuses on acoustic segmentation. Acoustic segmentation is when the longer wavefronts are segmented into shorter wavefronts using acoustic parameters, including turn boundaries (when several speakers are involved) and nonspeech intervals (e.g., pauses). (Stolcke & Schriberg, 1996) Segmentation of clauses can commonly be found in the commentators’ speech. Distinguishing one unit from another can be quite hard. The way to distinguish units is to listen to the rise and fall in tone and to look for the small pauses.

Usually, commentators try to avoid silence in the broadcast. They achieve that by stretching out the sentence with small short pauses. These small pauses can help to differentiate one linguistic unit from another. Examples of this in English commentaries:

43) Dean Ashton: *You can't allow Jamie Vardy (pause for 3 seconds) and try and catch him offside (pause for 2 seconds) because he's just too clever and too quick (pause for 2 seconds) with his run.*

Sam Matherface: *Here comes Justin (pause for 5 seconds) on the other end (pause for 3 seconds) Tammy Abraham getting down the right side (pause for 2 seconds) good block by Fofana.*

What needs to be said though is that there were virtually no long periods of silence from the commentators in the English commentaries. In Estonian commentaries, longer stretches of silence happened quite often. The possible reason for the long stretches of silence in Estonian was most possibly because of the fact that the Estonian commentator was

reporting alone while in English there were two commentators. Yet acoustic segmentation can be found in Estonian comments too.

44) Estonian commentator: *Ndidi juba 6. minutil skoori avas (paus) Leicesteril siis veel mitmeid võimalusi oli (paus) neist midagi ei tulnud (paus) aga lõpuks 41. minutil jälle tuli.*

‘Ndidi opened the score on the sixth minute (pause) Leicester has had many more opportunities (pause) but nothing came of them (pause) but finally on the forty first minute it came.’

In addition to pauses that help to differentiate one unit from another, also the tone in which the commentator is speaking can help to differentiate units. The change in tone catches the audience’s attention, and it can stress the importance of the action happening. Examples of the change in tone: (the parts in all upper case indicate that the commentator was screaming)

45) Estonian commentator: *Ja siin ka madalalt mängitakseeee (the end of the word is stretched out) lahti ja seal Barnes’il oli võimalus ja Ndidi eemalt ↑JA WILFRED NDIDI LÖÖB SUUREPÄRASE VÄRAVA.*

‘And here they are playing goal kickkkk (the end of the word is stretched out) and there Barnes had a chance and Ndidi from afar ↑AND WILFRED NDIDI SCORES AN AMAZING GOAL.’

46) Dean Ashton: *↑NDIDI WITH A THUNDERBOLT, ↓hits the post and Leicester City have taken less than six minutes to go in from from a corner, which was misfilded by Harvey Barnes as he attempted to show from inside the area.*

The pauses and changes in tone create tension and capture the audience’s attention. If the commentators do not make those pauses or do not change the tone, the audience will soon get tired and will focus their attention elsewhere. The usage of these acoustic segmentation tools can also make the audience feel like they are part of the team and the game, even when they cannot be present in the playing field during the game.

2.5. Discussion

This study was carried out to find if there are any similarities or differences between English and Estonian football commentaries. From what the author had observed outside of this thesis, she thought that the similarities and differences between these two languages would be distinguishable. This expectation was in some cases met and, in some cases, not.

The previous studies about football language mentioned before gave an overview of what has been researched before in Estonian about football language. All of these previous studies focused on the lexical aspects of football language, but the author of this thesis was more interested in the grammatical aspects. Because of different fields of research, this thesis did not refer to them in the analytical part.

The author of the thesis was expecting that in Estonian commentaries, the sportscasters would use other word orders than SVO too. The reason for this expectation was because, in Estonian, the word order is quite free (Erelt et al., 2007). This expectation was not met and despite that other word orders could have been used, the Estonian commentator used only SVO.

The main function of modifiers in the commentaries of both languages was to give additional information about the player. Most commonly, the commentators mentioned the nationality and/or the age of the player they were currently talking about.

Dislocation was an aspect that the author had not noticed before while following football commentaries. Both left and right dislocation were present in both languages. What can be seen from these transcriptions of matches used in this study that dislocations were more common in English than they were in Estonian. Whether they appear in other sports commentaries than football commentaries is beyond this thesis and needs to be researched further.

Paralinguistic aspects were quite similar in both languages. Linguistic segmentation can be found in both commentaries. These manifested as extra-linguistic attributes (laughing, screaming), pauses and changes in the commentators' tone. The author was expecting the Estonian commentator of these games to be more monotone than the English commentators because of previous experiences when listening to football commentaries, the Estonian commentators have been more monotone than the English ones. The author was also expecting the English commentators to not have long pauses in their talk. Both of these expectations were not met during the analysis of the commentaries.

3. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to find out if there any similarities or differences in football commentaries in English and Estonian. The study was entirely focused on the language of sport used by football commentators in English and Estonian to bring out the linguistic similarities and differences and the importance of them.

In the first part of the thesis, the author gave an overview of the language of sport, registers used in sports commentaries, different mediums for broadcasting and the tasks of commentators. In addition, this thesis covered Estonian media language and gave a brief overview of other studies that have been done about the language of sport or football language more specifically.

The study found that sportscasters in both languages use neutral and informal register. Because the commentators have to report the actions happening on the field at a fast pace, the commentators do not turn so much attention to the grammatical correctness of the sentence they are saying. Because of that, there are quite a lot of sentences and/or clauses that are broken and would not be correct according to grammar rules. The study found that the sentences did not have a verb and consisted only of the name of the player.

From this study, the author found that SVO word order was used in both English and Estonian. It was expected to find any other word order in Estonian commentaries as well since word order is quite free, but this expectation was not met. Comments in both languages included run-on sentences and minor sentence fragments.

Dislocation was another important aspect that was researched in this thesis. It was something that the author had not noticed before. English and Estonian had both left and right dislocation. The transcriptions of matches used in this study show that dislocations were more frequent in English than in Estonian. Since this aspect was new to the author, she finds it important to study it further outside of this thesis.

From the analysis of football commentaries, the author found that both languages had a lot of similarities in terms of paralinguistics. Both commentaries contained linguistic segmentation, and the reactions to the same events were quite similar to all commentators of English and Estonian.

Since the aim of this thesis was to find out if the football commentaries in English and Estonian are similar or different, the author now concludes that there are both similarities and differences across the two languages. Football language in English and Estonian is a topic that could and should be researched further in order to find out other aspects that were not covered in this thesis where differences and similarities manifest.

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Resümee

TARTU ÜLIKOOL

ANGLISTIKA OSAKOND

Merike Voss

Comparison of Football Commentaries in English And Estonian

Inglis- ja eestikeelsete jalgpallikommentaaride võrdlus

Bakalaureusetöö

2021

Lehekülgede arv: 43

Annotatsioon:

Käesolev bakalaureusetöö uurib inglise ja eesti keeles English Premier League mängude kommentaaride salvestusi ja nende transkriptsioone. Töö eesmärk oli uurida, kas inglise- ja eestikeelsete jalgpallikommentaaride vahel esineb erinevusi ja/või sarnasusi.

Töö teoreetiline osa annab ülevaate sellest, mis on spordikeel ning selle osadest ning samuti tutvustab lühidalt erinevaid jalgpalli mängude ülekannete meediumeid ning kommentaatoreid. Praktiline osa keskendub kahele English Premier League mängule ning nende eesti- ja ingliskeelsetele kommentaaridele. Kommentaaride audiosalvestused transkribeeriti ning selle põhjal uuriti, milliseid keelelisi konstruktsioone kommentaatorid kahes keeles kasutavad. Analüüsi käigus leiti, et eesti- ja ingliskeelsete jalgpallikommentaaride keelekasutuses on nii sarnasusi kui erinevusi.

Märksõnad:

Inglise keel ja keeleteadus, spordikommentaariid, võrdlev uuring

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