Sports live text commentary as a hybrid register

Marin Pažanin ,
Ivana Petrović

University of Split, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, Split, Croatia

Aim: To present and analyze features of live text commentary (LTC) as a recent register of the English language using examples from the coverage of UEFA Euro 2020. The paper explores the influence of spoken language and sports announcer talk (SAT) on the register. It focuses on the differences and similarities between LTC and SAT and presents an overview of features unique to LTC.

Methods: LTC was examined as a text variety following Chovanec's (2018) analysis and using the register perspective proposed by Biber and Conrad (2009). Examples from fourteen LTCs reporting on the UEFA Euro 2020 competition held in June/July 2021 were analyzed, including their typical situational and linguistic characteristics and some of their functions.

Results: LTC is a hybrid register that exemplifies today's convergence of different media. LTCs take the context of production from live blogs, while their language is mainly reminiscent of SAT, including tense usage and adoption of certain forms. Spoken language, in general, is also an influence, especially on the syntactic and grammatical levels. Distinct LTC features include the internal structure, icons, and interactiveness of the text. The analyzed commentaries feature clearly outlined sections (e.g., opening and closing posts) that serve specific discursive purposes. Icons have a particular function in LTC; their meaning is well-established, and they sometimes function as utterances. Another remarkable characteristic is the intertextuality derived from text contributions provided by various spectators of the sports event, including fans. This interaction is, at times, simulated.

Conclusion: The paper confirmed LTC as a hybrid format with avenues for further hybridization. In LTC, we see an intertwining of different elements, which, taken together, produce a new whole in a process typical of the convergence seen in the media today. The most innovative aspects of LTC, the intertextuality, interactiveness, and co-production of a text, are limited.

Correspondence to:
Ivana Petrović
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Poljička cesta 35, 21000 Split, Croatia
ipetrovic@ffst.hr

Introduction

This paper will present the contemporary format of *live text commentaries* (in the example of football games) as a recent register of the English language and analyze its key features. Live text commentaries are a recent development in journalism. Jucker (2010, p. 58) defines them as "written accounts of sports events that are produced and published incrementally on the Internet while the event is unfolding, and thus they are a new form of real-time narratives. The format is still so young that no clear terminology exists." They are texts produced by websites of popular media outlets, typically news providers, which provide a continuous, live-written commentary of a match in progress. The writing and publishing of an LTC typically start shortly before the match and end shortly after the match. The completed LTC is archived and available for future viewing, starting from the most recent post. This format has been named in various ways by its producers, including *live updates, live blogs, live reporting,* or simply *commentary*. In contrast, researchers have used terms such as *online sports commentary* (Lewandowski, 2012) and *online text commentaries* (Werner, 2016). As Chovanec (2018, p. 83) explains, the term *live text commentary* (commonly abbreviated as LTC) is the most appropriate naming for this type of text because it indicates several essential elements: liveness, the written mode of communication, and the connection with the previously established form, which is commentary.

Crystal (2006, p. 51) uses the umbrella term *Netspeak* to describe any format found on the Internet that "is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both." This new, emerging group of texts is a hybrid of sorts, incorporating features of both speaking and writing. Netspeak needs to contain a blend of spoken and written language. However, due to the medium in which it is produced, it cannot adequately process some elements of spoken language, namely prosody and paralanguage, which is why Crystal (2006, p. 37) describes it as "unlike speech also with respect to the formal properties of the medium – properties that are so basic that it becomes extremely difficult for people to live up to the recommendation that they should 'write as they talk.'" He further elaborates that as a result, there is a need to replace prosody and paralanguage with exaggerated use of spelling, punctuation, capitals (examples include "what?!!!!", "NO!!!"), spacing ("h o w") special symbols, and various novelties. In conclusion, the online (digital) language with all its derived (sub)registers, LTC included, can be seen as a cross between speaking and writing. Combining elements from the media as diverse as television, radio, and the Internet has created a new whole with new strength. This process helps facilitate one of the ongoing processes in the ever-changing language landscape, the move toward more informal language. Fairclough (1995, p. 51) defines it as the "public-colloquial style" and mentions that it is emerging not only in the media, especially in entertainment, but in many domains of public discourse. Pérez-Sabater, Peña-Martínez, Turney, and Montero-Fleta (2008, p. 4) associate it with *technologization*, a process in which new technologies have transformed or rendered possible certain discourse practices, LTCs included. The rise of technology can be seen to breed new registers that combine different potentials of previously established registers.

LTCs take the outside form of *live blogs,* another register from the domain of *electronic registers* (Biber & Conrad, 2009, p. 177). Live blogs are online texts usually published on

newspaper websites that provide commentary on unfolding events, presenting the newest information or post at the top of the webpage or its most visible section. The appearance of an LTC largely corresponds to the appearance of a live blog, as the commentaries are constantly updated to report on the immediate aspects of the match, with updates provided in the form of short posts typically containing less than 200 words. The entire commentary appears either on one page or a few pages that can easily be navigated. The central textual part of the LTC is in the middle, with the most recent post appearing at the top, followed by preceding posts underneath. Many newspaper websites have incorporated live blogs into their coverage because they focus on breaking news and upcoming events. In this context, LTCs do the same with updates from a sports match. It should also be noted that webpages where LTCs are found consist of several structural features, both textual and non-textual. Some of those features are merely contextual rather than textual. These elements can be termed paratextual (Werner, 2016) (e.g., infographics, videos, hyperlinks) and are removed from the main body of the text.

Research on spoken sports commentary is rather extensive. Ferguson carried out its first landmark study in a 1983 paper titled "Sports Announcer Talk: Syntactic Aspects of Register Variation". Focusing on its syntactic differences from the everyday talk, Ferguson (1983, pp. 155–156) defined sportscasting as "the oral reporting of an ongoing activity, combined with the provision of background information and interpretation". A clear differentiation against such varieties as newspaper reports after a match was made, with Ferguson (1983) pointing out six syntactic features standard to sports announcer talk (henceforth SAT): simplification, inversions, result expressions, heavy modifiers, tense usage, and routines. Another essential observation by Ferguson (1983, pp. 155–156) elaborated on the roles of the commentator during the broadcast: the commentator plays two roles by reporting the ongoing activity of the game (*play-by-play*) and providing background information and analysis (*color commentary*). Reaser (2003, p. 320) defines coloring as any statement that does more than describe the action, including reports, recaps, evaluations, and background. The changes in types of commentary are linked to the action – if there is more action, more description is needed. At the same time, background information is relayed more when there are fewer important events on the field, requiring the commentator to be both an objective narrator and an entertainer. In recent broadcasts, the play-by-play commentator is usually a professional journalist employed by the media broadcasting the game, while the color commentator is typically a former coach or player, called a pundit. An analysis of Croatian sports commentators (Carović & Sokolić, 2011, p. 10) found that their most crucial speaker strategy is providing excitement and suspense. The primary duties of a sports commentator can therefore be categorized as providing information about the event but also entertainment, sometimes not directly related to the event. The differences in sports commentary become obvious when commentaries from different mediums are compared. In his quantitative analysis of a radio and television broadcast of the same basketball game, Reaser (2003, p. 307) found that "the radio broadcast has a significantly larger percentage of utterances devoted to action description" compared to a television broadcast where "evaluative statements or statements that provide background information or details about strategy" prevailed. This is only natural as the commentator's task is dramatically different when comparing television and radio. On television,

the viewer can see the action on the screen, meaning the commentator is not expected to relay everything that is happening by producing a spoken account of the action and can concentrate on providing more background information. In online sports commentary, as in radio sports commentary, since there is no visual input of the event (e.g., a video of the match being played), the audience has to rely on the commentator to describe the actions on the pitch.

On the other hand, research about LTC is limited. The first LTC, under the *minute-by-minute* banner, appeared in *The Guardian* only in June 2002 (Chovanec, 2018, p. 187), so it is a novel and still emerging format. Research has steadily been growing in the last decade, and the first complete book on the subject, Chovanec's *The Discourse of Online Sportscasting*, was published in 2018. Chovanec (2018) views LTC as a new innovative media genre. On the other hand, Ferguson viewed SAT as a register. Ferguson (1994, p. 20) employed the idea of the register as a type of language conventionalization, stating that "a communication situation that recurs regularly in a society (in terms of participants, setting, communicative functions, and so forth) will tend over time to develop identifying markers of language structure and language use, different from the language of other communicative situations." Biber and Conrad (2009, p. 2) use the terms *register, genre,* and *style* in reference to three different approaches to analyzing text varieties. They emphasize that analyzing a text variety from the register perspective integrates linguistic analysis with the study of the situational context and communicative purpose. They further specify how register differs from genre and style and find subtle differences between the three perspectives. Like the register perspective, the genre perspective includes the analysis of the context and purpose of a text variety but emphasizes the distribution of conventional forms within the variety. At the same time, in its analysis of standard linguistic features of a text variety, the style perspective does not consider the context but the particular aesthetic inclinations of authors. Biber and Conrad (2009, p. 47) describe that a register analysis consists of at least three components: "(1) describing the situational characteristics of the register; (2) analyzing the typical linguistic characteristics of the register; and (3) identifying the functional forces that help to explain why those linguistic features tend to be associated with those situational characteristics." Although the analysis in this paper will primarily follow Chovanec's (2018) guidelines, their approach and research will also be considered.

The connections between SAT and LTC were investigated in several studies, and all have pointed out considerable degrees of similarity between online and radio/TV commentaries, with some (Lewandowski, 2012) also noting similarities with *written sports commentary* (WSC), reports created after the sporting event they cover has ended. Lewandowski (2012, p. 74), who calls LTC *online sports commentary* (OSC), concludes that "it could be argued that OSC shares some of its linguistic features with both SAT and WSC and thus can be regarded as a hybrid of both of these registers." In his analysis of LTCs, Jucker (2010, p. 66) writes that, as a novel and emerging genre on the Internet, LTCs are expected to display features of spoken language. Furthermore, Chovanec (2009, p. 116) claims that the influence of spoken language is, in fact, overarching: "The actual manifestation of the hybrid nature of LTC as regards spoken/oral/conversational features and informal ways of expression is apparent on all levels of linguistic analysis – phonological/morphological, lexical, syntactic, as well as discoursal/pragmatic." However, it should be pointed out that

Chovanec ([2018](#)) analyzed only LTC from *The Guardian*, which is seen as the most "interactive" form of LTC. Werner ([2016](#), p. 301) considered *The Guardian*'s LTC as the "the odd one out. It was the one using most words but least paratextual elements, one potential explanation being that there the entertainment function is strongest, while the other OTCs [*online text commentaries*, the preferred term from Werner ([2016](#))] provided more factual information". In that sense, when investigating LTC as a register, it is necessary to look at *The Guardian*'s texts as just one of the manifestations of LTC, which can significantly differ from the rest. For these reasons, this paper analyzes examples from *The Guardian* and seven other producers (*BBC, Eurosport, Evening Standard, Goal.com, Hindustan Times, Sky Sports*, and *The Sun*). Our goal is to provide an analysis of LTC as a register – a type of language conventionalization. An analysis of the influence of SAT and spoken language on LTCs is considered, along with an overview of features unique to LTC. While our primary concern is what unites LTCs from different producers and publishers as a hybrid register, individual LTCs are also expected to show degrees of stylistic divergence.

Methodology

This paper analyzes and uses examples from fourteen LTCs. Each example has been given a simple code designation, with prefix C- and a number. The list of commentaries, including references to websites, is presented in **Table 1**. C-07, for instance, indicates *Sky Sports'* commentary of the Belgium vs. Italy football game from 2 July 2021. The paper aims to analyze recent developments in LTC, so LTCs reporting on the recent UEFA Euro 2020 competition held in June and July 2021 are examined. When the commentaries were collected (July and August 2021), they represented the most recent commentaries for an important event that generated much coverage. Additionally, commentaries on the same match are to be compared. It is thought that analyzing commentaries of the same match can present a better picture of the register features of LTC, as they cover the same actual event, and the comparison would focus on language variation only.

Table 1. The list of commentaries

Code designation	References
C-01	Mahood, 2021
C-02	Doyle, 2021
C-03	Netherlands vs Czech Republic LIVE, 2021
C-04	Netherlands v Czech Republic Live Commentary, 2021
C-05	Hobbs, 2021
C-06	Euro 2020 highlights Netherlands vs Czech Republic, 2021
C-07	Belgium vs Italy LIVE, 2021
C-08	Dawkes, 2021
C-09	Murray, 2021
C-10	Belgium v Italy Live Commentary, 2021
C-11	Rosser, 2021
C-12	Dymond, 2021
C-13	Foley, 2021
C-14	Euro 2020 Quarterfinal Highlights, 2021

The corpus of the paper includes two sets of commentaries. C-01 to C-06 (Mahood, 2021; Doyle, 2021; Netherlands vs Czech Republic LIVE, 2021; Netherlands v Czech Republic Live Commentary, 2021; Hobbs, 2021; Euro 2020 highlights Netherlands vs Czech Republic, 2021) are commentaries of the Netherlands vs. Czech Republic game played on 27 June 2021, while C-07 to C-14 (Belgium vs Italy LIVE, 2021; Dawkes, 2021; Murray, 2021; Belgium v Italy Live Commentary, 2021; Rosser, 2021; Dymond, 2021; Foley, 2021; Euro 2020 Quarterfinal Highlights, 2021) are commentaries of the Belgium vs. Italy game played on 2 July 2021. The texts were collected and analyzed from the relevant web pages in their entirety. The games were chosen from the competition's Round of 16. At that point, the competition's knockout stage commenced, meaning that all matches were highly important as only the winner advanced to the next stage. The high stakes of the games were seen as potentially a positive aspect for the proliferation of texts. The specific commentaries were chosen for several reasons. First, they appear in the first three pages of Google's search for reports on the matches in question, suggesting they are popular and relevant for language use. Second, among the commentaries are those from outlets that pioneered the format: *The Guardian, Sky Sports,* and the *BBC*. Next, *Eurosport* is included as a regional TV representative, and *Goal.com* as a representative of sports outlets that operate only websites, without other forms of publication. Finally, two more popular British papers (i.e., their web versions) are also included, *The Sun* and the *Evening Standard*, with the analysis completed by *Hindustan Times*, whose inclusion provides a non-British entry. Excerpts from the commentaries are provided in their original appearance, including text formatting.

Results and discussion

The results in this paper are split into three sections. Firstly, the influence of the spoken language on the writing of the LTCs is shown, followed by an analysis of the similarities between LTCs and sports announcer talk, the spoken language of sports commentators. Finally, features unique to LTC, including its structured language variation, usage of icons, and interactiveness, are presented.

The influence of spoken language on LTC

Multiple examples of the influence of orality can appear in just a single LTC post, usually in tense and emotional moments such as penalty shootouts, where it is easy to imagine a TV commentator raising their voice or even shouting. As Chovanec (2018, p. 199) notes, various typographical means are used to indicate orality. Usually, there is excessive use of duplicated letters and exclamation marks, with capital letters to emphasize a word or a whole sentence and try to mimic the paralinguistic features of the commentator's spoken language. The emphasis can be even further noted by some graphological means, such as italicizing and underlining (both of the following examples come from C-01):

27TH JUN 2021, 18:38

GOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAALLLLLLLLL!!

It's that man Patrik Schick again and the Czechs are in dreamland!!

Dumfries bursts forward and is wiped out by Coufal who picks up a **YELLOW CARD** (C-01).

The use of three dots to indicate a pause is also noticeable and provides heightened immediacy:

27TH JUN 2021, 18:12

NETHERLANDS 0-0 CZECH REPUBLIC

HE'S OFF TO SEE THE MONITOR....... (C-01).

Various interjections (such as "ooooh") are also regularly found in LTCs. Using emphatic lengthening, capital letters, various typefaces, and abbreviations to imitate spoken language can be seen as features of Netspeak in general. It is then intriguing that, as seen by Chovanec (2018, p. 201), there is a tendency for them to be "counterbalanced in live text commentary with some graphological means found exclusively in written registers". Chovanec's (2018) examples include strikethroughs, asterisked comments, and hypertextual links inserted into the main text. However, our analysis found such examples present exclusively in *The Guardian*. Regarding the influence on the lexical level, Chovanec (2018, p. 202) notes that „live text commentaries are marked by the usage of colloquial, informal words that contribute to their general conversational styles." The informal back-formation of *referee, ref,* and *penalty, pen,* is perhaps the most obvious example. It appears frequently, as in:

53 min: The referee has booked De Ligt but the Czechs say the player should be sent off. And VAR advises the ref to have a gander on the pitchside screen... (C-02).

Its ubiquity means it can also appear in several derivations, for instance, the plural:

Today's whistler is Moscow-native Sergei Karasev, one of the more card happy refs at this tournament (C-01).

Chovanec (2018, p. 203) lists colloquialisms, contractions, lexical innovations, and mild expletives as evidence of the influence of orality on the lexis of LTC. However, these features, especially slang vocabulary, appear primarily in *The Guardian* and are absent in other LTCs. It is on the syntactic level where different structures markedly point to the influence of spoken language. Their function is often not based on news reporting but on entertainment, according to Chovanec (2009, p. 120): „As regards sentence types, statements satisfying the referential function of information-provision are complemented with exclamatives, directives and interrogatives with their expressive (emotive) and conative functions.". Exclamatives are mainly used to provide more excitement and emotion to the proceedings, so they do not appear in just the game's pivotal moments. For instance, the textual part of C-03 contains 56 exclamation marks. Exclamatives can also often appear in sequence. The following post contains four sentences, three of which are exclamatives. Interestingly, the reported action did not directly influence the final score – no goal was scored. The commentator, nevertheless, wanted to emphasize it. The immediacy of reporting evident here would not have been replicated in an after-game report:

38: **WHAT A CHANCE!** It's a massive opening for the Czech Republic as Soucek spots the overload down the right with Antonin Barak fed through by Masopust. De Light looks like he's played him on but the defender gets across to make a superb block and concede the corner! That was goalbound! (C-03).

Interrogatives are an essential part of nearly every LTC. Usually, their function is purely rhetorical – they do not provide any information and do not seek any. Commentators

pose questions that readers cannot answer. The questions mainly serve as anticipatory announcements for the next part of the game:

> 64: Could that missed chance from Malen, moments before the red card incident, now prove costly for Netherlands? (C-03).

> 40' There isn't long left to play before the end of the first half, can either side break the deadlock before the half-time whistle? (C-04).

The most pronounced function of the questions is to encourage readers to track the commentary continually. This can also be achieved with reflexive questions about contentious situations, which would be used as discussion starters in a conversational setting, such as in this example from *The Sun*. As there are no avenues for responding, the question's function is merely rhetorical:

> Was this a red card? (C-01).

In more interactive types of LTC, questions can lose their rhetorical function and be used as actual means of eliciting responses. Among other elements evocative of the spoken mode, Chovanec (2018, p. 206) identifies imperatives and non-finite sentences (noun phrases). Non-finite sentences usually appear in contexts immediately recognizable to the readers and are almost exclusively used for simplification, such as these two examples close to one another from C-05:

> 90' Six minutes of added time

> 84' Booking for De Jong (C-05).

It is easy to imagine the TV commentator articulating the 84' example verbatim as the brandishing of the yellow card is shown on the screen. In this example from C-01, the clever use of typography also replicates the tone of spoken commentary. By using a different type for the action (a substitution of players) compared to the players' surnames, a contrast that hints at the dynamics of the quick action is created:

> Dutch change:

> OFF - Malen

> ON - Promes (C-01).

Sequences of non-finite sentences are much rarer and, therefore, cannot be mentioned as a recurring feature. Conversely, some commentators (or webpage policies) generally refrain from using non-finite phrases, usually those with wordier posts, such as *The Guardian's* C-02 and C-09. Imperatives can appear as external to the actual game commentary and provide linking for segments outside the main narrative. They can help readers navigate the page or point them to other pages or even TV broadcasts. An interesting example is *BBC's* noticeable call for as many readers to get involved in the commentary, which was posted after each minute in C-08:

> **Get Involved**

> #bbcfootball or text 81111 (UK only - standard rates apply) (C-08).

However, imperatives generally appear as parts of the main narrative threads. In this example, the summary of the victory for one team is figuratively portrayed as a warning to other teams in the imperative form:

> Rest of the tournament big boys, beware! (C-04).

The following expression can be seen as a formulaic comment on the action-packed nature of a game – it can also appear in some LTCs from other producers in the corpus and shows the most common use of imperatives, which is emphasis:

> And breathe! (C-09).

Chovanec (2018, p. 206) also identifies some grammatical phenomena which align the language of LTCs with the spoken mode, including repetitions, multiple coordination, subject ellipsis, self-correction, and tag positions. Tag positions (inverted, dislocated sentences with post positioned 'that') is a feature most often found in *The Guardian* but was also recorded in a *Sky Sports* commentary from our corpus with the function of the commentator's casual reflection on the game, which he assessed as attractive to follow after 16 minutes had passed:

> 16: Belgium have reacted strongly to the reprieve. The drum beats even harder, as De Bruyne and Chiellini share a smile with the ball out of play. Proper game, this (C-07).

Fascinating is the analysis of multiple coordination, and the sequencing of elements placed side by side (Chovanec, 2018, p. 207). Using the conjunction 'and' can give the impression of recounting, similar to oral retellings of a story. Coordination can appear to link two descriptions in an action-reaction scenario:

> Barak finds Masopust on the edge of the box and he curls one towards the top corner but Stekelenburg is alive to it and works his away across to catch easily (C-01).

It can also appear as a much more evident rhetorical device to further the sense of dynamism and immediacy, seen here in a post that describes several passages of the play/match as if the commentator did not have time to hold his breath:

> **DE LIGT RED CARD- WHAT HAPPENED?**
>
> So, Schick, down the left, was through and was cutting into the box. De Ligt looked to stop and they both fell to ground. First, the referee gave Ligt a yellow and then a VAR check turned it into red as Ligt was seen palming the ball away on the way down. So a handball plus a foul to deny his opposition a clear opportunity to score (C-06).

Chovanec's (2018, p. 206) mention of self-correction concerns the type where it is explicitly stated by the commentator, who apologizes for an incorrect statement. These are rarely found outside *The Guardian*, where the commentator's „I" is most present. However, it should be argued that the mere possibility of being able to correct a previous statement is a feature that ties LTC to the spoken mode, where utterances can be misspoken and then corrected. Commentators often look at the newly published post and modify it between two posts, usually correcting a statement or adding to it. This can be seen as a parallel to TV commentary, where the broadcaster can retract their statement, possibly issue an apology, and then provide the correct information. Even though commentators do have the chance to correct themselves, mistakes often remain uncorrected, especially the case with punctuation, where errors are frequently left out when commentators do not have time to update or modify the posts due to more pressing matters, with a dot and a comma missing in this example:

> They love this system Belgium Three at the back, wing backs pushed on, Thorgan Hazard on that left-hand side has been outstanding so far in the tournament (C-08).

Such evidence of modifying, correcting, and changing is reminiscent of the spoken word, where commentators must act and speak quickly, resulting in many mistakes. Players' sur-

names get misspelled regularly, especially foreign names. Here, *Celustka* becomes *Celutska* (also note the coordinating use of *and*):

> He picks out Malen in the area who takes a touch and fires at goal but Celutska gets in the way and it's a corner (C-01).

In fact, *Celustka* is incorrectly exchanged for *Celutska* five of the six times the player's name appears in the commentary. The actual spelling of the Czech footballer's name is *Čelůstka*. The C-01 commentator refrained from using Czech diacritics in the commentary. Still, an exception was made for *Kadeřábek*, who appears three times in the in-game LTC, always with the diacritics included for reasons unknown. A more obvious mistake occurs later when an image of a player named Holeš is provided with the caption:

> **HoleÅ¡Â celebrates** (C-01).

Chovanec (2018, p. 207–209) identifies three influences of spoken language on the pragmatic and discourse-oriented levels of LTC: demonstratives for common knowledge, metareferences, and colloquial address forms. Demonstratives provide the most avenues for analysis, with common examples being *this* and *that*, which can point to „assumed shared knowledge" (Chovanec, 2018, p. 208). In the example below, the commentator does not feel the need to describe the *Malen save* as he implies his readership already knows of it:

> Other than that Malen save, he's not had to do much more in this second period (C-01).

Assuming a reader shares specific background knowledge with others from the audience helps construct a kind of virtual community. *That* appears in such a way four times in C-01 but can also be found in C-02 („There were three defenders on the line trying to block that header") or C-05 („The Czech have been buoyed by that chance just before the water break"). Various gestures often accompany demonstratives in speech, which the commentators at times also try to reproduce in writing:

> **HOW HAS HE MISSED THAT!!?** (C-01).

Elements of SAT in LTC

As already stated in the introduction, it is evident that LTC shares many features with SAT, which is seen as one of its foundations. It is essential to consider that, despite appearing in different modes, both registers share an important factor during their production. In SAT, commentators are expected to produce language constantly and in high quantity, without many breaks. Likewise, LTC commentators are also required to produce language, although written, on a very high basis, as shown in **Table 2**. The table also includes those

Table 2. Number of words produced in the first half of an LTC coverage of the Belgium vs. Italy game in descending order

BBC	2379
The Guardian	1602
Sky Sports	1473
The Sun	1311
Goal.com	1160
Eurosport	1141
Hindustan Times	521
Evening Standard	518

entries added automatically, such as the score (i.e., Belgium-Italy 1–2) or the timestamp (20:34), considered integral to the commentary process.

For instance, in the LTC with the highest number of words, the *BBC's*, there are around 52 words produced per minute. Although this includes all the additions constructed with computer assistance (such as timestamps or hyperlinks to other web pages and websites), the number is still considerably high. The *BBC* usually produces multiple posts in the same minute. On the other end of the table, the *Evening Standard* produces significantly fewer words because their coverage is not based on providing updates continually but sporadically (presumably when they feel something significant has happened in the game). For example, they produced no posts between the 5th and the 12th minute of the game, which is, apart from some technical error, highly improbable in the first six LTCs (*BBC, The Guardian, Sky Sports, The Sun, Goal.com,* and *Eurosport*). Even with the last two LTCs included (*Hindustan Times* and *Evening Standard*), the average number of words produced is roughly 1263, or approximately 27 words per minute, still a considerable number. It is one of the reasons why LTC commentators resort to techniques and language formulations used by SAT commentators, such as the use of the Present Simple and copula *be* deletion (cf. Lewandowski, 2012). In his research, Lewandowski (2012) analyzed LTCs from 2010 and found that the Present Simple predominates. As regards tense usage, there are no significant changes to today's LTCs, as evidenced by tense usage in the LTCs of the three major producers shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. Tense usage in the first-half coverage by percentages. LTCs of the Belgium vs. Italy game from Sky Sports, BBC, and The Guardian

Tense		BBC	%	The Guardian	%	Sky Sports	%
Present	Simple	165	**75.3**	120	**71**	98	**76**
	Continuous	17	**7.8**	26	**15.4**	13	**10**
	Perfect	10	**4.6**	6	**3.5**	10	**7.7**
Past	Simple	20	**9.1**	12	**7.1**	6	**4.7**
	Continuous	0	**0**	2	**1.2**	0	**0**
	Perfect	5	**2.3**	1	**0.6**	0	**0**
Other		2	**0.9**	2	**1.2**	2	**1.6**

The distribution of tenses is also similar, percentage-wise, to the other analyzed LTCs. Our analysis is in line with Lewandowski's (2012) research. Most of the verbs are in the Present Simple tense, as the commentators' primary role is to describe the current action. The Present Continuous tense can be used for describing longer stretches of action or, as Chovanec (2018, p. 191) mentions, „for information that has more of a background status and for summarizations on the progress of the match." In this example, the Continuous tense is used to describe the match's progress. That description is followed by a prediction of the upcoming performance of a team, using the *going-to* future form:

> **19 min**: This match is being played at a fair old lick. Both teams seem minded to go for it, that they're not going to leave this competition wondering. Plenty of players thrown into attacks (C-09).

Besides, the commentators frequently describe the game's atmosphere, relaying information about the crowds' behavior and support. Past tenses are seldom used, mainly because,

as Lewandowski (2012, p. 71) puts it, „there is also little opportunity to provide frequent recaps of the most exciting and controversial events of the game." However, they are still present in the three coverages in **Table 3**, as there is sometimes a need to describe events that are seen as already belonging to the past (even though LTC is „live"). For instance, the analysis of the *BBC's* commentary has registered more usage of the Past Simple than *The Guardian's* or *Sky Sports'* not only because they produce more posts but also because one of the posts, containing the commentator's explanation and correction of a situation that had happened ten minutes before, was produced almost entirely in that tense:

> 24 mins My apologies on the goal. It wasn't Giorgio Chiellini's touch that meant it was off. It was a flick from Giovanni Di Lorenzo. Either way, the right decision was reached (C-08).

The Past Simple is frequently used in combination with the Present Simple, usually to indicate an action that happened before the (re)action reported on, as in the case of a yellow card being shown and the reasons for it:

> 20' The first yellow card of the game is shown to Verratti after he catches Tielemans late as he looked to break away (C-10).

Chovanec (2018, p. 193) identifies goal reportage, one of the key aspects of the match, as having a greater variety of tenses: „There appear to be three basic options: the simple past, a combination of the simple past and the present simple, and the present simple." Sometimes, the goal is described in multiple posts, as in the following C-09 examples. Although both posts describe the goal, the first still carries a sense of immediacy, so all reporting is done in the present. The second was posted two minutes later, so it is written in the past.

> **2 Jul 2021** 20:32 GOAL! **Belgium 0-1 Italy** (Barella 31)
>
> Italy take the free kick quickly. Immobile goes down, wanting a penalty. He's not getting one. Belgium only half clear. Verratti, to the right of the D, feeds Barella down the channel. Barella squeaks through a gap, past three at once, and buries a shot across Courtois and into the bottom left! This one counts! (C-09).
>
> **2 Jul 2021** 20:34
>
> 33 min: That was a sensational goal! Barella turned on a sixpence and in one swift, elegant pirouette, saw off Vermaelen, Vertonghen and Hazard. The finish into the bottom left wasn't half bad either (C-09).

Chovanec (2018, p. 194) notes that the Present Perfect tense is the last tense with a distinct function in LTCs, which „involves summarizations of the event so far, without referring to any specific action in progress at the time of the verbal formalization of the commentary." In such cases, the tense is often paired with other tenses, as in this example:

> 63' The game is really open now, Italy look very confident in attack and are pouncing on any little mistake that Belgium make, as there have been a few sloppy passes in the last few minutes (C-10).

A case can also be made for the Future Simple tense. Even though it appears sporadically, it is usually used when the commentator predicts something will happen in the near future. This includes formulaic language typical of SAT (e.g., *there will be a minimum of five minutes added time played*) but also comments related to performance:

> 24: The technique on show is frightening. A rare loose touch from Immobile doesn't prove costly as a team mate is there to regain possession. It doesn't stick again, moments later. Mancini will demand more (C-07).

The application of the *Video Assistant Referee* (VAR) has recently provided another avenue for the tense. The acronym can be considered a new entry to the technical lexis of football, especially as outside commentators often misuse it. VAR originally stood for the referee using the technology, not the technology itself, but this distinction is slowly disappearing. Commentators use the Future Simple tense when they are confident a review of a situation will occur. Also, note the use of three dots/ellipsis in the following example. The three dots are again reminiscent of storytelling orality, although their use is somewhat different, as the commentator is not retelling an action but awaiting its outcome in line with the audience:

> VAR will check this for a potential offside... (C-07).

As noted earlier, some forms of simplification, especially copula *be* deletion, are also present. Instances can be found throughout LTCs. The analysis presented in **Table 4** shows that they occur as a rule.

Subjects can also change mid-sentence. The following post is much more evocative of spoken language, *unscripted*, making it appear more like an SAT comment written down, with verb phrases followed by another. The subject changes from the corner or ball (*it*) to the player executing it, Chiesa. They are linked only by a quite informal noun, *deadeye*, here in the role of an adverb. The final exclamative is again missing a/the copula:

> 41: **CLOSE!** Verratti's corner is headed out by Meunier... it's killed by Chiesa on the edge of the box, deadeye, shoots with no back lift and his effort veers just a yard wide of Donnarumma's left-hand post. Very nearly a second! (C-07).

Sometimes, LTCs wholly incorporate certain forms from SAT. Lewandowski (2012, p. 72) states that one of them is using the pronoun *it* to refer to the ball. This usage can be seen across the board and is very frequent, even in producers with a lower number of words produced, as presented in **Table 5**.

Especially interesting is this post in C-08 from text contributor Martin Keown, who uses the pronoun somewhat redundantly in this single post in an add-on strategy (Chovanec

Table 4. Copula be deletion in first-half coverage, LTCs of the Belgium vs. Italy game from Sky Sports, BBC, and The Guardian

BBC	18
Sky Sports	10
The Guardian	8

Table 5. Use of 'it' to refer to the ball in first-half coverage of the Belgium vs. Italy game commentaries

BBC	15
The Guardian	9
Sky Sports	7
The Sun	6
Goal.com	12
Eurosport	2
Hindustan Times	5
Evening Standard	2

2018, p. 207). As Keown's utterances are translated verbatim from the studio, the example shows his spoken impressions and recounting of the event, which then, along with his other contributions, has a direct influence on the LTC's text:

> 21:35 2 Jul They win it back. Italy come onto it so quickly, the way they press the ball it's brilliant. Then it is emphatic from Barella, he controls it, moves it forward and then hits it into the far corner (C-08).

Lewandowski (2012, p. 74) also noticed some features which differentiate LTC from SAT, and explained that „looking at the rates of occurrence for subject simplification, subject-verb inversion, some adverbs of time and place, and personal pronouns, we would locate the OSC register somewhere halfway between SAT and WSC." The most frequently used adverbs of time (*now, still*) and place (*here, there*) are still regularly present in LTCs. Adverbs of time can especially be used as intensifiers that portray immediacy. They often appear in places where they could be left out without any change in meaning, as *now* in this example:

> 77: **INJURY!** A real shame for Leonardo Spinazzola now as he pulls up with a muscle injury as he went for a sprint. Looks like a calf (C-07).

Now appears in that function five times in the 90-minute commentary. The distinctions become clearer when analyzing adverbs of place. The commentators cannot provide the readers with any related visual material, or video of the game unfolding, so they must construct the space verbally, which, especially in the case of adverbs of place, leads to the use of some adverbs which are not common in SAT. The writers at *The Guardian* are especially inventive, with examples such as *goalwards*:

> The ball eventually breaks to De Bruyne, who thumps a shot goalwards from the edge of the box (C-09).

Lewandowski (2012, p. 74–75) sees these examples as evidence of the influence of the written mode on LTC, as „despite various attempts at rendering orality in the OSC discourse, its syntactic patterns are more characteristic of WSC thanks to well-formed coordinate sentences." Another feature frequently found in SAT but not in LTC is the use of the demonstrative pronoun *this* to identify the player who is on the ball at the time of speaking. As Lewandowski (2012, p. 72) writes, „this linguistic feature, which is a pervasive attention-drawing device in SAT, is completely absent in the OSC corpus data (nor, for obvious reasons, does it occur in written reports)." Indeed, this type of use was also not found in any of the LTCs from our corpus, confirming the observation from Lewandowski (2012).

Distinctive features of LTC

Features unique to LTCs that have not been directly derived from either SAT or spoken language in general and cannot be readily applied to other registers include internal, structured language variation, the use of icons, and, most innovatively, interactivity and interactiveness.

Internal structure of LTC

A well-established feature of LTCs is their structure – most LTCs are structured similarly, with their constituting parts performing different discursive functions. The structure of

LTCs is usually as follows: preparatory posts, LTCs of the first half, first-half summary, LTCs of the second half, summary, and closing posts. Chovanec (2018, p. 141) sees the patterned nature of LTCs as modelled on TV broadcasts, where the actual live coverage of an event is usually preceded by an introduction and followed by an analysis, often given by the commentator with pundits. Lewandowski (2012, p. 74) also finds similarities to SAT, arguing that „what the register of online reports also shares with TV commentary is a few genre conventions, whose general purpose is to establish a more personal relationship with OSC readers. This is accomplished by means of salutations and closings and the use of informal vocabulary and occasional questions." Conversely, Tereszkiewicz (2014, p. 306) writes that opening and closing reports are typical attributes of live blogs, with some important elements considered obligatory as the thanks addressed to readers for their comments, which she finds present in all live blogs. Consequently, it can be regarded that the structure of LTCs is derived in a hybrid nature from both TV broadcasts and the live blog format in which an LTC is presented on a webpage. These two elements both contributed to the creation of the LTC structure.

Pre-match and post-match commentaries can be quite extensive and frame the overall event but are perceived by Chovanec (2018, p. 142) as not necessary themselves. However, from the eight commentaries of the Italy vs. Belgium game we analyzed, only two (*Eurosport's* and *Hindustan Times'*) did not feature any post-match message. Still, they featured welcome messages, showing that certain structural and orientational points can probably be found in any randomly picked LTC. We will focus on the opening, half-time, and closing posts, as they are functionally and linguistically distinct from the rest of the LTC. LTCs usually start with a post greeting the readers. In fact, half of our analyzed commentaries (C-07, C-10, C-13, and C-14) begin with the expression *hello and welcome*, a standard greeting used in broadcasting, especially on television, and adopted by live blogs, which shows the LTC commentator in the moderator role. The full opening post of C-07 is:

> Hello and welcome to Sky Sports' digital coverage of Belgium's Euro 2020 quarter-final clash with Italy from the Allianz Arena in Munich.
>
> This will be the fifth meeting between Belgium and Italy at a major tournament - all four previous meetings came in the group stages, in the 1954 World Cup and European Championship in 1980, 2000 and 2016.
>
> Italy avoided defeat in all four matches, winning three and drawing one, but will their long unbeaten run end this evening?
>
> We've got all the build-up and team news ahead of the 8pm kick-off (C-07).

It is a good representation of pre-match posts in general, containing a) a welcoming message; b) a combination of the prospective (written in the Future Simple tense) and retrospective (the Past Simple tense) orientation to the match; c) an anticipatory rhetorical question; and d) an announcement of build-up posts. The quantity and layout of the series of build-up posts differ from outlet to outlet, but they are usually all prepared in advance. The switch from pre-match to match commentary is usually apparent, evoked with the formulaic use of expressions denoting the start of the match. Examples from the eight commentaries include *kick off, here we go, we're under way,* and *we're up and running*. The change is also followed by the change of real-time deixis to match-time deixis, with future posts stating the minute of the game being described. An interesting example of the switch

is in C-14, where the final pre-prepared post is followed by a post twice explicitly indicating liveness, thereby verbalizing the change from non-live to live.

JUL 03, 2021 12:18 AM IST

On the other end...

Spain have defeated Switzerland 3-1 on penalties to reach semifinals. Who will they meet Belgium or Italy? (C-14).

JUL 03, 2021 12:19 AM IST

Euro 2020, Belgium vs Italy - LIVE!

LIVE! The players from both the teams Belgium and Italy are in the middle for the National Anthems. Here we go.... (C-14).

Posts at half-time are handled in three different ways, depending on the overall number of posts produced by the media outlet in an LTC. Commentaries with fewer posts, like C-14, tend to skip half-time posts altogether and „switch off" the commentary during this time. Typically, as the number of posts in an individual LTC grows, so does the number of its posts at half-time. A median can be seen in commentaries like C-07 and C-09, with five and four posts, respectively. Half-time posts are also distinct from the rest of the LTC because they may serve several purposes: a summary of the first half is usually provided, making the posts look more like excerpts from a written report, emphasizing the description in the past tense. The descriptive sentences are usually paired with forecasts of the second half, as in the ending of this, the first of three half-time posts from C-12:

HT: BELGIUM 1-2 ITALY

It's been a breathtaking first half. Belgian began the better, but then Italy exploded into life. Stunning strikes from Nicolo Barella and Lorenzo Insigne had the Azzurri in control until Jeremy Doku won a soft penalty on the stroke of half-time. Romelu Lukaku did what he does best from the spot, and there is all to play for in the second half as Spain await the victors (C-12).

Chovanec (2018, p. 168) also notes that half-time enables *The Guardian's* LTC commentators to turn their attention to other activities like catching up on interesting contributions from readers, providing citations, and providing extensive off-the-point remarks. In LTCs with fewer contributors, one function of the commentaries is still preserved – an invitation to the audience to continue reading or return after half-time, sometimes expressed with imperatives. An example is the first half-time post from C-09:

HALF TIME: Belgium 1-2 Italy

That's the last act of a frenetic, frantic, freestyle first half! What entertainment! Italy were well worth their two-goal lead, having scored a couple of absolute peaches. But that light shove on Doku - which Italy are still complaining about as the teams leave the pitch - has brought the world number one team back into it. You're not going to go anywhere, are you? Thought not. See you for the second half! (C-09).

The switch to the play-by-play commentary of the second half is usually enacted by similar devices used in the switch from pre-match to match commentary, with phrases containing the adverb *underway* (i.e., *we're back underway*) especially common. The discourse markers to accomplish the switches can be the same in all three instances (from first half to half-time to second half to full-time), as is the case in C-12, where the onomatopoeic realization of the referee's whistle is used:

2ND JUL 2021, 20:00

PEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!

HERE WE GO IN MUNICH!

2ND JUL 2021, 20:48

PEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!

THAT'S HALF-TIME!

 2ND JUL 2021, 21:57

PEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!

IT'S ALL OVER IN MUNICH! (C-12).

As indicated earlier, the end of the match does not usually equal the end of the LTC. **Table 6** shows the number of posts published after the final whistle, which we have named *post-match posts*.

Table 6. Number of posts produced in LTCs after the Belgium vs. Italy match had finished

BBC	33
The Guardian	4
Sky Sports	8
The Sun	8
Goal.com	4
Eurosport	2
Hindustan Times	2
Evening Standard	4

A connection between the overall number of posts and the number of post-match posts can again be constructed (especially in the *BBC's* case). However, it is not one-dimensional, with some LTCs with less frequent outputs (like the *Evening Standard's*) still featuring a significant number of post-match posts, demonstrating that they are a regular feature of the LTC genre. Their function is also twofold: to summarize the finished match and conclude the LTC. The summarizing function of the closing posts is reflected in their formation. Chovanec (2018, p. 151) notes that „the functional complexity is translated into a complex temporal structure – the post-match commentary is oriented towards the past (the match that just ended), the present (the result that has emerged), and the future (the implications of the result)." To conclude the LTC, a goodbye message is usually present, containing a direct address to the audience. Although unusually long, the final post from C-12 illustrates these points well and shows that our findings are in line with Chovanec's (2018):

3RD JUL 2021, 23:03 **ARRIVEDERCI**

It's one-on-one - or at least it is as far as Italy and Spain are concerned.

The two nations will face off in the first Euro 2020 semi-final at Wembley on Tuesday after the Azzurri knocked out the number one ranked side in the world, Belgium, earlier this evening.

Roberto Mancini's men impressed yet again with their tireless tempo as they engineered a two-goal cushion, and then demonstrated their defensive nous and darks arts in seeing the game out once their lead was halved.

The Italians march on, but will have to do so without Leanardo Spinazzola, whose injury late on marred another otherwise triumphant night.

For Belgium, their Golden Generation depart at a quarter-final stage yet again, and perhaps for the last time. We will undoubtedly look back at this collection of players in years to come and wonder how they didn't win anything.

We're back tomorrow with the other two quarter-finals that includes the big one in Rome between England and Ukraine. Get some rest, you're gonna need it.

Goodnight (C-12).

In this post, we can see jumps from the prospective orientation (with the announcement of the forthcoming match) to the retrospective (the summary of Italy's performance in the match) and again to the prospective (Spinazzola's – whose name is misspelled – future absence) in the first four paragraphs. The fifth paragraph contains both the prospective and retrospective as the commentator reports on the Belgium side's fate and predicts future discussion about their performance. The final paragraph is LTC-centred, announcing future coverage and addressing the audience, imperatives included. Of course, the imperative *Get some rest* is uttered in a playful, joking manner, as is the Italian *arrivederci* in the post's header.

Given that the closing post usually addresses the audience, it is frequently one of the most informal segments of LTCs. The goodbye message of the 33rd and final post-match post from C-08 starts in a formulaic manner but, in a meta-commentary turn, ends completely informally:

That's all folks

And that is your lot for this evening. The highest-ranked side in the world bow out, joining the world champions and the Euros holders.

Italy, though... well, they continue to look the part.

Join us tomorrow for... like you need me to tell you (C-08).

This message may even appear to be rude. Still, some context is needed – the match taking place the day after, referenced here, was an important quarter-final game for the England team, so it was highly expected of the audience to know about it. The remark is also an excellent example of the audience's shared knowledge, which LTC commentators often assume.

Use of icons

LTCs are produced in a multimodal context. The main textual part of an LTC is surrounded by many elements, which can be described as paratextual, including infographics, hyperlinks, and images. More and more non-textual elements are included in the main body of an LTC. For example, C-07 and C-09 were regularly updated with images of recent events in the game, while C-08 contained both images and videos. While such additions influence the construction of an LTC, they do not form the text itself. However, icons are a graphical element in LTCs present since their beginnings, and their function and usage make them a constituent part of the text itself. An array of icons used in *Sky Sports*' C-07 is presented in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1. Some of the icons used in Sky Sports' commentary of the Belgium vs. Italy match.

There are several reasons why these icons can be considered textual elements. Firstly, their meaning is well established and always identical. In the above set, the meaning of individual icons is left-to-right: *kick-off, offside, goal, penalty kick, yellow card, save, injury, substitution, half-time, full-time*. In essence, they are pictograms modified or placed in different contexts to represent events on the pitch. The uniformity and repeated usage in the same context set them apart from some elements added to a text, like emoticons and emojis, which Crystal (2019, p. 465) describes as not uniform in form or function and, therefore, highly ambiguous. In the case of the icons used in LTCs, ambiguity is not possible. For example, the two diagonal lines always represent *substitution* and can be seen as an utterance in the form of *A substitution has been/is being made*.

The second rationale behind categorizing icons as textual and, therefore, linguistic elements is that they sometimes function as utterances. While icons are typically additions to utterances (in written posts), they can appear on the site before the text, when a post's text box is published, but the text is still being written. In that regard, they serve a referential function. As noted, the icon can unambiguously be interpreted as the utterance *A substitution has been/is being made* and inform the reader before the intended utterance: the text has been relayed. By posting an icon, the commentator produces an utterance that informs the reader. This connection is realized in the most elaborate way in C-07 and *Sky Sport's* LTCs in general. In these commentaries, icons and text are inseparably linked in the way that certain post openings always follow certain icons, creating patterned, routine cases of language use. Consider the example shown in **Figure 2**.
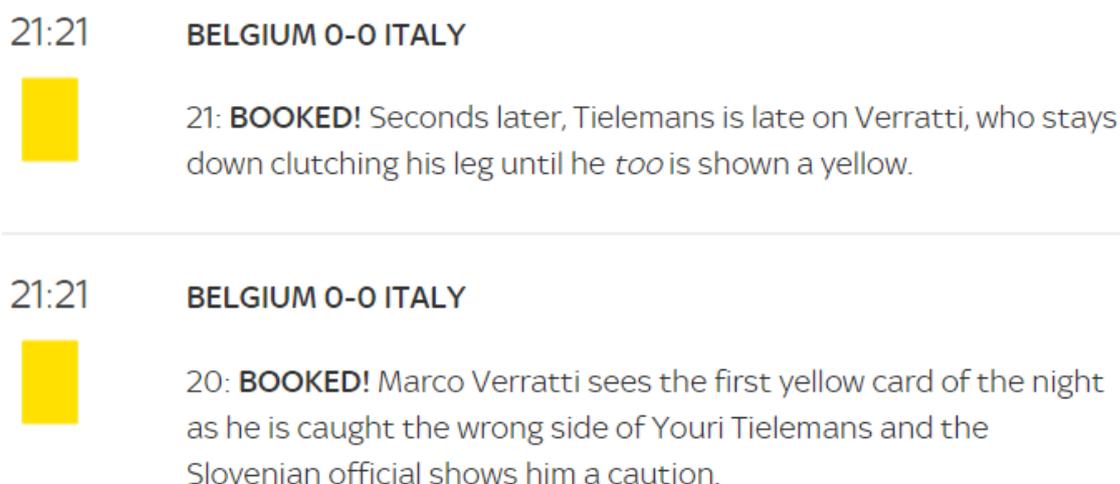

Figure 2. Consecutive live text commentary posts starting with the same icon and sentence.

It may appear unusual that two posts in succession start with the same exclamation (**BOOKED!**). There was another brandishing of the yellow card in the match in the 90th minute, and the post referencing that event in the commentary again started the same. Also, every time a substitution was performed in the match, the resulting posts started with **SUBS!**. This cannot be a coincidence as there is an infinite number of possible sentences or even clauses that can be constructed by the commentator in the process of writing the text to describe that a yellow card has been given (for some made-up examples, *Player X.Y. is getting booked/A yellow card is incoming/X.Y. is going into the book*). On that account, we can see that the appearance of a certain icon presupposes the opening of the post. Presumably, the commentator starts constructing the post by selecting an icon that automatically produces the text's beginning. Icons used in this way appear in half of the commentaries analyzed in this section (C-07, C-08, C-10, C-13). A notable exception is *The Guardian*, which has always built a reputation for more „wordy" commentaries leaving out icons in general.

Interactivity and interactiveness

One of the most innovative features of LTCs is its interaction, or rather *interactiveness* (Chovanec, 2018, p. 189), a tendency to portray some sort of interaction as happening in the text even when there is none. Thompson (1995, p. 85) calls a similar phenomenon *mediated quasi-interaction*, where commentators „interact" with their viewers, who cannot communicate with them. There is a tendency to portray interaction as happening, which is done by creating language resembling spoken dialogue. Although there are commentaries in which some sort of communication is present, instances of interactiveness, where actual interaction is not present but rather simulated, are more common. Interactiveness is used to provide more dynamism to the commentaries, building on their entertainment function. The primary device used for creating interactiveness is the concept of *text contributors*. Text contributors are people or organizations whose written contributions are inserted into the main body of the text by the LTC commentator. Examples vary and include everything from SMS messages to emails to tweets. The number of text contributors varies from LTC to LTC, as shown in the analysis of our eight LTCs of the Belgium vs. Italy game, presented in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Number of text contributors in LTCs of the Belgium vs. Italy game

BBC	24*
The Guardian	5
Sky Sports	3
The Sun	7†
Goal.com	0
Eurosport	13
Hindustan Times	0
Evening Standard	1

*The number would be considerably higher if non-textual contributions, consisting of like/dislike reactions and reader polls, were to be included. As these contributions are performed anonymously, they cannot be measured.
†Non-textual contribution in the form of answers to reader polls.

As shown, *Goal.com* and *Hindustan Times* use no outside contributors. The rest of the LTCs use them in different ways. The *Evening Standard* only uses video tweets from *Match of the Day*, the *BBC's* live football coverage on that social media platform. The tweets are used mainly to provide audio-visual bonus content, but the „voice" of the Match of the Day's posters still becomes part of the main text. Similarly, tweets from *Opta* are used by both *The Sun* and *Sky Sports*. Opta is the official Twitter handle for football coverage from *Stats Perform*, an organization that keeps statistical track of various sports using AI technologies. Therefore, such tweets do not come from fans following the LTC but from well-established organizations, so no real interaction is present. The staged interaction is best seen in *Sky Sports'* commentary, whose two contributors in C-07 are Opta and Adam Bate, another *Sky Sports* journalist. Bate contributes ten posts to C-07, most of which place him in the role of a color commentator who provides bonus commentary of certain actions, for instance:

21:33 BELGIUM 0-1 ITALY

Sky Sports' Adam Bate:

„Donnarumma has pulled off two good saves but Italy deserve their lead.

„Belgium have plenty of quality out there on the pitch but it is Roberto Mancini's side with the more fluid movement right now" (C-07).

As in this example, all of Bate's contributions are provided in the form of reported speech (together with Bate's icon), as if the main commentator had written down Bate's utterances, which can be seen as further mimicking the SAT register. Also, note the absence of the closing quotation mark after the first sentence, where it would usually be needed. In the following example, Bate's contribution also features two rhetorical questions, which would usually not be posed by the color commentator but by the main play-by-play announcer:

22:37 BELGIUM 1-2 ITALY

Sky Sports' Adam Bate:

„That is unfortunate for Spinazzola, who has been excellent again. He is in tears.

„We know what we are getting from this Italy team, but what more do Belgium have? This is a huge 15 minutes for this ageing side, can they seize the day?" (C-07).

The incongruity of Bate's contributions becomes even more intriguing as, for the most part, the LTC writers at *Sky Sports* remain uncredited. Therefore, the contrast between their anonymity and Bate's prominence is strange, especially as readers do not know who interacts with whom and what kind of role Bate plays in the LTC production. Across other commentators, interaction takes precedence over interactiveness. *The Sun* incorporates tweets from organized sites and „regular" users while featuring *Have Your Say* posts, where readers are encouraged to vote on certain topics. In C-12, they could enter their score predictions and vote on the awarded penalty kick. While not textual, these contributions still provide a platform for interaction not possible in other types of sports commentary. Although there are 13 different text contributors in *Eurosport's* commentary, all from *Twitter*, most are verified sports journalists, not casual fans. As with the previous examples, their tweets are inserted into the LTC without any comment or reference, giving readers the idea that the LTC commentator agrees with them (**Figure 3**).
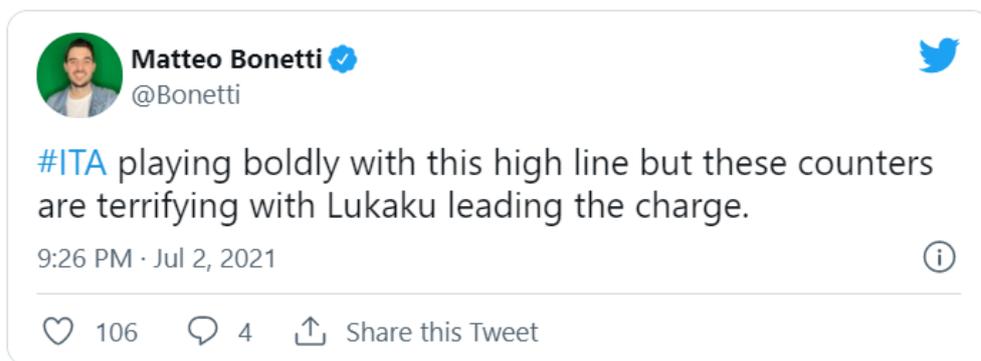
30'

Figure 3. Incorporation of a tweet into the body of the live text commentary.

The only exception is a tweet by tennis player Roger Federer, which had to be referenced by the commentator as it did not pertain to the game being covered in the LTC. The *BBC's* commentary features all the aforementioned interactive features on a larger scale. As the *BBC* is primarily a television broadcaster, it complements the LTC with regular input from TV commentators. On this occasion, the LTC is in constant communication, not just influence, with SAT commentators, whose contributions are added without quotation marks but with images and names of the speaker. The SAT commentators' words, which are transferred verbatim hastily, resulting in frequent mistakes, often contrast with the written mode of the LTC. For example, a high frequency of the pronoun *it* referring to the ball in C-08 is a direct consequence of contributor Martin Keown's utterances being transferred verbatim. However, written tweets from fans, who are encouraged to participate by the imperative *Get Involved* are also present, bringing the number of known participants in the text to 24. The + sign in the table refers to unknown participants. In C-08, every post features a thumbs down and thumbs up option, enabling readers to provide feedback. **Figure 4** is a typical section of the *BBC* LTC, showcasing three different authors – a post from the actual writer (identified as Paul Dawkes) followed by an SAT entry from the studio and a user's written contribution.

All posts are subject to the same rating system, while the differences in the posts' producers are not explicitly referenced, making all the posts appear „woven" into the same structure. *The Guardian* is the only LTC that explicitly comments on the text contributors, as in this example from C-09:

> **2 Jul 2021** 21:04
>
> **Italy get the second half underway.** Neither manager has blinked yet; no changes. Here's Billy Graboso: „Expect the Italians to win a penalty in the second half. Belgium's penalty was quite soft." Christopher Burke adds: „I think the penalty was a penalty, but overall I find this referee too credulous when players hit the floor. I don't trust him to keep a lid on things in the second half" (C-09).

Although we can only observe a reference to the incoming contributions without any comments on their content, LTC commentators from *The Guardian* usually interact with the contributions much more than commentators from other producers of LTCs. The number of five distinct contributors in C-09 is unusually low, probably owing to the high tempo of the match.

90+3 mins
Belgium 1-2 Italy

Just two of the added minutes left. I don't want this to end.

156   47   f   y   < Share

22:52 2 Jul
'Belgium need something brilliant'
Belgium 1-2 Italy

Martin Keown
Former England defender on BBC One

You see exactly the same from the substitutes for Italy, every one puts a shift in, scrapping, wrestling trying to get over the finish line here.

If Belgium want to find something it's going to have to be something brilliant.

183   60   f   y   < Share

22:52 2 Jul
Get Involved
#bbcfootball

Paolo Brand: If there really is a script in these Euros, for this tournament to be one of the greatest, Belgium have to come back and pull this off. Surely…

141   202   f   y   < Share

Figure 4. A section of the LTC of the Belgium vs. Italy game from BBC: three consecutive posts are seen, all with different text contributors.

While not all LTCs feature outside text contributions, they appear often enough to be considered an important element of the format. LTCs are, as shown, produced as intertextual works where different text producers are in constant communication. The LTC commentator, who functions as the moderator of the texts, can surrender his authorial voice at any point and give it to someone else, often another journalist or sometimes a fan. The action can hardly be replicated in SATs. Although we could imagine the interaction between Adam Bate and the main commentator in C-07 as analogous to the color commentator and play-by-play commentator in SATs, it is impossible to imagine a radio or TV commentator surrendering their voice so many times to so many different language producers. The incorporation of direct quotes is seen as an example of *manifest intertextuality*, a type of intertextuality identified by Fairclough (1992, p. 104) where „other texts are explicitly

present in the text under analysis; they are 'manifestly' marked or cued by features on the surface of the text, such as quotation marks." Our analysis has shown that the features on the surface are diverse and range from quotation marks to icons signifying a different text producer. This propensity is present as an influence of the format of live blogs, as intertextuality and polyvocality are some of their most prominent features (Tereszkiewicz, 2014, p. 306). An LTC commentator, operating a kind of live blog, has to offer readers a multitude of quotations from several external sources. Tereszkiewicz (2014, p. 310) sees moderation as one of the main roles a live blog writer has to perform, „acting as a moderator and intermediary who brings different voices and accounts into a whole."

While the LTC commentator has been tasked with increasingly expanding different roles, the complexity of the LTC format leads different participants in its production to assume several roles at a time. The audience can, through intertextuality, become a co-author, albeit in a limited fashion. This is one of the most novel means of communication in LTC, seen by Chovanec (2018, p. 117) as „the most remarkable pragmatic phenomenon of live text commentary." As we have seen, not all LTCs feature audience participation, which is why Chovanec (2018, p. 104) suggests a line of LTC classification ranging from more telegraphic to more conversational types. From this viewpoint, three LTC classifications can be established: a) LTC as one-way information streaming, b) LTC with parallel audience participation, and c) LTC with integrated audience participation. Of the eight commentaries of the Belgium vs. Italy match from our analysis, commentaries C-07, C-10, and C-14 can be classified under a), while the rest fall under c). However, C-07, with its staged interaction, shows discoursal similarity to c), suggesting that this type is currently the most popular. None of the commentaries from our analysis fall under b), which is a type of LTC where the audience participates via an online chat, with the chat box usually placed parallel to the LTC on a web page. This type seems to have never quite gained traction in the English media but has been popular in Germany, for instance, in *Der Spiegel* (Werner 2016, p. 283). Examples can also be found in the Croatian media, such as *www.vecernji.hr/sport/idemo-hrvatska-vatreni-protiv-gauca-traze-potvrdu-za-drugi-krug-1253632* (accessed 11 August 2021), with the LTC on the left and the audience commentary on the right. Given the rise of social media platforms, especially *Twitter*, audience participation can only be expected to increase further in the coming years, as in the *BBC's* C-07, where seventeen different LTC readers were given a chance to participate in the co-creation of the main text and constituted, thus, 70 percent of all text contributors.

A special case of interaction has been observed in *The Guardian's* LTCs, analyzed extensively by Chovanec (2018, p. 227), who concludes that „while conversational contributions related to a given topic are found threaded throughout the text of the LTC, their totality constitutes a specific narrative layer that needs to be conceptualized differently from the match commentary itself." Furthermore, Chovanec (2018, p. 271) claims that this form of constructed interaction „bears all the signs of male gossip and is classifiable as a relatively independent narrative layer that has a social function: mutual bonding and the shared enjoyment of the occasion." The notion of a secondary *narrative line* (i.e., the discussion of events not directly related to the match resembling a friendly interaction) as a register feature is debatable as its manifestation varies from LTC to LTC. It may not appear at all, which we argue is the case in C-09. During the course of that particular LTC, only six email

contributions from five contributors were included by the commentator Scott Murray. It can be argued that of the posts containing the contributions, only the following can be classified as pertaining to the second narrative layer:

2 Jul 2021 20:52

Not for the first time during Euro 2020, Mary Waltz speaks for us all. „Hot damn! Shit howdy! It's crackin! It's bumpin'! Oh my! Choose your favorite expression, this match has it all" (C-09).

The commentator clearly references the mutual enjoyment of the match and the whole tournament. The rest of the emails in C-09 are included without such elaboration, and their threading into the LTC text is performed in the same way as with tweets in C-08 or C-13. The absence of a secondary narrative layer in C-09 probably occurred due to the high intensity of the match, where the commentator had to perform play-by-play reportage and inform the audience frequently, so he did not have ample time and opportunity to co-construct a secondary layer. In any case, such interaction can only be found in *The Guardian*, which makes its classification as a feature of LTC in general problematic.

Conclusion

Our findings confirm similarities between SAT and LTC observed in previous research (cf. Lewandowski, 2012; Chovanec, 2018), especially regarding tense usage (Lewandowski, 2012, p. 74). The Present Simple is the norm, but other tenses also have specific functions. Commentators are free to use them interchangeably and can utilize some forms that do not often appear, like the imperative. SAT is often seen as a foundation of LTC. While that is correct, LTC is not just a derivation of SAT, so analyzing LTC exclusively using the SAT model will not provide a complete picture of this register. Although Lewandowski (2012, p. 74) places the LTC register halfway between SAT and written reports, the influence of SAT is more strongly felt. The influence of the written mode is more discernible in cases where features of SAT cannot be adequately reproduced in LTC, such as the use of „this" to identify the player who is on the ball or utterances composed just of surnames of players in action, which are entirely absent in the LTC. We have also presented the structure of LTC as composed of several sections. These sections are clearly outlined (for example, summarizing and closing posts, all produced after the match has finished) and serve specific discursive purposes, similar to television broadcasts and live blogs. A thorough analysis of icons in LTC, another important element of the format, has yielded interesting results, showing that they must be considered textual, not paratextual elements, which is another novel way in which LTC constructs language, increasing its multimodal potential. Icons can even be thought of as markers of a sort, influencing which utterances will precede or follow their usage.

The interplay of the diverse aspects and origins of LTC leads to the creation of new linguistic situations and facets. The most innovative are pragmatic aspects concerning interactivity, interactiveness, and co-production of a text. However, it would perhaps be too radical of a stance to describe these situations as revolutionary. For one, behind the outside contributions to an LTC's text, there is still a moderator who approves or denies them. At the

same time, some LTCs do not let the audience get „behind the microphone" (in this case, the keyboard) and stage the interaction instead. This happens precisely because LTC is a hybrid that traces its lineage to different formats and registers. In this case, the moderator role and the command of the text it enables are essential and will not change in the near future.

As noted before, each of the eight LTCs contains certain distinctive characteristics already mentioned in passing. Some of them are: *The Sun's* commentary does not use graphics, but graphological emphasis (bold and capital letters) is regularly present. *Eurosport's* incorporates more tweets than expected for its size (13 different contributors for 1141 words, with many contributors appearing multiple times). *Goal.com* strives to be more formal, factual, and telegraphic but uses icons. The *Hindustan Times'* commentary can contain explicit switches of the temporal orientation, while the *Evening Standard's* LTC can be put on hold for more than ten minutes. The latter two LTCs also contained a much smaller number of words than expected. Each of the three main LTC producers (the *BBC*, *Sky Sports*, *The Guardian*) has several distinctive features (for example, in that order, the number of text contributors, a connection between icons and utterances, and a reflection on users' emails). A thorough analysis of the differences in production practices between these LTCs would certainly need to consider many more factors. Still, we have shown that LTCs are very diverse and represent a where language variety is commonly showcased profusely – even in broadcasts of the same event. These differences can be associated with different conceptions of style, used in the broadest sense. In the case of LTC, both textual and non-textual features, such as webpage design, need to be considered, especially as Pérez-Sabater et al. (2008, p. 33) note that „the stylistic features of each commentary are most probably ultimately determined by the newspaper's ideological stance in general and towards football in particular", so the overall conception of a newspaper influences the production of its LTC.

Furthermore, we have shown the underlying effects of spoken language on LTC, which uses many different forms and structures evocative of spoken language. The influence is mainly seen on the syntactic level. Written language can, in certain situations, be more economical to present views than spoken language. However, it seems that LTC is still unwilling to go beyond some boundaries when the influence of the spoken language is concerned, restricting its scope to mostly syntactical phenomena. Nevertheless, the interaction between the spoken and the written is a fascinating example of how language evolves with the advent of new technologies. It provides an exciting outlook for the future, where the appearance of new technology will undoubtedly provide new potentiality to language use.

LTC combines influences from the Internet, radio, and television, while it is seen as multimodal, with that aspect of its production further increasing. It can be said that the situational characteristics of this register are similar to live blogs in their appearance on websites and are even occasionally named *live blogs*. However, the typical linguistic characteristics of the register do not overlap with live blogs, which is why it cannot be adequately put into that bracket. LTC shares much more of its linguistic features with SAT, even though the influence of spoken language is also not regularly seen in live blogs in

such quantity. However, while there is overlap with SAT, there are also certain differences given that SAT is a spoken register while LTC is a written register. The functional forces behind LTCs are just as diverse as their linguistic features, which is best seen in the roles of the LTC writers, who at various points need to provide commentary, address the audience, keep track of other media following the event, moderate outside contributions, and even step back and let others take the „stage" of text production. Therefore, LTC struggles to be contained in boundaries from which registers were previously analyzed and remains a hybrid determined by other registers but not in complete overlap with them. LTC is an electronic register in close connection with what Crystal (2006) termed *Netspeak*. Just like Netspeak, LTC is not identical to SAT, live blogs, or oral narratives. Nonetheless, it displays features of all these formats, picking the best suited for specific functions. We can predict that LTC will continue to change in the future, dynamically adapting features found in other registers for its use and creating new situations, perhaps even new registers, as is typically the case with the Internet on the whole.

ORCID

Marin Pažanin ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2497-9965

Ivana Petrović ⓘ https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0565-245X

References

Belgium v Italy Live Commentary. (2021, July 2). *Goal*. Retrieved from https://www.goal.com/en/match/belgium-v-italy/brondt03n5g5od7fygoj8yxka

Belgium vs Italy LIVE! (2021, July 2). *Sky Sports*. Retrieved from https://www.skysports.com/football/belgium-vs-italy/live/421527

Biber, D., & Conrad, S. (2009). *Register, Genre, and Style*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Carović, I., & Sokolić, N. (2011). Prijenos sportskog događaja – elementi različitih govorničkih strategija [Sportscasting: Elements of Different Rhetorical Strategies]. In V. Karabalić, M. Aleksa Varga, & L. Pon (Eds.), *Diskurs i dijalog: teorije, metode, primjene* (pp. 159–174). Osijek: HDPL/Filozofski fakultet Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku.

Chovanec, J. (2009). Simulation of Spoken Interaction in Written Online Media Texts. *BrnoStudies in English, 35*(2), 109–128. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/105142

Chovanec, J. (2018). *The Discourse of Online Sportscasting*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Crystal, D. (2006). *Language and the Internet*. Second Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Crystal, D. (2019). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Third edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dawkes, P. (2021, July 2). Euro 2020: Italy set up Spain semi after beating Belgium – reaction. *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/sport/live/football/50941433

Doyle, P. (2021, June 27). Czechs bounce into last eight after Matthijs de Ligt sparks Dutch implosion. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/football/2021/jun/27/netherlands-czech-republic-euro-2020-match-report

Dymond, S. (2021, July 2). FOR WHOM THE BEL TOLLS Belgium 1-2 Italy LIVE RESULT: Insigne and Barella wondergoals set up Spain semi-final – Euro 2020 reaction. *The Sun*. Retrieved from https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/15445916/belgium-italy-live-stream-free-tv-watch-euro-2020-online/

Euro 2020 highlights Netherlands vs Czech Republic: Schick, Holer help Czech beat 10-man Dutch 2-0 to make quarters. (2021, June 27). *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from https://www.hindustantimes.com/sports/football/euro-2020-live-score-netherlands-vs-czech-republic-can-patrik-schick-s-czech-stop-the-memphis-depay-led-dutch-juggernaut-to-make-quarters-101624801160256.html

Euro 2020 Quarterfinal Highlights: Insigne, Barella star as Italy beat Belgium 2-1 to reach semifinals. (2021, July 2). *Hindustan Times*. Retrieved from https://www.hindustantimes.com/sports/football/belgium-vs-italy-euro-2020-quarterfinal-live-score-can-romelu-lukaku-inspire-belgium-to-win-over-roberto-mancini-s-italy-101625243134141.html

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London/New York: Hodder Arnold.

Ferguson, C. A. (1983). Sports Announcer Talk: Syntactic Aspects of Register Variation. *Language in Society, 12*(2), 153–172. doi:10.1017/S0047404500009787

Ferguson, C. A. (1994). Dialect, register, and genre: working assumptions aboutconventionalization. In D. Biber & E. Finegan (Eds.), *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Register* (pp. 31–56). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Foley, M. (2021, July 2). Hello and welcome to live updates of the quarterfinal stage tie at Euro 2020. Belgium, the number one side in the FIFA rankings, will take on Italy, the dark horses who have not been beaten in a national record 31-match run. This mouth-watering battle between international heavyweights is sure to be exciting, as something has to give. Kick off in Munich is at 20:00 BST. Eurosport. Retrieved from https://www.eurosport.com/football/euro-2020/2021/live-belgium-italy_mtc1109790/live.shtml

Hobbs, T. (2021, June 27). Hello and welcome to Eurosport's live coverage as Netherlands face Czech Republic in the last 16 of Euro 2020 at the Puskas Arena in Hungary. All the team news, facts and stats to follow with kick off at 17:00 GMT. *Eurosport*. Retrieved from https://www.eurosport.com/football/euro-2020/2021/live-netherlands-czech-republic_mtc1109783/live-commentary.shtml

Jucker, A. H. (2010). 'Audacious, brilliant!! What a strike!': Live text commentaries on the Internet as real-time narratives. In Hoffmann, C. R. (Ed.). *Narrative Revisited. Telling a Story in the Age of New Media* (pp. 57–77). *(Pragmatics & Beyond New Series 199)*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi:10.1075/pbns.199.05juc

Lewandowski, M. (2012). The Language of Online Sports Commentary in a Comparative Perspective. *Lingua Posnaniensis*, *54*(1), 65–76.

Mahood, C. (2021, June 27). Holland 0 Czech Republic 2 LIVE REACTION: Czechs shock 10-man Dutch side to reach Euro 2020 quarter-finals – updates. *The Sun*. Retrieved from https://www.thesun.co.uk/sport/15391752/netherlands-czech-republic-live-result-reaction/

Murray, S. (2021, July 2). A couple of beauties from Nicolo Barella and Lorenzo Insigne saw off Belgium's golden generation. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/football/live/2021/jul/02/belgium-v-italy-euro-2020-quarter-final-live-score-updates

Netherlands v Czech Republic Live Commentary. (2021, June 27). *Goal.* Retrieved from https://www.goal.com/en/match/netherlands-v-czech-republic/5ctdbn16ebingdbx9epsa60kq

Netherlands vs Czech Republic LIVE! (2021, June 27). *Sky Sports.* Retrieved from https://www.sky-sports.com/football/netherlands-vs-czech-republic/live/421521

Pérez-Sabater, C., Peña-Martínez, G., Turney, E. & Montero-Fleta, B. (2008). A spoken genre gets written: Online football commentaries in English, French, and Spanish. *Written Communication, 25*(2), 235–261. doi:10.1177/0741088307313174

Reaser, J. (2003). A Quantitative Approach to (Sub)registers: the Case of 'Sports Announcer Talk.' *Discourse Studies, 5*(3), 303–321. doi:10.1177/14614456030053002

Rosser, J. (2021, July 2). Belgium 1-2 Italy LIVE! Lukaku penalty; Insigne, Barella goals; LIVE! Euros result, highlights and reaction. *Evening Standard.* Retrieved from https://www.standard.co.uk/sport/football/belgium-vs-italy-live-stream-latest-score-euro-2021-result-watch-tv-team-news-b943887.html

Tereszkiewicz, A. (2014). 'I'm Not Sure what that means yet, but we'll Soon Find Out' – The Discourse of Newspaper Live Blogs. *Studia Linguistica Universitatis Iagellonicae Cracoviensis, 131*(3), 299–319. doi:10.4467/20834624sl.14.018.2326

Thompson, J. B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Werner, V. (2016). Real-time online text commentaries: A cross-cultural perspective. In C. Schubert & C. Sanchez-Stockhammer (Eds.), *Variational Text Linguistics* (pp. 271–306). Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter.