

T.V. Sports Commentators: What do They Say and Why?

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Very little work has been done on sports commentary. and I am aware of none which analyses what T.V. viewers actually hear. Accordingly, each comment made by commentators on tapes of two nationally televised baseball, football, tennis and soccer games was timed and placed in one of four categories: description of the specific game, information on the sport given as a result of specific events in the game, background of players/teams, and material unrelated to the specific game being viewed.

The results show that the length and purpose of commentary differs between sports, football commentators saying about twice as much as the soccer commentator. Football commentators spend most of their time describing the game and instructing viewers about it, baseball commentators talk most on matters unrelated to the game, tennis commentators instruct. The soccer commentator epitomizes traditional European ways of treating sports spectators; the baseball, football, and tennis commentators are always conscious of the American sports promoters' desire to enlarge the audience and encourage its active participation.

This analysis also raised theoretical questions about the validity of reducing performance to text, and studying it as text.



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