
Syntactic Structure of Play-by-Play Description found in Live Tweet Reports of English Premier League Matches Posted by English Sport Journalists

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Abstract

The changing of technology prompts a new kind of sport commentary, as can be seen in live reports of football matches posted on Twitter. As the commentators describe the action of the match, the syntactic structure used is quite distinctive. This study aims at describing the syntactic structure of play-by-play description in live tweet reports of English Premier League matches which are posted by English sport journalists. The method used in this study is qualitative approach. The data were taken from a compilation of live tweet reports that focus on English Premier League matches especially those posted by English sport journalists. In analyzing the data, Radford's theories on null constituents and auxiliary inversions are used. The findings of the research show that the syntactic structure of play by play description in live tweet reports involves several categories of syntactic reductions or null constituents. The categories of null constituents are null subjects, null auxiliaries, null T in finite clauses, null C in finite clauses, null determiners, and null quantifiers. These syntactic reductions occur because of the focus of the tweets which mainly revolves around the actions happening on the match. Furthermore, the syntactic reductions are caused by the limitation of Twitter's feature which only allows the users to post 140 characters at most. Beside syntactic reductions, the syntactic structure also involves several syntactic inversions, such as auxiliary inversions and inversions of word order.

Keywords: english journalist, english premier league, live tweet reports, play-by-play description, syntactic structure

Introduction

When a sporting event is being broadcasted on television or radio, it is usually followed by a commentary of the event. The commentary usually comes from the announcer who is chosen to announce the sporting event broadcasted on television or radio, whether it is a live broadcast or a recording. Beard (1998) states that the commentators are often those who have special knowledge of the game, including the tactics and terminology.

As technology is changing rapidly, it is found that there is another kind of live sport commentary that appears. The internet, especially the Social Networking Sites, apparently has become a place that can also be used for people to do live reports and commentary of sporting events such as football match. One of the Social Networking Sites that is often used for the live reports of football match is Twitter. As the site allows news from any parts of the world to spread quickly, it appears that it is often used by many sport journalists to give direct reports of football match they attend to people who follow their accounts, before the complete reports are printed in the newspaper.

The sentences that are constructed by the journalists deal with the syntactical rule of sentences. Holmes (2008) suggests that when people describe a sporting event, the grammar is distinctive as the focus is on the action, also known as 'play-by-play' description. He also indicates that 'play-by-play' description is characterized by the telegraphic grammar which involves features such as syntactic reduction and the inversion of normal word order.

Some studies have been conducted related to play-by-play description and online sport commentary. Rosmia (2011) in her undergraduate thesis explained about the syntactic and intonation

patterns in play-by-play description used by football commentator in Barclays Premier League. The theories used in her research are Janet Holmes' theory on play-by-play description, Andrew Radford's theory on syntax, and J. C. Wells' theory on intonation. Another research had been conducted regarding online sport commentary. Lewandowski (2012) of Adam Mickiewicz University previously conducted a research entitled "The Language of Online Sports Commentary in a Comparative Perspective". On his research, he explained about the correlation between the situational characteristics and lexico-grammatical features of a particular language variety that is involved in English-language online live soccer match reports. However, it appears that none of these studies is focused on the latest kind of sport commentary found on Twitter.

The objective of this research is to describe the syntactic structure of play by play description found in the live tweet reports of English Premier League matches posted by the sport journalist. It is expected that this research contributes to the study of sociolinguistics and syntax. It describes in more details the theory of register that explains about the differences in language used by particular groups. The analysis of this research gives a clear picture of telegraphic grammar, including syntactic reduction and inversion, which is beneficial for the study of syntax. The results of this research are useful for helping the readers and the users of Twitter to understand more about register and the telegraphic grammar used in sport announcer talk which is found on the live tweet reports of football match. In addition, this research would be an inspirational study for future research especially on sport announcer talk and the syntactic structure.

Method

The data used in this research were taken from the personal Twitter accounts of the participants of the research. They were two sport journalists whose nationality was English and they worked for English newspapers, one for the Daily Mail and the other for the Telegraph. The data are in a form of live reports or short updates or tweets of English Premier League matches posted by the journalists on their personal Twitter accounts every match day. For the first journalists, the tweets included in this research were the live reports from seven English Premier League matches including the match of Southampton FC against Chelsea FC on April 7th 2013 at 21.00 – 22.48 IT with 4 tweets featured, Manchester City FC against Manchester United FC on April 9th 2013 at 02.45 – 04.04 WIT with 4 tweets featured, West Ham United FC against Manchester United FC on April 18th at 01.45 – 03.04 WIT with 5 tweets featured, Liverpool FC against Chelsea FC on April 21st 2013 at 22.00 – 23.54 WIT with 7 tweets featured, Aston Villa FC against Southampton FC on April 30th 2013 at 02.00 – 03.47 WIT with 9 tweets featured, Stoke City FC against Southampton FC on May 7th 2013 at 01.45 – 03.32 WIT with 3 tweets featured, and Wigan Athletic FC against Swansea FC on May 8th 2013 at 01.45 – 03.34 WIT with 7 tweets featured. For the second journalists, the tweets included in this research were the live reports from seven English Premier League matches including the match of Arsenal FC against Reading FC on March 30th 2013 at 22.00 – 23.51 WIT with 25 tweets featured, Reading FC against Southampton FC on April 6th 2013 at 18.45 – 20.38 WIT with 11 tweets featured, Arsenal FC against Norwich FC on April 13th 2013 at 21.00 – 22.54 WIT with 29 tweets featured, Arsenal FC against Everton FC on April 17th 2013 at 01.45 – 03.33 WIT with 5 tweets featured, Fulham FC against Arsenal FC on April 20th 2013 at 21.00 – 22.53 WIT with 14 tweets featured, Arsenal FC against Manchester United FC on April 29th 2013 at 22.00 – 00.04 WIT with 14 tweets featured, and Arsenal FC against Wigan Athletic FC on May 15th 2013 at 01.45 – 03.37 WIT with 8 tweets featured.

As the data of this research are in a form of text, qualitative approach was used for this research. Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge (2007) point out that qualitative approach focuses on reports of experience or on data which cannot be adequately expressed numerically. This approach is suitable for the research as the data cannot be shown in numbers. The data for this research also does not involve variables and statistical techniques as it is in a form of text. The text data that is featured in this research can attest that qualitative approach is suitable for this research as Creswell (2003) states that qualitative approach can be employed for text or image data.

This research involved several steps in the collection of the data. Firstly, the writer searched for the English journalists who usually did live reports of English Premier League matches on their personal twitter accounts. Aside from writing articles for the newspaper they worked for, the English journalists also often reported the ongoing match on their personal twitter accounts before the complete reports of the match were posted on the website and printed in the newspaper. Secondly, the writer then looked for information about the journalists from their profile in twitter and online news sites to make sure that they were the proper journalists specialized in reporting sports. Thirdly, after the writer determined the English journalists, the writer then asked for the journalists' permission to use their live tweet reports as data in this research. After the writer got the permission from the journalists, the live tweet reports were then copied and saved in a Word document.

Regarding the analysis of data, this research involved a few steps. Firstly, the identification of the syntactic structure whether it involved reduction or inversion or not. It was done by analyzing each sentence in the live tweet reports posted by the sport journalists to find out whether it followed the syntactic structure of English sentence or not. Secondly, the sentences which did not follow the syntactic structure of English sentence were then classified into two groups: syntactic reduction and syntactic inversion. Thirdly, the sentences with syntactic reductions were analyzed in order to describe what elements of the sentences were reduced and how they were reduced by using tree diagram. After that, the sentences with syntactic inversions were also analyzed in order to describe what elements of the sentences were inverted and how they were inverted by using tree diagram. The analysis of the syntactic reduction and inversion was based on Radford's theory of syntactic reduction and inversion. Finally, interpretation regarding the findings was made and concluded.

Syntactic Reduction in Live Tweet Reports

Sport journalists posted their live reports of the ongoing football matches on the form of sentences that were posted on their twitter accounts. The sentences that are constructed by the journalists deal with the syntactical rule of sentences. Regarding syntactic structure, Radford (2009) explains that it relates to how words are combined together to form phrases and sentences. He indicates that phrases and sentences are built up by a series of merger operations, each of which combines a pair of constituents together to form a larger constituent. It is also explained that the syntactic structure can be represented in a form of tree diagram. In tree diagram, some abbreviations are used, such as T which stands for Tense markers, TP for Tense Phrase, N for Noun, NP for Noun Phrase, ADV for Adverb, AP for Adjectival Phrase, AUX for Auxiliary, AUXP for Auxiliary Phrase, C for Complementiser, CP for Complementiser Phrase, D for Determiner, DP for Determiner Phrase, PRN for Pronoun, Q for Quantifier, QP for Quantifier Phrase, V for Verb, and VP for Verb Phrase.

Radford (2009) explains that in syntactic structure, it is possible that there are null constituents or empty categories involved. Radford (2009) states that syntactic reduction or empty category relates to constituents which have semantic features but lack audible phonetic features, as they are given null spell out or omitted. In the case of this research about syntactic structure in live reports of English Premier League matches posted by the sport journalists on their twitter accounts, the finding of the research shows that there are syntactic reductions in almost every sentence contained in the live tweet reports. It is also found that there are several elements which are often omitted from the sentences in the live tweet reports.

Radford (2009) states that empty categories or null constituents in syntactic structures can be classified into several categories such as null subjects, null auxiliaries, null T in finite clauses, null T in infinitive clauses, null C in finite clauses, null C in infinitive clauses, and null determiners and quantifiers.

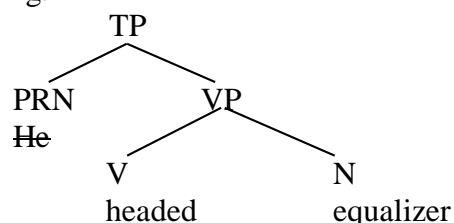
One category of null constituent that can be found in the data is truncated null subjects which relates to subject pronouns like I/you/he/we/they that are given a null spell out if it is the first word in a sentence, and if it is weak, in other words, if it is unstressed or non-contrastive. This null subject can usually be found in informal styles of spoken English and also in diary styles of written English. For example, in the sentence 'I can't find my pen', the word 'I' can be given a null spell out to become 'can't find my pen' without affecting the meaning of the sentence.

In the data of the research, there are several sentences in which the truncated null subject was found. One of them can be seen from the example given below.

J1 M4 S47 headed equalizer 2-2.

It can be seen that in the sentence of the example above, the subject of the sentence is omitted. The subject of the second sentence could actually be filled with subject pronoun 'he', resulting in the sentence 'he headed the equalizer', but instead, the subject pronoun is given a null spell out to become only 'headed equalizer'. The omitted subject pronoun in this sentence does not affect the meaning of the sentence as it is made clear from the sentence preceding the omitted subject pronoun that the subject that is talked about in the second sentence is the same subject as that in the previous sentence as can be seen in J1 M4 S46 'Suarez definitely has the headlines.'

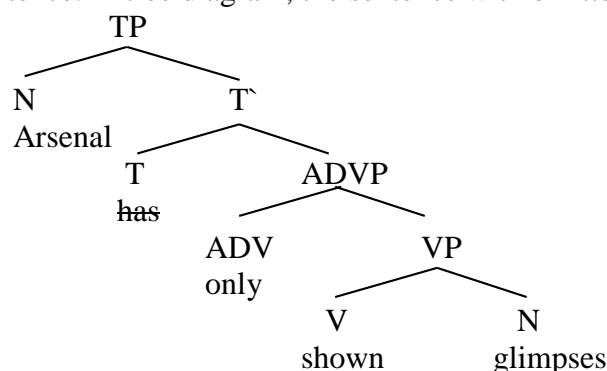
The sentence with omitted subject pronoun above can be represented in tree diagram as the following.



Other than null subject, it is found in the data that there are also some sentences involving null auxiliaries. Downing et al. (2006, p. 319) classified auxiliaries into several types including auxiliary 'be', 'have', and modal idiom such as 'had better' or 'would rather'. The data of the research shows that there are empty categories found in the sentences which involve null auxiliary 'be' and 'have'. One example of the sentence with null auxiliary 'have' can be seen below.

J2 M4 S238 Arsenal only shown glimpses.

In the sentence above, it can be seen that the Predicator of the sentence, 'only shown' is in a form of perfect tense. However, the auxiliary 'has' cannot be found thus it means that it is omitted from the sentence. In tree diagram, the sentence with omitted auxiliary can be represented as follows.



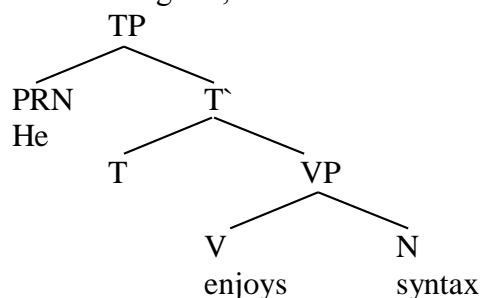
Another type of auxiliary that is often omitted in the data is the auxiliary 'be'. One of the sentences with null auxiliary 'be' in the data can be seen below.

J2 M3 S216 Arteta taking it..

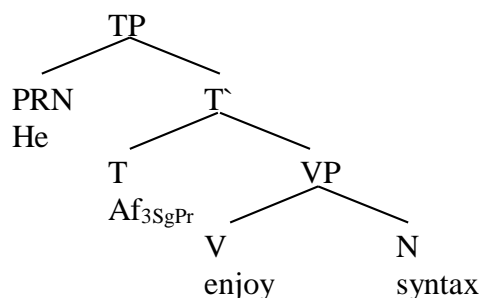
The sentence above includes several syntactic elements such as 'Arteta' which acts as the Subject, 'taking' which is the Predicator and 'it' which can be considered as the Object. However, it can be observed from the sentence that there is a syntactic element in the Predicator that is missing. It can be seen that the word 'is' is omitted from the sentence. Since the word 'is' is considered to be an auxiliary, there is a null auxiliary 'be' involved in the sentence.

Beside null subjects and null auxiliaries, the data of the research was analyzed to have another category of null constituents. It was found that there are null T and C in finite clauses. Radford (2009, p. 89) states that auxiliariless clauses explained previously seem to suggest that all finite clauses are Tense Phrases (TP) which are headed by an overt or null T constituents. However, it is explained that

there are some cases in which the T constituents seem to be omitted, such as in the sentence ‘he enjoys syntax’. In tree diagram, the structure of ‘he enjoys syntax’ can be represented as follows.



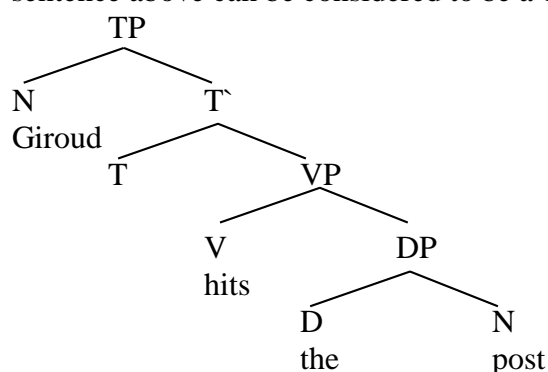
Regarding this matter, Radford (2009, p. 90) explains that the head position of TP has to be occupied by some kind of lexical item. However, the T constituents in the structure above can be seen to be containing nothing. It is also assumed that the sentence ‘he enjoys syntax’ could be originated from ‘he does enjoy syntax’, in which the T constituents is occupied by DO+Af3SgPr. Therefore, in the sentence ‘he enjoys syntax’, the T constituents can be considered to have a third person singular affix (Af3SgPr) which is attached to the verb. Therefore, the structure can be represented as follows.



The findings of the research show that there are sentences which can be considered to have null T in finite clauses. One of them can be seen below.

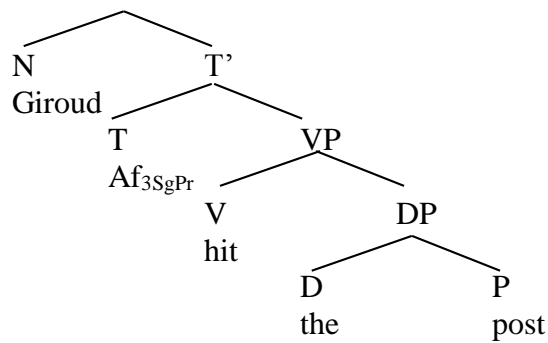
J2 M5 S252 Giroud hits the post.

The sentence above can be considered to be a Tense Phrase (TP) which has a structure as follows.



As explained by Radford (2009, p. 90) that the head position of TP has to be occupied by some kind of lexical item, the T constituents of the sentence in J2 M5 S252 can be seen to have nothing. Regarding the TP that is headed by a T constituent, it can be considered that the sentence ‘Giroud hits the post’ has a null T constituent. It can be explained that the sentence could be originated from ‘Giroud does hit the post’, in which the T constituents is occupied by DO+Af3SgPr. Therefore, in the sentence ‘Giroud hits the post’, the T constituents can be considered to have a third person singular affix (Af3SgPr) which is attached to the verb. Therefore, the structure can be represented as follows.

TP



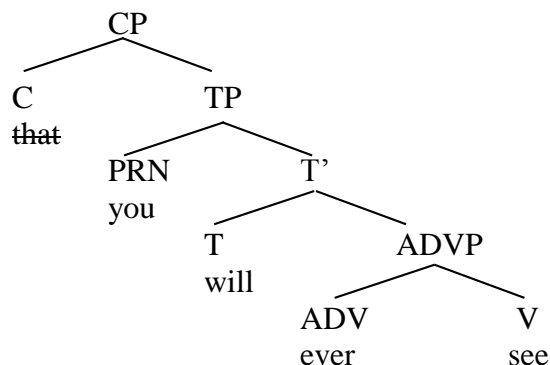
Other than null T in finite clauses, the data of the research was observed to also have null complementiser in finite clauses. Radford (2009, p. 97) mentions that clauses can be introduced by complementisers such as *if*, *that*, and *for*. It is also stated that complementiserless clauses are possible because they can be considered to have CPs headed by a null complementiser.

One of the sentences in the live tweet reports that can be considered as having a null complementiser in finite clause can be seen below.

J1 M7 S93 That is some of the worst defending you'll ever see.

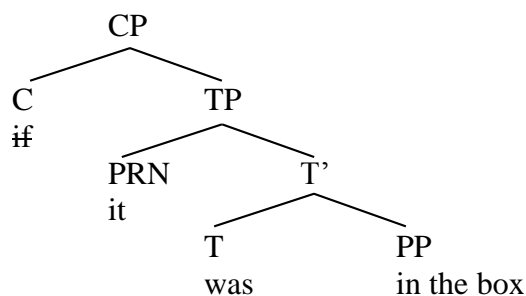
In the sentence above, the clause 'you'll ever see' can be interpreted as declarative in force, therefore the clause can be introduced by a declarative complementiser 'that' as mentioned previously. However, the declarative complementiser 'that' cannot be found in the sentence, thus it can be concluded that the clause 'you'll ever see' in sentence J1 M7 S93 involves a null complementiser 'that'. Therefore, the sentence can be considered to originate from 'That is some of the worst defending [that] you'll ever see.' with a declarative complementiser 'that' which introduces the clause 'you'll ever see'.

In tree diagram, the clause with omitted complementiser above can be represented as follows.

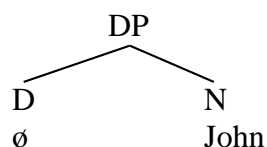


Beside null declarative complementiser 'that', the data of the research mentioned above also shows that there is also a sentence which involve null interrogative complementiser 'if'. In J2 M1 S154, the clause 'it was in the box' included in the sentence can be interpreted as interrogative in force, thus it can be introduced by an interrogative complementiser such as 'if'. However, the complementiser cannot be found in the sentence, therefore it can be considered to have an omitted complementiser 'if' as it can be originated from 'Not sure [if] it was in the box.'

The structure of the clause with null complementiser 'if' above can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



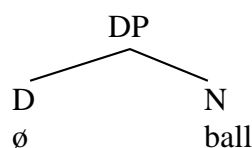
Other type of null constituent that can be found in the data of the research is null determiner and quantifier. Radford (2009, p. 108) states that in the syntax of nominals or noun expressions, it is possible that the noun expression contains no overt determiner or quantifier. It is elaborated that these noun expressions are generally headed by a null determiner or quantifier. An example of null determiners can be seen in the sentence ‘John and the chairman are attending the meeting.’ In this sentence, the determiner phrase (DP) ‘John’ can be considered to have a null determiner as opposed to ‘the chairman’ which has overt determiner ‘the’. Structure of the phrase with null determiner can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



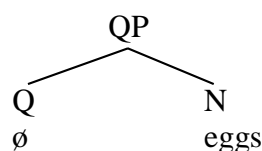
Sentence with null determiner can also be found in this research as seen in the example given below.

J2 M1 S102 Giroud lifted ball over Taylor, Taylor clears him out, Reading clear.

The sentence above can be seen to include an expression ‘ball’. This expression can be considered to be a determiner phrase. However, it can be observed that this expression has no determiner, thus it can be concluded that the expression ‘ball’ has null determiner as it can be originated from a determiner phrase ‘the ball’. Therefore, the structure of the phrase can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



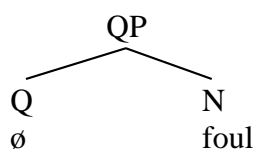
Other than null definite determiner, Radford (2009, p. 110) states that English also has a null indefinite quantifier. In the sentence ‘eggs and many dairy products cause cholesterol’, the plural noun ‘eggs’ can be considered to have a null quantifier. It is explained that the word ‘eggs’ can be described as a bare plural noun, however, in the sentence it can be seen that it is then coordinated with a quantifier phrase (QP) ‘many dairy products’. Therefore, it suggests that the bare plural noun ‘eggs’ is a quantifier phrase which is headed by a null quantifier. The structure can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



One of the sentences in the live tweet reports which have a phrase with null quantifier can be seen below.

J2 M6 S287 Evans booked for foul on Walcott.

In the data above, it can be seen that the sentence contains an expression ‘foul’ which can be considered to be a quantifier phrase. This expression is considered as a quantifier phrase because another sentence featured in the data as can be seen in J2 M6 S289, ‘That notorious hardman Theo Walcott booked for a foul’, is observed to have a quantifier ‘a’ that precedes the word ‘foul’. However, the quantifier of the expression found in the sentence J2 M6 S287 ‘Evans booked for foul on Walcott’ cannot be found. Therefore, it can be concluded that the expression ‘foul’ in the sentence has a null quantifier. The structure of the phrase with null quantifier above can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



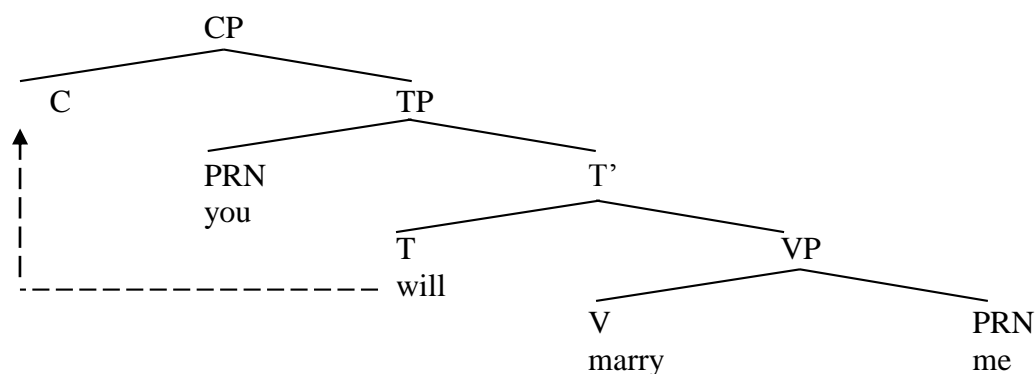
Syntactic Inversion in Live Tweet Reports

Other than null constituents, it was also found that there are syntactic inversions involved in the sentences of live tweet reports. In the case of syntactic inversion, Radford (2009, p. 11) explains that if the primary goal of the sentence is description rather than explanation, it is possible that there is syntactic inversion involved. For example, in the sentence ‘Who had he said would do what?’ which involves auxiliary inversion operation by which the past tense auxiliary ‘had’ is moved in front of its subject ‘he’.

One type of syntactic inversion which is mentioned by Radford (2009) is the inversion of auxiliary. Regarding this type of inversion, it is explained that it usually involves head movement as can be seen in the comparison of two sentences ‘if you will marry me’ and ‘will you marry me?’ Radford (2009) indicates that the first sentence ‘if you will marry me’ could be considered to be an elliptical form of the sentence ‘I wanted to ask if you will marry me’. The ellipsis results in the word if that introduces the complement clause. However, it is stated that complementisers like if cannot be used to introduce main clauses in English, so it results in auxiliary inversion as can be seen in the second sentence ‘will you marry me?’.

Regarding the inversion of auxiliary in the second sentence, Radford (2009) explains that the verb marry merges with the pronoun me to form the VP marry me. This VP is then merged with the T-auxiliary will to form the T-bar will marry me, and this T-bar is, in turn, merged with the pronoun you to form the TP you will marry me. The resulting TP is then merged with a strong null interrogative complementiser \emptyset to form the CP \emptyset you will marry me. As the interrogative complementiser \emptyset is considered to be strong, the null complementiser then attracts the auxiliary will to move from T to C to attach to the null complementiser, so filling the C position. Therefore, it can be said that this inversion involves T-to-C Movement.

The structure of auxiliary inversion found in the sentence above can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



Regarding syntactic inversion in a sentence, Downing et al. (2006) mentions that it is possible that there is inversion of some syntactical elements in sentences. It is indicated that this syntactic inversion can usually be seen in direct or quoted speech which involves syntactical elements such as Subject and Predicator. Downing et al. (2006) elaborates that the inversion of Subject and Predicator is possible in direct speech if the Subject is a proper name, for example ‘said Clark’, and not a pronoun as in ‘said she’.

Some of the sentences with syntactic inversion found in the data of this research can be seen below.

J1 M5 S66 "We want six," chants the Holte End

J1 M6 S89 "We are staying up" chant #wafc fans

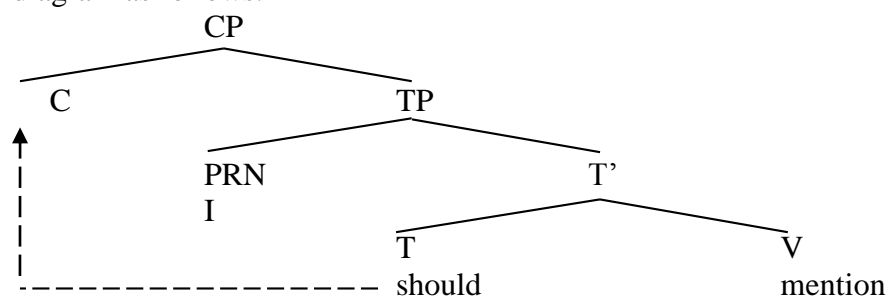
J2 M6 S280 Should I mention RvP gave it away?

As mentioned earlier, direct or quoted speech is possible to include the inversion of syntactical elements such as Subject and Predicator. The sentences such as those in J1 M5 S66 and J1 M6 S89 express direct speech made by the journalist who reports the chanting of the fans in the stadium. It can be seen that there is a syntactic inversion involved in the sentence as the Subject ‘the Holte End’ is located after the Predicator ‘chants’. However, this syntactic inversion is possible as the sentence is a direct speech. Furthermore, the Subject of the sentence is not a pronoun but a proper name of the place in which the fans are located ‘the Holte End’.

Other than the inversion of syntactic elements such as Subject and Predicate that was found in direct speech, the syntactic inversion in the data also involved auxiliary inversion that was found in questions such as those in J1 M5 S50, J2 M1 S168, and J2 M6 S280. The clause ‘should I mention’ in sentence J2 M6 S280 can be considered to involve auxiliary inversion as the clause which is a CP was introduced by an auxiliary which initially acted as a T. However, as mentioned by Radford (2009, p. 120), a Complementiser Phrase (CP) should be headed by complementisers such as that, if, and for. Regarding the clause ‘should I mention’, it can be seen that instead of complementiser, the clause was introduced by an auxiliary. In this case, it was also explained by Radford (2009, p. 120) that complementisers are not the only kinds of words which can precede subjects in clauses as can be seen in yes or no questions which have auxiliary as the head of the clause. The head position of the clause which is filled by auxiliary as seen in questions is possible as elaborated by Radford (2009, p. 121) that those auxiliaries move out of their normal post-subject position into pre-subject position, therefore it can be concluded that the auxiliary in questions moves from the head T position in TP into the head C position in CP.

Previously, it was mentioned that the sentence ‘will you marry me?’ can be regarded as an elliptical form of ‘I wanted to ask [if you will marry me]’, with T-to-C movement involved. Similarly, the sentence in J2 M6 S280, ‘should I mention RvP gave it away?’ can also be considered to be an elliptical form of ‘I wanted to ask [if I should mention RvP gave it away]’. In this case, the clause ‘if I should mention’ has a complementiser ‘if’ which introduces the clause. However, as stated by Radford (2009, p. 122) that complementisers like if cannot be used to introduce main clauses in English, so the head C position which is considered strong then filled by moving the auxiliary ‘should’

from T position to C. Therefore, the clause ‘should I mention’ above can be represented in tree diagram as follows.



Conclusion

From this research, it can be concluded that the language used by sport commentators to describe a sporting event on television, radio, or live broadcast is quite distinguishable. It is as distinctive as the new kind of sport commentary which results from the advance of technology that is live reports of football matches posted on Twitter.

The findings of the research show that there are six categories of null constituents used in the live report on Twitter. They are null subjects, null auxiliaries, null T in finite clauses, null C in finite clauses, null determiners, and null quantifiers. Null subjects include sentences which have no overt subjects, null auxiliaries are used by omitting auxiliaries such as ‘be’ and ‘have’, null T or C involves a null spell out of T constituent or a complementiser such as ‘if’. The syntactic reductions that were found in live tweet reports can be caused by the focus of the reports which mainly revolve around the actions happening on the match. Furthermore, it can also be caused by the limitation of Twitter’s feature which only allows the users to post 140 characters at most. However, this syntactic reduction does not change the meaning of the sentence because the omitted elements are mostly predictable in the context (Holmes, 2008).

In addition to syntactic reduction, it was also found that there are several sentences in the live tweet reports which involve syntactic inversion. Regarding Radford’s (2009) theory on auxiliary inversion, it was found that there are three sentences in the live tweet reports that are in the form of questions and feature this auxiliary inversion. Other than that, it was also found in the findings that there are two sentences in the live tweet reports that are in the form of direct speech, which as stated by Downing (2006) can be considered as inversion of word order. Finally, the low number of syntactic inversion found in the live tweet reports is related to the time of player and action identification as the sport commentators on Twitter have more time to identify the players and the actions happening in the match comparing to sport commentators on television or radio. Therefore, passive construction is used instead of inversion of word order.

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