

# Post-match interviews in New Zealand rugby: A conciliatory media interview genre<sup>1</sup>

Kieran A. File  
Victoria University of Wellington

## Abstract

In this article I explore the way New Zealand English speakers use language in post-match interviews after professional televised rugby games. More specifically, I focus on the linguistic features that serve to create the *tone* of this particular interview genre. What I will demonstrate is that features of interviewer conduct such as the use of terms of endearment, tokens of commiseration and congratulations, a focus on positive experiences, complimenting and praising, and the use of humour help to create a conciliatory interview experience. These features and this tone of interview differ remarkably from other media interviews that have been frequently explored in the media discourse literature, such as political interviews. In the discussion I explore this point further by comparing the social contexts of both the post-match interview and the more adversarial political interview in an attempt to account for the conciliatory fashion in which post-match interviews are carried out. Suggestions for future research are also explored.

## 1. Introduction

This article focuses on the way speakers of New Zealand English operate in an institutional speech event – the post-match interview. The post-match interview could be regarded as an obligatory component in the closing stages of a televised sporting experience. This is almost certainly the case in the New Zealand professional rugby context, where interviews with captains, players of the day and coaching staff happen ritually after the match. However, despite its prominence as a resource in televised sport, the post-match interview has been subjected to relatively little attention from researchers (see Caldwell, 2009; Emmison, 1987, 1988). In what follows, I explore prominent linguistic features of the post-match interview in a New Zealand professional rugby context. More specifically, I focus on the *key* or *tone* of this speech event and will highlight how many of the prominent linguistic features function to construct a conciliatory interview experience. I focus on interview

---

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr Elaine Vine and Professor Janet Holmes for their helpful suggestions on draft versions of this article. I would also like to thank the two reviewers for their comments on the initial version of this paper.

openings and closings, and aspects of the main questioning and answering tasks interviewers and interviewees engage in. Features such as terms of endearment, focusing on positives in questioning, compliments and humour are prominent in post-match interview discourse in the context explored here and when used help to create a conciliatory interview experience. This article focuses primarily on the conduct of interviewers, since it is largely the interviewer's role to run the interview, and arguably the way they approach an interviewee in the setting of a media interview accounts for the tone or key of an interview exchange.

In the discussion section, I explore the findings of this conciliatory interview context in relation to findings from another media interview context – the adversarial political interview (Blum-Kulka, 1983; Clayman, 2001; Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Jucker, 1986; Lauerbach, 2004, 2006). Research has identified that political media interviews have a tendency to be carried out in an adversarial and combative fashion. Interviewers often use discursive resources to trap interviewees into making face-threatening admissions, while interviewees use their talk to defend themselves or to launch attacks on other politicians and their political parties. This presents a very different tone to the one evident in post-match interviews. I explore what features of the context perhaps lead to New Zealand professional rugby post-match interviews being constructed in a more conciliatory fashion. I do this by focusing on the social purpose, the status of the interviewee and the shared sociohistorical backgrounds of the interviewers and interviewees in post-match interviews, and consider how these contextual features, which differ from the more adversarial political interview context, may account for the conciliatory nature of interviewer and interviewee conduct in post-match interviews. While this study does not have an explicit focus on features of New Zealand English, it does provide insights into how some New Zealanders use language in institutional contexts, insights that can then be used as a point of comparison by future studies in different regions.

## **2. Data set and methodology**

The findings presented in this article draw on a sub-corpus of 40 randomly collected interviews from the Super 15 rugby competition.<sup>2</sup> In its current form, this competition is an international club competition that is played between fifteen professional rugby teams from large cities/territories in New Zealand, Australia and

---

<sup>2</sup> The data for this particular study come from a New Zealand component of a larger data set of 240 post-match interviews and a larger study of the language use in post-match interviews with professional male sports players. Considering this paper is concerned with New Zealand English, I will restrict myself to this sub-corpus and also to those interviews within this sub-corpus that involve a New Zealand interviewer, a New Zealand interviewee, or both. There are 25 interviews that fit this description. While this amount will not allow for major claims to be made, it will allow for exploratory insights into how New Zealand speakers do things with their language in this particular interview genre to be drawn.

South Africa, with five teams from each of the three countries. The analysis focuses on how New Zealand English speakers use language in these interviews, either in their role as interviewer or interviewee. The focus on rugby interviews here also represents its status as New Zealand's most prominently televised and supported sports game. This data set presents a contrasting media interview context from the political ones frequently researched. It also provides data from a region other than the United Kingdom and the United States, which have also dominated media interview discourse research.

The interviews in this data set were analysed from a discourse analytic perspective to highlight features that contributed to the key or tone of the interview. This approach allows the analyst to explore the link between language use and context, providing a detailed examination of the way language is used by speakers as they interact in a particular context. From a very early stage in the analysis, it was clear that interviewers and interviewees were interacting in very conciliatory ways, and this theme developed as one for further and detailed exploration. The findings of this analysis of the tone of the post-match interview are presented and discussed below.

### **3. Linguistic features of the post-match interview genre**

#### **3.1 Using tokens of empathy, congratulations and good luck**

One of the key markers of a conciliatory interview experience is the use of tokens of empathy and congratulations. Often in the opening and closing stages of post-match interviews, interviewers will directly congratulate or commiserate with the interviewee. This is particularly prominent in the closing moves, as the following examples illustrate (see underlined extracts in particular).

#### **Winning players**

##### **Example 1: RO008**

##### **Interviewer**

well we enjoyed you here at waikato stadium  
→ well done and good luck next week

##### **Luke Morahan**

thank you very much

##### **Example 2: RO029**

##### **Interviewer**

→ well congratulations on the victory  
thanks for talking to us

**Juan De Jongh**

thanks eh

cheers eh

**Losing players**

**Example 3: RO004**

**Interviewer**

→ commiserations

safe travel

**Jimmy Cowan**

thanks willy

thanks very much

**Example 4: RO030**

**Interviewer**

→ well hard to swallow kevvv

but congratulations again for being the most capped ah super rugby player for new zealand

**Keven Mealamu**

cheers willy

thanks

Within the openings and closings of these interviews, many tokens of this nature are employed by interviewers to create empathy and build rapport. These tokens, it could be argued, serve the function of indicating that the interviewer is aware of how the players are likely to be feeling. Other ways interviewers can linguistically achieve this with losing interviewees is through expressions and wishes of good luck and expressions of hope that the interviewee can turn things around in the next match.

**Example 5: RO005**

**Interviewer**

→ okay well have a good one next week next friday against the lions

**Jimmy Cowan**

thanks very much coops

thank you

For winners, interviewers can instead express wishes that the good form continues and that the interviewee's team can continue to win and perform well.

**Example 6: RO020**

**Interviewer**

→ ah (well) hope to see more  
good luck

**Neemia Tialata**

cheers mate  
thanks

These explicit tokens of good luck, congratulations and commiseration are commonly employed and arguably mark a ceremonial type experience where winners and losers are praised (see Emmison, 1987 for similar findings).

### **3.2 Using nicknames to construct solidarity**

Another feature common to openings and closings in post-match interviews is the use of terms of address to greet and identify the interviewee. Terms of address are almost exclusively used in opening and closing stages of the interview and are employed structurally to signal the opening and closing of the interview. However, the choice of nicknames in performing this structural function simultaneously serves to construct solidarity between the interviewer and the interviewee. Consider the examples below.

**Example 7: RO022**

**Interviewer**

→ well dan  
back in the saddle  
and ah you just slotted into it beautifully  
off the boot  
made a number of breaks as well  
looked pretty good

**Example 8: RO011**

**Interviewer**

→ well karkis how do you how do you sum that one up after eighty

In examples 7 and 8 above the interviewer uses a shortened form and a nickname respectively to address the interviewee. 'Dan' in example two is used to identify Daniel Carter, whereas 'Karkis' in example three is used instead of Richard Kahui. The use of nicknames also extends to the way commentators and interviewers

address each other when transitioning from commentary to the post-match interviews and even the way interviewees can address interviewers. In example 9 below, the use of nicknames in the exchange between the commentator and the interviewer, and the way the interviewer addresses the interviewee illustrate this.

**Example 9: RO014**

**Studio commentator (Grant Nisbett)**

→ and here's ah keven mealamu + with /tj\

**Interviewer (Tony Johnson)**

→ /i've got\ two hookers here nisbo

i've got ah both captains

firstly keven mealamu

→ kevie ah + good first half

but I guess those penalties were expensive weren't they

**Keven Mealamu**

definitely I think ah +

[turn continues...]

In the above extract, the studio commentator addresses the interviewer by his nickname (TJ – Tony Johnson) who then addresses the commentator by his nickname (Nisbo – Grant Nisbett). The interviewer then identifies the interviewee for the audience using his full name but as he shifts his footing to address the interviewee himself, he uses a shortened version of his name (Kevie). In example 10 below, a closing stage, the interviewee addresses and thanks the interviewer by using a nickname (Coops – Matthew Cooper). A similar pattern can be seen above in example 5.

**Example 10: RO011**

**Interviewer**

okay thanks

**Richard Kahui**

→ cheers coops

The deployment of nicknames by interviewers, interviewees and studio commentators to refer to and address each other helps to create a conciliatory and friendly tone and arguably illustrates that the exchange is between mates and that it is unlikely to be adversarial or combative in nature. The use of terms like *mate* (see example 11 below) also help to create this feel.

**Example 11: RO001**

**Interviewer**

okay thanks andrew

**Andrew Hore**

→ cheers mate

*Mate* is typically used by interviewees when thanking interviewers at the conclusion of the interview as is the case in the above example. Terms like *mate* can also occur throughout the interview and not exclusively in the opening and closing stages. In the following example, *mate* occurs in the immediate response to every question asked by the interviewer in one of the post-match interviews in this data set.

**Example 12: RO027**

**Interviewer**

well jamie

you've got there again

it was always gonna be a battle

it proved to be the case

but that's a fine- a fine win

**Jamie Mckintosh**

→ yeah mate it was ah it wasn't pretty at times

[turn continues...]

**Interviewer**

probably that ten point haul just before half time was the difference

you managed to hang on to that

**Jamie Mckintosh**

→ yeah mate we're struggling to build pressure with our goal kicking sometimes

[turn continues...]

**Interviewer**

marshy and I in the commentary box were talking about ah the importance of key players in positions

and you'd have to look at ah jimmy cowan on a night like this

he had a + outstanding game

**Jamie Mckintosh**

→ yeah mate ah our plan during the week we knew it was going to be wet and shitty was (you know) do a lot of box kicking

[turn continues...]

**Interviewer**

well these points keep you in the hunt ah up around ah the top six again which is outstanding

and ah you get a wee breather next week

**Jamie Mckintosh**

→ yeah mate it was ah + the bye's come at a right time=  
[turn continues...]

The interviewee responds to each of the presuppositions raised in the interviewers questions with a 'yeah mate' construction. While this may be an idiosyncratic feature of this speaker's speech, the use of this construction may also mark a pre-existing relationship. As with nicknames, the fact that terms of endearment like *mate* can be employed in this genre suggests that there are not the same constraints on formal address as there are in other media interview genres like the political news interview where interviewers and interviewees tend to 'disattend' pre-existing personal relationships constructing a more formal and less personal interview exchange (Clayman & Heritage, 2002: 67).

### 3.3 Siding with an interviewee

In the openings, interviewers also foreground a conciliatory tone by providing assessments of the match that are likely to align with the way the interviewee is feeling about the match. Examples of this can be seen below.

#### Example 13: RO037

**Interviewer**

→ alright richie I imagine that's a pretty pleasing win particularly coming back from south africa=  
=you've had a number of injuries to contend with  
and ah the chiefs were always gonna be difficult tonight

#### Example 14: RO001

**Interviewer**

and ah + andrew hore stepping in  
well andrew ah + taking over the captaincy  
→ that's a great way to start the season

#### Example 15: RO012

**Interviewer**

yeah thanks very much tony  
and tom your fiftieth game  
→ obviously you would've liked it of you had a victory



Additionally, and especially in interviews with players from losing teams, interviewers can propose excuses and reasons for the loss in these assessments.

**Example 16: RO016**

**Interviewer**

well nathan no doubt you'll be disappointed

→ but it was always going to be a very hard task coming over here with the amount of injuries that you suffered in- during the week

**Example 17: RO035**

**Interviewer**

mils + you'd be ah bitterly disappointed I'm sure

→ I suspect you looked the crusaders side and thought it was really an opportunity to knock them over tonight particularly on this ground

Many of these assessments presented in the opening exchange of the interview function as the main eliciting act of the interviewer's initial questioning turn, where they are presented to the interviewee for confirmation and agreement. Because they are oriented to the way the interviewer predicts that the interviewee is likely to be feeling, the responses are predominantly in agreement, which further creates a conciliatory tone.

This feature, along with the use of empathetic terms of address and explicit tokens of congratulations and commiserations, suggests that interviewers work particularly hard at the beginning of interviews to create a conciliatory interview environment. This may be a strategic resource employed by interviewers to get the interviewee relaxed and onside and consequently more willing to do an interview. This is likely to lead to a more fruitful and cooperative interview experience for the interviewer. However, the conciliatory work is not limited to openings and closings and is also evident in the main eliciting acts in the body stages of the interview, as we will now see.

### **3.4 Asking positively oriented questions**

Interviewers in the post-match interview tend to angle their questions so they primarily focus on positive elements. When interviewing winners, interviewers tend to focus their questions on the accomplishment of winning and the positive elements of play that led to the interviewee's team winning. As indicated in the examples above, many of the elicitations interviewers ask take the linguistic form of declaratives and because these declaratives are constructed to focus on positives they may also be functioning as positive assessments or in some cases even as

compliments (see Emmison, 1987, 1988 for a similar finding). Examples 18 to 20 below illustrate this practice.

**Example 18: RO003**

**Interviewer**

→ last week you were very disciplined=  
=it looked pretty good on defence  
this week you probably added some of the attack as well

**Example 19: RO032**

**Interviewer**

→ scrums were good  
they got better in the second half  
and really that was probably the where you won the game as well as much as anything else  
you'd be pretty happy with the lineouts too

**Example 20: RO037**

**Interviewer**

toddy mentioned the um + territory game ah at the half time + talk that I had with him  
and that proved to be probably the turning point  
→ you just nailed them down there

These questions, or “queclaratives” as they are sometimes referred to (Thompson, 2004), are indicative of how winning interviews are carried out in this data set. Interviewers typically highlight the positive features of the match for comment by the interviewee. In the three examples above the interviewer highlights positive actions in professional rugby such as being disciplined, good in defence, implementing scrums and lineouts well and focuses on aspects of the match that are likely to please the interviewee. However, this positive orientation is not exclusively the case. Compare the following example, also from an interview with a winning player.

**Example 21: RO032**

**Interviewer**

grind was probably the word  
and ah it was pretty much that sort of match  
and you didn't really allow them to release very much at any stage with their with their  
talented backline  
→ but + it it was quite messy around the breakdown even for your side

This example differs from examples 18 to 20 in that it focuses more critical attention on aspects of the team's play, and also the breakdown aspects of play that the interviewee, as a forward in the team, was involved in. The example thus illustrates

that interviewers do have the agency to ask interviewees to focus on the negative aspects of the match, even as winners, an action that may potentially cause a disruption to the conciliatory interaction. However, typically questions with winners take a very positive line. In the data set under exploration here, sixty-two questions were asked in post-match interviews with winners and only three of these questions take a noticeably negative slant on aspects of the interviewee's team's performance and their actions in the match. Also, in the example above, notice the use of hedging language (i.e. 'quite') used here to temper the assessment. The negative criticism is also presented amongst other clauses in the eliciting turn that are quite positive. It seems then that while questions can focus on negative aspects of the match or performance, it is rare that they do so, and when it is done it is presented to the interviewee in a hedged fashion, or even covertly amongst a range of other positive comments.

### 3.5 Focusing losing players on the positives

If winners are praised then one might realistically expect losers to be criticised or held accountable for the loss. However, in losing interviews as well, positively oriented questions are commonly employed by interviewers, seemingly for empathetic purposes. In the data set under examination here, interviewers frequently asked interviewees to comment on positive aspects of the match, either by directly asking them to extract positives from a losing performance or through providing their own positive assessments.

#### Example 22: RO005

**Interviewer**

→ good things out the game jimmy

#### Example 23: RO012

**Interviewer**

→ I suppose some of the positives you can take is the way that ah your lineout was able to disrupt the blues  
and also how dominate how dominant you were in the scrums

#### Example 24: RO016

**Interviewer**

→ looking at the positives=  
=you scored three tries=  
=you finished very strongly  
and few young fellas had a run tonight as well

**Example 25: RO030**

**Interviewer**

well you got the bye next week

→ and so ah + are there positives that you can take from this

**Example 26: RO004**

**Interviewer**

→ you must have been delighted though=

=josh bekhuis in the sin bin for the ten minutes and the team showed some real resilience

These positively oriented elicitations may be employed strategically by interviewers to mitigate the disappointment and face-threat of a loss. Instead of actively attacking the losing interviewee, aiming to hold them accountable for the loss, interviewers shape their elicitations in ways that encourage the interviewee to keep their chin up and focus on the positive aspects of the performance. This further contributes to the creation of a conciliatory experience with a losing player.

Interviewers can also achieve this across the interview by balancing an interviewee's negative assessments with positively directed questions. Example 27 illustrates this.

**Example 27: RO004**

**Interviewer**

1 you must have been delighted though=

2 =josh bekhuis in the sin bin for the ten minutes

3 and the team showed some real resilience

**Jimmy Cowan**

4 yeah it sort of sums our group up

5 ah ++ great some- we've got some great characters in there +

6 as I said that's what we're all about

7 and + ah + just didn't come on the right end of the scale tonight

8 so + that's unfortunate

**Interviewer**

9 obviously disappointed

10 but you'd be thrilled at some special occasions tonight

11 don tom- tom donnelly played in his fiftieth

**Jimmy Cowan**

12 yeah it's it's ah it's a huge milestone for him

13 um + he's one of the characters that sums up that sums up our team

[turn continues]

In the talk before the elicitation in lines 1 to 3, the interviewee was construing the loss negatively. The interviewer counters this by posing a positive elicitation (lines 1 to 3) that redirects the interviewee from the negative assessments he was previously providing. The use of 'though' in line 1 explicitly marks a shift from negative to positive (*delight* in this case). The interviewee takes the invitation to speak positively in lines 3 to 5 but then redirects his response to again focus on negatives in lines 7 to 8. The interviewer acknowledges the obvious disappointment the interviewee is feeling (line 9) and again redirects the interviewee to focus on a positive in line 10 to 11. This balancing of negatives with positives also illustrates the way a conciliatory interview experience is co-constructed and how important the role of the interviewer is in creating this tone.

### 3.6 Asking accountability questions carefully

Eliciting acts that focus on holding interviewees accountable can occur in post-match interviews. Accounting for the loss is one activity that losing players can be asked to do. In the data set analysed here, losing interviewees were at times asked to provide reasons for the loss – a potentially face-threatening task as it can make relevant such linguistic acts as blaming and criticising. However, interviewees are asked to account for the loss in ways that do not attribute blame to any individuals or even to the team as a whole. Interviewers also frequently provided 'accounts' for the interviewee to agree or disagree with, as the following examples (with losing players) illustrate.

#### Example 28: RO014

##### **Interviewer**

your defence in the first half was also very good

→ perhaps in the second half started falling off a couple as the fatigue set in

#### Example 29: RO035

##### **Interviewer**

→ they certainly put you under pressure in the second half in particular at scrum time made difficult to work much around that area

In both these examples, the interviewer provides a potential or partial account for the loss and presents that to the interviewee for confirmation. This removes the responsibility from the interviewee for providing an account for the loss themselves. Additionally, in neither of the examples is blame attributed to a specific individual. The interviewer in example 29 even attributes the reason for the loss to the opposition being too good and making things difficult for the interviewee's team. By agreeing with this account the interviewee can also compliment the opposition,

which itself helps create a conciliatory interview experience (as will be explored below). If the interviewee was asked to, or decided to, single out individuals for critical attention, then this would create a very different interview tone.

### 3.7 Praising and complimenting

The data examined here also include a range of discourse acts that could be interpreted as acts of praise or as complimenting individuals and teams, a finding that mirrors previous research (Emmison, 1987, 1988). As discussed above these compliments may be simultaneously achieved in eliciting acts. Praise and a positive focus in this context is typically directed at the team as a unit, a finding that is not surprising considering that the interviews in the context explored here come from a team sport. However praise of individuals, either the interviewee directly or another individual, is also a common feature of these interviews. In winning interviews in particular there is a good deal of praise of individuals for their actions in the match that has just been played, or their abilities more generally.

#### Example 30: RO010

##### **Interviewer**

→ well you weren't only devastating on attack=  
=also on defence  
is that something you pride yourself on

#### Example 31: RO027

##### **Interviewer**

marshy and I in the commentary box were talking about ah the importance of key players in positions  
→ and you'd have to look at ah jimmy cowan on a night like this  
he had a + outstanding game

In example 30, the interviewer simultaneously asks the interviewee a question and praises his overall attacking and defensive abilities, asking him more specifically about his defensive abilities. In example 31, the interviewer has done something similar. However the focus of the compliment question is on another member of the interviewee's team, not the player being interviewed. Interviewers can also praise or compliment the opposition in an elicitation, and this usually prompts the interviewee to follow suit in the response, as example 32 illustrates.

### Example 32: RO020

#### **Interviewer**

- 1 they ah it was probably written off a wee bit actually before this weekend because of
- 2 their injuries and you guys were hot favourites
- 3 but they they gave you some stern defence particularly in the first half

#### **Neemia Tialata**

- 4 yeah they were tough eh
- 5 we knew coming into this week that they + they weren't gonna give up ++
- 6 and ah our focus coming into this week was + just keep working hard as a pack +
- 7 and ah hopefully our flash backs could finish off

The interviewer suggests that despite the opposition being 'written off' (considered unlikely to be able to win) before the match, they actually played very well, particularly defensively, in the first half (see lines 1 to 3). This compliment-question is presented to the interviewee for confirmation, and in his response the interviewee mirrors the interviewer's presuppositions and provides evaluative responses that also heap praise on the valiant losers (lines 4 to 5).

As well as individual praise or praise directed at a team, sometimes questions, particularly those also functioning as observations or assessments of the game, can praise both teams. The following example illustrates this.

### Example 33: RO020

#### **Interviewer**

both sides probably battled to find any space in that first forty  
it was um we'd mentioned it was a bit like test match conditions in that respect  
it was just hard to find

In this example, the interviewer suggests that both sides had trouble finding space to move because of the tight defences in the first half. The interviewer also likens this to test match rugby, the next level up from the Super 15 competition. While this contribution functions as an elicitation, it could also be seen to function as a compliment to both teams and their defensive qualities, equating them to test match levels.

A great many elicitations and interviewer comments in the data set explored here function to praise individuals and the teams that played in the match. This feature of the discourse can be seen as further evidence of a conciliatory and complimentary interview exchange.

### 3.8 Joking and laughing

Another feature that helps to create a conciliatory interview experience is the frequent joking and laughter that occurs in these interviews, by both interviewers and interviewees. Laughing in particular is a feature that Emmison (1988: 243) also noted in his studies. Below are several examples of joking or humour attempts in the post-match interview data set under examination here.

#### Example 34: RO008

##### **Interviewer**

well thanks TJ

→ well luke + you've actually wrecked the big party here in hamilton  
they- the crowd all came here and ah + you've wrecked our party

##### **Luke Morahan**

yeah we have we- it was um + a good win  
we looked like we were behind there at um + half time  
but I think we just the boys stuck in there  
and (pulled out) for a win

[...]

#### Example 35: RO006

##### **Interviewer**

now john + we've seen you at tighthead  
we've seen you at hooker  
now we see you at loosehead  
ah + how did you enjoy that

##### **John Smit**

→ yeah I'm just waiting  
i'm working my way down=  
=next week fullback  
so

##### **Interviewer**

→ {laughs}  
you'd be one of the biggest fullbacks around  
well done  
have a ni- good last week in australasia  
[...]

#### Example 36: RO020

##### **Interviewer**

touchdown for yourself as well  
it's been a while



**Neemia Tialata**

yeah + I'm pretty sure I got that second one down

→ but ah + I think the official didn't get the + the second one because my gut was in the way

{laughs} I think

so {laughs} but it's been a while + {nods}

happy with that

[...]

Joking and laughter is something that only occurred in winning interviews. Losing interviewees seem to be treated in a more commiserative way. Interviewers and interviewees can *do* humour simultaneously in questioning or responding. As can be seen in the examples above, interviewers sometimes make light-hearted or jokey remarks in their eliciting turns, as is the case in example 34. Interviewees sometimes respond to questions with an ironic statement, as in example 35 where the interviewee suggests he may be able to play in a playing position (fullback) that requires a great amount of speed and agility, despite the fact that he is a large player with none of the characteristics needed for that position. Alternatively, self-deprecating remarks can be employed to function as humorous remarks as is the case in example 36 where the interviewee suggests he was not awarded a second try by the official because his large stomach was impeding a clear view of him scoring the try.

Jokes and humour can function in a number of ways. In the above cases humour creates a positive feeling and illustrates solidarity between the interviewer and the interviewee. Because the humour is typically self-deprecating or ironic in that the speaker often uses the humour to make fun of himself, it cannot be seen as combative humour. These humorous exchanges can, then, be seen to contribute to the conciliatory and light-hearted nature of the post-match interview. Also, due to the public performance nature of these interviews, humour may function as a way of signalling a relaxed and down-to-earth social identity, even in high pressure situations like televised media interviews.

#### **4. Discussion: Conciliatory and adversarial interviewing styles – accounting for the conciliatory interview experience in the post-match interview**

What we have considered above are some of the ways in which speakers use language in post-match interviews in a New Zealand rugby context. Many of the ways speakers use language in this interview context serve to create a conciliatory interview experience. Some of these features include the use of terms of endearment, tokens of commiseration and congratulations, a focus on positive experiences, complimenting and praising and the use of humour. These findings contribute to

our understanding of a largely unexplored media interview genre and also provide insight into how New Zealand rugby players and interviewers use language in post-match interviews.

The findings also contribute to our understanding of media interview discourse more generally. They are particularly interesting when we consider what occurs in other media interview genres more thoroughly explored in the literature, like the adversarial political interview. In the political media interview genre, interviewers will seek to hold politicians accountable for their decisions and policies. Because interviewers aim to *do* accountability, the interview exchanges tend to be quite adversarial as interviewees try to resist the goals of the interviewer. While most of the research into political interview talk has been conducted in European and American contexts, there is evidence to suggest that the same adversarial approaches are present in New Zealand political interviews and in the way media approach politicians in New Zealand. For example, in a recent radio interview, New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key, launched an attack on New Zealand's media suggesting that they had become more aggressive, hostile and antagonistic in his second term of government ("John Key with Leighton Smith," 2012). While referring explicitly to his government's second term, in a follow up newspaper article, other politicians suggested that it was part of the media's role to be critical of politicians ("Key told to harden up after media moan," 2012). One politician even suggested Prime Minister John Key should grow a thicker skin. With more specific focus on actual media interview encounters, one does not have to search far for examples of adversarial treatment of politicians in New Zealand. A classic example of the adversarial interview in a New Zealand political context was the 'corngate' interview between John Campbell and Helen Clark ("'Corngate' interview with Helen Clark," 2002), the opening section of which has been partially reproduced below.

**John Campbell**

did you mislead the royal commission yes or no=

**Helen Clark**

=did i?

**John Campbell**

did cabinet did the /government mislead the royal commission \

**Helen Clark**

/mo- most certainly did not \  
most certainly not=

**John Campbell**

=right well I want to quote something to you the cabinet report that went to the royal commission said and I quote tests could not confirm whether or not gm material was present

**Helen Clark**

look john

**John Campbell**

your government told the royal commission that tests had confirmed

While this is a particularly adversarial encounter, one that led the then prime minister Helen Clark to label the interviewer a 'sanctimonious little creep', it does suggest that political interview contexts in New Zealand can also be adversarial in nature, and that this is very different from the way post-match interviews after New Zealand rugby matches are carried out. It indicates that the conciliatory style observed in the post-match interview discourse explored here is not representative of New Zealand media interview discourse in general but is reflective of a different interview approach in political interviews compared to post-match interviews.<sup>3</sup> In the remainder of this discussion, I would like to consider why this is the case.

One reason may have to do with the social purpose of the interview. Political interviews are generally considered to be employed as a way of holding politicians accountable for the policy decisions they make on behalf of the people who elect them. In these interviews, the interviewer takes on the role of a 'tribune of the people' (Clayman & Heritage, 2002: 171) seeking justification for political actions on behalf of an imagined audience of tax payers. Specific generic stages found in research into the political media interview such as *entrapment* and *challenge* (Bell & Van Leeuwen, 1994: 137) are obligatorily employed in order to achieve this social purpose and these generic stages of the political interview are realised by quite adversarial language features, for example using statements and questions that identify and probe contradictions in the interviewee's position on a public matter. The social purpose of a post-match interview is much less confrontational. The social purpose, one might argue is much simpler: to elicit the opinions and emotional reactions from a professional sports player about the match that they have just played. This foregrounds a focus on the sports player's experiences. As we have seen, these goals are achieved by interviewers in the New Zealand rugby post-match interview context, in a much more conciliatory manner. For an interviewer to take an adversarial approach in a post-match interview would be marked. Questions like *why did you lose today* or *was it your fault you lost*, or *was Dan Carter to blame, yes or no*

---

<sup>3</sup> I am not in a position to make any extensive claims regarding the nature of New Zealand political interviews due to the limited amount of analytical attention paid to political interviews in this study. However, the evidence presented here suggests that the same adversarial potential of political interviews, noted in American and European contexts, appears in the New Zealand context as well. More thorough exploration of New Zealand political interviews in a range of different contexts is required to strengthen this particular claim. While such an analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, such an exploration would provide a better platform for subsequent and more detailed comparisons of the different New Zealand media interview genres.

are not questioning devices used by interviewers in the context explored here even though they would be well within their rights to ask them in their role as interviewer. The specific discursive practices of interview talk can, then, be seen to derive from the social purpose of the particular interview genre. The goals of adversarial political interviews, it would seem, are successfully achieved when a politician is held accountable for their political decisions, whereas the goals of a post-match interview are successfully achieved when sports players provide their opinions and emotional reactions to the match. Both, however, require different discursive practices from the interviewers in order to meet these goals.

Connected to this is the relative status of political and professional sports figures in New Zealand society. Politicians are typically treated with a great deal of scepticism and are often constructed negatively as sneaky, evasive or untruthful. Sports players, on the other hand, particularly professional rugby players in New Zealand, have higher public status. They are often constructed as superstars and are celebrated for what are considered incredible athletic abilities. Political interviewers are celebrated for their tough stance on political figures (Clayman & Heritage, 2002: 30), using the interview to try and hold them accountable for their decisions and actions. As viewers we expect this approach and align with the interviewer in his or her search for this information, as these issues affect us directly and we as a public want answers about them. However, the sports fan may be more aligned with the sports player. As a *tribune of the fans*, a post-match interviewer, by approaching the interview in a conciliatory fashion, may be reconstructing this higher public status through conciliatory actions that align themselves with the interviewee and in turn align themselves with the sporting public who worship their sporting heroes. A conciliatory style ensures that interviewers in post-match interviews do not dis-align with the fan base.

Finally, the conciliatory interview experience may also be influenced by the shared histories and shared backgrounds of the interviewers and the interviewees. While interviewers and interviewees in post-match interviews are representatives of different institutions (interviewers are representatives of the broadcasting institution and sports players are representatives of the professional sports institution) many interviewers in the rugby interview context under exploration have themselves previously been professional sports players and have been on the other side of the microphone as an interviewee. In the current data set, all but two of the interviews are carried out by an ex-player. As ex-players, they are likely to draw on their knowledge of how an interviewee is feeling at this current time about the prospect of doing a post-match interview. This may extend to an understanding of how speakers feel about doing these interviews more generally and how they feel after a win and a loss. Added to that is the possibility of a pre-existing relationship between interviewers and interviewees, something that might explain the use of nicknames in

particular. Interviewers may have played on the same teams as the people they are now interviewing. It would be very unlikely that interviewers would use a media interview exchange after a sports match to go after a friend or acquaintance and, for example, hold them accountable for a loss, especially if they had a pre-existing relationship that might suffer if this approach was taken.

What these contextual differences highlight are potential motivations for the construction of a conciliatory interview experience in the post-match interview. Together they also highlight that media interviews are not a single genre type on every level. There may be linguistic features that characterise media interviews more generally. However, the way different media interviews are carried out in relation to the contextual demands, including the social purpose, interviewee status and the backgrounds of the interviewers and the interviewees, will result in the employment of different discursive practices, and these practices may develop formulaic tendencies over time, a feature that often seems to be attributed to the post-match interview. Research into other media interviews, such as the post-match interview, can address what Montgomery suggests is an overrepresentation of adversarial political interview research that is potentially skewing our understanding of the media interview as a discourse event (Montgomery, 2008: 261).

## **5. Conclusion**

In this article I have explored how language is used in post-match interviews after rugby matches in a New Zealand context. I have established that a number of the linguistic features interviewers, in particular, use help to create a conciliatory interview experience. Linguistic features such as terms of endearment, positive and conciliatory questioning, compliments and humour are all examples of linguistic features that help to perform actions that build solidarity and create a conciliatory interview experience. These features and this tone of interview differ remarkably from other media interviews that have been frequently explored in the media discourse literature, such as political interviews. To explain these differences I have suggested that the social contexts of these two media interview genres differ in important ways and may account for the different discursive practices.

As well as contributing to our knowledge of how New Zealanders use language in institutional settings, this study has also contributed to our understanding of the differences in media interview language use. However, is this just a New Zealand English phenomenon? While it seems that political interviews are carried out in a similarly adversarial manner in different regions, it remains an open question whether post-match interviews are performed in a similar fashion in different regions. This study has provided a baseline for further exploration into post-match interview practices in other regions. By carrying out research with data from other

regions we can investigate further the language use of this particular genre and also explore whether region is an influence on the linguistic approach taken by participants in this genre. Research into post-match interviews after sports other than rugby may also be an interesting future research direction, particularly sports that do not have the status as the most popular sport in a given country/region. Research addressing the linguistic behaviour of speakers in post-match interviews in different regions and in different sports is currently underway (File, forthcoming).

## References

- Bell, P., & Van Leeuwen, T. 1994. *The media interview: confession, contest, conversation*. New South Wales University Press.
- Blum-Kulka, S. 1983. The dynamics of political interviews. *Text-Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 3(2), 131–154.
- Caldwell, D. 2009. "Working Your Words" Appraisal in the AFL Post-Match Interview. *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 32(2), 13.1–13.17.
- Clayman, S. 2001. Answers and evasions. *Language in Society*, 30(3), 403–442.
- Clayman, S., & Heritage, J. 2002. *The News Interview: Journalists and Public Figures on the Air*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- "Corngate" interview with Helen Clark. 2002, September 7. Retrieved May 19, 2012, from <http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/3-news-corn-gate-interview-with-helen-clark-2002>
- Emmison, M. 1987. Victors and Vanquished: The Social Organization of Ceremonial Congratulations and Commiserations. *Language and Communication*, 7(2), 93–110.
- Emmison, M. 1988. On the interactional management of defeat. *Sociology*, 22(2), 233–251.
- File, K. A. (2013). *The post-match interview as a discourse genre: A combined genre and register analysis* (PhD Thesis). Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand.
- John Key with Leighton Smith. 2012, May 15. *Keepin up with Leighton Smith*. Newstalk ZB. Retrieved from <http://www.newstalkzb.co.nz/Auckland/player/ondemand/1683342839-John-Key-with-Leighton-Smith---part-one>
- Jucker, A. H. 1986. *News interviews: A pragmatological analysis*. Pragmatics and Beyond. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Pub Co.
- Key told to harden up after media moan. 2012, May 15. TVNZ. Retrieved from <http://tvnz.co.nz/politics-news/key-told-harden-up-after-media-moan-4889389>
- Lauerbach, G. 2004. Political Interviews as Hybrid Genre. *Text*, 24(3), 353–397.
- Lauerbach, G. 2006. Discourse representation in political interviews: The construction of identities and relations through voicing and ventriloquizing. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 38(2), 196–215. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2005.06.015
- Montgomery, M. 2008. The discourse of the broadcast news interview. *Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 260–277. doi:10.1080/14616700701848303
- Thompson, G. 2004. *Introducing functional grammar* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.