An Analysis of the Language in Rules of Sports Competition from the Perspective of Register Theory

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Abstract: The rules of sports competition is regarded as a new style of language due to its particular field, tenor and mode. However, there is a lack of systemic study of that in language study. So, based on the rule and regulation of Modern Pentathlon, this essay gives a more specific study of the rules of sports competition from the perspective of Halliday's register theory: the field of discourse, the tenor of discourse, and the mode of discourse. All in all, the language in sports rules and regulations are descriptive, formal and cohesive.

1. Introduction

Since 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, the eagerness for sports, just like a gust of strong wind, has been prevailing in our society. Especially, when 7th Military World Games was successfully held in Wuhan, more and more people devote much of their lifetime to sport. This is a trend that sport will function as an essential component of economy, diplomacy, culture and so on. Therefore there is a necessary academic study on the characteristics of the rules of sport competition.

Although it is in a compelling situation in conducting a study on sport, less attention is paid to sport competition rules. Considering that this subject belonging to a special register, this paper decides to begin the study from the perspective of register theory.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Historical Studies on the Theory of Register

The register theory is regarded as a crucial theory in the Systemic-Functional Grammar. In 1964, Halliday studied register into a deeper level with four linguists. They believed that language changed along with its functions, and the products of change were called language varieties. Register is a kind of a language varieties [1].

However, Halliday redefined register as a meaning system associated with one certain situation. Therefore the differences among different kinds of registers were not only confined in forms but also meaning which decides the former.

Halliday explains the register theory in three parts. They are field, tenor and mode. And the theory of register greatly focuses on them. Nowadays, this theory is generally applied in discourse analysis.

2.2 Three Register Variables

2.21 The Field of Discourse

It has been defined as the purpose and subject-matter of communication that is why and about what the communication takes place. In many approaches, the field of discourse can be categorized into two halves: technical and non-technical. It enlarges the vocabulary and it also defines some attributes in sound and grammar. The field is in a certain relationship with ideational function. In other words, field is realized through the ideational function of language by means of systems of choice available to the speaker or writer. It consists of transitivity and voice.

Transitivity includes 6 processes. They are material process, mental process, relational process, relational process, behavioral process, verbal process and existential process.

Voice includes 2 types: active and passive

2.22 The Tenor of Discourse

It refers to the role of relation in the situation in question that is the identification of the participants and the relationship they have. It judges the degree of formality and triviality of the language we use. The tenor is related to one of the meta-functions of language: interpersonal function, which is realized by mood and modality.

2.23 The Mode of Discourse

It refers to the means of communication, that is, how communication is carried out. It determines the way of utterance (speaking or writing or both). The mode is related to one of the meta-functions of language: textual function, which is realized by cohesion, meaning and message structure (word order and placement of elements in the text).

3. Register Analysis of Rules of Sports Competition

Sports competition rules are some kinds of special languages in our daily life, which are only used in books designed by some official sports organizations. According to Yule, the analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use [2].

This study will begin from three register variables. These three factors are correlated with each other but distinguishing itself from each other. The field of discourse aims to study the transitivity and voice of sentences; the tenor of discourse aims to detect features of mood and modality of sentences and the mode of discourse aims to make a study on the cohesion in the material.

In order to satisfy the need of this analysis, a simple linguistic corpus has been established. The samples are all exerted from Competition Rules and Regulation of UIPM.

3.1 Analysis of field of rules of sports competition

The field in discourse analysis is closely related to the ideational function. It is used to convey new information, to communicate a content that is unknown to the hearer. It is a meaning potential, because as soon as people want to speak or express some information, they have to make a search through the vocabulary list. It is made of transitivity and voice. It not only urges people to choose from the linguistic units which they could said but also give a definition to how the structures are realized by them. The field of discourse is created to describe the social activity in which we are engaged and in which the text is playing a role [3].

3.11 Transitivity

Halliday once said in his books that a sentence can be interpreted as a clause complex: a Head clause together with other clauses that modify it. There relation between sentence and clause is same as that between group and word that there is theoretically no limit in the number of clauses embedded in a sentence.

Collins Dictionary defines transitivity as the transitivity of a verb is whether or not it is used with a direct object [4]. Transitivity is the basis for the expression of human being's subjective and objective experience and the access to the recurring of language.

In order to make a strong evidence, this essay will make an analysis on 10 more samples of their transitivity features.

The transitivity in Systematic-Functional Grammar is extremely dissimilar to that in the traditional grammar. It is an affiliated frame of the net of language system, which can be classified into 6 processes:

Material process: the process of doing something. For example: John drinks a cup of tea.

Mental process: the process of mental activities, like feeling, attitude, sense. For example: John feels scared.

Relational process: the process of presenting the connections between things. For example: John is on the sofa.

Behavior process: the process of physical process, like breath, coughing, sighing, dreaming etc. For example: John laughed.

Verbal process: the process of exchanging information with communication. For example: Marry said it is cool outside.

Existential process: the process of the expression that something exists. For example: There is a cat on the mat.

sample	Number of the clause	Material process		Relational process		Mental process		Existential process		Behavioral process		Verbal process	
		num	Per (%)	num	Per (%)	num	Per (%)	num	Per (%)	num	Per (%)	num	Per (%)
1	33	27	78.8	6	21.2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	39	25	64.1	14	35.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	15	12	80.0	3	20.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	15	13	86.7	2	13.3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	11	7	63.6	3	27.3	0	0	1	9.1	0	0	0	0
6	14	9	64.3	5	35.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
7	15	9	60.0	5	33.3	0	0	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
8	8	6	75.0	2	25.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
9	15	12	80.0	3	20.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10	20	15	75.0	3	15.0	0	0	2	10.0	0	0	0	0
average	18.5	13.5	72.8	4.6	24.7	0	0	0.4	2.5	0	0	0	0

Figure 1. Analysis on the transitivity of all samples.

According to the figure, it is not difficult to figure out that material process and relational process is the major means. The cause is that the rules in sports competition are descriptive. In order to demonstrate a clear explanation and decrease the ambiguity, the descriptive sentences are widely used.

And the relational process is the second choice of the writer. It creates a relation between two or more separated entities. It is generally used for the situation or condition of the competitors and the requirement for equipment.

3.12 Voice

When it comes to voice, it is generally acknowledged that there are active voice and passive voice. Active voice is a kind of voice that the subject is the user of the action. In other words, the action is made by the subject and used for the object. While a special mode of some clauses can be realized by the passive voice. Generally speaking, only the transitive verbs which need object have this mode. The form is designed to delve the voice in the rules of sports competition.

sample	Number of the clause	Active voice		Passive voice	
		Num	Per(%)	Num	Per(%)
1	33	25	75. 8	8	24. 2
2	39	22	56. 4	17	43. 6
3	15	11	73. 3	4	26. 7
4	15	11	73. 3	4	26. 7
5	11	6	54. 5	5	45. 5
6	14	10	71. 4	4	28. 6
7	15	10	66. 7	5	33. 3
8	8	5	62. 5	3	37. 5
9	15	11	73. 3	4	26. 7
10	20	12	60. 0	8	40. 0
average	18. 5	12. 3	66. 7	6. 2	33. 3

Figure 2. Voice analysis of the sample.

Take each kind of sentence for example:

A pentathlete that is injured may start in the water holding the rail of the pool.

Pentathletes are not permitted to exit from the arena dismounted.

It is very obvious that active voice is used for stating or describing a fact. Active voice is such a voice that is more mimic and easy to comprehend. So in the sample one, the writer intends to describe a situation and tell the readers in that situation what the pentathlete should do. Contrary to the active voice, the passive voice is more objective and is always used for regulations, such as what people can do or what people cannot do governed by one certain rule. The sample actually proves this point. The writer warns what the pentathlete is not allowed to do in the rules and regulation of sports competition. And there is another situation, generally speaking, the content in the front of the clauses is easily to fascinate the readers. So, when author wants to emphasize on something essential, he will choose passive voice.

3.2 Analysis of tenor of rules of sports competition

The mirror image of tenor is the interpersonal function of language. It is a broad category by which people establish and maintain a status in a society. It enacts the relationship in a society. This encompass several ways the speaker join in a linguistic communication and do some communicative actions.

The tenor of discourse attaches great importance to the participants and the relationship between participants. Context and function are closely interconnected [5]. In the context of sports competition rules and regulations, participants are concerned with the athletes, coaches and audiences. But there is hardly an intimate connections between the writer and his readers. Thus he will keep a decent distance with them, which will also make an impact on the use of words in his writing.

3.21 Mood

Language is generally regarded as the means used in doing or performing actions by people, which unavoidably reflects the relationship among people [6]. Mood make clear the standpoint that the speaker elects in an actual linguistic communication and the figure he tells the communicator to act as. There are four preliminary speech functions. They are offer, statement, command, and question. Correspondingly, there are four kinds of mood. They are imperative, declarative, interrogative and exclamative mood.

sample	Number of the clause	declarative		imperative		interrogative		exclamative	
		num	Per(%)	num	Per(%)	num	per(%)	num	Per(%)
1	33	20	60.6	13	39.4	0	0	0	0
2	39	33	84.6	6	15.4	0	0	0	0
3	15	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
4	15	4	26.7	11	73.3	0	0	0	0
5	11	7	63.6	4	26.4	0	0	0	0
6	14	13	92.9	1	7.1	0	0	0	0
7	15	11	73.4	4	26.7	0	0	0	0
8	8	4	50.0	4	50.0	0	0	0	0
9	15	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0	0	0
10	20	12	60.0	8	40.0	0	0	0	0
average	18.5	13.2	68.8	5.3	31.2	0	0	0	0

Figure 3. Mood analysis of the sample.

According to the figure, declarative and imperative mood are widely used. In terms of the style of the text, the main intention of it is to describe and discipline rather than to set questions or praise or criticize something.

3.22 Modality

Another equivalently significant grammatical resource to convey interpersonal meaning is modality. Modality originated from mode [7]. But, different from mood, modality is the speaker's judgement, or request of the judgement of the listener, on the status of what is being said [8]. This essay will make a careful study on the use of modal verb. According to the degree of possibility, the level of modal verbs can be classified into 3 categories: high, median and low.

Modal verbs	Number	Percentage(%)
will	16	21.1
must	43	56.6
shall	2	2.6
should	2	2.6
ought to	0	0
would	0	0
can	9	11.8
could	0	0
may	4	5.2
might	0	0
Total	76	
Word number	2494	

Figure 4. Analysis on the modal verbs.

It can be suspected that many modal verbs are used in the whole passage. And most of all are the modal verb, must. The frequency of usage of must reaches 56. 6%. Therefore, the mood of the rules and regulation is formal than other styles of language materials.

3.3 Analysis of mode of rules of sports competition

Mode is the medium that connects the writer and the readers. Text is a written material, not a simultaneous monologue [9], so the connection between them is the written language instead of the spoken language. Interpreting the register differences in terms of the model of acts of identity is essential as well [10]. Therefore, this part will focus on the cohesion of text. Cohesion refers to the relation of meaning within a text and usually defines it as a text. Some conjunctions are selected in order to make an assessment on the cohesion of the text.

According to the figure, lots of conjunctive words are used in the whole passage. In order to make the text more cohesive, the writer uses them when he is writing. Therefore when readers browse over it, they will feel that the text is easy to get through and more coherent than conjunctive words have not been used, For example,

If after 50 seconds the athlete has not completed 5 hits, the athlete may continue to the swimming.

Otherwise they will incur a 10 second' penalty to be given at the shooting range before proceeding to the next leg.

Conjunctive words	Number	Percentage(%)
therefore	0	0
because	1	0. 3
then	3	0. 9
however	2	0. 6
otherwise	1	0. 3
but	1	0. 3
by	15	4. 5
when	4	1. 2
yet	0	0
after	11	3. 3
unless	2	0. 6
before	11	3. 3
and	75	22. 4
though/although	0	0
if	16	4. 8
as	65	19. 4
or	124	37. 0
whether	0	0
than	4	1. 2
Total	335	
Word number	2494	

Figure 5. Analysis on the conjunction.

4. Conclusion

The rules and regulations of sports are relatively stable and hardly with a colossal change. So when one kind of sports rule can be figured out, it is helpful to study the features and properties of others. In order to benefit language learners and sports fans, the essay is created. Based on the study and analysis, it can be concluded that:

Field of rules of sports competition encompasses the content, the participants and the environment. Material process and relational process are widely used in sports rules and regulations, and existential process is also covered. They are the realization of transitivity. Contrast to passive voice, active voice enjoys a priority. However, the passive voice is not hardly to find.

Tenor of rules of sports competition includes what kinds of language the writer selects to communicate with readers. The mood in sports rules and regulations is prone to being formal, because declarative and imperative mood are extremely popular. The modality proves that at the same time. High-possibility modal words such as must are used frequently in the text.

Mode of rules of sports competition is the way that participants communicate. In this essay, written sports rules and regulation are analyzed. In the material, a huge number of conjunctive words are used, which reinforce the cohesion of the text.

Therefore, the language of sports rules and regulations can be regarded as descriptive, formal and cohesive.

Acknowledgment

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