# In their own words: informant recommendations for English communication by sport coaches, trainers, and instructors

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## Abstract

This article reports the findings of a study into English for sport coaching and instruction in which sport informants from New Zealand and Japan were interviewed to identify their English communication needs and usage during coaching and training sessions. Furthermore, informant recommendations, supported by research literature, for English language learning and use within these activities are quoted extensively, particularly with reference to communication involving nonnative English speakers. These recommendations are organized into six categories related to ideal coaching or instructional behaviours and attitudes.


本論文はニュージーランドおよび日本においてスポーツ指導者を対象にインタビューを実施した。インタビュー内容はスポーツ現場における英語によるコーチングやトレーニング指導の際に実際に用いている用例についての知見を報告する。さらに、インタビューの結果を最新の研究論文をもとに英語学習やスポーツ現場における英語を用いたコーチング、トレーニング指導における勧奨として広範囲に示し、特に非ネイティブ英語スピーカーを含めてコミュニケーション時の勧奨にまで言及している。本論文ではこの勧奨を理想的なコーチング、指導時の振る舞いや態度と関連する６つのカテゴリーに分類した。

Key Words: sport informant; coaching and instruction; language use

## 1．Introduction

Sport is a global industry with substantial financial investment. As it expands, there is a growing need for international communication, more often than not in English. In addition to such communication at mega-sport events like the Olympics or the various World Cups, there are often multi-linguistic communication needs within one team or sport organization. For instance, coach and player may have different cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds, requiring language study or the use of interpreters. English, as the current main international language, acts as the common denominator for much of this intercultural communication. Therefore, English communication skills are important requirements for most sport coaches, trainers, or instructors, regardless of their locale.

However, in many situations sporting professionals are nonnative speakers of English（NNESs） with varying limits to their English language proficiency, making their communication in English – whether with native English speakers（NESs） or NNESs-challenging or problematic. In the sport field, communication through English may be conducted between NESs and NNESs（e.g., an Australian with a Japanese） or at times between NNESs（e.g., a Chinese and a German）. Regardless of the position of the professional（i.e., coach, instructor, trainer, or trainee）, such English interactions require communicative knowledge and skill. Hence, it would be of great benefit to identify typical English communicative needs and utterances used in the sport field. Yet, little research or pedagogy is available to provide insights and support for such communication.

## 2．Methodology

As part of a long-term study of English for Sport Coaching and Instruction, a series of recorded interviews were made of sport informants（coaches, trainers, instructors, sport science lecturers, learners and clients） and their comments transcribed in order to identify key English communication issues and typical oral production of such professionals while working with their athletes or clients. These interviews of sport informants covered a variety of sports in New Zealand and Japan and were carried out in 2013. Several live training sessions were also observed, recorded and transcribed so as to capture samples of authentic spoken language.

The informants came from eight cultural backgrounds（NNESs: Japanese, Maori; NESs: American, Australian, Canadian, English, New Zealander, Welsh）. These informants were involved in a range of sport situations: recreational to professional levels, youth to elderly markets, local to international competition.

To be specific, there were 31 recorded interviews of specialists in the following sports: rugby, tennis, judo, golf, skiing, snowboarding, soccer, fitness training, yoga, personal training, scuba diving, and squash. In addition, 2 college lectures on sport science were observed and recorded, as well as 7 live training sessions (in soccer, tennis, group fitness training, personal training, and weight training). Several live sport competitions were also observed: the Tokyo International Rugby Sevens tournament, the Tongariro M42 Multisport Event (MBX cycling and cross-country running race), and the Watarase Triathlon race. The main purpose of these live observations was to identify typical English utterances in a game or competition.

In addition to these information sources, consultations were made with several sport science lecturers in five tertiary institutions: Auckland University of Technology, Tokai University, Toyo University, Unitec Institute of Technology, and Victoria University of Wellington.

From these sporting informants and observations, specific recommendations for coaching, instructing or training using English were given. These recommendations can be loosely grouped into two communicative situations: (a) those involving NNESs; (b) those involving NESs only.

On the theory that direct quotation often adds strength and vividness to academic analysis, this paper quotes selected comments and recommendations from the above sport informant sources for practical use in the sport field by practitioners and for English education of aspiring sport specialists (trainees).

## 3．Learning by Doing

One of the ways that Sport distinguishes itself from other fields is that it is above all else an **activity**. That is to say, the processes of actions are the key to its endeavour. As such, all learning that takes place in the field of sport is aimed at the performance of a set of specified actions with the clear goal of some kind of physical achievement – whether it be the scoring of a goal or the completion of a challenging movement (e.g., a triple twist with a half pike dive).

The German philosopher Alexander von Humboldt once said, "*A language cannot be taught. One can only create conditions for learning to take place*." Since sport involves to a large extent the doing of actions, one might call that an ideal environment for the creation of conditions for language learning. Just as the learning of a new sporting skill requires physically trying to do it, the learning of appropriate English expressions for this activity will come naturally through the highly-repetitive actions of sport training and competitions. In a sense, the nature of sport is implicitly designed to enhance language learning, since so many of its actions are ritualistic and

repeated. After all, there are only so many ways to take a slap shot in ice hockey, yet players take repeated shots throughout training in preparation for game situations.

The language needed to coach a player about slap shots will be mainly limited to a few utterance types with a predictable lexis. Moreover, such language will be intimately linked to the specific sport action, so the player will be learning both action and language in a co-relational way – a kind of natural collocation between word and physical performance. This kind of learning pattern has been utilized by language teachers for decades – the TPR（Total Physical Response）methodology introduced by James Asher（of San Jose State University）as long ago as the 1970s is a classic example.

## ４．Motivation

Coaches or instructors must be aware that the athletes or trainees they are working with have a wide variety of goals and motivations, often dependent on factors such as age, gender, skill level, and sport situation（e.g., whether recreational or professional）. A coach or instructor must adopt a variety of coaching styles to deal effectively with different skill or motivation levels.

With a very young and inexperienced athlete, a **direct teaching** style may be the most suitable. The coach would have to explain and show the athlete what to do in such a situation, particularly if the athlete had low motivation. A child who has been pushed into a sport by a parent might have neither the interest nor physical development to carry out the requisite skill set for that sport, and so be unmotivated or even hostile to the sport.

On the other hand, as the player improved in skill and motivation, the coach would be able to change their coaching approach to one of **guiding** or **inspiring**. When an athlete reaches the stage of being both highly skilled and motivated, the coach can then choose to **delegate** or encourage the player to decide performance needs and training regimens.

Ultimately, though, athletes and coaches have a variety of motivations for sport participation. Some are intrinsic: a motivation to engage in the sport for its own sake, because it is enjoyable or self-fulfilling. Other motivations are extrinsic: for social status, financial reward, and so on.

## ５．Definitions

The referenced article "Training and Coaching" states that training is "*directive*" while

coaching is "*non-directive*" and comments:

> *Training, simply put, is where those with knowledge, experience and expertise in a certain field instruct and teach individual(s) who have less knowledge, experience or expertise in that field... the trainer is the expert in the area of learning. He/she will tell, direct and instruct those they are training what to learn and how to learn it, so as to promote enhanced performances...*

> *Coaching, in its simplest form, is where a coach facilitates enhanced performance learning and development in the individual whom they are coaching... the coach does not tell or instruct. The coach elicits expertise and resources already present in the person(s) they are coaching, so they can choose their own direction and best way forward to enhanced performance.*

However, sport coaches use both training and coaching (as defined above), though they move from emphasis on training to coaching as the athlete's skill and motivation levels increase. Clearly, coaching includes a greater variety of communicative functions than training (or instructing). In fact, one might call training a subset of the functions and roles of coaching. For instance, a coach may act at various times in any of the following roles (Mackenzie 2005)：advisor, assessor, counsellor, demonstrator, fount of knowledge (expert), facilitator, instructor, mentor, motivator, organizer (planner), friend, or fact finder (researcher). Each of these roles may call for different communication styles and utterances. The role of trainer or instructor is just one of the many roles of a coach. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this paper, the trainer or instructor will be included in the general term "coach" when discussing communicative issues.

## 6．Coaching Styles

As mentioned earlier, coaches working with lower proficiency in sport skill tend to depend on a "Direct" coaching style. The coach **tells** the athlete what to do and how to do it, as well as providing direct feedback on the quality of the athlete's performance. This style of coaching is prevalent throughout sport and sport history, and stems from the militaristic command style used by the first sport coaches. After all, the first coaches almost invariably came from the military and were accustomed to managing soldiers or sailors through a tight command structure. Most of today's older coaches were indoctrinated into this style of coaching as that was their own personal experience as athletes when they were younger. Although this style of coaching has its place, because of its direct instructional approach it is likely to require a heavier language load than other styles.

Another style of coaching may be labeled the "Laissez-Faire" approach. Here, the coach steps back from directing and **allows** the athletes to manage their own training and gaming. In this style, the coach is more of a consultant or facilitator – though some would argue that by letting the athlete lead, coaches are avoiding their responsibilities. After all, the coach is supposed to be an "expert," at least in comparison with most athletes（elite athletes being notable exceptions）.

In recent years, however, many coaches support the principle of "Cooperative" or democratic coaching styles. The coach and athletes **share** responsibility and work together as a team to develop sport performance. This style of coaching comes from a view of the coach's function as more than simply athletic performance enhancement. Rather, the coach has a prime or at least equal function to aid in the athlete's character development. As a result, the coach is more of a mentor than an instructor. Kidman（2013）refers to "holism" in sport coaching, which she defines as "*the development of the 'whole' athlete… based on social psychology, pedagogy and sociology.*" Using this idea, she supports the notion of a humanistic or athlete-centred coaching approach "*where sport experiences are used to enhance personal development and understanding.*"

A tennis coach of elite youth athletes in New Zealand promotes this paradigm of coaching:

> *We're trying to create players that are independent and not dependent on the coach, so that's a philosophy way to look at it,. Part of the messages that we are giving to our players is to think for themselves on the court. Because the reality of being a good tennis player is that you're not going to be able to have your coach with you and not on court with you when you play.*

This current democratic style of coaching is gaining support around the world in a variety of sports. A New Zealand rugby coach of elite youth athletes explains:

> *We have a coaching philosophy… which is athlete-centred. It's very much based around including the athlete in not necessarily decision-making but in understanding and problem-solving. Whereas traditionally coaching in most sports has been a very directive command style endeavour and possibly dates back to the military P.E. background which you still see in P.E. teachers… When I go out and coach myself, players tend not to be used to be asked questions or been involved or learning without being told how to do something through experience and problem-solving. And so it is very different to what players and also what parents have been exposed to [in the way] they've experienced themselves as players. Or how they've seen coaching performed.*

Ironically, coaches of elite（national or professional）athletes – who are the most capable in sport performance and therefore developmentally ready to benefit from a cooperative coaching style – may be under the highest level of pressure to have their athletes win competitively. As a result,

many of them neglect this holistic side of coaching in the interests of performance success.

The three types of coaching styles discussed previously have been labelled by UK Athletics (Callej 2001) as:

    1. Telling (instruction and explanation)

    2. Showing (demonstration)

    3. Involving (self-discovery, peer coaching, and awareness questioning)

Each of these styles requires varying levels of language, yet most coaches claim that demonstrating is superior to instructing in almost every situation, but especially when coaching NNESs. That is because it is infinitely easier to show something visually than it is to tell how to do it through words. It is not coincidence that an English proverb states "Actions speak louder than words." By the same token, people who have language deficiencies may still understand and be able to copy an action when they can see it being performed in front of them.

# 7．Communication Skills

A sport coach or instructor has a wide variety of communicative situations, including live training sessions, competitions, media interviews, parental consultations, public forums or meetings, promotional events, coaching clinics, and so on. Each of these situations calls for the use of a number of communicative skills (Mackenzie 2003) :

・*organizing*

・*managing risks ∕ safety*

・*building rapport*

・*instructing and explaining*

・*demonstrating*

・*observing ∕ reporting*

・*analyzing*

・*questioning*

・*providing feedback*

# 8．Informant Observations and Recommendations

Given the variety of communication skills needed, the coach should pay attention to a lot of issues in order to achieve effective communication. Mackenzie (2003) presents a kind of mantra he terms the "Six C's" which a good coach should follow to be effective in communication:

1．Be **clear**

２．Be **concise**

３．Be **correct**

４．Be **complete**

５．Be **courteous**

６．Be **constructive**

Failure to follow any one of these recommendations may lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding.

As will be seen shortly, many of the comments of the informants for this study concur with Mackenzie. Miscommunication or other ineffective communication may occur due to problems connected to the coach, the athlete, or the environment. For instance, the coach may set unreasonable goals or tasks for the athlete, or even provide incorrect information. The athlete may not be paying attention or only giving partial attention during communication of key information. Furthermore, he/she may have inadequate background knowledge or experience to understand the coach's instructions. As for the environment, noise interference from fans or other athletes may make it difficult for the athlete to hear the coach's comments.

*1. Clarity (Simplicity)*

Clarity is a big issue for coaching communication. A skiing instructor complains that sport instructing in Japan tends to emphasize long explanations at the expense of actual skill practice:

> *The way the Japanese teach is very, very technical and long-winded. You'll stand there for five minutes at the side of the hill to explain something very very simple. The Japanese will think they've had a good class if you've given them 20 times more information than they need…. There's a pattern where people over-coach in Japan where you just keep throwing information until it's complete overload: they haven't got any chance of really changing, it's just too much information.*

The effect of this is that learners become confused, frustrated, or lose interest in the activity. The ski instructor goes on to recommend simplicity in language:

> *Most of the communication issues that are not language-based centre around when coaching becomes too technical and you've missed the learning style of the person. So the best way to get around the overuse of jargon is to 'Keep it simple, stupid!' Even if it's language-based – they can't understand what you are saying – then you [use] mime and demonstration.*

The use of jargon and other technical language is viewed by many coaches as detrimental to

comprehension for many NNESs. A rugby coach comments,

> *Rugby like any sport is filled with jargon. And I think I've learned that the one thing that I always have in the back of my mind is to seek clarity... So I will for the good of the group say, "Da-da-da-da. Clear on it?... And I'll try and use analogies as much as I can. Liken it to something they know, because sometimes I find analogies can convey a lot of information without having to add all the words to it.*

A Welsh football（soccer）coach observes that regardless of whether one is coaching NNESs or NESs, miscommunication can happen when language instruction is too complex. As a consequence, he uses simplicity in verbal instruction with frequent repetition:

> *The type of verbal communication I try to keep as simple as possible. And being Welsh I tend to speak quickly. I'm aware that New Zealanders struggle to understand me on occasion... So in the classroom or in the coaching environment I slow down, and I always try and repeat things in different ways... The approach I use coaching and in the classroom are similar, because they're both pedagogically influenced. And so I tend to say things once, twice, then establish understanding. I use a lot of hand gestures, body language... And more so in coaching, ... I tend to keep instructions brief and encourage athletes to learn through experiential learning as opposed to listening to the coach. So irrespective of the language of the athlete or player, I try to be very conscious about not overloading the player with instructions or information.*

*2. Conciseness (Brevity)*

As shown above, when communicating with a NNES using as few words as possible for explanation is more efficient and clearer than detailed utterances. A squash learner notes,

> *I want something quicker and more concise... I think communication should be simple, simple and straightforward, and so my preference is to have somebody who maybe does use single, simple to understand explanations.*

He goes on to compare a hypothetical longer instruction by a Japanese squash instructor during a training session with a simple command:

> *If you're going to use language, you could also be very eloquent. If he said to me in perfect English, "You need to get further away from the wall on the shot. You're cramping your style getting too close to the board," is that any better than saying to me, "Space?" I think 'Space'is better... So if he improved his language skills, he would probably just take more time. It would actually serve as being less effective... I want something quicker and more concise.*

Similarly, a ski learner finds brevity in oral communication vastly superior to lengthy explanation, especially since the ski learner is paying directly for instruction on an hourly basis. For him, "time is money"：

*I find language to often not be effective... For me the visual representation [is] definitely more eloquent than language... I really think that the use of language is overemphasized. And I think it's actually a problem... Whenever I've had these longwinded explanations in Japanese about how to improve my skiing, I find them singularly ineffective. Yet, if I'm going down a hill and watching a guy and copying him down the mountain, that 'language'if you want to call it 'language of demonstration'is much, much better. .. For me the biggest communication difficulty in Japan is talking too much. If you're paying for a two-hour skiing lesson and the guy's talking for half an hour, I feel like I'm being short-changed. I feel that from a sports perspective that the most effective language is physical demonstration and not language.*

Brevity in language can also come naturally from brevity in content. Narrowing a lesson's focus to one or at most two new learning points should effectively reduce the need for a large quantity of language input. A sport science lecturer gives this illustration:

*The golf swing is notorious for something that's over-complicated and over-detailed, [so] people can provide 275 pieces of information to help you with your golf swing. But if they come up with something simple, then you're going to be far more likely to learn and understand the movement and how it relates to you as opposed to trying to maneuver all these different body parts in whatever way the coach is telling you to.*

A golf instructor sums up this point concisely: *I don't teach them what they don't need to know.*

*3. Correctness (Accuracy)*

Providing accurate information to an athlete is an obvious goal. Yet one of the most prevalent problems for sport instruction is the need to reteach someone in order to correct skill errors. A golf instructor reports that his teaching style is intended to help the golf student identify problems and learn how to correct themselves:

*Fundamentally, I'm trying to teach these people, turning people into their own teachers. If I've gotta give them 20, 30, 50 lessons, I think I'm doing something wrong. Because after a few lessons they should really know what they're doing and they should have a feeling of how to practice. And they just need periodic checking by somebody to make sure they're not developing bad habits.*

*This game, fundamentally people knew how to play this game very well 100 years ago.*

*Nothing really changed – the equipment's changed but really actually the equipment has brought a little bit of change there [in] the technique we use, but overall we're not talking about fundamental changes to the game. So really it's all been done: how we grip particularly has never really changed, and how we aim has never really changed and where we put the ball hasn't changed that much... Certainly there are some tweak things you can do, but really when you get to the core of it, you're teaching where to hold it, how to hold it, how to stand, how to swing, and of course there's all the other aspects.*

His emphasis on fundamentals is mirrored by a ski instructor, who states that accurate performance depends on movement experience, not linguistic explanation:

*Explanations of movements are poor representations of the movement itself. The movement itself needs to be explored... in a range. Then the person can actually experience and have intrinsic feedback of that movement, rather than the poor explanation of "Balance on your outside ski." What does that mean? What is 'balance on the outside ski?' What actually has to happen? So you explore ranges of movement. If the person hasn't had experience [with a movement], they can't visualize it, they can't feel it and so you need some exercises then in order for them to do that.*

A scuba diving instructor explains that accurate performance is critical in diving: skill failure underwater can be very dangerous. She stresses that a step-by-step mastery approach is vital. That is, the learner should not progress to the second skill until the first skill is mastered:

*Each skill when you break it down is broken down to critical attributes, so there's portions of a skill that if they don't do it or they don't do it in the right sequence, they're not going to be able to accomplish the skill. So you're emphasizing the bits that are important, like what the critical attributes are of the skill... When they teach you to become an instructor, they teach you to break a skill down into its little sub-steps... The main thing about diving is that you don't want people to get stuck on negative or doing things incorrectly. And so... you're introducing the skill, you're emphasizing that, but when you're watching them do the skill you're watching for a breakdown... So you want to arrest that before it becomes an issue for them, because if someone gets stuck on something it can become a big mental block and it will take them a lot then to get over that or to get past that. So you don't really want them to fail and then learn from the failure.*

*4. Completeness (Thoroughness)*

As mentioned above, to teach a learner a skill is normally a process of steps or stages. Each skill can be broken down into its components and learned in sequence. The scuba instructor refers to

"*sub-sets*" that need to be learned one at a time. A yoga instructor observes that the type of yoga she teaches "*is based on a set series of postures.*" Similarly, a golf instructor points out,

> *…in the golf coaching in the UK what they're encouraging is you choose and you have that negotiation to choose one thing that will make the most difference for that lesson. Otherwise, you kind of half-get that done and move on to the next thing, and that thing isn't done yet, and you're really setting yourself up for failure.*

Another golf instructor refers to the teaching of balance, swing, and so on using clearly defined steps:

> *…it's very nice to give people simple lists of things, and I always do it with golf and I think it applies to most sports. But I do the four fundamentals of golf, so I think it's very nice for people to be able in general and with golf to say, "Today we're going to do how to swing the golf club and [sic] there's four elements connected to that: number 1, number 2, number 3, number 4." And I find people do hang onto that… in terms of them remembering it… and then tend to develop subsets within that.*

A key element in teaching a sport skill thoroughly is initially to identify an achievable and appropriate lesson or training goal and make that goal clear to the learner. An achievable goal is one that can be carried out within the time limits of the training session and that the particular individual has the physical capacity to carry out, given coaching support, at least.

Most of the coaching informants emphasized this point over and over again. For example, a weight training instructor explains,

> *What we generally try and encourage is progressive overload, which is trying to progressively increase what they're doing within reason. So we tell them that "you can move up in weight when you're ready, in small increments."*

A tennis coach commented in a similar vein:

> *It's most important to understand the goals of the player and then coach according to the goals. Because if the player's expectation is to reach here [gesturing medium height] and the coach's expectation is to reach here [gesturing a higher level], it's not going to work… And setting goals and talking that through, communicating with the player.*

A ski instructor describes how each lesson's goal is matched to learner variables such as age, gender, learning style and physical capacity:

> *[The way you instruct men and women is different], but only to the extent that their learning styles are different. You can't make a generalization gender-wise, [but] with guys it's very ego-*

*centred, much more so than with women… So the way you approach that is the same with all the skiers: figure out what the goal is first, and then the way you teach is linked to the goal.*

*With kids it's all games and a lot of movement They get bored very quickly. With people in their teens, you'll [tend to] ski a lot more with them. It'll be less talking and more doing. Whereas with somebody who's a bit older, it'll be slower and you'll discuss concepts and let it seep in that way. There'll be less practice because you try and manage it to their fitness level and their age.*

Appropriate goal-setting is vital to the success of any lesson: without it, learning becomes random and lacks focus. The ski instructor points out:

*…it's not the business of teaching students, it's the business of people having fun safely on holiday… Rookie instructors think their goal is to get that person up the chairlift and ski, which is the wrong mindset from the get-go. Because it sets up an expectation that might not be realistic given that person's athletic ability or their background… So I think goal-setting for sport is critical.*

*5. Courtesy (Respectfulness)*

Among other things, a coach is a role model for athletes. If we accept that this role is part of the holistic or humanistic approach espoused by Kidman, and, moreover, that modern coaching philosophy encourages self-development and discovery learning rather than directive, autocratic style coaching, then it is logical to expect courtesy to be exercised by coaches towards their athletes. After all, how can democratic or shared responsibility for sport learning be furthered if athletes feel uncomfortable or unequal to their coaches?

There are various aspects to the concept of politeness, related to many factors including gender communication styles. It is a well-researched observation that women tend to be more interactive and less directive in communication style than men. Coaches need to be aware of this and adjust accordingly, if they wish to have female athletes relaxed and communicating effectively.

A NES female personal training client regrets that her L2 （Japanese） weakness in proficiency makes her feel inadequate at times during training:

*When you don't have a language ability,… you hope it's sort of magically been communicated nonverbally… I do wonder if his other clients have a much richer experience, … because there's so much I can't understand… Maybe there are things that he doesn't think he can communicate and so just doesn't… Because I mean you have this experience of kind of being*

*autistic in these sorts of environments – you don't know things.*

In addition to these feelings of inadequacy, she observes that sport learners with low skills may feel embarrassment:

*I feel like maybe [the trainer] would like to work with someone where there's more to work with... But I think also there could be something there in terms of awareness that in some sense there is a power thing where you as a client, even though on the one hand they're servicing you I suppose, on the other hand you're also in the position of being judged... There's some sensitivity to the fact that this is not one's area of proficiency.*

In the light of these emotional reactions, the coach needs to be aware of the power differences and attempt to reduce them by communicating in a courteous way.

Courtesy also extends to movement behavior. For instance, when working with females, the issue of touch is quite important. A coach needs to be cautious and respectful when touch is required to explain a sport action（such as a pose or starting position） － regardless of gender.

A golf instructor comments,

*Sometimes you want to touch people in a lesson. I'm much more aware of that with women than with men obviously, because sometimes you have to [gesturing a shoulder touch and twist]. [Then] I say, "Do you mind if I...? I want to show..." Especially I try to get hold of their hips, because some people don't turn their hips properly. And I sometimes talk to girls who say they had an instructor before and they got a bit [too touchy]. And I so don't want to be known as that person, so I'm very careful and [standing back] I say, "Do you mind if I show you this thing? " And I do it with the guys, too – you don't walk up to a guy and start pulling him around... But I also think it's why people have golf lessons, because you can say "Turn your hips" but if you can't actually show them what it should be, it helps them when I say "Keep it there" [pulling someone's shoulders]. I believe it does help and it's very hard or it would take too long to explain to them [otherwise].*

A training gym instructor adds that touch can be a cultural issue as much as a gender one:

*You've got to be a bit careful with touching people – that's something that you do have to be wary of. So often I'll show them again or I might just tell them to tuck their shoulders back or something or indicate what they need to do [instead of touching]... [In addition to gender issues], generally you might be a bit more wary of touching Muslim people.*

Despite this caution regarding touch, a female personal training client notes that cultural norms

appear to be different in Japan than in Western countries:

> *I feel like here he does touch me and it's not an issue... It's interesting because in the West they always jump up and down about that kind of thing. And then here it's not a problem. It's very natural.*

One might speculate that Japanese culture is quite different than other Asian cultures in terms of the sport touching she refers to. The relatively minor role that religion plays in Japanese morality compared to other cultures perhaps may give the Japanese a more permissive attitude towards touching in sport training.

The cultural differences regarding gender and sport may also be linked to the personal goals for learning or training. A judo instructor trains his female athletes in the same way as the males, yet notices different goal orientations by gender（with the exception of elite female athletes）：

> *The techniques are the same; however, males train hard but females not so much. For them it's like half-training. Women don't train hard, so the class is more like play. Female beginners are interested in self-defense techniques. Of course, judo is partly for self-defense. So motivation is different for the women. Men like to practice very much, but women are more interested in self-defense techniques. So they are more selective, learning a smaller component of judo than the men.*

Being sensitive to these differences in goals, culture, or language proficiency shows respect by coach to athlete, regardless of age or gender. For instance, a coach can adjust his/her oral communication to fit the age or English language ability of the learner. A golf instructor states:

> *[With non-native English speakers] you just grade your English language a bit and you make sure that [they understand]. And they won't necessarily want to admit "I don't understand." [So] I tend to keep everything as short, as simple as I can in order to avoid overload, and then involve some demonstration, because that's very powerful. Or using video of them to show by demonstration... But even sometimes Asians from Hong Kong, they're very close to native but they're not perfect speakers – even then sometimes you've just gotta pick up a little on how they talk and make sure that you don't use words that are going to confuse them.*

> *[When teaching older people] I try and keep it language-neutral. Obviously if you know someone well, you tend to use a bit more slang and certain types of language a bit closer to the edge of polite society... With older people probably there is a little slower pace of delivery and I take out any what you might call modern jargon words of young people's [language].*

Mirroring the ski instructor's comment about the key goal of enjoyment for a sport lesson, a

yoga instructor alters the overall approach of her teaching in a children's class by making it less serious and more entertaining:

> *[With children] it's less rhythmic, because there's definitely a flow through my adult classes. I've taught a few kids'classes and have to keep in mind to make it silly and entertaining.*

Since play is an integral part of child development, a focus by the coach on winning instead of the love of the sport is a kind of insult to the children. Fortunately, a growing number of youth sport coaches recognize this. A football coach contrasts a typical team oriented towards winning with the lessons provided at his school:

> *The Japanese teams are very focused, very determined. They train hard, it's very strict. We provide football for the kids that aren't so desperate to get into the competitive teams. We just want to play, have a kick-about, learn the game, play the game, and have fun... It's about improving but it's about fun. There's no real competitive edge to it: it's playing games. My main goal is to make them improve as a player. To love the game like we do.*

Furthermore, cultural attitudes towards the process of learning can be advantageous or detrimental to instruction. A golf instructor finds Japanese learners often easier to teach than others, since he feels they are better listeners and more respectful of the instructor:

> *I think that Japanese are extremely kind of receptive... I don't know whether it's the teacher respect thing but they take what you say as gospel. And generally speaking, they really take on board and try to do the same and try and respect what I'm saying. [Whereas] Westerners may have a lesson and think "He doesn't know what he's talking about" so they start going on the Net, start going to various books, their friends... Before you know it, next time you do them, they're doing all sorts of stuff you hadn't taught them or you hadn't referenced. They start to basically make it up themselves... they go off the path, they'll start to reinvent the golf swing.*

It seems logical, then, for coaches to pay attention to and respect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their athletes when organizing activities and communicating with them. A rugby coach outlines this view as follows:

> *A real key to  [learning English for coaching] would be understanding the people you work with. Instead of making assumptions around the culture, the ethnicity, seeking to understand what's their background, where they come from, what might be some things that you can link to to help their communication... New Zealand coaches that have gone overseas to, say, France, Italy in particular and Japan, the coaches that have been more successful have engaged in the culture. Instead of saying, "I'm from New Zealand. I understand rugby. I'm going to come over here and tell you about New Zealand rugby," they've gone over there*

*and embraced the culture as part of their coaching. You know, John Kirwan speaks Italian, speaks Japanese. Vern Cotter speaks French…. So I would say if you were to have coaches coaching people that didn't speak the language of the coach, a big part of that would be the coach understanding, learning how to speak the language but also understanding the cultural nuances of the group that they're coaching… The more you can understand people the better it'll make you as a communicator.*

## 6. Constructiveness (Positive Feedback)

When an athlete fails in performance of a skill, becomes too emotional (angry or overexcited), loses motivation, misses practices, or acts in any other way that is harmful to the sport and the individual's growth and development, it is one of the responsibilities of the coach to provide suitable feedback that will mitigate or correct these problems. In educational psychology it is standard practice to advocate **positive reinforcement** as the best method to modify inappropriate behaviour. It is not enough to point out error: one must give the athlete alternatives that the coach believes will rectify the problem.

One of the steps towards being constructive is for the coach to gain the athlete's trust. As noted above, some cultures have a greater tendency than others to respect an instructor or coach merely because of their status. On the other hand, paying attention to the individual athlete by adjusting the training to the individual's personality, skill level, preferred communication style, and so on – as well as making the athlete aware of such individualized attention – is the important step of gaining credibility and trust as a coach.

A Japanese personal trainer describes his usual communication style in a lesson that focuses clearly on the "personal" aspect of his work:

*Communication is about the individual's condition and motivation – which is the first thing. [It's] about if the training level is going up or down. Then, risk control management which is important. From that, we decide what to do next. So it's about performance. And training level control: risk control is number 1… Each client is different so the [communication] contents are different. Also, we have different social chatting – for example, the greeting style varies. Sometimes more polite. So I use different language. Also, some clients are strict, others relaxed, so slow tempo vs. fast tempo [in speech as well as in training].*

Once the athlete has come to respect and trust the coach, the learning experience should proceed more effectively and performance or other advice will be 'taken on board'more easily. It is at this point that constructive coaching can really take off.

To be constructive in coaching implies that you are giving positive feedback. To do that, a coach needs to inform the athlete that they are carrying out some action incorrectly or inappropriately before any effort to fix the problem can take place. Nevertheless, it is a sensitive issue for anyone to be told that they are doing something wrong. A sport science lecturer illustrates this situation as follows:

*A lot of times your unconsciously incompetent athletes are going to be your more frustrating ones, because they think they're good at something. And you go, "Well, actually you're not, but how do I tell you that without telling you you're not?" Because that's not great feedback at all. So our goal is to move them into being consciously competent… How can we teach somebody that while you think you're good at something we're going to try and get you to recognize that what you're doing probably isn't great?*

In such a situation feedback can be either positive or negative. Positive feedback would inform the athlete about what was correct in a movement or other behaviour. By contrast, negative feedback would inform the athlete of what was incorrect. In general, for motivation positive is used more than negative feedback, though both are at times necessary. A ski instructor describes this approach as follows:

*The way you teach is, if in the last 30 minutes, you're not going to say "You're still not getting it." Because the person's paid money and they want to feel good, and you want to encourage them. And you want them to come back as it's a business. So you will be massaging their ego, focusing on the positive things that they did do, and then talking about the things that they didn't quite do in terms of they need to focus just a little more on this and then they'll be away.*

According to this instructor, it is the careful wording of the negative feedback that makes it acceptable – by couching the correction in encouraging words.

Nevertheless, there are times (such as during a game or busy training session) when negative comments are more efficient. A football coach observes:

*[Using negatives like "Don't …] depends on the situation. It's hard to avoid negatives in every situation. It's much quicker to say "Just don't…" if you're telling someone off than maybe the positive.*

The use of banter or teasing jokes as a kind of feedback is quite common in sport situations. Although banter tends to be negative in form, if it is not negative in tone or purpose it can promote team spirit and friendship. However, banter can be confusing or even not recognized as humour by young learners or people from other cultures. A youth football coach points out:

> *It would be difficult to be sarcastic to a 6-year-old. Some kids are very shy. They're not confident, so you don't want to say something that's a joke and then maybe they make a mistake. It depends on personality and age. I think if they were adults, then it'd be a lot more banter back and forth.*

In light of this, feedback in the form of simple gestures can be just as effective as banter or other positive or negative spoken comment. A simple shake of the head to indicate a poor choice of shot or pass is often enough to pass the message. A pat on the back or a 'thumbs-up'sends a clear positive message.

A coach should also be aware of the **quantity** of feedback that is being given to the team and individual athletes. A tennis coach believes "*being able to monitor the amount of positive and negative feedback that they're giving to the player and assessing the situation*" is a major part of sport coaching.

A personal trainer claims that feedback has a dual role: to improve both the body and the motivation of the trainee:

> *The individual's feeling as it affects the body is important. [Another communication scenario] is about improving motivation for following the training menu. You need to talk to the client and explain how it feels good or will help to change one's body.*

His point about explaining "how it feels good or will help" is central to constructive feedback. In other words, it isn't enough to explain or show what to do: the benefits for doing something correctly need to be understood (as well as the disadvantages of doing it incorrectly).

Several coaches have said that they sometimes have to teach an athlete a new method for carrying out a sport movement, because the athlete is doing the movement in an inefficient or incorrect way. However, the athletes in question may argue that they were taught a certain movement by previous coaches. Rather than criticize the previous coaching, these coaches recommend suggesting improvements that will provide alternative ways to carry out an action. In other words, a coach should never attack or criticize a person, but instead focus on an action. This is the heart of constructive feedback: focus on the movement or behaviour rather than the individual.

In addition, the athlete-centred coach needs to pay attention to feedback needs of the individual. As the athlete gains skill and experience, more and more feedback should be coming from the players to each other. A rugby coach describes this feedback process as a coach:

*… being aware of not overloading players – understanding who might be able to take a little bit more information, who you just might need to pull a little bit of the information back and let them do what they do naturally… Some players want more, other players want less. And one of the challenges when you're working with a group is: some want more feedback, some are quite happy generating their feedback themselves.*

*I don't think there's a coach anywhere that when they're doing an end-of-season review, the players have said "We got enough feedback." They always want feedback, they want to be told what they're doing well and what they're not doing well. But then the challenge to that is: how can they be generating their own feedback through their own reflection skills?*

One method to provide feedback that encourages athletes to reflect on their own performance is to use **questioning** rather than comments. Questions may be for the purpose of clarification or checking understanding. For instance, a football coach says:

*I tend to question, so after saying something I'll question the athletes for them to ensure that they understand what's been asked of them… I never ask an individual athlete to do more than one thing. When I've explained it to them, I ask them to tell me what their understanding is of what they've been asked to do.*

Other questions may be designed for the development of critical thinking and awareness skills. A rugby coach states he uses questioning extensively in training:

*A range of questioning: questioning around sort of technique and skill, but also questioning around technical awareness or technical understanding. But a lot of the questioning is to try to develop a sort of internal feedback: instead of me telling them what to do, develop greater awareness through the use of questioning. But also to see clarity, to make sure myself and the players are on the same page… [Questions like] "What did you notice? When? How could we do that more effectively?" Those types of questions to sort of prompt self-awareness but to get more clarity as well.*

Obviously, the ability to generate internal feedback through guided questioning is a developmental process. But questioning should be an integral part of any coach's feedback, as it inevitably provides a critical thinking tool that will help the athlete to "construct" improved performance.

## ９．Conclusions

This paper has looked at English communication issues for sport coaching, instruction, and

training. Some of the comments pertain to communication in any language with any athlete in any sport. Other observations are more language- or sport-specific. Sport informants bring a rich source of language and work experience to the study of English for Sport. It is hoped that using direct quotation from such specialists has provided the reader with many insights into the nature of English in sport communication. However, since sport is intrinsically active, demonstration and performance are the core of any coaching, learning, or for that matter, communication. Therefore, spoken language should be de-emphasized or at least simplified.

A scuba diving instructor explains how she deals with communication issues related to her NNES diving learners:

> If English isn't their first language, a lot of the vocabulary that is being used is… hard [even] for someone whose English is their first language. You're learning a whole new set of words to relate to stuff. And unless you actually get hands on and show them and say, "Well, BCD, what's a BCD?" and physically you've got one here and [say], "This is your BCD," … Because what we're talking about here you can read it, you can look at it, but until you actually hands on and get physically in the water and do it, it won't make sense.

> I'm conscious if English isn't their first language that I speak slower – I know that I do speak quite fast normally… I slow down my pace and the words I use will differ a bit. I'd carefully pick how I word things. I'd simplify things.

NNES coaches who must use English from time to time should model their English on the diving instructor's methods. Since one of the more commonly reported problems for Japanese or other NNES instructors is a fear of using English for oral communication, they should try to relax and use a few simple English words or phrases instead of lengthy explanations that may be difficult to say or hard to understand. Positive feedback such as "Good work!" or "Oh, yeah!" are as effective as saying "You did that very well! I liked the way you focused your eyes on the ball." Similarly, when describing how to do something, calling out "Toes, forward!" may be easier to comprehend than to saying, "You need to lean your body forward until all the weight is on your toes." After all, these phrases can be illustrated or elaborated on effectively during demonstration and performance.

Nonetheless, trying to help an athlete to improve performance does not mean that a coach should lose sight of the central goal of playing sport: enjoyment. After all, sport is not a universal, all-important value. No one will live or die if they aren't involved in a sport. Sport is play. Sport is entertainment. Even when an athlete or coach is highly motivated, this key element should not be forgotten, as the following comment by a squash learner illustrates:

*[My purpose for having lessons] is to try to improve. It's to try to understand and know how I should be playing the game, because I've never been coached [before]... It's a variety of objectives, I think. It's to try to enjoy the game more. First of all the lessons themselves are fun, nice to actually practice different shots. And if you only do competitions and games, then you don't actually get any better. And you also don't think about what you are doing. So it's as much to try to enjoy those games afterwards as it is to enjoy the lesson.*

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