

An Analysis of Language as a Catalyst to Sport Violence. A Case Study of Ten Secondary Schools in Marondera Urban

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ABSTRACT

Sport violence has been as cancerous as human diseases among developed and developing world. Media is awash with sport violence both in armature competitions and elite competitions in all sport disciplines. There are several causes of these types of violence in the fields of play, and one of these is language, both verbal and non verbal in the form of gestures. The verbal utterances and gestures in bad faith provoke the opponents who interpret the message differently and this degenerate into violence that has seen most competitions being abandoned prematurely or some officials or athletes slapped with punitive actions. Abandoning of games because of violence have made sponsors to shun away funding sport games as it becomes not cost effective to refund rerun competitions, a situation that is detrimental to the development of sport in Zimbabwe. Therefore, it is the focus of this study to analyze words, gestures and their meanings which are rampant and are part of unsporting behaviours. The following words and actions have been identified as insinulators of violence during sport competitions: if you miss the ball, take the man, that rotten egg, amahlola nyama, the red devils, the cobra (warumwa warumwa), pointing up a fore finger to spectators etc.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Numerous sport games have been robbed of their integrity and sweetness by violent incidents especially at school level where the spirit of fairness should be nurtured for the future goodness of sport. Several words were noted in this study as rampant in most school games, and have triggered violence since time immemorial. The world sport governing bodies have come up with rules and regulations to control bad language during competitions, but with little success. Officials are trained to detect such unsporting languages, for instance with video cameras and other modern communicative devices. It is unfortunate that at school level, such modern communicative devices are unavailable and most players and spectators including the community are far short of social responsibility and ethics for avoiding sport violence. Therefore; it is the aim of this study to explore the meanings of bad language, the effects and way forward to curb language abuse during sport competitions.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITIRATURE

Language is a very important tool in the day to day running of activities. Its role in sporting activities cannot be over looked. This paper shall therefore present the general functions of language in a society. It will also explore the incidents of abuse of language and its repercussions on sporting activities. Unsporting language fuels violence before, during and after sport competitions. Violence is the use of excessive physical force, which cause or has obvious potential to cause harm or destruction, [1].

There are so many definitions of language. For purposes of this study we gave some definitions of language. [4] defines language as ... a set of elements and a system for combining them into patterned sentences that can be used to accomplish specific tasks in specific contexts. [3] says language is the systematic, conventional use of sounds, signs or written symbols in a human society for communication and self expression. From these two definitions we noted that language is there to foster communication between humans in a given society. Language in this case becomes a source of transferring information whether verbally or through gestures.

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There are various functions of language and these include the informative function, where language is used to provide information. Language also has an expressive function where it is there to express feelings and emotions. The directive function of language causes someone to do or not do something whereas the phatic function is there for formality purposes as in greetings where there is really no intention to communicate some message. According to [2] these functions are performed by gesture, physical contact and facial expression.

Language is an essential element in the lives of people. Language is a social phenomenon and is closely linked to the social structure and value systems of a society, [6]. This is because it makes up the social aspects. Language aids the different social activities for, “it is in and through language that most of the activities we perform are done.” This is the reason why language is also important in sporting activities.

Of importance are Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory of 1978 which focuses on the gestures people make when making utterances. The theory states that when one performs gestures, politeness is exhibited; this can either be negative politeness or positive politeness, [7]. That means one may make an utterance which can be interpreted negatively or positively due to the gestures performed. The utterances and gestures in sport may be unsporting and mean to annoy players, spectators or officials who in turn can reciprocate and such a situation degenerates into sport violence.

Without language it will be difficult to have successful sporting activities. It is language that promotes or demotes the whole purpose of sports as unifying tool. The good use of language will promote sporting activities; on the other hand, abuse of language affects the smooth flow of sporting activities. Bad language also dismisses the whole purpose of doing sports as the expected unity is distorted. Segave (1997) in [1] notes that language regarding sport intones words that have to do with the themes of violence, life and death, and such words are ‘Destroy! Slaughter! Bury! Show them! Cowardice!.

[1] posits that there are words that insinuate violent responses in sports which players regard as sexually-laden terms e.g. “drive! penetrate! creamed! and even scored! This reference to predominately male functions refers to power infused terminology depicting a power structure of gender favouritism. Also, coaches and parents use war words that encourage drama during play, for instance, “Victory! Concede! Surrender! Defeated! Takes no prisoner! [5]. Such terminology create a war situation instead of a fair game situation.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopted a qualitative approach that used observations and interviews to solicit information from participants who were saturated with information and behaviours on abusive use of language in sport.

POPULATION

Players, coaches, referees, umpires and spectators during the 2014 National Association of Secondary Heads games constituted the participants whom the researchers considered as sport participants whose experiences with sport violence was vast and of significant value for this research.

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

To come up with a sample size of fifty (50) participants for this study, the researchers used a purposive sampling technique adopted during sport competitions. This technique was time serving and targeted participants who had useful information required in this study.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

In response to the question on the prevalent words that cause sport violence before, during and after games 99% of respondents concurred that words which are militaristic in nature were rampant and are often called out by coaches and supporters as a way of instilling anger in the players. It also emerged that supporters usually throw insulting words against other supporters, and that cascade into field violence that disrupts the games. The prevalent bad words are “*rakawora*” (is rotten)! If you miss the ball take the man! kill them! Tear them apart! Attack! Get into the enemy territory!

The majority of players pointed out that school children have composed irritating songs that are accompanied by drum beats meant to provoke and dehumanize opponent players and their supporters.

Some of the songs have these words: *hatitambe nemvana dzasiya vana mu dura!*(we do not compete with mothers who pretend to be virgins yet they have left their children in the granary), *rinzvenge rakarara iro zirema!*(dodge him he is a fool) *Keeper wenyu ane sadza muhomwe!*(your goalkeeper has pap/ thick porridge in his pockets) Majority of songs are culturally-sexually insulting, for instance, *Dongo dongo kudongorera bhurukwa kuti do-o vanhu vese kuti ah!*(peeping in one’s pants, see the pants are down and everyone is peeping). The general feeling was that such songs emotionally displace the players’ integrity and one retaliates by showing bad gestures to the supporters who might also throw missals to the players in the field, leading the match officials either to stop the games or abandon the games for the safety of the players.

On how sport participants interpret the bad languages during and after play, several responses were summed up to the following: the opponent becomes intimidated and loses confidence. The winning team enjoys the words and feels superior and reacts according to the meaning of the words and increases injuries upon the opponent. 100% of the players said that insulting words are unsporting behaviour but through such an unfortunate situation players become emotionally uncontrollable and end up retaliating to save their existence.

Spectators expressed dismay as the majority sees no fairness in school games and spectators lose enjoyment from most secondary school games especially where fair-play is at stake.

100% of the respondents singled out perpetrators of bad language as the hosting team’s supporters who enjoy territorial advantage, defeated coaches and the bussed cheer-leaders. It emerged that players at school level do not start violent language but act according to instructions from out of the field sport stakeholders. Opinions from the National Association of Secondary Heads concurred that if war of words is limited, athletes compete friendly and peacefully. Another observation was that arch-rival schools which compete in the same tournaments have deep rooted vendettas and some spectator camps are well pronounced only awaiting for the big clash. In such games, bad languages become common, leading to sport violence.

In order to create peaceful and friendly sport environment during schools tournaments, several suggestions from respondents were that; the National Association of Secondary Heads must seek police monitoring units to reinforce lawfulness and tranquillity during sport games. This law enforcement unit should be given details of certain body and verbal utterances that constitute unsporting behaviour before the games start, so that the police could refer correctly to the laid down violence insinuating words. The majority of respondents agreed to orient communities who are the majority of supporters to appreciate tolerance and sportsmanship behaviours. The culture of bringing politically inclined and tribalistic words during competitions (the case of Dynamos and n Highlanders in Zimbabwe) should be avoided and must be a punishable offence before, during and after games. The community leaders should be engaged to ban those well-known unruly elements from attending school sports games. 100% of the interviewees advocated the engagement of qualified and competent match officials who execute their duties efficiently to avoid doubts and anger from players and supporters. All schools should be made aware of some national sports association rules and regulations governing the smooth running of their games, for instance, FIFA rule Number 12.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Therefore; from the findings in this study, the researchers made the following conclusions:

- Spectators, players, coaches and team supporters tend to use militaristic words and behaviour which provoke their opponents’ anger.
- Bad language is a common source of violence in secondary schools games.
- Majority of songs during sport games have provocative and insulting word meant to dehumanise the opponents
- Team supporters are the ones who use bad language to emotionally detract opponents from being confident and once an athlete loses confidence, performance diminishes.
- NASH is paying little attention to guard against bad language as they do not value its negative impact since there is no much research so far to this effect.
- Hosting teams have highest rate of abusive language against visiting teams.
- Unsporting utterances are rampant when there is poor match officiating.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Police units must be hired by NASH to enforce the observation of acceptable sport language.
- NASH should ban the chanting of songs with bad language during games.
- Community leaders like councillors, headmen, elders and church leaders must be engaged by NASH to conscientize/educate the unruly cheer-leaders in their areas of influence.
- NASH should invite sport research personalities to present papers on effects of bad language during sport games.
- Ministry of education should include bad language in its list of chargeable offences, and this must be communicated through circulars.
- NASH should always use qualified match officials.

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