The Discourse of Football Post-Match Interviews

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI

FILOZOFSKI FAKULTET

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(ZAVRŠNI RAD)

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ODSJEK ZA ANGLISTIKU

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THE DISCOURSE OF FOOTBALL POST-MATCH INTERVIEWS

(Završni rad)

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THE DISCOURSE OF FOOTBALL POST-MATCH INTERVIEWS

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IZJAVA O AUTORSTVU ZAVRŠNOG RADA

Izjavljujem da je moj završni rad **The Discourse of Football Post-Match Interviews** izvorni rezultat mojeg rada te da su svi korišteni izvori, kako objavljeni, tako i neobjavljeni, primjereno citirali ili parafrazirani te navedeni u popisu literature na kraju rada.

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Abstract

Being the most popular sport in the world, football does not only attract sports fans, but also researchers from various disciplines. In this context, linguistic research in football is described as a rather new academic (sub)field, thus, this paper deals with the discourse analysis of one post-match football interview after a lost game. As they do in any interaction, the interlocutors construct and communicate details about their actions, identities and relationships in the post-match interviews as well. By combining methods in several spoken discourse approaches – conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics and positioning in narrative discourse – the analysis aims to uncover linguistic and paralinguistic strategies that the interlocutors in the interaction use, how the interviewee deals with the questions after a lost match, how he positions himself in the three levels of positioning and if, and who he holds accountable for the lost game.

Key words: *football, post-match interview, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, positioning*

1. Introduction

Out of all the sports in the world, football is by far the most popular one (Baboota & Kaur, 2019). An incredibly large number of people watching it, playing it, and overall participating in it, contribute to its constant growth everywhere around the world. Looking at all the leagues that exist, English Premier League is undoubtedly the most watched and the most powerful football league in the world (ibid.; Torkkeli, 2020). Just how popular the League is, shows the number of its followers, which was 1.87 billion across the world in the most recent 2023/24 season, according to the official Premier League website on May 19, 2024. With that many people taking interest in this sport and game, those people are also exposed to the language which comes along with it (Torkkeli, 2020). In this context, language is constantly expressed through media, and media as such are key components is football's representation (Lavric, 2008). Inter alia, post-match interviews are part of the media, which are in "broadcasting sporting events" as stated by File (2012, as cited in How, 2018, p. 17), regarded as requisite "journalism practise." Through those interviews, which are, as the name itself suggests, conducted right after the games, the players give their initial thoughts and reflections on the match (Wilton, 2021). During those interactions, the interlocutors construct, establish and convey information regarding their identities, actions, relationships and positions; and, to do that, they use their words and other linguistic and paralinguistic strategies, which can be examined through approaches from the discourse analysis – conversation analysis/interactional sociolinguistics and positioning theory (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021; Jones, 2019).

The aim of this thesis is to uncover the most prominent strategies that the participants (with central focus being on the interviewee) of the interaction (post-match interview) use. The aim is also to observe how the football player deals with the interview questions about and (clearly) after the lost game – does he answer them or deflect them? Furthermore, the goal is to analyse the positions which the player takes in relation to the events, the characters and the interviewer. The goal is also to examine the position which the interviewer takes in relation to the player. Additionally, this thesis aims to explore the effect of the broader socio-cultural ideologies on the player's emotional positioning in the post-match interview (PMI). Finally, through the analysis of positioning, the goal is to discover if and who the player actually holds accountable for the poor outcome of the game.

2. Literature review

2.1. Football linguistics

One of the results of football being the most widespread sport in the world is the growing number of research about it in numerous fields like sports pedagogy, sports psychology, sociology of sports, etc. (Graf et al., 2023). When it comes to the linguistic research in this sport, Graf et al. (2023, p. 921) describe it as "a relatively recent academic (sub)field" where nowadays exists a small number of collections that are thematically oriented. If it is looked in its global context, football is linked with linguistics in multiple ways, and from the linguistic context, football can be studied (explored) from numerous different viewpoints (Biró, 2023; Graf et al., 2023). While Billings (2016, as cited in Graf et al., 2023) in this framework in general mentions football's re(production), organization and its consumption, more specifically, aspects of the game which can be linguistically quite interesting are the participants of the event – the players, the fans, the coaches, the referees, the journalists, and their ways of communication. Moreover, Biró (2023) in her work also mentions similar things and adds on to this by saying that in the last few years research was (and still is) to a greater extent concerned with the coaches' and players' language choices. Additionally, the mentioned linguistic studies are often focused on analysing different "expressions" of fan communication (interactional phenomena), ways/methods of giving names to football stadiums (lexical phenomena), "wordplay and humour in TV interviews or football reports" (pragmatic phenomena); but also, phenomena that are connected to social domains such as race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Graf et al., 2023, p. 922). What is more, in her introduction part in "The Linguistics of Football" Lavric (2008) draws attention to the massive part that media play in football's image (presentation) – because football matches are frequently characterised as media events. That is why quite a number of articles focus their analysis on football matches (i.e., their reports) in newspapers, radio, TV, live-text commentaries, post-match interviews, etc. (ibid.; Graf et al., 2023). All in all, with the development and rapid growth of technology and linguistic research growing to be more interdisciplinary, in this day and age, there are various "paths" that could be taken when it comes to analysing language, football and all the multimodal features and new kinds of interactions (online/social media) that this technologically evolved world brought and still brings along (Graf et al., 2023).

2.2. Post-match interviews

The post-match interview (PMI) is a short interview with a player (or the manager) "immediately" after a played game; and it takes place either "on the pitch or in the mixed zone" (Torkkeli, 2020; Wilton, 2021, p. 133). In her work, Rhys (2016, p. 183) focuses on the analysis of the post-match interviews that were conducted in the English Premier League (EPL) with managers and describes the setting of the interviews – where the interviewer stands "behind" the camera and only his/her microphone movements could be seen, while the team manager stands in front of the "wall of sponsorship logos." Even though the author describes the interview with the manager, this kind of setting is usually common in the post-match interviews in the EPL with the players as well. What makes this type of interview special is that the aim is not to just find out some "basic" information about the game[1], but the audience and the interviewer want to hear the player's reflection and evaluation of the game (Wilton, 2021). Wilton (2021, p. 133) notes that it is important to be aware and expect these types of evaluations "to be preliminary and/or rather general" because of the very fact that the players do not really have much time to think about/review the match, as the interviews are taken shortly after the game ends. It is also important to mention the effect of the invested "sports fan audience" on the "course" of the PMIs, and the criticism to which these interviews are exposed to on a daily basis because of their insufficient journalistic quality or the players' ability to take on the role of the interviewees (Rhys, 2016, p. 185; Wilton, 2016).

Furthermore, Wilton (2019) according to Kivimaa (2022, p. 11) emphasises the fact that the PMIs can also have "the status of a ritual." That is because nearly all televised sports and sports broadcasts encompass the post-match interviews, the interviews include a restricted number of topics, and their structural pattern is quite "strict" (inflexible) (ibid.). Regarding research in the area of post-match interviews, How (2018) suggests that the frequent occurrence of verbal disputes between the interviewers (journalists) and the interviewees (the players/managers/coaching staff), which are often prompted by the interviewers who are using rude/disrespectful language, makes language use in this context an extremely interesting subject of analysis. However, in this respect, it is necessary to note that the PMIs in general do not have an adversarial style – which is quite prominent in political news interviews, but they are rather identified as conciliatory (File, 2012, according to Reber, 2021).

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[1] Because most of the people that watch these interviews (and the interviewer himself/herself) have probably watched the game and know what happened.

In order to dive deeper into the area of post-match football interviews, in 2017 Antje Wilton focused on the German television, and studied 57 interviews which were conducted with German male footballers. In her research, Wilton argues that during the interviews, the participants used formulaic language, repetition, topics that were expected/unsurprising, and "a rigid question-answer structure" (Wilton, 2019, as cited in Kivimaa, 2022, p. 1). In this sense, the event's collective and social characteristics are highlighted due to the use of the formulaic language and repetition, which points to the common knowledge in a community regarding the meaning and language use (ibid.).

2.3. Spoken discourse

Although written and spoken discourses have certain characteristics in common, they also differ quite a lot from one another. For example, Jones (2019) argues that spoken discourse implies more interaction and immediate responses from interlocutors. He also writes that talking (speech) in spoken discourse is more spontaneous and multimodal (because people use a wide range of (non-)verbal communication), transient and less explicit. Next, participants of the conversation usually share the social and physical context, however, the author emphasises that there are instances of spoken discourse, like phone conversations, radio shows or YouTube videos, which do not correspond to all the characteristics that were mentioned (ibid.). Therefore, a category of spoken discourse is an incredibly broad one, and it can be analysed from different fields/approaches, such as corpus linguistics, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, etc. (Hughes, 2021).

2.4. Conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics

Conversation analysis (CA) - an approach to spoken discourse which has its roots in sociology and studies "social interaction as it *actually* happens in its natural habitat" – was founded in the 1960s by Gail Jefferson, Emmanuel Schegloff and Harvey Sacks (Waring, 2021, p. 21). According to Hughes (2021), what might seem like a simple interaction/conversation, for conversation analysts presents an abundance of linguistic evidence. In dealing with CA, various practitioners designate what they are studying as 'talk-in-interaction', rather than 'conversation'[2] (Cameron, 2001). Conversation analysis mainly focuses on the sequential patterns in talk – so people taking turns during their conversations is essential and of the utmost interest to the researchers in this field (ibid.). Moreover, CA assumes that people understand/interpret other people's words "by paying attention to the local conditions of the

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2 That is because initially, CA was "devised" to analyse interactive talk (and not written discourse or monologues) (ibid.).

conversation itself, especially the sequence of utterances" (Jones, 2019, p. 20). Further, in this context, what is important are conversational strategies, which are defined as the methods that people apply when they are negotiating their actions and identities during the interactions with other people (Jones, 2019). The mentioned category of conversational strategies consists of face and framing strategies; and while both strategies stem from the field called the interactional sociolinguistics, there are some differences between them.

However, before moving on any further, it is necessary to briefly explain the field of interactional sociolinguistics. Interactional sociolinguistics (IS), which is based on the work of the American linguist John Gumperz (ibid.), according to Jaspers (2012, p. 135), aims to describe, "how meaningful contexts are implied via talk, how and if these are picked up by relevant others, and how the production and reception of talk influences subsequent interaction." From the perspective of IS, inadequacy of talk is responsible for the need of language users to depend on the extracommunicative knowledge to make sense of their interlocutors' words in the conversation (Jaspers, 2012). To put it differently, words cannot be the only thing that the participants of the conversation rely on for understanding each other; rather, they are "paired up" with other verbal and non-verbal aspects of the conversation, i.e. contextualizing cues. Contextualizing cues, as Gumperz (according to Jones, 2019) called them, are actually signals which people exchange in order to "demonstrate" their actions. In this aspect, when analysing an interview for example, close attention should be paid to the discourse markers (which frequently in an obvious way label the beginning and the end of the activities in a conversation), paralinguistic signals (intonation, rhythm, speed of talking), non-verbal communication (facial expressions, gestures) and registers (ibid.). Contextualizing cues are thus important in the context of shifting frames; and the concept of frames belongs to the framing strategies that were previously mentioned. On the one hand, framing strategies refer to one's actions during the conversation (e.g. teasing, arguing…), and with reference to them, frames are defined as "series" of expectations (regarding content and the way of interpreting it) that people have for the activities throughout the conversation (ibid.). In this respect, interaction consists of the primary framework, which is related to "a set of expectations about the overall activity", but also of "smaller, more local frames" (interactive frames) (Jones, 2019, p. 24). Face strategies – on the other hand – are connected to one's identity, and they refer to one's relationship with their interlocutor(s). In relation to them is the concept of face, which, according to Jones (2019), is not a person's real "face", but more of a public "mask", which the interlocutors "give" to one another. Alongside face, relationships between people are

negotiable by using independence and involvement strategies, which people employ to show how close they are. Using aspects of speech such as formal and indirect language, titles, hedging, etc., suggests independence strategies (distance); while using informal and direct language, first names/nicknames, asking personal questions, etc., suggests involvement strategies (closeness) (ibid.). Lastly, regarding the employment of the two strategies for conveyance of power and intimacy details, before taking part in conversations/interactions, people typically have one of the three sets of beliefs/expectations (i.e. face systems): solidarity, deference or hierarchical face system. Solidarity face system implies the participants using involvement strategies, deference means that they are using independence strategies, and when there is hierarchy in the interaction, that means that one person is using independence, while the other (usually person with more power) is using involvement strategies (ibid.).

2.5. Positioning

"The discursive production of a diversity of selves" is the definition which Davies and Harré (1990, p. 47, as cited in Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021) ascribed to the concept known as *positioning*. In their work, Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou (2021) present three levels of analysing affective positioning in narrative discourse. Those three levels, each of which emphasises affective dimensions, can reveal which linguistic sources and strategies speakers actively use to achieve identity positioning in discourse.

The first level, also called *positioning 1*, or positioning in "the taleworld", focuses on the description and the evaluation of characters and events as the ones that belong to the specific kinds of affective characters and events (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021, p. 249). The second level, also called *positioning 2*, or positioning in "the storyrealm", emphasises the affective attitudes - their conveyance "through different (para)linguistic and visual cues and the kinds of relationships established through these with story recipients as intimate, proximal or distant" (ibid.). Here, it is also important to take into account certain reactions which are stimulated through the mentioned relationships. Finally, when it comes to the third level of positioning (*positioning 3* or "the level of the self"), it refers to the affective attitudes (states) which are affected by "broader sociocultural and social-mediatized norms of emotional displays", and which serve for communicating and "setting up" "a sense of an emotional self" (ibid.).

3. Data and methods

The data analysed in this thesis is one post-match interview video which was conducted on May 16, 2022, after a football game in the English Premier League (EPL) between Newcastle United and Arsenal football clubs. The interview from the EPL was deliberately chosen, because, as it was stated in the beginning, nowadays, the EPL is considered to be the most popular football league. The video for analysis was taken from a YouTube sports channel Optus Sport, which posted the video the day after the game and titled it "Granit Xhaka goes OFF! He throws teammates under the bus following loss to Newcastle." The football match, which was played at St. James' Park stadium (Newcastle upon Tyne), ended with Newcastle's win 2:0 against Arsenal. The interviewee in the PMI is Arsenal's Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka. The analysed video lasts 3 minutes and 42 seconds and in it the player answers five questions regarding the played match. This exact interview was chosen for the analysis because it is different from the classic post-match interviews after lost matches, which are usually more positive in tone and predictable in essence. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in the analysis, it is not typical to see a player who criticizes his team's performance in such an honest and objective light, especially when the lost game was one of the most important ones in the whole season.

Regarding the interview transcription[3], certain parts of the transcript key *(Table 1.)* were made following the examples of Giaxoglou and Georgakopoulou (2021) and Podboj (2020). What is important to take into account, is that the interview (video) in question is multimodal, so, not only the words that the interlocutors are saying are important, but also how they are said. Thus, even though the pauses are not thoroughly analysed in the paper, the transcript key differentiates shorter pauses (below 1,40 seconds), from the longer ones (above 1,40 seconds). Concerning nonverbal communication, more specifically the gaze and head turning – those cues appear simultaneously in the video; therefore, they will be written as such in the transcription. Namely, they are treated as separate "categories" – in the sense of each being written in its own row. For better understanding of the transcription, it is also vital to know that, for the head turning category, if no sign is written, it means that the player keeps his head straight (in the direction of the interviewer/camera). Moreover, for the gaze category, writing of the next symbol indicates stopping of the previous one. Lastly, for easier reading, the multimodal transcription (gaze and head turning) is present only in the analysis of the

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[3] The full transcript is presented in the Appendix part of this thesis.

mentioned aspects, in other cases, transcription without gaze and head turning signals is applied.

Transcript key *(Table 1.)*	
(.)	pause below 1,40 seconds (when the interlocutors are quiet or taking a breath)
(..)	pause above 1,40 seconds (when the interlocutors are quiet or taking a breath)
əm	when the player produces "umm" sound
text in *cursive*	the interviewer's shift to soft/gentle voice
bold text	increased volume of voice
[…]	omitted text
The next symbols (gaze and head turning categories) are applied only to the interviewee (the football player) regardless of the person speaking:	
↑	upward eye gaze
↓	downward eye gaze
←	left directed eye gaze
→	looking into the distance
∘	gaze fixed on the interviewer
<	head turned to the left side
>	head turned to the right side
|	indicates that the previously written symbol for head turning is no longer "active" (i.e. the player's head is in a straight position)

In the following chapters, the data is first analysed through the lens of conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics (Jones, 2019), where the main focus is on the face and framing strategies that the interlocutors use (contextualizing cues – such as paralinguistic signals, shifting frames, etc.). Then, the data is analysed through the first level of positioning, where the aim is to find out how the characters and events are described – mostly by looking at pronominal use. Next is the second level of positioning, where the goal is to observe the strategies (once again), paralinguistic and visual cues and pronominal use – all in order to uncover the relationships that are established with the recipients of the story. Finally, there is also the third level of positioning, where it is necessary to consider broader ideologies, such as the competition (EPL) and the influence of media in the player's establishment of his emotional self. These approaches are suitable for the analysis of this data (the post-match interview), because according to Clayman and Gill (2012, p. 121), conversation analysis is concerned with

conversation/interaction which happens in a natural way "as it has been captured in audio and video recordings and rendered into detailed transcripts." The same thing applies to the interactional sociolinguistics (Haugh, 2021), while for the positioning, even though the main focus has been on the question of identity in the area of narrative, this theory is likely appropriate for every discourse since people always position themselves in interactions in relation to other people, events, norms, etc. (Georgakopoulou, 2007, according to Gordon, 2015).

The way of writing examples in this paper was done by imitating Torkkeli (2020), only, here the abbreviation "GX" stands for the football player – Granit Xhaka, and the letter "I" stands for the interviewer.

4. Analysis

4.1. Interactional strategies

Since the data analyzed is a post-match interview, the primary framework implies the following: the interviewer will ask the player some questions about the game and will make the player reflect on it and give his opinion. As it is a football game, the topic of the interview/conversation is not as deep and as serious, but at the same time, it is serious to a certain extent; because Arsenal lost (as Xhaka says) one of the most important games of the season. Therefore, the player must deal with the questions regarding the team's poor performance and must elaborate on the reason for their loss. According to Jones (2019):

> In cases in which the topic of the conversation is serious or potentially embarrassing for either party, or in which the weight of imposition is seen to be great, independence strategies will be more common, whereas in situations where the topic is less serious, the outcome more predictable and the weight of imposition seen to be relatively small, involvement strategies are more common. (p. 70)

Even though the topic weighs more on the serious side, the participants (the interviewer and the player) of a post-match interview are both using more involvement than independence strategies. Delin (2000), according to Torkkeli (2020), notes that the interviewer is usually the one who controls the turn-taking and the interview's agenda, and because of that, he or she is "more powerful" than the person being interviewed. However, the author also emphasises the fact that post-match interviews can most definitely question those things (ibid.). Thus, when it comes to face systems, it seems that, although hierarchy would be expected to be a more used strategy (since this is an interview), solidarity is the one that prevails in this case.

If the attention is shifted to the participants and the strategies they use; it can be noticed that the interviewer mainly uses involvement strategies, such as in the first question where he addressed Xhaka using the first name (Example 1). Compared to the player, the interviewer uses more formal language[4] and asks very direct questions (Example 2). Moreover, Examples 3 and 5 show that when the interviewer asks certain questions, he uses hedges such as "I mean", "maybe", "I don't just mean you personally", etc. to specify them, so that the questions would not be taken in the wrong way or interpreted differently.

(1) **I**: Uh Granit, is that (.) just devastating?

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[4] Although looking at the whole interview, it would be more correct to say that he uses semi-formal language.

(2) **I**: *Why not? Why such a below power performance when it mattered so much?*

(3) **I**: I mean, it's not an excuse but, was it the performance of a young team feeling the pressure maybe?

GX: I don't know, if someone isn't ready for this game, stay at home. As simple as it, no? Doesn't matter the age. […] and I feel very, very sorry for the people that came over here to support us. I feel very, very sorry (.) **for Arsenal supporters** […]

(4) **I**: You're speaking incredibly passionately. Has there been strong words in the dressing room as well?

GX: You can imagine how- how the dressing room was no? əm Very, very quiet […] But, it's easy to speak and not to do it, you know so, (..) this today is not the coach mistake, it's our mistake because (.) **the game plan was** totally different. […]

(5) **I**: *Is it the most disappointingly impossible as a professional* to feel like, I don't just mean you personally, but the team, but to freeze on a really big occasion?

In Xhaka's case, on the other hand, the use of informal, conversational language is more than obvious, which can be seen in the Example 6, which shows the player using a vulgar word to express his anger with the result. In his answers, Xhaka is very honest and direct; he criticizes his team's performance with no restraint, calls out those that are not ready to give their all in the game (however, he does that in a subtle way, which will be discussed in more detail later), and apologizes to all the supporters.

(6) **GX**: […] We need people (.) **that have the balls, sorry to say that, to come here and to play** […]

The player's frustration with the overall result and the performance can be seen through his constant repetition of the same expressions (such as "I don't know why", "we can't accept", "very sorry"...) which are listed in the Examples 7, 8, 9, and 10 below. Moreover, it is almost impossible not to notice the loudness which can be heard in certain segments in the video. In this sense, it is vital to be aware of the effect of this paralinguistic signal on the recipients of the story. When people notice an increased volume, not only is their attention automatically drawn to whatever the speaker is saying, but they are also "warned" about the informative value of what is being said (Arnaut & Jokanović, 2018). By increasing volume on specific words in the Example 8, Xhaka wants to bring his interlocutor's attention to his (the player's) cluelessness regarding the reason for the players' way of performance. Not only that, but the player also once again conveys information about his emotional attitudes towards the game (i.e. frustration and disappointment).

(7) **GX**: […] I don't know why we are not doing that what the coach is asking for us.

(8) **GX**: […] I don't know **why** we are not doing the **stuff** what we are preparing.

(9) **GX**: […] But the performance like this, (.) it's not to accept and (..) very, very, very sad for us, very, very disappointed, and I feel very, very sorry for the people that came over here to support us. I feel very, very sorry (.) **for Arsenal supporters** […]

(10)   **GX**: […] we can't accept.

In this context, it is important to mention another prominent paralinguistic signal which, first the interviewer (Example 1), and then the interviewee uses, and that is the pause. Belz and Trouvain (2019) mention two types of pauses – filled and unfilled (silent) pauses. While filled pauses refer to "fillers such as [ə] or [əm]", unfilled pauses refer to those pauses without "filler particles" (ibid., p. 5). Nevertheless, the authors highlight the ambiguousness of the unfilled pauses, and question whether they could also refer to the "subtle phonetic particles such as breathing noises, tongue clicks or other unspecified articulatory activity" (ibid., p. 5). In the interviewer's case (Example 1), a complete/unfilled pause is evident, and it can be assumed that he pauses because he does not know which word to use to describe the game. The same thing happens to Xhaka who pauses many times through the interview and uses filled pause "əm" (as a paralinguistic signal) quite a lot. However, compared to the interviewer, it is quite difficult to differentiate and determine the meaning of Xhaka's (unfilled) pauses, because of the circumstances in which these types of interviews are conducted in. In other words, throughout the interview, the audience can see Xhaka pausing simply to take a (sometimes more intense) breath – which could be a consequence of the game that finished before the interview. In addition to that, those pauses could also be a result of Xhaka's frustration, and some of them definitely have to do with what author Kurzon (2013) says about a pause (short silence) in his work; namely, that a short silence can imply that the speaker for instance has to gather his or her thoughts. During the interview, Xhaka himself even says that he cannot explain the team's poor performance and struggles to find the right words to "satisfy the interviewer's curiosity".

Furthermore, even though the main topic of the interview is the played football match, there are also many smaller topics within that topic, i.e. there are quite a few frames in this interview. For example, the interview starts with the question which relates to the result/overall performance of the team (Example 1). Then, with the third question (Example 3) the interviewer changes the topic, and so the frame shifts to "the performance of a young team". However, with a slight deflection of the interviewer's question, the player shifts the frame to

"the players (in general) who are not ready for this kind of game". His deflection of the question may not be as obvious, however, the question asked refers to the "young team", while Xhaka chooses to talk in a more general sense, and not about the specific people. Here he also uses a contextualizing cue – gaze, which will be further analysed in the positioning section. Throughout that same answer, the player once again shifts the frame by changing the topic of the conversation to "the apology to the supporters" (Example 3). The next question that the interviewer asks changes the frame again by changing the topic to "the strong words in the dressing room". Although he starts his response with what is related to the question asked, Xhaka then uses the discourse marker "so" and changes the frame to "the team's responsibility for the result" (Example 4). Lastly, the frame is shifted with the final question, by changing the topic, which can be seen in the Example 5.

4.2. Positioning

As was noted in the analysis of framing and contextualizing cues from the examples above, the interviewee Xhaka uses several strategies to re-frame focus from the interviewer's perspective to emphasize the responsibility of the team for the loss. This can also be observed as an example of *(affective) positioning* in discourse. Therefore, the next part is concerned with the analysis of the interview from the three levels of positioning that were explained in the *Literature review*.

4.2.1. Positioning level 1

The first level is *positioning 1*, where the focus is put on the portrayal of characters and events (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021). Because this analysis is about the interview that was taken right after the football match, it can be said that the answers that the Arsenal player gives are produced through a reflection on the game – in a sequence of a question-answer form (adjacency pair). Therefore, in the big picture, the main event – the game/the performance of the Arsenal team, is described/evaluated with adjectives "devastating" and "(one of the most) important". Furthermore, it is described with a noun "disaster" and overall deemed as unacceptable – "it's not to accept". Xhaka also evaluates team's performance through a comparison with the imagined/pre-planned vision of the game, which, according to the player, was completely different than the game that was played (Examples 11 and 12).

(11)   **GX**: […] We didn't do what, what the game plan was. əm (.) Not listening to the coach, doing our things; and when you do your things, these games happen. […]

(12)   **GX**: […] we was prepared very well. […] this today is not the coach mistake, it's our mistake because (.) **the game plan was** totally different. […]

Further, description and evaluation of the event and the characters can be studied from a linguistic strategy which indexed positioning in discourse – pronominal use. During the interview, the most prominent pronouns that Xhaka uses are "I", "we" and "you", and by using them he evaluates the event and the characters and positions himself in relation to them.

When using the first-person plural pronoun "we", Xhaka does not always refer to the same people. That is, Xhaka always includes himself, but, at the same time, sometimes he refers to the Arsenal players who played in that game (Example 13), sometimes to the whole team (including the manager, the coaching staff and the players who were on the bench; Example 14), and sometimes to a broader "composition" of the club (referring to the players who are maybe not at the club anymore but were there as he says five/six years ago; Example 15). The distinction between the first two "we" referents is quite important, because, on the one hand, it tells the audience who does the player hold responsible for the outcome of the game; and on the other hand, it tells discourse analysts how the important characters are evaluated in this context. Example 16 shows that the first use of "we" refers to the whole Arsenal team (including the manager, coaching staff, etc.), however, the second "we" refers to the particular players who were running on the pitch that day. The distinction which justifies the stated premise is visible from Xhaka's other answers, (such as in the Example 17) where the player clearly emphasises that the coach had nothing to do with the players' poor performance; thus, the first "we" in the Example 16 represents the whole team which intended to show a different game, but the second "we" particularly alludes to the players who were playing and did not carry out the imagined plan and hence deserve to be on the pitch that day. Moreover, the use of the pronoun "we" (in the Examples 13 and 17) when talking about the played match, indicates that Xhaka does not have the intention of escaping accountability – instead, he holds the players, including himself, responsible for the outcome of the game, and so positions himself as identifying with the players.

(13) **GX**: […] We didn't do what, what the game plan was. əm […]

(14) **GX**: […] because we knew (.) this game is (.) maybe one of the most important game for us. […]

(15) **GX**: It's frustrating because əm we are waiting since six years maybe, five or six years to go there where we normally want to be. […]

(16) **GX**: […] əm We came here (.) to show a different game, but əm from the first minute until the ninetieth minute (.) we didn't deserve to be on the pitch today.

(17) **GX**: […] this today is not the coach mistake, it's our mistake because (.) **the game plan was** totally different. What we did over ninety minutes, and this is very frustrating because (.) I don't know **why** we are not doing the **stuff** what we are preparing.

Further, to get to the bottom of the question of responsibility for the result, it is important to analyse the difference in referents when Xhaka uses the pronoun "you". There are instances when the player refers to the interviewer (which will be discussed in the level 2), however there are instances when the "you" that the player uses does not have a specific referent, but it is generic. That being the case, generalization strategy, which Podboj (2020) mentions in her work, can be noticed. The author analyses the generic "you" in the context of narratives about the experience of emigration and writes that the use of "you" portrays the described experience as more general/common, more understandable for the interlocutor, and it also makes the evaluation of the situation (i.e. the event, which is in this example the football match) more objective (ibid.). Example 18 shows that the player evaluates the team's performance in the context of generalization; that is, with the prior use of pronoun "our", Xhaka associates himself and the players with the general fact in the football context (which refers to the footballers universally), to which the player makes a reference with pronoun "you". Therefore, the player evaluates the event with simultaneous usage of pronouns "our" and "your", and so relates his unfortunate experience to general, similar occasions where wilful actions result in disastrous performances and undeserving achievements of reaching the Champions League (UCL[5]) or the Europa League.

(18) **GX**: doing our things; and when you do your things, these games happen. What happened was a disaster əm performance, and like this, (.) **you don't deserve to ch- to play Champions League, you don't deserve even to play Europa League,** (.) and əm (.) […]

Then, in the Example 19, in some way Xhaka deflects the question related to the performance of a young team and chooses to speak about the players on his team through generalizations, and so partially saves the public image of the "young team". The player only partially saves their image, because he uses pronouns such as "someone" and "you", which do not directly

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[5] UEFA Champions League

point to the young players. However, by choosing to speak about the players' mental "inadequacies" (in the sense of not being mentally ready to play the game) in the context of losing immensely important games, Xhaka alludes to the possibility of some players on his team fitting those descriptions, and therefore those players being the most responsible for the outcome of the game. However, the player never explicitly calls them out. Hence, with the use of "you" Xhaka distances himself from those players, but on the other hand, by using the pronoun "we" (at the beginning of the sixth sentence, Example 19) he associates himself with the club and the players who came ready to play that highly important match.

(19)   **I**: I mean, it's not an excuse but, was it the performance of a young team feeling the pressure maybe?

      GX: I don't know, if someone isn't ready for this game, stay at home. As simple as it, no? Doesn't matter the age. You can be thirty, you can be thirty-five, you can be ten, you can be eighteen. If you're not ready for that, you're nervous, stay on the bench or stay at home; don't come here. We need people (.) **that have the balls, sorry to say that, to come here and to play**; because we knew (.) this game is (.) maybe one of the most important game for us. […]

4.2.2. Positioning level 2

The second level is *positioning 2*, where the emphasis is on different (para)linguistic and visual cues which help in creating specific relationships with the recipients of the story (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021).

Looking from a wide perspective, it can be assumed that the interviewer approaches the interaction with Xhaka with a degree of caution; in the sense of being careful not to stir up the player's emotions after a lost game even more. That can be seen, as it was already mentioned, in his use of hedges, but it can also be noticed in his voice, which at times appears to be gentler/softer (Examples 20 and 21). The involvement strategies discussed in the previous section, such as the interviewer's use of the player's first name, indicate that the interviewer takes up a friendlier position in relation to the player. In addition to that, even though it was stated that the interviewer is not supposed to be seen in the post-match interviews, in the video, from time to time, part of the interviewer's head can be seen. In those moments it is obvious that he nods with his head to confirm that he is actively listening to/confirming what the player is saying. Podboj (2020) mentions that the interlocutor in her analysis proves the involvement in the interaction with the use of sounds and words (such as "yes" or "mhm"). That way the

interlocutor in her analysis, and the interviewer in this interview, both position themselves in solidarity with their interviewees (ibid.).

(20)   **I**: *Why not? Why such a below power performance when it mattered so much?*

(21)   **I**: *Is it the most disappointingly impossible as a professional* to feel like, I don't just mean you personally, but the team, but to freeze on a really big occasion?

Next, looking from the perspective of the player, it was previously mentioned how he uses the pronoun "you" to also refer to the interviewer, and the Examples 22 and 23 illustrate that. Moreover, the Example 23, along with the Example 24, displays another strategy which refers to Xhaka using questions in his answers in order to get confirmation from the interviewer. Both the strategies, which the player at times uses throughout the interview, contribute to the active involvement of the interviewer in the conversation. The parallel can be drawn with what Podboj (2020) once again talks about in her narrative analysis; she notes that the direct addressing of the interlocutor contributes to the shift from the *story world* to the *storytelling world,* where the interlocutors mutually "comment on a certain aspect from the *story world*" (ibid., p. 256). As a result of using these strategies, the player reduces the distance between him and the interviewer.
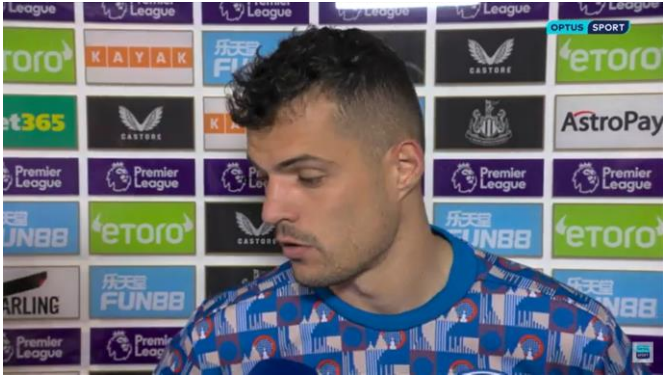
(22)   **GX**: […] I can't explain to you why. […]

(23)   **GX**: […] You can imagine how- how the dressing room was no? […] But, it's easy to speak and not to do it, you know so […]

(24)   **GX**: […] As simple as it, no? […]

Further, what is important to notice in Xhaka's behaviour is his gaze. When a person maintains eye contact, which falls into category of kinesic features, they are expressing likeness, trust, intimacy, and assertiveness (Jenkins & Parra, 2003). When the person avoids eye contact, that is linked with "nonimmediacy, psychological distance, and lack of involvement" (ibid., p. 92). In the answers to the second and third questions, the player's first words are "I don't know", and both times (when he says that) he turns his head to the left (from the camera's perspective) and looks away from the interviewer and the camera (in a way which seems to be more pronounced than usual; Examples 25 and 26). However, when he wants to emphasize something in his response, the player's gaze is "fixed upon" the interviewer. For example, from observing Xhaka's response to the question regarding the young team's performance, it can be noticed that he maintains eye contact with the interviewer for the most part (which can be seen in the Example 27 below). Nevertheless, throughout most of the interview the player avoids

eye contact, so the conclusion that can be drawn (which at the same time contradicts the previous one), is that Xhaka is not really involved in the conversation and establishes a distant relationship with the interviewer, and on the whole, with the people[6] watching the interview.

Example	Time	Verbal/nonverbal
(25)	0:24	**GX**: I don't know. I can't explain to you why. […] 　←　　　　　　　　　　　　　↓ 　<　　　　　　　　　　　｜
Nonverbal:		

Example	Time	Verbal/nonverbal
(26)	1:07	**GX**: I don't know, if someone isn't ready for this game, stay at home. 　←　　　　　↓　　　　　　　→　　　° 　<　　　　｜ As simple as it, no? Doesn't matter the age. […] 　　　　↓　　　　→
Nonverbal:		

Example	Time	Verbal/nonverbal
(27)	1:15	**GX**: […] You can be thirty, you can be thirty-five, you can be ten, ° ↓ you can be eighteen. If you're not ready for that, you're nervous, ° ↓ ° ↓ stay on the bench or stay at home; don't come here. We need people ° → (.) **that have the balls, sorry to say that, to come here and to play**; ° → ° because we knew (.) this game is (.) maybe one of the most → ↓ → important game for us. […] ° →
Nonverbal:		

Furthermore, repetition in this interview can be compared to the function of repetition in the study of literature (Straniero Sergio, 2012). There, the repeated words serve as "a powerful rhetorical device for producing emphasis, intensity, clarity, exaggeration and/or making a deeper impression on the audience" (ibid., p. 28). In the Example 28 it is evident that Xhaka repeats an adverb "very" multiple times in different contexts, and thus he expresses/highlights his annoyance with the result, and "puts forward" his apology to the fans[7]. Since the player does not really show a different range of emotions throughout the interview – the tone of his voice is mostly indifferent/it does not change much – it is fair to believe that he uses the repetition[8] of the mentioned adverb to compensate for the lack of emotion and eye contact that

[7] Fans are the secondary recipients of the story, since the player communicates with them through this interview.
[8] However, it is also important to emphasize aspect/fact which possibly contributes to Xhaka's constant repetition. That is the fact that, in this interview, Xhaka does not talk in his first language, which most certainly affects his

would usually be expected when someone sincerely apologises and expresses melancholy. Although, it would be incorrect to say that during his apology Xhaka completely avoids eye contact; more specifically, he looks at the interviewer exactly when he addresses the people/ Arsenal supporters that came to the stadium to support the players, and rather than making excuses, the player gets straight to the point in his apology. Thus, taking into consideration all that was mentioned during this segment, the player establishes some kind of proximal relationship with the specific audience (once again – Arsenal supporters[9]) that he addresses, who, in this case, can be labelled as the secondary/hidden recipients[10] of the story (since the player uses this opportunity to justify the players' performance and issue an apology to the fans).

Example	Time	Verbal/nonverbal

(28)	1:49	**GX**: […] very, very, very sad for us, very, very disappointed, and I feel
		                                                          ↓ →
		very, very sorry for the people that came over here to support us. I feel
		↓ ○ →
		very, very sorry (.) **for Arsenal supporters əm** (.) […]
		                                        ○ →

Nonverbal:		

---

ability to express himself. Although the mentioned aspect is not within the scope of this analysis, it is vital to be aware of it.

[9] When he addresses Arsenal supporters, he also uses paralinguistic signals - a pause and a paralinguistic signal "əm".

[10] However, they are not the same recipients as the interviewer, as they are not the player's interlocutors in the interview.

4.2.3. Positioning level 3

The final level, *positioning 3*, focuses on the formation of the emotional self and the influence of/on broader socio-cultural norms in that context (Giaxoglou & Georgakopoulou, 2021). It is important to put Xhaka's words and behaviour into a wider picture, which had an influence on the establishment of his self, presented as disappointed, frustrated and sad. First of all, Fynn (2017) emphasises the fact that in the Premier League, success is compulsory regardless of *your* identity. Even more so, he lists the clubs which he calls the "big six" (among which is Arsenal) whose success "is defined by the title and Champions League qualification" (ibid., p. 3). Therefore, when dealing with that kind of pressure to meet the standards, little to no mistake can be tolerated. Moreover, considering the fact that the season was coming to an end around the time when Arsenal played Newcastle (which was one of the key/determining games for the club's qualification for the Champions League), every move that the players made had far-reaching consequences. With pronoun "we" (which was analysed in the first level of positioning) which at one point (Example 29) Xhaka uses to talk about broader "composition" of the team – referring to the Arsenal players of past six years, Xhaka identifies himself with *that* team and the long-anticipated wish to be where they "normally want to be".

Expectations and the pressure that comes with this highly competitive league, the wish to succeed, poor performance and the lost game – they all had an immense impact on Xhaka's post-match behaviour, his choice of words (which seemed uncommonly objective and honest), affective states and the establishment of his emotional self.

> (29) **GX**: It's frustrating because əm we are waiting since six years maybe, five or six years to go there where we normally want to be. […]

On top of that, there is also the media. Kristiansen et al. (2011) in their work "Coping with negative media content: The experiences of professional football goalkeeper", note the fact that losing an important match, along with feelings of frustration and exhaustion, contributes to "easier" attribution of blame. In this context, it could be said that the media takes advantage of the players who give controversial remarks or do not process their words before saying them out loud. Thus, video clickbait (titles), such as "Granit Xhaka goes OFF! He throws teammates under the bus following loss to Newcastle" are born (ibid.). However, rather than falling into a trap of explicitly throwing specific individuals "under the bus" or even making excuses, Xhaka takes the other path and breaks the norms of such discourses by mentioning multiple times throughout the interview, "I don't know why we are not doing the stuff we are preparing". To

finalize this segment, it is only right to refer to the words Kristiansen et al. (2011, p. 305) used to conclude their study, "it is important to stay together as a team when confronted with the media and not blame each other when matches are lost."

5. Conclusion

This thesis presented the analysis of one post-match interview (PMI) through the lens of conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and the theory of positioning in narrative discourse. The interview in question was conducted on May 16, 2022, with Arsenal's Swiss midfielder Granit Xhaka after a played football match in nowadays most popular football league – English Premier League (EPL). On that day Arsenal F.C. lost 2:0 to Newcastle United, and thus significantly decreased their chances of qualifying for the Champions League. The interview, which lasts for 3 minutes and 42 seconds, was chosen for the analysis because of its untypical nature – not being as optimistic and as predictable as most of the PMIs after lost games tend to be. The aim of this analysis was therefore to uncover and analyse the (para)linguistic strategies which the interviewer and the interviewee use; the analysis also aimed to observe the player's ability to handle the post-(lost)match interview questions, his attribution of the blame/accountability, and the overall positioning in discourse.

Starting from the interactional strategies, it is important to emphasize that this PMI most certainly questions the controlling of the turn-taking – in the sense of the interviewer being more powerful than the interviewee (Delin, 2000, as cited in Torkkeli, 2020). In this case, the analysis showed that due to both interlocutors using involvement strategies (showing closeness), the most predominant face system is solidarity. On the one hand, involvement strategies which the interviewer uses are the interviewee's first name and asking direct questions. Nevertheless, he carefully carries himself through the conversation so as not to make the player's negative feelings even more intense. That can be seen from his, at times, softer voice, his use of hedges and head nodding. Therefore, the parallel which can be drawn with the positioning theory is that the interviewer (in the positioning level 2) positions himself in solidarity in relation to the interviewee. On the other hand, the interviewee's use of involvement strategies is the most obvious in his language, which appears to be quite informal. Moreover, with the player's use of questions and the pronoun "you", in cases in which the mentioned refer to the interviewer, the interlocutors shift from level 1 to level 2 positioning, where the participants of the conversation in the spatiotemporal context of the interview refer to things from the 'taleworld', i.e. the match that had just taken place, which is a strategy also confirmed by Podboj (2020). Consequently, the distance between the interlocutors is reduced. However, since the player averted his gaze from the interviewer during most of the interaction, it can be concluded that he was neither "present" in the interview (Jenkins & Parra, 2003), nor was he in the mood for it. Thus, the player positioned himself as distant towards the interviewer.

Going back to the interactional strategies, this analysis showed that Xhaka occasionally uses loudness to bring the attention of the interviewer and the broader audience to the informative value of what is being said (Arnaut & Jokanović, 2018) – i.e. to the player's cluelessness regarding the played game where the Arsenal players did not carry out the initial game plan. Besides this, the player also uses paralinguistic signals "əm" and pause, however, due to the interview conditions, the meaning of pauses in this analysis was undetermined. As the analysis demonstrated, another notable linguistic device that the player uses is repetition, which, not only reinforces his frustration and disappointment with the match, but it also makes up for the lack of emotions that the player expresses. Further, the positioning level 1 shows the match performance being evaluated with a noun, adjectives, and through comparison with a pre-match plan. Moreover, Xhaka positions himself in relation to the event and the characters by using pronouns "you" and "we". While the pronoun "you" can refer to the interlocutor, it can also be used in a general sense, and one instance in this interview shows it being linked with the pronoun "our". By linking those pronouns, the player generalizes his experience (regarding the performance), which is then labelled as more common, and it makes the player appear as being objective in his evaluations (Podboj, 2020). With the generic "you" and pronoun "someone", the player also deflects one of the questions alluding to the young team being responsible for the game outcome, and, although he partly saves the face of the young team, Xhaka indirectly suggests that some of his teammates might not have been mentally ready for the game and consequently are the ones to blame for the devastating outcome. In this context, he also uses the pronoun "we" to equate himself with those who were fully prepared for that deciding match and thus are not responsible for the game loss. Moreover, the pronoun "we" carries the most significant difference – between the referents whom the player in general, explicitly holds the most accountable for the loss (i.e. the players who were playing on the field that day), and the ones who came there along with those players to show a different game (i.e. the manager, substitutes etc.). Finally, the player uses pronoun "we" in a broader context (linking positioning level 1 and level 3) to refer to the past and present players who were, and still are waiting for their rightful place on the Premier League table and the Champions League. Other socio-cultural norms (analysed in the level 3) which influenced the player's emotional self were the pressure of the club as one of the big six Premier League clubs to be at the top of the English League, and the outcome of the game which resulted in the club's impossible qualification for the UCL (Fynn, 2017). The pressure of the lost game, along with the negative feelings, could have led the player to succumb in front of the media, and give them exactly what they wanted – a headline (Kristiansen et al., 2011). Yet, although Optus Sport decided to use the player's

words, twisting them out of context to make a clickbait title for the YouTube video, Xhaka never explicitly attributed the blame to any specific player to save his face, but his use of the pronoun "we" asserted the fact that the blame for the lost game was ascribed only to the players who came on the pitch that day, including Xhaka himself.

Overall, this study demonstrated that tenets from conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics can easily be adapted to analyse football post-match interviews and furthermore, that such interviews exhibit many features found in narrative discourse. It can be said that the contribution of this work to the research area of post-match interviews consists in the fact that it provides a detailed insight into one, untypical post-match interview and combined methods to successfully uncover strategies and affective attitudes which may not be evident from other approaches.

6. Appendix

I: Uh Granit, is that (.) just devastating?
　↓　　　　　　　　　　°

GX: (..) So difficult to find the right words after the game. əm We came here (.) to show a
　　↓　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　→

different game, but əm from the first minute until the ninetieth minute (.) we didn't deserve to
　　　　　　°　　↓　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　°　　↓

be on the pitch today.
　　　　　　　°

I: *Why not? Why such a below power performance when it mattered so much?*
　　　　↓

GX: I don't know. I can't explain to you why. əm (..) We didn't do what, what the game plan
　←　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　↓　　°　　　　　　　　　　　↓
　<　　　　　　　　　　　　　|

was. əm (.) Not listening to the coach, doing our things; and when you do your things, these
　　　°　　　　↓　　　　　　　　　°　　　　　　　　　　　↓

games happen. What happened was a disaster əm performance, and like this, (.) **you don't**
　　　°　　　↓　　　　　　　　　　°　↓

deserve to ch- to play Champions League, you don't deserve even to play Europa
　　°　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　↓

League, (.) and əm (.) yes, it's very hard to take it at the moment, (.) and əm (.) I don't know
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　°

why we are not doing that what the coach is asking for us.
　　　　　　　→　　　　　　　　°

I: I mean, it's not an excuse but, was it the performance of a young team feeling the pressure
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　↓

maybe?

GX: I don't know, if someone isn't ready for this game, stay at home. As simple as it, no?
　←　　　　　↓　　　　　　　→　　　　°
　<　　　|

Doesn't matter the age. You can be thirty, you can be thirty-five, you can be ten, you can be
↓　　　　　→　　　　°　　　　　　　　　　　↓　　　　　°

eighteen. If you're not ready for that, you're nervous, stay on the bench or stay at home; don't
　　↓　　　　　　　°　　　　　↓　　　　　　　°

come here. We need people (.) **that have the balls, sorry to say that, to come here and to**
　　→　　　°　　　　　　　　　→

play; because we knew (.) this game is (.) maybe one of the most important game for us. But

the performance like this, (.) it's not to accept and (..) very, very, very sad for us, very, very

disappointed, and I feel very, very sorry for the people that came over here to support us. I

feel very, very sorry (.) **for Arsenal supporters əm** (.), but this is not the way we wanted to

go, and əm (.) this is the only thing what I can say and to say sorry to them. Other things, I

don't have any other words.

I: You're speaking incredibly passionately. Has there been strong words in the dressing room

as well?

GX: (..) You can imagine how- how the dressing room was no? əm Very, very quiet. əm Of

course, the coach əm, he spoke, (..) and, yeah for him as well it's very difficult because we

was prepared very well. (..) But, it's easy to speak and not to do it, you know so, (..) this

today is not the coach mistake, it's our mistake because (.) **the game plan was** totally

different. What we did over ninety minutes, and this is very frustrating because (.) I don't

know **why** we are not doing the **stuff** what we are preparing.

I: *Is it the most disappointingly impossible as a professional* to feel like, I don't just mean

you personally, but the team, but to freeze on a really big occasion?

GX: It's frustrating because əm we are waiting since six years maybe, five or six years to go

there where we normally want to be. (..) We had **everything in our hands** (.) əm (.), and to

come here, to perform like this (.), we look like (.) second team division. Newcastle looked
°

like a Champions League team. (.) We have to be honest after the game, but this is the reality.
→   °   →

I like to be honest, I like to speak the reality, and this is what today we looked… like we are
°   →

in a position where Newcastle is, and they was looking like where we are; and **to come here**
°   →   ↓

with a performance like this, when you have everything in your hands, you know
°   →

exactly you have to win (..), we can't accept.
°   →   °

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