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Taking a Stance on Doping. Online Press Evaluation of a Parliamentary Select Committee's Investigations into Doping in British Cycling¹

Abstract: Between 2016 and 2017, the Parliamentary Select Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee was charged by the House of Commons to investigate doping in British sport, following revelations in the press that this practice was widespread. This study focuses on the witness sessions involving exponents of cycling, a sport frequently linked with performance enhancement.

The study adopts a Computer-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) approach. By comparing a corpus of the Committee hearings with a corpus of online media coverage, the study offers a detailed qualitative analysis of stance and evaluation strategies in both corpora. Analysis highlights the importance of stance adverbials for witnesses and Committee members alike. It also reveals patterns of attitude adverbials. It is shown how patterns of stance in the hearing prime the press account of the issue, resulting in predominantly negative evaluations that reduce the complexity of the issue to an oversimplified more polarized account, presumably in the interests of newsworthiness.

Keywords: *cycling, doping, evaluation, keyword, media coverage, Parliamentary Select Committee, stance*

1. Introduction

Main Scholarly investigation into doping in sports abounds in a variety of disciplines spanning the hard sciences, sociology, the history of sport and philosophy of sport, to name the most obvious. By contrast, while various aspects of sport in general have inspired important linguistic studies, the topic of doping has not been fertile ground for linguists. A similar pattern prevails in studies of the press coverage of sport, which has been extensively analysed from various perspectives across a numerous disciplines, though linguists, with notable exceptions,² have not been drawn regularly to examine the print media discourse on this issue.

The present study considers online media coverage of a Parliamentary Select Committee's investigation into combating doping in British Sport.³ Specifically, it analyses those sessions

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² See, for example, Henk Erik Meier et. al., "Spirals of Signification? A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of the German Doping Discourse", *Communication and Sport*, 5:3 (2015), 352-373; Scott Jedlicka, "The Normative Discourse of Anti-doping Policy", *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 6:3 (2014), 429-442; Tarja Laine, "Shame on Us: Shame, National Identity and the Finnish Doping Scandal", *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23:1 (2006), 67-81.

³ See *Media and Sport Committee Oral Evidence: Combatting Doping in Sport*, House of Commons, 146 (2016, 2017a, 2017b), www.parliament.uk.

dedicated to the sport of cycling, in which doping practices are so well and sensationally documented as to have jeopardized the very credibility of the entire sport.⁴ Primarily, the analysis is concerned with the formal linguistic transformations that occur when some key procedures of an oral, institutional discourse are relayed in the print media. However, given that this issue is a bioethical one, that admits of different interpretations and stances as to what even constitutes performance enhancement for athletes and other stakeholders (governments, governing bodies, politicians, doctors, coaches, sports fans, sponsors, to name the most obvious), it also considers the print media’s contribution to public understanding of this issue, of its complexity and different interpretations. Further, as the Committee’s understanding of the issue is based on the testimony of witnesses, many of them high profile figures from various spheres within the world of cycling, it is also appropriate to consider how their reputations are affected by their appearance at a hearing and subsequently by their depiction in the media. Thus, media reporting on investigations into a bioethical issue also, inevitably, invites reflections on the ethics of how that information is conveyed and considerations as to whether the popular press is entirely fit for purpose on such a contested issue.

1.1 Background

The world of professional cycling is governed by strict anti-doping rules, although it not completely sure that these regulations are administered and policed in entirely effective or totally ethical ways. To appreciate the investigation of the Parliamentary Select Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee on Combatting Doping in Sport and the press coverage it received some familiarity with the regulated substances and the basic medical and scientific view of their use may be helpful.

For the immediate background to the present study, one need go no further than the fourth and final report of the parliamentary Digital, Culture Media and Sport Committee Combatting Doping in Sport,⁵ specifically the second section, which is concerned with unethical performance enhancement within British professional cycling as represented by Team Sky, under the management of Sir Dave Brailsford:

In September 2016, the Russian-based cyber espionage group, Fancy Bear, published documents obtained by hacking into WADA (World Anti-doping Agency) computer systems, which showed how a number of athletes had been granted Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs), which permitted them to take medicines to treat long-term conditions like asthma or pollen allergies. These exemptions were required because the drugs that were requested to be administered were banned within periods of competition in the absence of TUEs ... As a result of the Fancy Bear hack, there was particular scrutiny of three TUE’s granted to British cyclist, Sir Bradley Wiggins, before the 2011 and the 2012 Tour de France and the 2013 Giro d’Italia, for the use of the powerful corticosteroid, triamcinolone, to treat his asthma.

⁴ See David Millar, *Racing through the Dark* (London: Orion, 2011); David Walsh, *Seven Deadly Sins* (New York: Astria Books, 2012); Juliet Macur, *Cycle of Lies: The Fall of Lance Armstrong* (New York: Harper Collins, 2014); William Fotheringham, “What Crisis-ridden Team Sky Must Do to Restore their Shredded Credibility”, *The Guardian* (2018), www.theguardian.com; Martha Kelner, “Remarkable Drugs Report Shatters Team Sky’s Illusion of Integrity”, *The Guardian* (2018), www.theguardian.com.

⁵ House of Commons, *4th Report: Combatting Doping in Sport* (2018), 19, www.parliament.uk.

The revelations of Fancy Bear subsequently drew the attention of the British press, notably of the Daily Mail journalist Matt Lawton,⁶ who in October 2016 revealed that The UK Anti-doping Agency (UKAD) had begun investigations into the delivery of a mystery package to the Team Sky Bus to treat Sky cyclist Bradley Wiggins. Both TUEs and the delivery of the package were subject to intense investigation when members of the team Sky management, medical and coaching staff were called before the Committee as witnesses.

1.3 TUEs

If TUEs are permissible under WADA rules, some explanation is required to understand the medical and scientific reasons why it can be considered controversial and unethical for team doctors to prescribe them. The glossary to the enquiry describes their conditions of use as follows:

[f]or a national governing body to approve a TUE, there are strict rules: that the athlete would suffer significant problems without taking the substance; that it would not be significantly performance enhancing; that there is no reasonable therapeutic alternative; and the need to use it is not due to prior use without a TUE.⁷

However, the system is open to abuse. Some medicines, when not used to treat a genuine condition, can deliver performance enhancement, which is why they appear on the WADA banned substances list.⁸ This is particularly true of a group of drugs used widely in professional cycling to treat asthma or allergy problems. According to medical and anecdotal evidence from athletes, corticosteroids like triamcinolone, for example, aid weight loss with no reduction in muscle power, which delivers a considerable advantage in races.⁹ Thus, there is considerable temptation for athletes (and conniving doctors) to bend the rules for granting TUEs in order to gain an unfair advantage. The Fancy Bear leaks showed that Team Sky rider Bradley Wiggins had applied for TUEs before his previous three Grand Tour appearances, also in the run-up to the 2012 Tour de France, which he won. Medical evidence quoted in the Parliamentary Committee’s closing report indicates triamcinolone “continues to have a positive effect for people who have taken the drug for two or three weeks after it has been administered”,¹⁰ ushering in the suspicion that “the assessment of medical need has been based too closely on trying to achieve peak level of physical condition in the athlete, rather than returning them to a normal state of health”.¹¹

⁶ Matt Lawton, “UK Anti-doping Called for Ban of Drugs at Centre of Current Storm that Has Engulfed Team Sky and British Cycling”, *Daily Mail* (2016), www.dailymail.co.uk.

⁷ House of Commons, *4th Report: Combatting Doping in Sport* (2018), 22.

⁸ WADA, *Prohibited List*, WADA (2019), www.wada-ama.org.

⁹ See House of Commons, *4th Report: Combatting Doping in Sport* (2018), 19-22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

1.4 *Delivery of the package*

The aspect of Team Sky’s anti-doping transparency that attracted most attention from the press was the delivery of a package from British Cycling’s Manchester medical stores, for which no credible explanation or record was available or, indeed, has so far been provided. Speculation about Team Sky’s clean credentials was further fuelled by Matt Lawton’s¹² revelation of possible rule bending by Team Sky and Bradley Wiggins at the close of the 2011 Criterium du Dauphiné. Held in June, this is an important lead-up race to the Tour de France, which starts in early July. According to an anonymous source within Team Sky, at the end of the race in La Toussuire, Dr Richard Freeman, the team doctor, took delivery from Simon Cope of a ‘mystery package’, the contents of which were then allegedly administered to the cyclist, even though no TUE had been granted; the implication being that this was meant to secure longer-term enhancement for the imminent Tour de France; besides the fact that, if the package contained triamcinolone, Wiggins was in breach of the rules by injecting it on the last day of a race, an offence punishable by a two-year suspension. The fact that no records were available either at Team Sky or at British Cycling, from where the package originated, only served to swell the clouds of doubt hanging over Brailsford’s team. His tardy claim that the package contained nothing more sinister than an over-the-counter mucolytic widely available in continental pharmacies did nothing to dispel those suspicions.

1.5 *Select committees*

House of Commons select committees are bipartisan, and their members are elected by fellow MPs. Their basic remit is to ensure that the House of Commons can better scrutinise the Government and hold it to account. These bodies “have the power to compel witnesses to attend, demand written evidence and even charge witnesses with contempt. Witnesses also have no right to silence”.¹³ However, it has been observed that committees increasingly go beyond scrutiny of the executive, “holding the wider world to account” and indulging in “hostile grilling of people who hold no governmental role”.¹⁴ The tendency to investigate issues outside the conduct of the executive has increased public interest in their work, because they intervene in areas of life more likely to attract public and, by extension, media attention; not least because they often involve well-known or powerful figures who, because of their fame or notoriety, or because they belong to unpopular categories, are of more general interest than the workings of the executive. Suffice it to remember the appearance of media magnate Rupert Murdoch before the select committee on phone hacking of celebrities by his journalists,¹⁵ or the Director General of the BBC, who had to answer questions about the decision not to broadcast a documentary on a BBC celebrity suspected of sexual abuse of minors.

¹² Lawton, “UK Anti-doping Called for Ban of Drugs”.

¹³ Adam Lent, “Select Committees Are Becoming the Ugly Face of Parliament: It’s Time to Rein Them in”, *The London School of Economics and Political Science* (2013), blogs.lse.ac.uk.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ House of Commons, *Unauthorised Tapping into or Hacking of Mobile Communications* (2010-2012), www.parliament.uk.

The MP Tony Wright observes that “the external media attention that the house gets comes far more from the Select Committee system than from anywhere else”;¹⁶ so much so that “the media visibility of the Commons’ select committees has grown substantially, giving them unprecedented national (even global) attention”.¹⁷ Indeed, research indicates “there has been a substantial growth in overall mentions of commons committees”.¹⁸ The Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee is one “whose prominence has grown greatly”,¹⁹ particularly as a result of the media behaviour scandal mentioned above.

As Kubala notes, “coverage of committees has clearly increased since the late 1980s, which starkly contradicts the evidence of a decline in political and other types of parliamentary coverage (specifically of the Chamber) during the same period”.²⁰ This is unsurprising, as the broader scope of committees means that they are more likely to meet several news value criteria such as continuity, because issues remain in the media spotlight for the duration of the committee’s work (which can extend over years); famous and powerful people (including high ranking ministers and high-profile, outspoken, ‘colourful’ chairs of the committees themselves); unusual situations and consequences, to name but a few.²¹ Press exposure is also facilitated by the communication strategy of the commons’ media and information service to attract journalist to evidence sessions in particular, for instance through live webcasting of evidence sessions, which means that journalists no longer have to attend Parliament for a story; Parliament now brings the story to them.²²

Of the various aspects of committee procedures, the evidence sessions have emerged as the most newsworthy. As Kubala notes, this “also suggests that the media increasingly consider select committees to be of news value when performing their function of publicly scrutinising, and holding to account, the Government and others – whilst their other main function of proposing policy change, via their reports, has perhaps diminished in importance”.²³ Moreover, the privileges, rights and conditions obtaining in evidence sessions inevitably have a bearing on the newsworthiness of these mediated events and the press’s own liability in reporting them. While witnesses have no right to silence²⁴ – or legal representation – committee members are protected by parliamentary privilege and can, substantially, state or imply whatever they want with very few constraints and without fearing the libel laws.²⁵ As a result, committees “are increasingly characterised by an extremely aggressive style of questioning, becoming ‘public

¹⁶ Cit. in Patrick Dunleavy and Dominic Muir, “Parliament Bounces back: How Select Committees Have Become a Power in the Land”, *Democratic Audit* (2013), www.democraticaudit.com.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Marek Kubala, “Select Committees in the House of Commons and the Media”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64.4 (2011), 694-713.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 706.

²² *Ibid.*, 710.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Lent, “Select Committees Are Becoming the Ugly Face of Parliament”.

²⁵ *A Point of View: Do Parliament’s Select Committees Wield Too Much Power?*, BBC (2015), www.bbc.com.

courts’ where individuals are tried on the strength of their performance rather than on the evidence”.²⁶ This inevitably adds to their news appeal. Committee members can interrupt their witnesses and prevent them from providing evidence, or otherwise browbeat them. When they use their privilege to brand a witness “a tax cheat or an idiot”,²⁷ is it any surprise they often become the darlings of the press?

[T]he Parliamentary Papers Act 1840 provides that the reporting of Parliamentary Committee Reports is always protected by absolute privilege unless the publication is not bona fide (‘without intention to deceive’) i.e. is malicious. This statutory immunity allows publishers to report material discussed in Parliament or Parliamentary Reports without threat of libel proceedings, insofar as those reports are *bona fide*.

It is not difficult to appreciate how advantageous this situation is to both committees and the press. The former’s privileges and practices potentially increase the likelihood of newsworthy proceedings and thus greater publicity and further justification of their work; the latter enjoys virtually unimpeded access to news, while its privileged position in the information chain is safeguarded in ways that would be unlikely in, say, a court of law. Indeed, it has been observed that select committees run the risk of becoming trials in which witnesses may quickly become defendants without, however, access to proper procedure or protections (Lent, 2013; BBC, 2015).²⁸

This close and mutually beneficial relation between the institution and the press cannot be overlooked when assessing the print media’s role in relaying information about this or any other aspect of bioethics; all the more so, considering that the way in which witnesses are questioned and their words reported raises ethical issues, too, entailing questions of independence, objectivity and accountability. It is hoped the following linguistic analysis helps gauge to what extent these standards are respected in the press’s account of this affair.

2. Data

To examine how this issue was investigated by the committee and subsequently reported in the online print media, two corpora have been constructed. The first, the Committee Corpus (COC), is comprised of transcripts of three hearings at the Parliamentary Select Committee on Culture, Media Sports looking into doping in British cycling. The transcripts of the three sessions were downloaded from the UK Parliament site in pdf format and then converted into txt so they could be run on the concordancing software Antconc. The resulting corpus amounted to 57,432 tokens. The corpus is made up of the testimonies of the following witnesses: Robert Howden, Chairman of British Cycling, George Gilbert, Head of the Technical and Ethics commission of British Cycling, Shane Sutton, a coach from British Cycling, David Brailsford Head of Team Sky, Simon Cope from British Cycling Nicole Sapstead, head of UKAD, Britain’s antidrug

²⁶ Lent, “Select Committees Are Becoming the Ugly Face of Parliament”.

²⁷ *A Point of View: Do Parliament’s Select Committees Wield Too Much Power?*, BBC (2015).

²⁸ *Ibid.*; Lent, “Select Committees Are Becoming the Ugly Face of Parliament”.

Agency; Nicole Cooke, British Cycling medal winner.

The second, the Online Media Corpus (OMEC), was generated by the Lexis Nexis data bank (supplemented by data from the Pocket Hit service) in response to the search words ‘Team Sky’, ‘jiffy bag’, ‘Brailsford’, ‘British Cycling’, ‘whistleblower’, ‘parliamentary select committee’, ‘TUE’, and ‘doping’. The resulting corpus is composed of articles in the British online print media for the period 2016-2017, the years in which members of British Cycling and Team Sky were called to testify during the committee’s witness sessions. The articles comprising the corpus are drawn from across the spectrum of principle online dailies, from The Sun and The Mirror to The Daily Mail, The Daily Express, to the so-called qualities (The Times, The Observer, The Telegraph, The Guardian, and The Independent). The sample also includes reports published from the sports section of the BBC site, as well as articles from regional newspapers like The Scotsman, The Glasgow Herald, The Belfast Telegraph, and a selection from The Irish Times and The Irish Independent, the main newspapers in the Irish Republic. This provided a corpus of 214, 629 tokens which, while not exhaustive, is highly representative, particularly given the media’s tendency to replicate news.

Closer analysis of the data reveals that all mainline press formats are represented. However, the quality press accounts for 44% of the sample, The Times and The Telegraph alone providing 35% of that segment. The middle-market Daily Mail and The Express account for 26% of the sample, while the two principal tabloids, The Sun and The Mirror comprise just 5.3% of the data. Regional journalism and other outlets like the BBC make up the remaining 22.3% of the sample. The highest proportion of data originates from broadsheets, and it is conceivable that these papers are more interested in the complexities of the committee’s procedures than tabloids, which traditionally have a narrower focus on sports performance and results. The Daily Mail, alone provides 24.2% of the total data. As one of the paper’s journalist, Matt Lawson, was the first to break the news of possible abuse of TUEs, such a percentage of total coverage over the period is hardly surprising.

3. Method: Corpus Assisted Discourse Approach

The attempt to trace the changes that occur in transition from committee room to the front page is carried out by combining elements of corpus linguistics with the techniques of close and qualitative discourse analysis. Partington²⁹ terms this approach corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) and among its advantages includes “the uncovering, in the discourse type under study, of what we might call non-obvious meaning, that is meaning, which might not be readily available to the naked eye” (Partington et. al. 2013, 11³⁰).

The use of corpus technology, like the concordancing software Antconc used in this study, to investigate a corpus has a number of advantages, summed up by Partington et. al. as follows:

²⁹ Alan Partington, “Metaphor, Motifs and Similes across Discourse Types: Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) at Work”, in Anatol Stefanowitsch and Stefan Gries, eds., *Corpus-based Approaches to Metaphor and Metonymy* (New York: De Gruyter Mouton, 2006), 267-304.

³⁰ Alan Partington et. al., *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2013).

corpus technology helps find other examples of a phenomenon one has already noticed. At the other extreme, it reveals patterns of use previously unthought of. In between it can reinforce, refute or revise a reviewer’s intuition and show them why and by how much their suspicions were grounded.³¹

The Antconc concordance software features a number of tools for interrogating a corpus. The following have been used in the present study: concordances, which show patterns of significant lexical co-occurrence, i.e., that is the tendency of certain words to repeatedly appear together with other words; key words, which compares one corpus with another reference corpus in order to discover which words have a significantly higher frequency of occurrence in one corpus compared with another. This tool shows words that are “outstandingly frequent in terms of a reference corpus”³² and provides indications concerning the “aboutness”³³ of a corpus, or “what the text ‘boils down to’ ... once we have steamed off the verbiage, the adornment, the blah, blah, blah”.³⁴

As the data comprises two corpora, each one served as a control corpus for the other and the information from the keyword feature was the principal tool used for analysis, which was then further fleshed out by using the concordance tool. Although there has been a scholarly debate about the optimal size and type of reference corpora, an orthodox position has not yet emerged. Some, like McEnery et al.,³⁵ even maintain that the size of a reference corpus is relatively unimportant, while Scott³⁶ goes so far as to say that even an absurdly incongruous reference corpus will provide useful information on the defining content of the node corpus. Scott also indicates that genre is an alternative criteria for the selection of a reference corpus and will provide a different range of key words than a reference corpus chosen on the grounds of size. With these observations in mind, the present study uses each of these data sets as reciprocal control corpora despite their difference in size and genre.

It may be objected that the length of the two data sets (see next section) does not really warrant the use of concordance software and that it would have been possible to reach similar conclusions using a standard qualitative analysis. However, it would have been very laborious (and less reliable) to calculate the statistical keyness of a sample of terms in each corpus being compared with its counterpart. That factor alone, justifies the choice. Moreover, the concordance software tools ensure that the analyst does not overlook or underestimate the importance of certain function words or core lexis that can seem opaque and go unappreciated

³¹ Alan Partington, *The Linguistics of Political Argument: The Spin-doctor and the Wolfpack at the White House* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 12.

³² Mike Scott and Christopher Tribble, *Textual Patterns: Key Words and Corpus Analysis in Language Education* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2006), 59.

³³ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁵ Tony McEnery et al., *Corpus-based Language Studies: An Advanced Resource Book* (Routledge: London, 2006), 308-311.

³⁶ Mike Scott, “In Search of a Bad Reference Corpus”, in Dawn Archer, ed., *What's in Word-list? Investigating Word Frequency and Keyword Extraction* (Oxford: Ashgate, 2009).

in a traditional unassisted qualitative appraisal, whereas the software often reveals significant patterns and occurrences at this level of the language.

3.1 Method: CADS approach

Partington and Zuccato³⁷ draw attention to the fact that the CADS approach leads the analyst to results and conclusions by working bottom up through the textual evidence thrown up by the corpus technology. The significant data produced by the concordance software (such as the keyword tool) can feature function words or core vocabulary that may, at first sight and in the isolation of single texts appear to offer neither particularly significant nor interesting meanings, whereas cumulatively and quantitatively they do so and as a consequence warrant closer qualitative examination. This was the case with the corpora under investigation here. For example, the keyword tool of the concordancing software indicated that ‘stance’ markers, particularly adverbials, were in strong evidence and one of the distinctive linguistic features of the COC.

3.2 Analytical framework

Having identified the prominence of stance and its importance to participants in the COC, the analysis set out to verify what, if any, changes are made to these evaluation markers in the transfer to the OMEC. In this study the kinds of appraisal found in the two corpora are viewed slightly differently and defined using different though related terms. Although the terms ‘stance’ and ‘evaluation’ are very close in meaning, they seem to imply slightly different interpretations of assessment. Partington and Zuccato³⁸ refer to Hunston and Thompson,³⁹ Hunston⁴⁰ and Biber et. al.⁴¹ as seminal studies in evaluation. However, Hunston predominantly uses the term ‘evaluation’ and view it as a basically binary “indication that something is good or bad”⁴² while Biber et. al. prefer the term ‘stance’, which seems to indicate a more nuanced function by which “speakers express personal feelings, attitudes, value judgements, or assessments”.⁴³ As Biber et. al. have drawn attention to the prominence and variety of stance markers in oral interactions, this is the term that has been used for analysis of the COC, as has the taxonomy of adverbial stance they provide. “Evaluation”, with its more binary good versus bad polarity, has been used for the OMEC, largely because of the simplification that appears to occur in the conversion of the Committee’s procedures into news stories. Moreover, the very

³⁷ Alan Partington and Matilde Zuccato, “Brexit Before and after: A Corpus-assisted Study of the Referendum Campaigns and the Immediate Aftermath”, *Textus English Studies in Italy*, 1 (2018), 119-139.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁹ Susan Hunston and Geoff Thompson, eds., *Evaluation in Text* (Oxford: O U.P., 2000).

⁴⁰ Susan Hunston, *Corpus Approaches to Evaluation: Phraseology and Evaluative Language* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁴¹ Douglas Biber et. al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 1999).

⁴² Susan Hunston, “Counting the Uncountable: Problems of Identifying Evaluation in a Text and in a Corpus”, in Alan Partington et al., eds., *Corpora and Discourse* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2004), 157-188, 157.

⁴³ Biber et. al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 996.

titles of studies by a scholar like Hunston associate this term with ‘text’, rather than with oral discourse.⁴⁴ Additionally, the analysis of evaluative patterns in the OMEC will also involve reference to the way in which certain conventional lexis of newspaper reporting is implicitly evaluative and can be defined in terms of evaluative or semantic prosody to refer to lexical items that may look neutral when taken in isolation,⁴⁵ but for which “the community of speakers has acquired ... shared primed knowledge by repeatedly encountering an item in co-occurrence with other items of a certain polarity”.⁴⁶

4. Analysis and Findings: (COC)

The keyness results for COC reflect the institutional oral nature of the discourse type. Names of committee members who question witnesses (not foregrounded in press coverage) are prominent, as is lexis that refers to institutional roles, e.g., ‘chair’ (8 in order of keyness, with a frequency of 210). The formal nature of the hearing explains the high keyness of words reflecting the generally polite register: ‘thank’ (32, 48); ‘would’, widely used in indirect speech acts to ensure a courteous and respectful tone, as is ‘welcome’ (173, 11). ‘Respect’ (391, 18) occurs in the collocation ‘with all due respect’ alternatively it refers back to a previously mentioned topic. A very high proportion of high-ranking, key words reflect the dialogic, question–answer, structure of the interaction. Their prominence is related to their frequent use in the formulation of questions, as is the case with: ‘are’ (16, 474); ‘do’ (19, 263); ‘did’ (47, 227); ‘what’ (54, 227); ‘does’ (162, 53); ‘how’ (189, 85). Additionally, first person (singular and plural) and second person referring words: ‘my’ (51, 156); ‘us’ (44, 99); ‘your’ (8, 210), frequent in face-to-face interactions, are also in evidence, while ‘correct’ (60, 26), for example, is used in questions and affirmative one-word answers, as is ‘agree’ (92, 16), used in questions by the committee and answers by the witnesses. Other key words refer to the participants in the hearing: ‘we’ (9, 639), very often referring to the committee itself, as well as to the other bodies or teams the witnesses represent. The recapping function is key in utterances like ‘as we have said’, in which the committee summarizes evidence. Similarly, ‘this’ (61, 324) is used widely as an anaphoric reference to keep the object of questions well in mind. ‘Talking’ (91, 24), as in ‘we are/ are not talking about’ is used to define more exactly the object under discussion. Frequently ‘going’ (102, 89) is used by committee members to announce an imminent speech act or their desire to return to a previous point for better understanding, as in ‘going back to’. ‘Earlier’ (186, 25) is used exclusively by the committee to refer to what has been said previously and collocates frequently with ‘mentioned’ (402, 11). ‘Today’ (370, 33) also refers to the hearing. ‘Ask’ (75, 82) is very frequent in utterances such as ‘I am going to ask’; ‘what I would like to ask’, with which the committee member commentates on procedure; ‘happy’ (224, 23) expresses the willingness of witnesses to comply with the demands of the committee and conveys a collaborative spirit (downplayed in the press account). ‘Sorry’ (289, 11) is also

⁴⁴ Hunston and Geoff Thompson, eds., *Evaluation in Text*; Hunston, “Counting the Uncountable: Problems of Identifying Evaluation in a Text and in a Corpus”.

⁴⁵ Partington and Zuccato, “Brexit Before and After”; John Sinclair, “The Nature of the Evidence”, in John Sinclair, ed., *Looking Up* (London: Collins, 1987), 150-159.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

used to apologise for interruptions or failures on the part of witnesses to remember properly.

4.1 *Stance adverbials*

Of particular interest is the keyness of adverbs, particularly stance adverbials, which “convey speakers’ comments on what they are saying (the content of the message) or how they are saying it (the style)”.⁴⁷ They fall into three categories: epistemic (speakers’ judgements about the certainty, reliability and limitations of a proposition), attitude (speakers’ value judgments about a proposition’s content) and style (the speaker’s manner of speaking).⁴⁸ Stance adverbials are particularly concentrated in keyness rankings 100-199. Closer observation reveals that they are an important resource both for the committee and for witnesses, indicating both parties’ differing degrees of conviction and uncertainty, commitment and non-commitment to propositions in the course of the investigation. The following table provides an overview of their deployment by both witnesses (W) and committee members (C) during Committee Witness Sessions (CWS) 1 (Howden, Gilbert, Brailsford, Sutton), 2 (Cope, Sapstead) and 3 (Cooke) that constitute the corpus of the enquiry.

RANK	STANCE ADVERBIALS	CWS1		CWS2		CWS3	
		W	C	W	C	W	C
36	Obviously (attitude)	22	8	5	13	2	2
82	Really	16	8	15	3	2	1
95	Clearly (attitude)	15	4	6	8		
100	Presumably (doubt/ certainty)	7	4	0	5		
119	[of] course (doubt/certainty)	8	3	2	3	1	0
123	Basically (style of an utterance)	3	0	5	0	1	0
125	Necessarily (doubt/certainty)	7	3			0	1
133	Fairly (imprecision)	1	4	1	1	1	0
161	Certainly (doubt/ certainty)	17	3	5	6	8	1
199	Probably (doubt/uncertainty)	6	2	8	9	1	2
217	Potentially (doubt/ uncertainty)	11	0	11	2	1	1
353	Routinely (limitation)	2	0	1	0	0	0
392	Definitely (certainty/doubt)	0	0	0	0	9	1

Table1: Keyness of stance adverbials in the COC

To fully appreciate the distribution and use of stance adverbials across the three sessions, some observations about the kind of witnesses are useful. CWS 1 involves two high-ranking officials in British Cycling, the head of Team Sky, Sir David Brailsford, a national sporting hero for many, and its head coach, Shane Sutton, CWS 2 involves Simon Cope, the senior coach who delivered the suspect package to the team SKY Bus and Nicole Sapstead, the head of UKAD. In CWS3 Nicole Cooke, a cycling champion, is the sole witness.

⁴⁷ Biber et al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, 764.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 855.

The table shows that a consistently higher number of stance adverbials is used by witnesses in CWS1. In CWS2 that ratio is much closer, indeed it is the Committee who use them with greater frequency than either witness; while in CWS 3, Nicole Cooke makes more frequent use of them. This may be of significance if we consider the profile of the witnesses and also their alignment to the agenda of the Committee. All the witnesses in CWS1 enjoy a high status within their sport and they use stance adverbials much more widely than the committee. Simon Cope is a relatively low-profile member of the Sky organization, the unfortunate messenger boy who delivered the package, and in his case it is the committee’s stance that prevails, while Nicole Sapstead is the head of the UK’s antidrug agency and the Committee is sympathetic to her view. Nicole Cooke, a national sporting icon, on the other hand, expresses stance more frequently than the committee, who are also sympathetic to her view.

‘Certainly’ is an obvious candidate for further investigation, because it is used by all witnesses in all three sessions and because it occurs in the particularly relevant range of key rankings. It occurs with noticeable frequency in the testimonies of witnesses in CWS1 in statements like:

- (1) Howden: “but we are certainly not aware of any doping products that would be in there”
- (2) Howden: “We would certainly welcome more testing at an amateur level”
- (3) Brailsford: “Certainly, I think that is a very good point
- (4) Brailsford: “Certainly we would welcome transparency around it”
- (5) Brailsford: “We try to avoid the use of Tramadol. Certainly, when there is no medical need there is no appropriate, legitimate reason to use Tramadol
- (6) Brailsford: “Certainly, in a stage race, an issue might arise with a particular rider early in a stage race, so you have to get medical equipment out to them”

The overall attitude conveyed in such examples (countered by only three such stance adverbials from the committee) is one of conviction concerning a proposition and also signaling agreement with questions and observations from the committee itself.

In CWS2, all six witness uses are attributable to Sapstead, the head of UKAD, who is very critical of SKY, as in the following examples:

- (7) Sapstead: “There was certainly no record of what was put in this package”
- (8) Sapstead: “Certainly in relation to the record keeping of other doctors, yes, this unusual
- (9) Sapstead: “Yes at the time they certainly would not have known anything about the package in relation to our investigation”

In this session, not only is the ratio of use much closer, its use by the committee reflects that it is particularly convinced by Sapstead, so much so, that it shares her stance:

- (10) Chair: “They certainly clearly show that this is the case. The overall picture you paint is extremely alarming”
- (11) Chair: “It would certainly seem that records like that were not kept”
- (12) Chair: “ It would certainly seem that Dr Freedman is not complying with GMC’s guidelines on that”

Another critic of Team Sky, Nicole Cooke in CWS3, makes 8 uses of the adverb, prevalently to express conviction in her negative attitudes towards doping governance, as in the following examples:

(13) “It certainly reduces the amount of doping that riders can do”

(14) “I can only go off my own experiences and Shane certainly wasn’t suitable for the role of senior British coach for British cycling”

The only use of this adverbial by the committee actually concerns the place of women in the world of cycling.

Although no formal distinction is made between the witnesses, it seems clear that some (Howden, Gilbert, Brailsford, Sutton, Cope) are appearing in their own defence while others would seem closer to ‘witnesses for the prosecution’, in that they are critical of the former, and the committee basically aligns itself with their evaluation and makes this explicit through its own use of evaluation. For their part, the former use stance adverbials to emphasise the self-evident truth of their testimony, to convey conviction, to underline the validity of a point, to stress sincerity and veracity but also agreement, and to set limits to negative interpretations, and to minimize culpability, or the extent of the issue under investigation. The witnesses for ‘the prosecution’ (Sapstead, Cooke), on the other hand, preponderantly express certainty in their negative judgements about the former. The Committee’s own stance becomes dominant in the session with the Simon Cope, the weakest ‘defence’ witness and more symmetrical in the presence of the two ‘prosecution’ witnesses, Sapstead and Cooke.

As will be seen in the next section, although witnesses in CWS1 use the adverb ‘certainly’ by far the most, and in a far greater proportion to the committee (a pattern that is repeated in all but one of the key stance adverbials), it is the evaluations achieved through ‘certainly’ in CWS2 and CWS3 that appear to prevail in online media coverage of the issue.

4.2 *Representation of stance in press coverage*

As Biber et. al. note: “[n]ews has the lowest frequency of stance adverbials”, while conversation “contains by far the highest frequency”.⁴⁹ Even though a committee hearing is not strictly speaking a conversation, it is concerned with one of conversation’s main characteristics, namely, conveying “subjective information” which, it is reasonable to assume, accounts for the high presence of stance adverbials. We would not, therefore, expect to encounter many such adverbials in the media accounts and, indeed, the OMEC keyword list indicates just sixteen key adverbials, only two of which, ‘apparently’ (285, 29) and ‘allegedly’ (479, 16), are adverbs of attitude stance, occurring in lower key positions than the majority of stance adverbials in the COC, while the rest are circumstance (process, i.e., time and manner) or linking adverbials. These findings also tie in with Biber et. al.’s observation that “in news time dominates,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 859.

followed by place, then process”.⁵⁰ This finding alone reminds us that one of the prime functions and dynamics of news production is the transformation of events into a story.⁵¹

The remainder of this study will consider what occurs when one event in which stance adverbials are crucial to how the interactants present their case and version of events is transformed into a medium in which such markers are infrequent. It will also consider how the patterns of stance that emerged in COC are reproduced or distorted in the OMEC by its different linguistic repertoire for communicating evaluation.

4.3 Verbal processes and evaluation

In the conversion of an oral interaction into a written report verbal processes are more than likely to be key and indeed they are highly prominent in OMEC. The key word list includes a wide repertoire of such reporting verbs, ranked as follows: ‘said’ (60, 1067); ‘added’ (65 143) claimed (67, 139); ‘admitted (106, 103); ‘insisted’ (130, 73); ‘claims’ (141, 95) ‘claim’ (149, 127); ‘says’ (163, 159); ‘confirmed’ (168, 74); ‘described’ (231, 61); ‘questioned’ (254, 48), ‘criticised’ (27); ‘responded’ (235, 25); admitting (284, 29) ‘conceded’ (411, 19); criticized (309, 27); ‘responded’ (335, 25); ‘adding’ (341, 24); ‘admits’ (363, 22); ‘insists’/ ‘insisting’/‘insist’ (368, 22; 369, 22; 386, 21), ‘claiming’ (381, 21); ‘reiterated’ (417, 19); ‘called’ (421, 79).

It will be noted that a high proportion of these are far from neutral. Fifteen of these key verbal processes could be defined as marked. It is true they may indicate disendorsement (de B. Clark 2006, 88⁵²) (e.g. claim*) and therefore used to signal journalists’ neutrality by distancing themselves from the source. However, ‘claim*’ could be said to have acquired a frequently negative evaluative prosody, as what is usually affirmed is regularly presented as not entirely convincing or acceptable, as is evident from the following sample concordances taken from the OMEC:

- (15) UKAD has still not been able to verify that claim
- (16) Brailsford had barely made his claim before it was confirmed Pooley had in fact been in Spain
- (17) He even claimed in one interview that the package had nothing to do with Brad
- (18) Brailsford was testing credulity when he initially claimed to be unaware of its dark reputation

Similarly, other key verbal processes imply that a proposition is in some way cast in doubt, either because it is too emphatic and therefore to be distrusted (insist*) or because it

⁵⁰ Ibid., 783.

⁵¹ For this function with regard to the same events, see Dermot Heaney, “Online Print Media Coverage of a Parliamentary Select Committee’s Investigations into Allegations of Doping in British Cycling”, Veronica Bonsignori et al., eds., *Worlds of Words: Complexity, Creativity, and Conventionality in English Language, Literature and Culture. 1: Language* (Pisa: Pisa U.P., 2019), 77-81.

⁵² Caroline M. de B. Clark, *Views in the News* (Milan: LED, 2006).

acknowledges a compromising element (conceded, admit*). The concordancer tool, for example, shows that ‘admit*’ collocates with ‘Brailsford’ and ‘mistakes’. That contrasts with the wide use of stance adverbials in that part of COC – CWS1, largely meant by Brailsford to convey another impression of his conduct. This would suggest that the press has a predilection for a negative evaluation and for attributing and stressing blame. During the CWS1 this verbal process is used to offer an exculpating concession that Brailsford makes at the end of his lengthy hearing, offering it as the admission of a fair-minded man willing to accept a degree of responsibility, but not serious dereliction of duty. The keyness ranking, on the contrary, indicates a strong element of disendorsement, and also a tendency to magnify aspects that are prejudicial to this particular witness. The effect of this employment of verbal processes is augmented by nouns like ‘allegations’ (121, 128), ‘claims’ (141, 95) and ‘claim’ (149, 127). The keyword analysis points to an evident imbalance between the purpose of stance adverbials in the words of witnesses and the negative evaluative twist they receive in media reports and raises issues of whether all witnesses receive an equally fair hearing in press accounts.

4.4 *Evaluative lexis and phrases*

Keyword analysis of lexis reveals a deep-rooted evaluative stance when reporting such institutional procedures. Take, for example, the high keyness of ‘doping’ (58, 942) in the press corpus. On the contrary, this socially and culturally loaded word does not occur at all within the 500-word keyword threshold of the Committee hearing, where the more neutral term ‘enhancement’ (236, 6) (collocating with ‘performance’) is used, a choice that is not key within the 500 threshold in OMEC. Similarly, the word ‘confidentiality’ (164, 22) in the COC does not occur within the 500-word cut off in the OMEC. This has relatively high keyness in the COC, because it is an aspect of the issue that Brailsford and Sutton particularly stress as one of the reasons why doctors might not communicate an athlete’s medication to coaches or team managers. The press evidently gives much less importance to this mitigating explanation and complicating factor, with the result that it is not likely to enter into the public’s more simplified understanding of the doping issue.

A further foregrounding of negative connotation is reflected in the high keyness of ‘wrongdoing’. Ranked 89 with 226 instances, this word is not key within the 500 threshold of the Committee corpus. It is true that in roughly half the concordances it collocates with ‘deny’ or ‘no’; but in the other half it collocates with ‘alleged’, whereas no ‘allegations’ are actually made during the hearing. Here too, *alleg** is an item that has acquired a negative evaluative prosody. Good things, after all, are not alleged. This may, of course, be simply due to the basic dynamics of newsworthiness. As Partington et. al. observe: “[u]nfavourable uses outweigh favourable ones ... but this may well be due in part to the critical function that newspapers generally perform”.⁵³

Certain key lexical items provide a further indication of how evaluation is achieved through collocation, particularly noun phrases. ‘[J]iffy’ (17, 429), ‘bag’ (46, 455), ‘contents’ (126,141) and ‘package’ (303, 1097) collocate variously with ‘mystery’, ‘notorious’, ‘infamous’. Of course, these collocations exist to forefront newsworthiness, but also to shape negative

⁵³ Alan Partington et. al., *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse*, 51.

prejudices towards the issue. ‘Scandal’ (ranked 234 with 36 occurrences) works in a similar way as it occurs in noun phrases like ‘doping scandal, ‘team sky doping scandal’, ‘jiffy bag scandal’; ‘jiffygate scandal’, ‘Bradley Wiggins Scandal’, none of which occur in the COC. The creation of noun phrases is, of course, a particularly seductive means of evaluation as the noun phrase formulates opinion (more easily detectable in verb phrases) an acquired given. From Fowler on,⁵⁴ noun phrases resulting from reification have been recognized as a particularly persuasive means of evaluation, reformulating opinion (more easily detectable in verb phrases) as a given fact.⁵⁵ Tabbert⁵⁶ refers to this process “packaging up”, by which implicit negative evaluations go “unquestioned by the reader” (136).

Such collocations also confirm the press’s role in creating self-sustaining newsworthiness. If these items are notorious, it is in large measure because the press has made them so and has told us so, even though no such words are used in the hearings themselves. Such noun phrases can present readers with a pre-packed meaning, which in this case contrasts not only with the lexis used by the committee and witnesses but also with the way in which the information is elicited and defined through stance adverbials in that context.

Additionally, the critical stance that is so prominent in key lexis of OMEC corresponds largely to the CWS2 sub-section of the COC, where Simon Cope comes under so much pressure from the committee because of his inability to account for his conduct in delivering the package. This suggests that media stance to all the ‘defence’ witnesses mostly takes its cue from the weaker performance of one individual in particular and downplays the efficacy of the other performances, even though the committee itself is less categorical in its negative stance towards them, and indeed does not contest their stance as robustly as it does that of Cope.

5. Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study has shown some key linguistic changes that occur in the transformation of parliamentary select committee witness sessions into news stories in the mainstream online media about investigations into doping in professional cycling. In particular, it has demonstrated the importance of stance adverbials in the former, for witnesses and committee members alike, and the implications for public perception of this issue entailed in their substantial absence in the online media account and their substitution with other evaluative items and prosodies.

Detailed analysis of the distribution of the centrally key attitude adverbials, exemplified by the instance of ‘certainly’, across the three witness sessions has shown that there is a convergence of stance between the committee and those witnesses who are critical of Team Sky and British Cycling staff. As the committee members make their own stance clear during the

⁵⁴ Roger Fowler, *The Language in the News* (London: Routledge, 1991).

⁵⁵ See also Michael Billig, “The Language of Critical Discourse Analysis: The Case of Nominalisation”, *Discourse and Society*, 19.6 (2008), 785-800; Aleksandra Cichocka et al., “On the Grammar of Politics: Or Why Conservatives Prefer Nouns”, *Political Psychology*, xx.xx (2016), 1-17.

⁵⁶ Ulrike Tabbert, “Crime through a Corpus: The Linguistic Construction of Offenders in the British Press”, Christiana Gregoriou, ed., *Constructing Crime: Discourse and Cultural Representations of Crime and ‘Deviance’* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 130-144.

proceedings, they could be accused of pronouncing a verdict that provides the media with clear signals as to how to evaluate the entire proceedings. As a result, certain aspects of the witnesses’ testimonies are played down or indeed neglected in favour of a more polarized and negative evaluation of the affair, in which many conventional newsworthiness considerations prevail over completeness of information; for example, about issues of confidentiality and athletes’ health, which are certainly worthy of attention in the debate over the place of TUE’s in sport.

The origins of the long inquiry date back to 2015 when a series of articles about suspicious blood tests in endurance runners appeared in *The Sunday Times* (referred to in House of Commons, 2018, 5). In its final Fourth Report,⁵⁷ where it reflects on the evidence presented in all witness sessions, the Committee confirms its debt to the press:

The work of whistleblowers and investigative journalists has helped to bring this [the prevalence of doping] to the fore. Rather than their work being tantamount to a “declaration of war” on sport, a very ill-judged statement, it should be seen as a warning light that was acted upon too late.

Such statements testify to a very close relationship between the politicians and the press, especially when they share an agenda. They also remind us that committees owe much of their increasing importance in public life to the interest of the media, especially when they are convened to investigate matters of immediate public interest, like sport. The press itself has come under the Committee’s scrutiny, particularly for unethical practices like celebrity phone tapping.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Committee tolerated the under-nuanced account of the ‘scandal’ that accompanied its work in the reports analysed here.

The present writer is a cycling fan and a critic of Team Sky, principally because of what has been called ‘financial doping’, namely the unchallenged buying power that allowed it to pack its team with the best riders available, thus suffocating meaningful competition from other teams, a strategy now known as ‘putting the race to sleep’. However, linguistic analysis raises questions about an inquiry that has taken place at this intersection between sport, journalism, politics, bioethics and professional ethics. Team Sky continues to race, as nothing has been proved against it and no disciplinary action has been possible for the sports governing bodies and agencies. At the same time, the reputation of certain individual team members has been irreparably tarnished, and they continue to operate under a cloud of suspicion and undiminished skepticism. Due to this symbiosis with the press, the Committee’s work has amounted to little more than insinuation. For many readers that might be more enjoyable than fully understanding the complexities of the issue and difficulty for team managements of fully controlling the actions of individual cyclists and team staff.

⁵⁷ House of Commons, *4th Report*, 9.

⁵⁸ House of Commons, *Unauthorised Tapping into or Hacking of Mobile*.