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Zidane: more than a mythical figure, a prophet...

Introduction

Zinedine Zidane is one of the last soccer 'superstar'. His destiny as a sportsman but also as a man has nourished the literature during the last years. Even a year after his retirement, he is still present in media, but playing a new role. In this study, we will not go so far historically. We will focus on the very last days of Zidane's player career. We will underline the media impact upon the definition of the French symbolic identity.

The theoretical basis of my work is Critical Discourse Analysis or just Discourse analysis on a French Point of view. Starting from the assumption that the language is never neutral, we will consider that language privileges some realities and conceal others. With the language we actively create our identities and our social worlds.

(Van Dijk, 1992, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2001, Moirand 2007, for examples).

Clear problematic
Plan to be announced

Zidane: soccer superstar, celebrity & symbol: context, data and method

General Context

Zinedine Zidane is born in Marseille, France in 1972, on June 23rd and has four older siblings. He is 1.85 metres and 80 kilograms. These detailed information are actually true but they don't need be known to

make the man he is in his fans' minds. Zidane has been elected by the FIFA best European player of the last fifty years. He is a World and European soccer champion. Trophies and titles help for the mass recognition but many sport idols has a short list of distinctions but can be sure of a large popularity and public support. The opposite is also true, so what is important to think about at the early stage of this study, is : what is creating popularity? What is making someone famous besides his inherent talent?

Representations and collective memories are shared by communities or groups. They are permitting these group (each at their own level), to create a shared basis of knowledge and values. These elements are concrete and abstract. They help for self and other identification; but they also create in parallel a so called: 'distanciation'. The French will probably keep in mind this positive image of Zidane as long as they are going to mention him.

Event centered context

After the final of the last World Cup (2006), when ten minutes before the end, Zidane headbutted Materazzi and was excluded. The President of the French Republic, right after the end of the game, Jacques Chirac reacted on television and hailed Zidane as a national hero and called him a "man of heart and conviction". Chirac later added that he found the offence to be unacceptable, but that he understood that Zidane had been provoked.

The French press was not entirely angry against him. The national one was definitely shocked with *Le Figaro* for example (the conservative, right wing, newspaper). The journal called the headbutt "odious" and "unacceptable". But important examples are the daily sport newspaper (L'Équipe) and La Provence, the South-East and Marseillan newspaper:

L'Équipe:

"**Zinedine**, savez-**vous** que le plus difficile ce matin n'est pas d'essayer de comprendre pourquoi les Bleus, **vos** Bleus, ont perdu, hier soir, une finale de Coupe du monde à leur portée. Mais d'expliquer à des dizaines de millions d'enfants à travers le monde comment vous avez pu vous laisser aller à asséner ce coup de tête à *Marco Materazzi*, à dix minutes de la fin de la prolongation. Ils étaient tous là, devant leur télé, tendus vers ce match, ce combat de deux poids lourds, la France et l'Italie, à bout de ressources. Mais celui-ci semblait vous

appartenir. Par instants, en ce stade olympique de Berlin où s'est aussi écrite l'histoire du monde, vous étiez même Ali, l'ultime génie des rings. Le plus grand. Mais ni Ali, ni Pelé, ni Owen, ni aucun autre monstre sacré de leur dimension, de celle que vous étiez sur le point de rejoindre, n'ont ainsi enfreint les règles les plus élémentaires du sport. (...) C'était votre dernière image de footballeur, Zinédine. Comment cela a-t-il pu arriver à l'homme que vous êtes ?"

The editor-in-chief compared Zidane's greatness to Muhammad Ali's, but added that Ali, Jesse Owens, and Pelé had never "broken the most elementary rules of sport" as Zidane had. He questioned how Zidane could explain the offence to "millions of children around the world".

Zidane is called and addressed directly by his first name. But in the same time, he is called "vous", the formal (singular in that case) personal pronoun. The editor seems torn by Zidane's popular figure because he wants to show some respect to his talent with the pronouns but also recognize his popularity with the use of the nickname. The three other sports legends are defined as "genious" or "sacred monsters". They are identified by their last names only. This emphasized this dual and complex relation. Thus, Materrazzi, the Italian soccer player is named *Marco Materazzi*, first and last name, so a neutral address in that case.

La Provence:

"(...) Triste fin pour l'équipe de France, qui échoue de justesse dans cette finale de la Coupe du Monde de football, et pour son joueur vedette, qui rate sa sortie. Saura-t-on un jour ce que lui a dit Materazzi pour mettre Zizou dans une telle fureur et lui faire perdre son sang-froid? N'accablons pourtant pas notre héros qui n'a pas, tout seul, fait perdre son équipe, comme il ne pouvait pas, tout seul, la faire triompher. (...) Peut-on en tirer des enseignements sur cette France qui doute de son talent, qui se console avec son passé, et qui a du mal à se construire un avenir? On a trop fait de parallèle, il y a huit ans, entre le football et notre société, avec les approximations que l'on sait, pour recommencer aujourd'hui. C'était du football, c'était un spectacle, et ce n'est pas la fin du monde parce que l'équipe de France a perdu. (...) Alors, soyons seulement triste d'avoir perdu sur le fil et d'avoir vu Zinedine Zidane sortir la tête basse. *Il ne méritait pas ça et on l'aime quand même. Au revoir, et merci.*"

The French national soccer team is the element first evocated with his loss, and not the Italian victory by the way. In the same sentence just related by the conjunction of coordination "et" (that means "and")

comes Zidane, introduced as “his star player” who missed his quitting. Zidane is “our hero”. He is presented almost like a victim. We were (the French) expecting to win only thanks to him and that was not realistic, so don’t blame him for making us lose. There is an interesting play with the possessive, singular plural “notre” / “our”. One of the last sentence says that “so be only sad to have seen Zinedine Zidane leaving the head down.” To finish with the two sentences: “I did not deserved it et we love him anyway. Goodbye, et Thank you.”

In that article, Zidane is not directly addressed as a person but the last sentence in its form makes the entire article look like a public apologize. It is a reversed supposed situation. Instead of waiting for Zidane’s apologize the journalist is himself formulating some explanations including an virtual community (the French probably or maybe just the Southern French).

Method & Data

We have used *Factiva*, a computer database collecting all the major newspapers and information & economics magazines in Western Europe (French and English speaking) and North America. With a key word research, this full text database permits to select options like the date, by the language and can combine or exclude two or more words together.

This study is only in French but is not restrained to the only French country. However it is almost a qualitative one because each newspaper has his own period of archive. Some of them are stored from very recently. For example, *Le Monde* the oldest of the database starts in 1988 and some others like *L’Équipe*, the only French daily newspaper, has integrated the base from 2001.

Due to this data restriction, some historical extend of the study were impossible. Nevertheless, the two last years of the soccer superstar career are the main object of this research: Zidane retired for the time of the French National team on August 2004 after the defeat against Greece in quarter final of the European Cup.

He made his comeback almost a year after in August 2005, for a friendly game, but with the aim to help the team to qualify for the World Cup, next year. His career finally stopped in final of that World Cup in July 2006. From this three selected dates, I worked with lexical associations.

Considering the mythological and religious associated theme of this research, I entered Zidane & Dieu (God), Zidane & Prophet, etc.

Thus, Zidane has been associated with Dieu (God), Prophète (Prophet), Messie (Messiah), Sauver (Saver) and even more.

A specific naming: Zidane's namings and descriptions in the Francophone press

Namings

I will build the main part of this presentation on the topic of naming. Considering the central importance as the category in a syntactical approach, I would like to present some consideration from discourse analysis:

There is no meaning, there is only the production of meaning. In the same way, there is no identity (in the usual sense of describing ethnic identity by different idealizations of origins or races), there is only the incessant production of identity according to the dialectic of the Same and the Other.

There is a complex interplay of identifications and differentiations: I don't have an identity, I have several identities that are actualized according to the Other, the type of contact we have, and the structure of our relationship. That which I pose as Same when the dialectic operates on a certain level becomes the Other when the identity production movement is narrowed, or changes levels: individual identity, sexual identity, ethnic identity, social identity, national identity....This list is not exhaustive; to conclude it would be to block the dialectical movement that, at every occasion, defines the Same and the Other. All discourse establishes a hierarchy of identities.

[Barberis et al., 2003: 97]

Toni Bruce has made a very interesting study on television live comments in 2004. Focused on basketball in the USA, this research shows very important element of this genre. I won't totally apply to newspapers discourses the same treatment but I will try to get some inspiration from it. Linguistics constraints, contexts and realizations are different but some regularities can be find.

My consideration is that a smaller stress due to the written form (compare to live spoken broadcast television) and the possible multiple

review is reducing some more evident racial ideologies but they are anyways persisting in some other forms in the written press.

Although televised sports are far from alone in their reproduction of racist ideologies, their stories and narratives are particularly potent.

For example, based on an analysis of the 1989 NCAA basketball Final Four, in which only men of colour were referred to by first name, Duncan et al. (1990: 26) suggested that race needed to be included in the already-established gender hierarchy of naming.

At the top of the linguistic hierarchy sit white 'men,' whose last names always are used; followed by black 'men,' who sometimes are called by only their first names...
[Bruce, 2004: 863]

However, the criteria of prestige of the player was influencing the result in her research:

In stark contrast to the assumptions inherent in previous research – that the use of first name indicates that the named person is lower on the linguistic hierarchy – it was the most valued players on each team, independent of race, who were most often identified only by their first names. Overall, only a few players, and most often the 'star' of the team, received the majority of the first-name references. Thus, it was the more respected or highly skilled players who were most often referred to by what has been argued is the least respectful form of address.
[Bruce, 2004: 869]

This is coinciding with Zidane's case. Another element is the social-phonetic or phonologic aspect of the proper name. The entertaining aim of this commentators and probably some other reasons lead them to use the first name only.

Words which seem 'fun' or have a 'good sound' are often those which are unusual or unique. In this analysis it was usually the first names of black athletes that stood out to the mostly white commentators as unique enough for the audience to be able to recognize the player on this basis alone. Eg. Rashard This example suggests that for white commentators particularly, some African American names appear exotic. Although it was most often star players whose first names were widely used, other players with unusual names also attracted attention:
[Bruce, 2004: 871]

XXXX

However, the practice was not limited to the names of black athletes. Bender (1994) suggests that commentators have the most difficulty with 'foreign'-sounding names. In this study commentators struggled with multisyllabic names whose vocal combinations were uncommon in English and tended to use nicknames or first names more frequently for these athletes. Examples included Duke's white American bench player, Scott Wojciechowski (called Wojo 57% of the time) and Wisconsin's Nigerian-born centre, Osita Nwachukwu.

This practice of having fun or playing with the names of people from non-dominant racial groups suggests a form of boundary-marking such groups as not 'normal'.
[Bruce, 2004: 872]

Zinedine, Zidane, the first name and the last name or Zizou sometimes even ZZ and finally Yazid were some of the most frequent used denominations. Zidane is the key playmaker. He has a foreign name but easily pronounceable by a Francophone. With more than 2.5 millions of French with Algerians origins, he is the only representing in the French National Team.

Descriptions

Recours showed in a very recent study the essence of the champion's image in questioning nearly 900 adolescents in the region of Provence (France). To the question referring to Zidane identity, the most frequent results were "Marseille" (his place of birth), "Provençal" (regional identity – South of France) and "Français" (French). Then a second general identity was co-existing with the terms "Arabe" (Arab), "Algerien" (Algerian) and "Bèrbere" (Berber). This is not the image of Zidane for the entire France but it can give us an interesting consideration.

Most of the newspapers glorifying Zidane into a mythological or religious figure are regional newspapers. It seems that they are characterized by less objectivity than broader newspaper because of their diffusion. And most of these occurrences were between comas. The reported speech is either identified from his origin or is just the reproduction of a popular and common voice.

Aujourd'hui en France / Le Parisien – ???

Grands et petits du village sont mêlés aux nombreux journalistes. Ici, la victoire de la France est certaine avec « le génie, le magicien, le sorcier, dieu **Zidane** ».

Nouvelles Tele-Radio – ???

Dieu est une hypothèse, sauf en ce qui concerne **Zidane**", expliquait Nordine Belaïd, un Parisien de 34 ans dont les parents sont Kabyles, comme ceux du numéro 10 de l'équipe. "Il a réinventé le foot à chaque fois qu'il a touché le ballon", s'enthousiasmait-il en brandissant une petite pancarte "Zizou, tu es le plus grand.

Furthermore, Zidane is of course not the only player qualified as “messiah” for example, but in the exact same time at the exact same period some other team mates can receive the same categorization:

Le Monde – June 6th, 2002

Le troisième récupérateur est même déjà tout désigné par ces derniers: il s'agit de **Claude Makelele**. « **Je ne pense pas que je sois le Messie** », a prévenu le joueur du Real Madrid, gêné, mais à moitié, de se sentir à ce point « désiré » par ses coéquipiers.

The term « messie » / messiah has been used at least once during the last World Cup for Ribery, Malouda, Henry and Trezeguet too.

As a conclusion: If sport is a way of integration?...

Language is never neutral. Its analysis reveals embedded social meanings. The media and specially on the topic of sports reaffirms the biased meanings built into the language.

While some practices, such as the use of first names or nicknames to create a *faux* intimacy between audiences and star players, draw primarily upon institutional expectations and practices, they also appear to be inflected with racial ideologies. The ‘playful’ use of first names becomes part of an ‘Othering’ process which emphasizes names that do not fit the normalized (white) culture – names that are carried more often by African American players.

[Bruce, 869]

Zidane is a special case and fighting against racism and everyday task that goes along everyday persons and not only symbols.

It seems also that the religious identity is the most difficult or dangerous one. The press never deals with any specific comparison with any particular prophet from Christianity or Islam.

So the religious identity is the most complicated and maybe controversial one because it is never mentioned with Zidane.

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