

# The Impromptu Language and Emotional Expression in Sports Commentary: A Case Study of Wang Meng-style Commentary

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**Abstract:** *This article provides a detailed analysis of the commentary performance of Wang Meng, a versatile sports commentator, during the Beijing Winter Olympics. The analysis focuses on the linguistic characteristics, content features, and stylistic elements of Wang Meng's commentary, and draw the following conclusions: Firstly, her language expression is simple, colloquial, with strong randomness, with the pronunciation and intonation of northeast dialect; Secondly, in the terms of content selection, she will consider news, bias, professionalism and interest and adopt the combination of "commentator" + "guest". And it eventually leads to a discussion of the use of improvised language and emotional expression in sports commentary, which serves as a basis for exploring the use of impromptu language and emotional expression in sports commentary.*

**Keywords:** *sports commentary; impromptu language; emotional expression; Wang Meng*

## 1. Introduction

With the proposal of the construction of sports power, sports is paid more and more attention by people. Although the intuitive performance of the TV screen makes the audience have a clear understanding of the progress of the game, due to the deviation between the complexity of the sports itself and the knowledge of the audience, it requires the commentator to properly supplement and explain the TV picture. How to let the audience understand the process of the competition, experience the collision of physical strength, mental strength and skills between the athletes, feel the passion and charm of sports is the problem that every sports commentator needs to consider. During the 2022 Winter Olympics, Wang Meng, a former athlete, became popular with his "crosstalk commentary". This paper will deeply analyze the characteristics of Wang Meng's explanation from the two aspects of impromptu language and emotional expression.

## 2. Overview of Sports Commentary

Sports commentary refers to the broadcasting activity of providing live coverage and detailed information about a sports event, enabling the audience or viewers to experience the event as if they were present<sup>[1]</sup>. In sports event commentary, commentators play a crucial role as they convey the on-site updates and information to the audience. They act as the bridge connecting the viewers with the event, serving as gatekeepers of the match content and data, while also acting as a medium for communication with the audience<sup>[2]</sup>. In sports commentary, commentators often use fast-paced, colloquial, and visually descriptive language to guide the emotions of the audience. The overall style is warm, natural, and emotionally charged, with intonation emphasizing rises and falls, and minimal pauses. Additionally, commentators incorporate their personal insights and opinions, positioning themselves as avid fans of the sport. By adopting a "fan-like" persona, they aim to establish a closer connection with the audience.

### **3. Characteristics of Wang Meng-style Commentary**

#### **3.1. Linguistic Characteristics**

##### **3.1.1. Simple and colloquial word formation**

Similar to many sports commentators, Wang Meng also opts for concise and powerful expressions through the use of single words or short phrases to describe the scene and convey emotional expression. However, compared to others, Wang Meng's language expression tends to be more straightforward and colloquial. She frequently employs interjections like "aiya" or "aiyo" to assist in conveying emotions. Such linguistic characteristics are closely related to her personality traits and life experiences. In terms of personality, Wang Meng is known for her straightforwardness and fearless expression of dissatisfaction, always speaking her mind. In terms of life experiences, Wang Meng herself is an outstanding athlete, having created the "Meng era" during her career. She has won four Olympic gold medals in short track speed skating and has held positions such as head coach of the national speed skating training team and head of the coaching staff for speed skating and short track speed skating national teams. These life experiences not only provide her with athlete's experience but also give her a macro and professional perspective as a coach. This enables her to have a comprehensive evaluation ability of the events and athletes beyond her athletic achievements. She is very familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of each athlete and understands the potential issues they may encounter at different stages of the competition. She is also well aware of her role as a coach. In her commentary, Wang Meng often uses the language of a coach to shout instructions and remind athletes of possible problems. For example, during the semifinals of the mixed team relay in short track speed skating at the 2022 Winter Olympics, Wang Meng repeatedly shouted "Don't rush" to the female athlete more than twenty times and reminded the male athlete to "pay attention to speed and rhythm" over ten times in a span of two minutes. Furthermore, Wang Meng's professional background gives her greater credibility with the audience. Being an exceptional and highly recognized athlete herself, her commentary in her field of expertise does not come across as "arrogant" or biased. Instead, it instills the feeling that "professionals are doing professional work" and "there are higher expectations for the next generation." In this regard, commentators like Wang Meng who have a background in sports have a greater advantage compared to traditional commentators who come from broadcasting schools.

##### **3.1.2. Linguistic Freedom**

Wang Meng demonstrates a high degree of informality and spontaneity in her use of language during commentary. Her expressions rarely show traces of being "official," "conventional," or "standard." This is primarily manifested in two aspects: Firstly, Wang Meng openly expresses her likes and dislikes during commentary. In addition to praising athletes with outstanding performances, when encountering players who repeatedly engage in malicious fouls, she straightforwardly remarks, "You must surpass them in speed and deprive them of any leverage." Secondly, Wang Meng adopts a casual and free approach in interpersonal expressions. When the Chinese team is on the scene, she often uses pronouns like "we" and "our Chinese team" in an encouraging manner. When commenting on athletes from other countries, she commonly uses "they" as the subject. These characteristics in interpersonal expressions clearly indicate her personal logic and subjectivity<sup>[3]</sup>. Such expressions are not only consistent with Wang Meng's personal style developed over years as an athlete representing the nation but also align with the patriotic sentiment of the majority of Chinese sports event spectators. Therefore, during the Beijing Winter Olympics, the first Winter Olympic Games held in China, Wang Meng's expressions exhibited a strong power of influence. They greatly ignited patriotic enthusiasm, strengthened the emotional connection between the commentator and the audience, and quickly bridged the gap between them.

##### **3.1.3. Characteristics of Northeastern Dialect and Speech Intonation**

As a native of Northeast China, Wang Meng retains her regional dialect and speech intonation in her commentary. The Northeastern dialect is known for its rich and unique vocabulary, pronunciation, and usage patterns. Coupled with the straightforward, fun-loving, and optimistic nature of people from the Northeast, it possesses distinct characteristics of humor, warmth, and infectiousness. In recent years, the Northeastern dialect has gained widespread popularity through its incorporation and portrayal in various forms of art, such as crosstalk, skits, and films. This has further popularized and made it accessible to the public, resulting in its high level of dissemination, recognition, and favorability among the population. Wang Meng's decision to retain the characteristics of the Northeastern dialect in her commentary aligns with her personal identity and enables her to engage in straightforward emotional

expression, leaving the audience with a natural and unpretentious impression. Moreover, the use of dialect helps Wang Meng enhance the entertainment value and authenticity of her commentary, presenting a relatable and down-to-earth demeanor that resembles that of an ordinary sports enthusiast. This approach contributes to a more intimate and relatable commentary experience for the audience.

### **3.2. Content Characteristics**

#### **3.2.1. Balancing News and Bias**

Firstly, sports commentary is essentially an extended and amplified form of live reporting, which means it must adhere to the core principles of news reporting: truthfulness, objectivity, fairness, comprehensiveness, and timeliness. Commentators are required to provide the audience with accurate and comprehensive information about the event, including but not limited to the time, location, individuals involved, incidents, outcomes, and reasons. When offering commentary and analysis, they should base their judgments on objective facts.

Since sports competitions inherently involve winners and losers, it is natural for viewers to have emotional responses of satisfaction or disappointment based on their own preferences. However, it is crucial for sports commentators to avoid being swayed solely by these emotions. They should strive to maintain objectivity and avoid biased reporting or commentary that favors one side over the other. It is essential for commentators to present a balanced and fair perspective, accurately describing the facts and offering unbiased analysis.

However, sports commentary differs from news reporting in that it possesses a distinct commentary nature and often carries a sense of national pride. This means that it cannot completely eliminate its inherent bias, unlike news reporting. However, it is also inappropriate for commentators to display excessive bias, such as constantly blaming factors that led to their supported team's defeat. Finding the right balance in addressing bias is a challenging task for every commentator.

Just like professional sports commentators, Wang Meng's commentary exhibits a strong news-like quality. While she passionately cheers for her country's team and her former teammates, she also acknowledges the strengths of the opponents and respects their dignity. She strikes a balance by offering encouragement and praise to her own team without using it as an opportunity to belittle or humiliate the opposing athletes. When encountering exceptional foreign athletes who possess both skill and sportsmanship, Wang Meng is not hesitant to offer her admiration and compliments. Moreover, Wang Meng demonstrates a precise understanding of expressing the appropriate level of bias in her commentary. Firstly, her expression of bias in commentary may appear more explicit compared to other commentators. However, considering her personal character and her experience as a former national team athlete and coach, this level of bias is reasonable and acceptable. Secondly, Wang Meng's bias primarily manifests in the use of terms such as "our Chinese team," which reflects a viewpoint principle. When commenting on domestic events for a domestic audience on a national media platform, Wang Meng adopts a perspective that aligns with the media and audience. In this context, she speaks on behalf of the public and the majority, which means that even if her bias is more evident in her expression, it is generally considered acceptable. It serves to effectively engage the emotions of the audience and provide them with an authentic and immersive viewing experience.

#### **3.2.2. Exceptional Professionalism**

Wang Meng's "personal" style of commentary is not based on improvisation or seeking popularity, but rather stems entirely from her professional judgment. For example, during the final of the mixed 2000m short track speed skating relay at the Beijing Winter Olympics, when the Chinese skater Wu Dajing and the Italian skater crossed the finish line with their figures almost overlapping, while another professional commentator was anxiously awaiting the official result, Wang Meng confidently exclaimed, "You can always trust the Chinese short track team! My eyes are the ruler! No need to watch the replay! I'm telling you, we've definitely won!" As the final result showed, just as Wang Meng had early on concluded, the Chinese team claimed victory, with the Italian team trailing by a margin of only a fraction of a second. Wang Meng expressed her unwavering confidence, stating, "Even if it's only a difference of one-thousandth of a second, I can see on the short track ice whose blade crossed the line first. I'm even more reliable than your electronic timing system." Additionally, considering that many viewers may be unfamiliar with winter sports, Wang Meng takes the initiative to provide detailed explanations during her commentary about specialized terminology, competition rules, and tactical arrangements. For instance, during the men's 5000m relay semifinal at the Beijing Winter Olympics, when the Chinese skater Li Wenlong unexpectedly fell off the track, Wang Meng keenly

observed the kicking motion of the Canadian skater. She immediately reassured the audience with comforting words like "It's okay" and "Don't worry," while making an accurate prediction that the Chinese team would advance to the final based on the rules. Such sharp observational skills and in-depth knowledge of the sport demonstrate Wang Meng's exceptional professionalism. Her confidence and assertiveness are rooted in her extensive experience as a professional athlete, which allows her to provide expert insights and guidance to the audience.

### 3.2.3. *Entertainment Value*

In selecting her commentary content, Wang Meng goes beyond the events happening during the competition. She delves into personal anecdotes and stories about the athletes, adding a touch of intrigue and humor to her commentary. By incorporating these elements, she not only enhances the entertainment and storytelling aspects of her commentary but also bridges the gap between the audience and the athletes.

For instance, when the Hungarian-born skater Liu Shaolin competes, Wang Meng may mention, "I've known Liu Shaolin since he was very young, and he had a nickname called 'Stinky'." During the finals of the women's 500m and 1000m short track speed skating events, Wang Meng may also share the story of the "love-hate relationship" between the Italian skater Arianna Fontana and the Dutch skater Suzanne Schulting. These anecdotes and side stories not only add an element of fun and entertainment to the commentary but also help the audience to better understand and appreciate the competition.

### 3.3. *Format Characteristics*

Wang Meng's commentary, in collaboration with Huang Jianxiang, follows the "commentator + guest" format, which allows for strong interaction between the two. This format is characterized by a significant amount of banter and mutual praise, leading the audience to affectionately refer to it as "cross-talk-style commentary."

For example, during the men's 5000m relay semifinal at the Beijing Winter Olympics, after the referee announced that the Chinese team would advance to the final, Wang Meng and her co-commentator Huang Jianxiang had the following exchange:

Wang Meng: See, I told you!

Huang Jianxiang: Advanced to the final!

Wang Meng: What did I say! Am I just a useless coach?

Huang Jianxiang: No way! How could that be!

Wang Meng: It's all thanks to my humble advice back then! That's why I can sit here!

Huang Jianxiang: Ah!

Indeed, the dialogue between Wang Meng and Huang Jianxiang resembles the banter commonly seen in *xiangsheng* (Chinese crosstalk). Wang Meng takes on the role of the main storyteller, while Huang Jianxiang provides complementary responses. This creates a unique conversational context, making the audience feel as if they are casually chatting and joking with old friends. The banter enhances the entertainment value of the commentary and helps to bridge the gap between the audience and the commentators.

## 4. Research on Language and Emotional Expression Strategies in Sports Commentary

### 4.1. *Impromptu language*

#### 4.1.1. *Maintaining Control*

Sports commentators have the fundamental task of providing accurate and comprehensive descriptions of every detail and change that occurs during the game. They must maintain a strong grasp of the game's progress and effectively communicate it to the audience in a precise and concise manner. It is essential for commentators to remain attentive to the nuances of the game and draw the audience's attention to important details. Additionally, they must skillfully control their language rhythm to enhance the visual experience and ensure that their commentary aligns with the pace, tone, and rhythm

of the game. This ensures that the commentary accurately reflects the objective and live nature of the game for the viewers.

The role of a sports commentator extends beyond providing factual information. It also involves evaluating the performance and events during the game. In this aspect, commentators must carefully manage the angle and intensity of their commentary while considering the impact on the audience's psyche. As mentioned earlier, the competitive nature of the game can significantly influence both the audience and the commentator's emotional state. Consequently, commentators are required to fulfill their role as "opinion leaders" by utilizing language to stabilize the audience's emotions. For instance, in the final match of the 1998/99 UEFA Champions League season, when Manchester United, representing the English Premier League, scored two consecutive goals during injury time to overturn the result, commentator Clive Tyldesley demonstrated his exceptional control by recognizing the audience's need for a moment of release. He skillfully created a pause in his commentary, perfectly showcasing the composure of an excellent commentator.

#### **4.1.2. Respect for Content**

Sports commentators should not only possess strong language skills but also have a solid understanding of sports-related knowledge. This sports-specific knowledge encompasses theoretical knowledge, technical expertise, and cultural understanding displayed by the commentators during their commentary. It includes a command of sports policies, knowledge of various sports disciplines, familiarity with referee rules, and proficiency in professional terminology. Additionally, commentators should be well-versed in news policies, principles of news gathering and editing, and possess relevant knowledge related to program hosting<sup>[4]</sup>.

On February 14, 2022, a user posted a question on Zhihu for discussion: "How do you evaluate Wang Meng's commentary on short track speed skating as a professional athlete? What are the essential differences between her commentary and that of professional commentators on CCTV?" One highly upvoted response stated: "Normally, how many people have the opportunity to spend two hours consulting with technical representatives from the International Skating Union? It's already quite impressive to be aware of the latest rule changes." This answer undoubtedly indicates that, currently, the majority of sports commentators in China rely on their daily lives or engagement in sports activities for their sports theoretical knowledge, which is not systematic or scientific<sup>[5]</sup>. Mere descriptive, emotive, and repetitive low-quality commentary can no longer meet the demands of today's sports audience. People eagerly hope to learn something new from the commentator's narration. The "professionalism of commentary" holds great appeal for today's sports spectators.

#### **4.1.3. Enhance infectivity**

A good sports commentator, while professionally describing, explaining, and commenting on the game, can often evoke emotional resonance with the audience. The reason why Wang Meng's commentary has such strong appeal to the audience lies fundamentally in her genuine emotions towards her country, her sport, and her teammates as a retired athlete. Additionally, her humor in language expression, the interesting choice of content, and even the use of gestures such as tapping the table or thigh, create a sense of familiarity for the audience, as if they are watching the game with an old friend. These elements contribute to enhancing the infectiousness of her commentary.

### **4.2. Emotional Expression**

#### **4.2.1. Balancing Emotional Expression**

Sports commentary, resembling live reporting, requires the commentator to strike a balance between its journalistic nature and subjective expression, particularly when it comes to emotional expression. It is crucial to consider the platform's nature, the audience's receptiveness, and the alignment between the commentator's emotions and personal identity when engaging in emotional expression. Taking Wang Meng as an example, as mentioned earlier, her emotional expression in commentary can be seen as somewhat excessive in terms of intensity. However, when considering the platform's nature, her personal character, and her background, it becomes apparent that her expression is in harmony with the current live broadcast. This makes any irregular, inappropriate, or non-conventional expressions precisely the focal point of empathy. On the other hand, looking at Wang Meng's commentary partner Huang Jianxiang's performance in the Round of 16 of the 2006 FIFA World Cup, his level of emotional expression was similarly intense. However, his identity as a professional commentator and the authoritative nature of the platform he was on were not entirely

aligned with the emotional state he chose, leading him to be caught in a whirlpool of public opinion.

#### **4.2.2. Mastering the Rhythm of Emotional Expression**

A skilled commentator not only needs to master the rhythm of their language expression but also the rhythm of emotional expression.

Firstly, a commentator should be adept at capturing the rhythm. Describing the game's progress is the fundamental and crucial aspect of sports commentary. It serves as the basis for impromptu commentary and emotional expression. In other words, commentators must first grasp the rhythm of the game in order to choose the appropriate rhythm for their commentary and emotional expression. Secondly, a commentator should be skilled in setting the stage. Any emotion requires preludes and preparations before experiencing significant changes. For example, when Wang Meng was commentating on the Beijing Winter Olympics mixed 2000m short track relay final, she laid the groundwork for the emotional outburst by frequently using high-pitched expressions such as "excellent" and "beautiful," accompanied by actions such as tapping the table and slapping her thigh. This created a buildup of emotion leading to the final sprint.

Furthermore, a commentator should be adept at building climaxes. Typically, the finish line in a sporting event represents the pinnacle of the entire competition. At this moment, if the commentator can effectively release their emotions in a timely manner, it becomes an excellent highlight for both the game and the commentary.

Lastly, a commentator should be willing to leave moments of silence. In longer competitions, if the commentator continues to deliver intense expressions and emotional outputs for an extended period of time, it not only becomes a significant challenge for the commentator's own stamina but also risks creating listener fatigue and difficulty for the audience in capturing the key moments of the commentary.

## **5. Conclusions**

Sports commentary is a comprehensive type of work. How to show their comprehensive ability through impromptu language and emotional expression is a required course for every sports commentator. If you don't know how to master it, I believe that Wang Meng's commentary will give you a great inspiration.

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