

Change in the Sports Communication Paradigm Between 1998 and 2018: Game with Another vs Game Against Another

Tajana Obradović

University of Zagreb, Faculty of Kinesiology, Kinesiological Psychology, Sociology and Research Methodology Chair, Zagreb, Croatia

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes sports reporting in the context of game/competition with or against another in the most widely read daily media over a 20-year period. The purpose of the study is to question whether the preposition "against" just in the description of sports events on contemporary news portals has to a significant extent supplanted the preposition "with" in the context of competition with another, or whether this phenomenon, and to what extent, was also present in the earlier, pre-digital period of sports communication. Using qualitative and quantitative scientific methods, the study analyzes a corpus of 5984 headlines of sports reports from the FIFA World Cups in 1998 and 2018. The research results show that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of attributions "against" and attributions "with" in the description of sports events in 1998 and 2018 and prove the change in the communication paradigm of sports.

Key words: sports communication, sports reporting, newspapers, news portals, antagonism in sports

Introduction

With the advent of the internet and media convergence, which has led to the emergence and development of news portals, and with the commercialization of sports, sports reports are available to a large number of people of different ages. Research conducted by the Institute for Development and International Relations (hereinafter referred to as IRMO) shows that in 2017, 90.6% of internet users in Croatia, or 65.9% of the total Croatian population, read or accessed online newspapers and magazines¹. The two most common reasons why respondents used the internet in 2020 and 2021 were visiting social media and reading news portals, both with a representation of 84% in 2020 and 85% in 2021². When it comes to following sports online, IRMO's 2017 research shows that about one-third of the population using online media on portals followed sports content, and 38% of respondents followed specialized sports news portals¹. This finding is confirmed by Ipsos' Media Habits in Croatia research from the same year, which indicates that sports, with a share of 34%, ranked sixth in preferred content choices³. In the subsequent study from early 2019 (about six months after the 2018 FIFA World Cup, which is the subject of this re-

search), sports ranked fourth, behind domestic news, local news, and health, with a slightly lower share (28.4%) than in 2017⁴.

The previous data needs to be contextualized within the total number of visitors to the most read news portals, which will be the subject of research in this study. According to Gemius research from 2018, the top-ranked portal is *24sata.hr*, with a reach of 59.80%, recording 1,557,516 unique users and 30,376,296 visits, and 115,702,204 page views. In second place is *večernji.hr* with a reach of 53.36%, having 1,389,823 unique portal users, 16,847,224 visits, and 77,766,422 page views⁵. *Jutarnji.hr* and *sportske.jutarnji.hr*, which are part of this study, were not included in the Gemius research. However, IRMO's 2017 research includes Gemius's list of the most visited websites and indicates that the highest number of page openings is for the electronic publications *24sata.hr* and *jutarnji.hr*. Visitors return most frequently to *jutarnji.hr* and *24sata.hr* portals, and they spend the most time per month reading electronic publications *net.hr*, *jutarnji.hr*, and *24sata.hr*. According to this research, the third most read portal among news portals with a print edition is *večernji.hr*⁴.

For the context of the twenty-year period to which the analysis of this study relates, it is important to note that during the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France, Croatian daily newspapers had mostly not yet ventured onto the internet. In 1998, only *Večernji list* among the media included in this study had a "rudimentary page, with no access to content"⁶. The first print edition of *Jutarnji list* was published in April 1998⁷, two months before the start of the FIFA World Cup. Therefore, a brief overview of the publishing and readership of printed media during that period is necessary for the research in this study. Unfortunately, data on the circulations of the most widely read daily newspapers for the year 1998 were not available to the author at the time of writing this study. None of the contacted state institutions had this data either. Previous research and documents from the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia show that after the changes in Croatia during the 1990s (war in Croatia, difficulties in newspaper distribution, media privatization, etc.), newspaper circulations began to be "considered a business secret and thus the data about them are incomplete, difficult to access, and likely manipulated"⁸. However, even in the mid-1990s, the weekly magazine *Globus* was publishing data on the printed and sold copies of newspapers. These data show that *Večernji list* was the most widely circulated and most read daily newspaper at that time, with 198,000 printed and 154,500 sold copies in 1995⁹ and 165,000 printed and 135,000 sold copies in 1996¹⁰. In 1995, *Sportske novosti* recorded 55,000 printed and 42,000 sold copies, ranking third in both printed and sold copies⁹, while *Slobodna Dalmacija* ranked second in both years with 120,000 printed and 96,000 sold copies in 1995⁹ and 105,000 printed and 80,000 sold copies in 1996¹⁰. *Sportske novosti* are not included in the 1996 list. From 1997 there have been no publications of circulation data in *Globus*, which supports the aforementioned thesis of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia regarding the "business secret" and "inaccessibility"⁸ of circulation data during that period.

Although specific circulation data from 1998 is not available, Galić's research indicates that "*Večernji list* faced competition in the daily press in the form of *Jutarnji list* in 1998" and "that a significant battle for circulation began, which was not merely editorial"⁷. In the book *History of Journalism: A Brief Overview* by Magdalena Najbar-Agičić, it is emphasized that *Jutarnji list* "achieved great success in the market" and soon became "the most read daily newspaper in Croatia"¹¹. Galić, in his doctoral thesis, explains that "several circulation-boosting events favored the successful breakthrough of *Jutarnji list* in the market: apart from the FIFA World Cup where Croatia won the bronze medal, the story of Ankica Lepej by journalist Orlanda Obad contributed to the sale of *Jutarnji list* in its first year of publication, as it demonstrated the newspaper's independent and critical stance towards the authorities"⁷. In early 1999, *Globus* published the content of an internal document from the Office of the High Representative of the International Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which describes the media that can be mon-

itored or purchased in Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing insight into public perception as well as the reach of *Jutarnji list*, which is described as a "non-regime, quite populist" daily newspaper that "does not publish deeper analyses but rather short reports" and is currently "the number 2 daily newspaper" in Croatia and represents a "significant threat to *Večernji list*"¹². "The latest daily newspapers to appear on the Croatian media scene are (...) *24sata*. The first issue was printed on March 2, 2005." The newspaper quickly "becomes the highest-circulation and most widely read daily newspaper in Croatia, with a tabloid concept of brief news and articles and a low price of 3 kunas"⁷. The print edition of the daily newspaper *24 sata*, given the period of its appearance on the market, is not the subject of research in this study. However, as demonstrated by the previously mentioned data in this introduction, the news portal *24sata.hr*, which originated from the print edition platform and shares the same publisher as the daily newspapers, is the most read news portal^{1,5} in the period to which the research in this study pertains.

In line with the previously stated data, the aim of this study was to determine whether and to what extent the communication paradigm of sports reporting has changed in the 21st century, primarily in the context of findings presented in the doctoral dissertation by Tajana Obradović. She argues "that in contemporary media depictions of sports, the preposition "against" has to a significant extent suppressed the preposition "with" when it comes to match announcements or match reports, and the preposition "by" or "over" when it comes to match results"¹³. Consequently, this study focused on investigating the mentioned phenomenon – games/competitions against another versus games/competitions with another – in the reporting discourse of the most read daily newspapers and news portals at two time points, during the FIFA World Cups in 1998 and 2018. In both of these tournaments, Croatian athletes achieved significant sporting success, which was perceived by the public at the time as the greatest success of Croatian sports.

The aforementioned finding by Obradović suggests that in contemporary sports reporting, teams are no longer competing "with" other or playing matches "with" each other, but rather sports games and competitions in media presentation are characterized by the antagonism of the preposition "against". This antagonism is emphasized by the use of a series of lexemes such as duel, battle, combat, clash, fight, etc., instead of match, game, or competition, as well as a series of narrative-semiotic lexemes, phrases, and syntagms from the field of warfare, conflict, and violence that the analysis of the mentioned doctoral dissertation explores, and which further contribute to the narrative-semiotic impression of sports as a space of antagonism¹³.

Considering that, to the knowledge of the author of this paper, research on this topic, except in Obradović's doctoral dissertation, has not been conducted so far, the study relies on theoretical concepts and postulates extensively presented in that doctoral dissertation. This study compares its thesis and research results from 2018 with the results of the research conducted in this study.

Due to the limited space of the study, we will highlight only some of the concepts and postulates in the context of the contemporary relationship between sports and victory as the ultimate goal of competition, as well as the semiotic significance and modern media content of sports related to antagonism. Regarding the relationship towards others and victory in the game with another, it is scientifically valuable for the topic of this study to emphasize Huizinga's definition of the concept of victory, which is "closely related to play", where merely reaching the goal of the game "still does not mean winning". Victory only appears "in the game against someone else", and winning means "proving one's superiority by the outcome of a game. However, this proven and evident superiority is prone to take on the appearance of superiority in general. Thus, the gain becomes greater than victory in the game itself. The winner gains prestige, bears honors, and this honor and prestige are regularly used by the entire group to which the winner belongs"¹⁴. Martinić warns in this regard of the "pronounced duality" of the sports act when the "ludic" aspect of sports is accompanied by a desire "for improvement, testing, or competition" and the realization that in the sports act, alongside the game, there is always another – a co-player or opponent. That other is always "encouraging because it prompts perseverance in action". However, "what is a game can turn into compulsion, the community can turn into a group that threatens, and the desire to stand out can turn into a desire to nullify the other"¹⁵.

In his cultural studies, Eco also addresses the context of sport, pointing out that "'sports activities' are dominated by the idea of 'expenditure'. Loss is always opposed to gain, evaluated after the experience." Eco also discusses the concept of gain, or victory in sports, stating that global sporting events with a tournament structure promote a mentality of "survival of the most capable". Alongside this, boastful conversations come into the public sphere, "discussions full of unrestrained emotions and public competition for the 'right to boast – the right to claim categorical superiority of one nation over another through the measurement of human abilities related to mastery of a set of playing skills – for example, who can send the ball into the net more times". Media also follow this rhetoric, so in that sense, Eco points out that "the media apparatus – both lexical and visual – actively frames the way in which football signs are perceived. Signs are constructed to target affectively motivated reactions. We could say that they are deliberately aimed at achieving the ideal of 'receptivity' (e.g., surprise, tension, drama, disgust, pleasure, and so on), thus stimulating emotional associations"¹⁶.

Building the concept of the "ideal of 'receptivity'"¹⁶ media "make use of familiar narrative codes to present different content and contexts in similar terms, in order that they are able to be easily understood by the audience"¹⁷. Nicholson, referring to the theses of Bignell¹⁷, as well as other authors, explains "like other media narratives, those deployed within sport media have a relatively finite range of possible meanings. In many cases the narratives are used often and well known to audiences. For example, ri-

valry is a key narrative that is a regular feature of the sport media. The rivalry can be local, national or global, between individuals, teams or countries..." Nicholson also points out that "McKay and Rowe (1987) noted that the media legitimates masculine hegemony, capitalist rationality, consensus and militaristic nationalism and that it acts to marginalize, trivialize and fragment alternative ideologies of sport"¹⁸.

Supporting the previous considerations are some previous studies related to the media visibility of sports. Referring to earlier research by Billings et al. and Kunovich, Fan et al. state that "international sport competitions often create 'a strong sense of a first-person 'my' team and a third-person opponent, with content shifting dependent on what is of most interest to a country as well as what shapes the story in an appealing light', making national identification a socially constructed sameness". In support of this, Fan et al. also refer to the summary of previous research, concluding "that international sporting event success can activate and enhance national pride (Meier & Mutz, 2016), heighten positive emotions (Hallmann, Breuer, & Kühnreich, 2013), and deepen a sense of national belonging (Elling, van Hilvoorde, & van den Dool, 2014)", as well as "success during the 2014 FIFA World Cup increased uncritical patriotism, critical patriotism, and support of militarism (Atwell Seate et al., 2017)"¹⁹.

These findings could explain the contemporary media portrayal of sports, in which, according to Obradović's thesis, a significant portion of the headline content of sports reports on the most widely-read news portals in Croatia is characterized by narratives of combativeness, antagonism, and the potential for high emotional impact on the media audience through the "us against them" narrative, with the preposition "against" playing a significant role in the media portrayal of sports¹³. In its continuation, this study research through the analysis of sports report headlines whether this phenomenon of playing/competing "against" another observed in the reporting of the 2018 FIFA World Cup was also present, and to what extent, in the headlines of sports reports in daily newspapers twenty years earlier – during the 1998 FIFA World Cup.

Materials and Methods

The sample for analysis in this study consists of a corpus of 5984 headlines. The corpus includes 2846 headlines from the sports sections of the most-read news portals¹⁵ – *sportske.jutarnji.hr*, *večernji.hr*, and *24sata.hr* – from June 14th to July 16th, 2018, and 3138 headlines from the front pages, sports sections, back pages, and exceptionally, after the success of the national football team, on the first few pages of the most-read daily newspapers *Večernji* and *Jutarnji list*, as well as on the front and back pages and parts related to the 1998 FIFA World Cup in the sports daily *Sportske novosti* from June 10th to July 13th, 1998. Front and back pages of printed newspapers were included in the study due to the logic of reading printed media (people read newspapers from the front or back

page), and the headlines on them attract the attention of readers to the sports section, but also direct them to it.

For the analysis of headlines from 2018, data/results from Obradović's doctoral dissertation were used in the study¹³. For the analysis of headlines from 1998, newspapers from the digitized archive of *Večernji list*²⁰ were utilized, and missing data from this archive were supplemented with information from editions available at the National and University Library in Zagreb. Additionally, headlines from bound copies of *Jutarnji list*²¹ and *Sportske novosti*²² available at the City Library in Zagreb were analyzed, and for issues missing from this archive, copies from the National and University Library in Zagreb were used.

The analysis in this study explored the narrative paradigms of sports report headlines in terms of the use of the preposition "against" in the context of the game in the most widely read daily media in 1998 and 2018. It is important to note that the news portals *sportske.jutarnji.hr* and *večernji.hr* originated from the platform of the daily newspaper *Sportske novosti*, *Jutarnji list* and *Večernji list*, serving as their online versions and modern continuations. It is also worth noting that, before the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the sports editorial teams of the *Jutarnji list* and *Sportske novosti* news portals merged into a common domain of *sportske.jutarnji.hr*.

The unit of analysis in the research is the headline of the text in the broadest sense, following Bobić's definition of the headline. Bobić understands the headline in a broader sense as a "set of information" that includes "subtitle, main headline, subheadline, and intertitle"²³. In this study, the headline of the text is considered to be the headlines containing a subtitle, main headline, subheadline, and/or caption under the headline photograph/illustration or headline photograph of a photo gallery on news portals, or subtitle, main headline, subheadline, intertitle, and/or caption/description of the photograph accompanying the text and/or headline in the printed edition. This includes all the mentioned components as a headline unit or part of the mentioned headline components as a whole. The headline has been selected as the unit of analysis because of the dual function it has to perform: "(a) to summarize and (b) to attract attention to the full-text newspaper article"²⁴. Headlines, as a condensed form of information provided in the text and as a means of grabbing readers' attention on news portals, represent the first contact with the presented sports content, based on which readers decide whether to enter or refrain from entering the published sports content, and in newspapers, whether to read or refrain from reading the presented article. Given that readers of news portals "often only read headlines", the message they convey is particularly important²⁵. At the same time, however, it should be emphasized that in the modern media space, headlines that sell newspapers become constructions without a real basis in the text" and that "headline information in a large number of cases is based only on assumptions"²⁶.

In order to answer the research question – whether, according to the thesis by Obradović¹³, the use of the preposition "against" in the context of the game with another is a "product" of the contemporary media narrative in reporting on sports or was it present to the same extent in an earlier period – this study used qualitative and quantitative scientific methods – counting method, quantitative and qualitative method of content analysis and comparative method. Using the method of content analysis, all headlines about the 1998 World Cup were first extracted from the front and back pages and from the sports sections and main news (after the success of the Croatian national football team) in the printed editions of the daily newspapers *Večernji list* and *Jutarnji list* and from the front and back pages and articles related to the 1998 World Cup in the specialized daily newspaper *Sportske novosti*. The headlines in the sports sections of the *sportske.jutarnji.hr*, *večernji.hr*, and *24sata.hr* news portals related to the 2018 FIFA World Cup were extracted using the same method. By counting, it was determined to what extent the prepositions "against" and "with" are present in the headlines of the reports in the context of the game or competition with another. The counting was done manually based on forms with predefined columns for each term and columns for headlines, with designated space for adding remarks, comments, etc., and entering phrases and/or parts or whole headlines as examples of using the prepositions "against" and "with" in the context of the game with another in headlines. For each daily newspaper and news portal, a separate form was created to record the frequency and occurrence of these two prepositions, by days and headlines, enabling the acquisition of results indicating whether and to what extent the use of the prepositions "against" and "with" is present in sports reporting – for each newspaper and news portal separately and overall for all newspapers and news portals.

Additional statistical analyses were conducted to examine if there is a statistically significant difference in the use of the preposition "against" in the context of the game or competition with another when comparing the *sportske.jutarnji.hr* (for online news portals) and *Sportske novosti* (for printed editions) with the remaining two most read daily editions of each period.

Based on the research question, the hypothesis of this study was formulated as follows: The preference for the attribution "against" in contemporary media content about sports compared to the attribution "with" in the context of a game or competition with another has led to a change in the narrative paradigm of sports reporting in a period of two decades and to the perception of sport as a place of antagonism.

Statistical testing was performed using the licensed program STATISTICA 6.1 StatSoft Inc., Tulsa, OK, USA. The Chi-square test was used to test the hypothesis. Statistical testing was performed at a significance level of 95% ($\alpha = 0.05$), $p < 0.05$ considered significant.

Results and Discussion

As shown in Table 1, from June 10th to July 13th, 1998, a total of 3138 headlines related to events at the 1998 FIFA World Cup in France were published in the daily newspapers included in the study. The highest number of headlines was published in *Sportske novosti*, while the lowest was in *Jutarnji list*. Regarding this difference in the number of publications between newspapers, it is important to emphasize that *Sportske novosti*, as specialized sports daily newspaper, significantly differed in concept from the other two newspapers. In them, alongside main articles, a series of extremely short texts – news briefs unrelated to the main articles of the page and unrelated to one thematic unit were published. In contrast to *Sportske novosti*, but also *Večernji list*, *Jutarnji list* attempted to unify one theme/event/match on one page or in the form of a double spread and, within it, to place all related news in the form of subtitles and descriptions of photos.

As published in Obradović's doctoral thesis in 2023: "From June 14th to July 16th, 2018, all three news portals included in the study published a total of 2846 headlines related to events at the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia"¹³. The highest number of headlines was published on the news portal *večernji.hr*, while the lowest was on *sportske.jutarnji.hr*.

TABLE 1
NUMBER OF HEADLINES IN 1998 AND 2018

Year	Media	Number of headlines
1998	<i>Sportske novosti</i>	1579
	<i>Večernji list</i>	829
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	730
	Total 1998	3138
2018	<i>Sportske.jutarnji.hr</i>	869
	<i>Večernji.hr</i>	1036
	<i>24sata.hr</i>	941
	Total 2018	2846

Content analysis of headlines related to the FIFA World Cups in 1998 and 2018 showed that all the media included in the study used the preposition "against" in the headlines of sports reports in the context of playing against another and/or winning/losing against another.

Table 2 supports the hypothesis of the study and shows that in 1998, in the headlines of *Sportske novosti* and *Večernji list*, there was twice as much use of the preposition "with" in the context of game or competition with another compared to the use of the preposition "against." That year, the highest overall frequency of using the preposition "against" in the headlines of sports reports was

TABLE 2
PREPOSITIONS "AGAINST" AND "WITH" IN THE HEADLINES IN 1998 AND 2018

Year	Media	Attribution "against"	Attribution "with"*
1998	<i>Sportske novosti</i>	54	105
	<i>Večernji list</i>	22	44
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	60	66
	Total 1998	136	215
2018	<i>Sportske.jutarnji.hr</i>	88	13
	<i>Večernji.hr</i>	183	42
	<i>24sata.hr</i>	209	46
	Total 2018	480	101

* The table includes only the uses of the preposition "with" that come in phrases with a game/competition/match/encounter/fixture, etc., and the uses that come in phrases with duel, clash, battle, fight, etc., used in the context of a match, competition, or sports game, are not included.

recorded in *Jutarnji list*, with only six uses less of "against" compared to "with" in the context of game/competition with another. Twenty years later, there is a noticeable dominance of the preposition "against" in sports reports compared to the use of "with." Although the specialized sports portal *sportske.jutarnji.hr* in 2018 records considerably lower frequency of using the preposition "against" in its headlines compared to portals *večernji.hr* and *24sata.hr*, it is evident that authors of sports report headlines on the news portal *sportske.jutarnji.hr* rarely use the preposition "with," almost seven times less frequently than the preposition "against" in the context of game with another. Content analysis confirms that the difference is not only in the frequency of using these two prepositions in the analyzed media but there is also a significant difference in the narrative that these attributions involve.

According to the results in Table 2, and qualitative content analysis of the headlines in 1998, in contrast to 2018, headlines of sports reports with a narrative that used the preposition "with" in the spirit of sportsmanship were significantly more common such as:

- Although Jamaica seemed to be a likable national team, its popularity before today's match with Croatia is falling more and more²⁷
- Passarella: With Croatia to victory²⁸
- By the end of the competition, the Americans will have two more matches in the group – with the selected teams of Yugoslavia and Iran²⁹
- In the match with a weakened Cameroon, in the last meeting of Group B, the Chileans expect their first victory and passage to the round of 16³⁰

Accordingly, the analysis shows that in 1998, headlines were more frequent in which the antagonism of the prep-

osition "against" was inserted into a more moderate narrative-semiotic context of headlines such as:

- Today at 9 p.m., Croatia is playing at the World Cup against Jamaica³¹
- Silviije Marić, the national team player who announced the victory against Japan, in a conversation with our journalist³²
- Paraguay won against Nigeria (3:1) worthy of the round of 16³³
- Boban does not play against Japan³⁴

From these examples of headlines, it is evident that as early as 1998, there was a trend of labeling teams with the names of nations and states; however, based on this research, we cannot associate a more pronounced warrior-like semiotics with this phenomenon in 1998. Nevertheless, this conclusion should be verified by further research into the narrative-semiotic elements of warfare and violence in headlines.

In contrast, the authors of sports report headlines in 2018, alongside the narrative that uses the attribution "against" to describe events on the sports field, also use a wide range of narrative-semiotic elements from the spectrum of warrior/militant terminology:

- Who will win the "war" in the tribunes? The English Football Association revealed how many of their fans will be against Croatia³⁵
- (...) "Messi should be driven out for what he did against Croatia"; Lionel Messi is under fierce attack, he is being shot at from all weapons³⁶
- The Danes must fall; Subašić: Even with my head in the goalpost! All for Croatia and the quarterfinals; A trench battle awaits us against a serious opponent...³⁷
- (...) Let's break Iceland too; There is no need to calculate, the atmosphere is great now and on the wings of this victory Iceland should also be knocked down, said Igor Pamić about everything that Croatia showed against Argentina (3–0)³⁸
- Ivana brings happiness to the "fiery" and says: It will be 2–0 against Iceland Ever since she appeared on the stands in 'checkered', Croatia is tearing apart the competition! We crashed Nigeria, smashed Messi and Argentina...³⁹

In the context of using warrior terminology in sports headlines, for future research on this topic, it is useful to note that, the study has shown that in both analyzed periods, in the most read media, to a lesser extent, there is also the use of prepositions "with" in combination with combat terms such as clash, duel, confrontation, battle, etc., as a semiotic substitute for match, game, encounter, contest, etc. Some examples of this narrative are visible in headlines such as:

- The vice-president of Croatian Football Federation Vlatko Marković will watch the duel with Argentina from up close⁴⁰

- Jamaica coach René Simoes prepares his team's destructive game in combat with our national team⁴¹
- We expect victory in the game with Croatia (headline); Jamaicans can't wait for the clash with Croatia – Dean Sewell (left) in the clash with Choi Yoon Soo (description of the photo)⁴²
- Miroslav Blažević after the clash with Argentina (subheadline); Stanić competes with the Argentinians (description of the photo)⁴³
- Battle for the World Cup semi-finals; Russians in great euphoria before the clash with Croatia⁴⁴

The analysis shows that in 1998, there were no semiotic constructions that associate conflicts, duels, clashes, confrontations, battles, and so on with the preposition "against," whereas in 2018, although to a lesser extent, such narrative constructions appear, reinforcing the semiotics of antagonism between two sides in sports, as evidenced by headlines such as:

- Fan duel: 'To the battle, to the battle...' against the Icelandic roar!⁴⁵
- (...) Kovačić and Pjaca announced the clash against Denmark...⁴⁶
- What an ending! The English survived penalties; The Colombians are on the verge of becoming a sensation, but they still go home! 'Gordie Albion' fought in the skirmish against Sweden⁴⁷

These results suggest a change in the communication paradigm of sports reporting between 1998 and 2018, shifting from playing with another to playing against another, confirming the findings of Obradović that such constructions become "emotionally receptive narrative sets that evoke a combative state and emphasize the drama, antagonism, and aggressiveness of events on the sports field"¹³. Therefore, the further direction (stagnation, progression, or regression) of this discourse in sports reporting will be scientifically beneficial to monitor through future research.

As shown in Table 3, the research results indicate that all the media included in the analysis use both the preposition "against" and the preposition "with" for the attribution of playing/competing in the headline section (14 headlines in each period).

Although headlines like *Slaven Bilić has recovered and is a candidate for the team against Jamaica (...)* *Will he be ready for the match with Jamaica?*⁴⁸ speak in favor of the possibility of avoiding the repetition of double, triple or multiple attributions "with" in an individual headline or a headline unit that was analyzed, the content analysis indicates that this is not necessarily the reason for this practice. According to the results presented in Table 4, the analysis shows that the multiple use of "with" and "against" prepositions is present in both researched periods. The use of the preposition "against" in a game/competition with another is significantly represented in 2018. The fact that the use of *against* is not avoiding the repetition of the attribution of playing with another in the same

TABLE 3
PREPOSITIONS "AGAINST" AND "WITH" IN THE SAME HEADLINE

Year	Media	Attributions "against" and "with" in the same headline	
		Number of headlines	Number of appearances
1998	<i>Sportske novosti</i>	4	8
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	9	19
	<i>Večernji list</i>	1	3
	Total 1998	14	30
2018	<i>Sportske.jutarnji.hr</i>	1	2
	<i>Večernji.hr</i>	8	16
	<i>24sata.hr</i>	5	12
	Total 2018	14	30

headline, but rather that such usage is the primary choice of headline authors and reporting from the sports event, is demonstrated by headlines in which the "against" attribution is repeated two or more times, even though it could have been replaced by the use of "with":

- Dalić doesn't change the formula: On Danes as against Argentina Zlatko Dalić, like the whole of Croatia, is enchanted by the victory against Argentina, so he will go on Denmark with the same team. Although Milan Badelj played well against Iceland, he will give up his place to Marcelo Brozović⁴⁹
- (...) Clash of heroes in the quarterfinals: Danijel Subašić against Igor Akinfeev; "I'm glad I brought joy to my people," said Subašić after his miraculous performance against Denmark⁵⁰
- (...) Play Luka, demolish Danes, and fulfill your dreams! – Modrić against Denmark won't be as good as against Nigeria and Argentina; he will be – even better!⁵¹

- Against Argentine as against Portugal in England?⁵²

Observing these, as well as a series of other headlines that indicate their authors' use of the attribution "against" as a semiotic-rhetorical figure, it is necessary at this point to remind ourselves of capturing the reader's attention as one of the fundamental functions of headlines²⁴. Placing the function of attention-grabbing in the context of headlines that use the attribution 'against' for a match or game with another when juxtaposing two teams or players, we must, from a rhetorical standpoint, question the authors' intention. In contemplating intention, we will invoke the rhetorical rule that, from the speaker's perspective, "his will to be liked, to convince, to seduce, to persuade" is decisive⁵³. According to Meyer, it is most important for readers to decipher the speaker's intention or, in this case, the intention of the headline writer⁵³. Therefore, we can conclude that in creating such headlines, the authors' intention was not to replace the preposition "with" with the preposition "against", but rather, on the contrary, it was a conscious act of repetition and construction of drama and emotional impact on the reader that the use and gradation of the attribution "against" in comparison to playing with another carry. The result of this intention is the achievement of the semiotics of antagonism between opposing sides on the sports field. This antagonism sometimes occurs between two countries, sometimes between two players, sometimes implies "us" and "them," and sometimes, as the following headline shows, involves opposition between us and everyone:

- (...) Today we play against everyone!⁵⁴

Headlines that use the attribution "against," as opposed to headlines in which the attribution of playing "with" another is used to tell the story of a sports event, attract readers through semiotics that not only creates an atmosphere of antagonism but also builds the drama of sports with additional semiotics of warfare, heroism, etc., especially when names of nations i.e. states are added to the attribution "against." Such a narrative can also be observed in the context of Eco's "survival of the most capable" and the

TABLE 4
PREPOSITIONS "AGAINST" AND "WITH" – FREQUENCY OF APPEARANCES

Year	Media	Attribution "against"		Attribution "with"	
		Number of headlines	Number of appearances	Number of headlines	Number of appearances
1998	<i>Sportske novosti</i>	54	54	100	105
	<i>Jutarnji list</i>	50	60	61	66
	<i>Večernji list</i>	19	22	39	44
	Total 1998	123	136	200	215
2018	<i>Sportske.jutarnji.hr</i>	84	88	12	13
	<i>Večernji.hr</i>	164	183	39	42
	<i>24sata.hr</i>	182	209	42	46
	Total 2018	430	480	93	101

achievement of the "ideal of receptivity" – tensions, drama, curiosity, worry, enjoyment, etc. – "thus evoking emotional associations of the reader"¹⁶. If, keeping this in mind, we briefly return to Meyer and the rule of rhetoric that suggests that "there is a third point of view, which is the point of view of the medium itself, language or image, in short, the message" and that all three points of view represent "important indicators of what is implicitly suggested"⁵³, we can conclude that authors of such headlines aim at readers' needs for "belonging" and "respect" in the context of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory⁵⁵. They emphasize the drama, give sports significance beyond the mere sporting event, and not only draw readers into the drama of the event and its outcome but also attract and retain them in their content, for the sake of their economic survival.

In this context, and from a linguistic standpoint, but primarily from a communicative perspective, it is significant to mention that, albeit sporadically, even teams that have ended their matches with a draw are positioned in an antagonistic relationship:

- (...) he judged the English five times and they never lost. They beat Scotland, Switzerland and Andorra, and drew against Ghana and Ukraine⁵⁶
- With a 3:0 (1:0) victory against Cameroon, Italian footballers corrected the initial setback, a draw against Chile⁵⁷

Summarizing the results of the analysis, we can conclude that *Jutarnji list* in 1998 led in a more significant use of the attribution "against" compared to the attribution "with" in the context of playing/competing with another in reporting on sports events, while the primacy in the frequency and more aggressive context of using the attribution "against" in the context of sports in 2018 was taken over by the tabloid news portal *24sata.hr*. The conducted analyses have opened up an additional research question – is there a statistically significant difference in the use of the preposition "against" in the context of playing/competing with another when comparing *Sportske novosti* (in print editions from 1998) with the remaining two most read daily newspapers, as well as *sportske.jutarnji.hr* (in online editions), with the remaining two most read online news portals. This question was answered by additional statistical testing using the Chi-square test.

Testing the difference in the use of the attribution "against" between *Sportske novosti* and the portal *sportske.jutarnji.hr* as the most read specialized daily edition and the remaining two most read daily editions with respect to the period, showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of the attribution "against" in the two analyzed periods. In the most read daily editions, the use of the attribution "against" increased from 60% in 1998 to 82% in 2018, compared to the most read specialized sports edition where the frequency of use compared to the remaining two most read media decreased from 40% in 1998 to 18% in 2018.

Research results obtained through quantitative methods and qualitative content analysis, comparative method,

TABLE 5
COMPARISON – THE MOST READ DAILY SPORTS EDITION VERSUS THE OTHER TWO MOST READ DAILY EDITIONS

Year	Media	Attribution "against"	Attribution "with"
1998	<i>Sportske novosti</i>	54 (40%*)	105 (49%)
	<i>Jutarnji list</i> and <i>Večernji list</i>	82 (60%)	110 (51%)
	Total 1998	136	215
2018	<i>Sportske.jutarnji.hr</i>	88 (18%)	13 (13%)
	<i>Večernji.hr</i> and <i>24sata.hr</i>	392 (82%)	88 (87%)
	Total 2018	480	101

*% refer to the total number of prepositions "against" and "with" in 1998 and in 2018.

TABLE 6
CHI-SQUARE TEST ATTRIBUTION "AGAINST"

Test	Chi-square	p value
the most read sports daily edition vs the most read daily editions 1998:2018	27.29	<0.001

as well as discussion, suggest the confirmation of the study hypothesis. In order to finally confirm or reject the hypothesis, it was also checked with the Chi-square test.

TABLE 7
HYPOTHESIS TESTING – CHI-SQUARE TEST

Year	Attribution "against"	Attribution "with"	Total
1998	136 (39%*)	215 (61%)	351
2018	480 (83%)	101 (17%)	581

*% refer to the total number of prepositions "against" and "with" in 1998 and in 2018.

TABLE 8
CHI-SQUARE TEST PREPOSITION "AGAINST" VS PREPOSITION "WITH"

Test	Chi-square	p value
All media 1998 vs 2018	187.92	<0.001

The Chi-square test confirmed the hypothesis of the study: The preference for the attribution "against" in contemporary media content about sports compared to the attribution "with" in the context of a game or competition with another led to a change in the narrative paradigm of sports reporting over a period of two decades and to the perception of sport as a place of antagonism. Hypothesis testing showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the use of the preposition "against" and the preposition "with" between 1998 and 2018. The use of the

preposition "against" increased from 39% in 1998 to 83% in 2018, while the use of the preposition "with" decreased from 61% to 17%.

Conclusion

The research results confirm that the preference for using the attribution "against" rather than "with" in the context of game/competition with another in sports reporting between 1998 and 2018 has led to a change in the communication paradigm of sports. While in 1998, sports reporting was dominated by a narrative that used the attribution of playing/competing with another, in 21st-century sports reporting, there is a significant presence of semiotics of antagonism in the headlines of sports reports, so in 2018, the media predominantly report on playing/competing against another. Such a narrative places the media portrayal of sports in the sphere of antagonism. Sport is presented to the media audience through a discourse of rivalry in which the attribution of playing against another is combined with the names of countries and nations that oppose each other in this way, and the

perception of sport as a site of conflict is further emphasized by the more aggressive use of militant terminology.

The limitation of this study could be considered the difference in significance, reach, scope and discourse between the two types of media (printed and online media), as well as the impossibility of comparing media of the same type and/or the same media across two time periods. However, the results of the study, which support a significant change in the media paradigm of sports reporting towards the communication of antagonism in the media of the 21st century, considering their great reach and wide availability, including very young audiences, point to the need to monitor the power and influence of words in the public space on the media audience.

The study results represent the first results in this field and can serve as a reference point for monitoring the progression, regression, or stagnation of the trend of changing the communication paradigm of sports reporting in the context of game/competition with or against another in the future. Future interdisciplinary research on this change could delve into analyzing the causes and consequences of such a media narrative in sports.

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T. Obradović

Funditus, Lopatinečka 13, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

e-mail: tajana@funditus.hr

PROMJENA KOMUNIKACIJSKE PARADIGME SPORTA IZMEĐU 1998. I 2018.: IGRA S DRUGIM ILI IGRA PROTIV DRUGOG

SAŽETAK

Ova studija analizira sportsko izvještavanje u kontekstu igre/natjecanja s odnosno igre/natjecanja protiv drugog u najčitanijim dnevnim novinama odnosno novinskim portalima u razdoblju od 20 godina. Svrha istraživanja jest propitati je li prijedlog protiv u opisu sportskih događaja na suvremenim novinskim portalima u značajnoj mjeri istisnuo prijedlog s u kontekstu igre odnosno natjecanja s drugim ili je ovaj fenomen, i u kojoj mjeri, bio prisutan i u ranijem, pred digitalnom razdoblju sportske medijske komunikacije. Metodom brojanja, kvantitativnom i kvalitativnom analizom sadržaja te komparativnom metodom, studija analizira korpus od 5984 naslova sportskih izvještaja sa Svjetskog prvenstva u nogometu 1998. i 2018. godine. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da postoji statistički značajna razlika u uporabi atribucije protiv i atribucije s u opisu sportskih događaja 1998. i 2018. godine te dokazuju promjenu komunikacijske paradigme sporta u tom razdoblju