

Multimodal Translation in YouTube Shorts from Spanish Football Teams Real Madrid against FC Barcelona

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Abstract

YouTube Shorts (YTS) are a new type of audiovisual content akin to Instagram Reels and TikTok videos, which has gained increased popularity since its inception. This article is based on a recent dataset of 329 YTS from Real Madrid and FC Barcelona football teams (first round of LaLiga 2023-2024 season), and analyses how they employ multimodal communication and translation to create a brand image aimed at combining national and international identities. Results yield that the communicative goals are often pursued through multilingualism, but they also include overlapping semiotic codes designed to reach universal understandability and content access, such as emojis, proper names, and hashtags.

Key Words

YouTube Shorts, Real Madrid, FC Barcelona, audiovisual translation, semiotics



Introduction

YouTube Shorts (YTS) are a feature introduced by the American company YouTube as a response to the popularity of short-form video content on social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels. They are short, vertical videos with a maximum length of 60 seconds which offer a range of creative tools, including licensed music tracks (Later.com, 2024). YTS have their own dedicated

section within the YouTube app to help viewers discover trending short-form content, which is personalised based on the viewer's interests and activity on the platform.

YouTube's intent in the creation of YTS in 2019 was to compete with TikTok, another major online video platform for short clips. Since its inception, the usage rating of YTS has continuously increased. In April 2022, Alphabet (formerly Google) said that YTS generated over 30 billion views daily (Sato, 2022). Reportedly, the number of monthly users also increased from 1.5 billion in 2022 to two billion as of July 2023 (Mehta, 2023). This trend may grow if TikTok is banned in US territory at some point (Debusmann et al., 2024). The popularity of YTS has raised concerns within the company, with some believing that it will "cannibalise" YouTube's long-form video content (Criddle, 2023). These data make it necessary for communication and linguistic studies to place more focus on the analysis of this type of content, which does not exclude translation and/or interpreting studies. Despite their potential, YTS have been scarcely investigated in general, let alone linguistically (Navarro-Güere, 2023; Arkida et al., 2024; Violot et al., 2024). They are the youngest of the three short-form platforms, which makes them an appealing object of study.

1. Objectives

Due to the emerging nature of the studied YTS format, this article might be one of the first of its kind according to the researchers' knowledge. Such condition is reflected in its objectives:

- To analyse the linguistic and non-linguistic communicative features of a set of YTS published in the official YouTube channels of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid, which are taken as representative because of the global impact of both brands and their number of followers;
- To build a methodological structure able to include a predictably high number of different semiotic modes or resources in the YTS, with the aim of making it replicable for the analysis of similar audiovisual products;
- To determine the degree of multimodality (i.e., co-appearance of language with other semiotic codes) of the chosen YTS and whether it contributes to a certain communicative or marketing end;

- To specify the number and combination of languages used and the presence or absence of translation in the YTS, relating these data to the communicative purposes aforementioned;
- To observe the joint use of translation and non-linguistic codes in the YTS to uncover possible trends that relate them, and hypothesise the possible causes.

2. Theoretical background

The background for this study is divided into three parts, starting with a backtrace of the term “multimodality” and its current meaning in linguistic and corpus studies (Section 2.1.). Multimodality in translation is also discussed, with the first need of a differentiation between multimodality and intermodality in this context (Section 2.2.) Before the methodology, the choice of studying multimodal translation inside short-form football videos is discussed, also in relation to the state of the art of football translation and interpreting (Section 2.3).

2.1 Multimodality

The term “multimodality” originated back in the 1920s in the field of the psychology of perception. More recently, “linguists and discourse analysts have taken up the term, broadening it to denote the integrated use of different communicative resources, such as language, image, sound and music in multimodal texts and communicative events” (van Leeuwen, 2011, p. 668). From the 1920s onwards, public communication became increasingly multimodal, something which linguists as well as other scholars noticed. In the course of the twentieth century, at least five major schools of linguistics engaged with communicative modes other than language: the Prague School, the Paris School structuralist semiotics, American linguistics, Hallidayan linguistics, and mediated discourse analysis (van Leeuwen, 2011, 2023). In recent times, Jewitt et al. (2016) have identified Systemic Functional Linguistics, Social Semiotics, and Conversation Analysis as the three most relevant linguistic fields dealing with multimodality. According to Jewitt et al. (2016, pp. 2-3):

Multimodality questions a strict ‘division of labour’ among the disciplines traditionally focused on meaning making, on the grounds that in the world

we're trying to account for, *different means of meaning making* are not separated but almost *always appear together*: image with writing, speech with gesture, math[s] symbolism with writing, and so forth. [...]. This fact only became more noticeable with the introduction of digital technologies [...]. What the early adopters of the term recognized was not only the need to look at the co-occurrence and interplay of different means of making meaning but also that each 'mode' offers *distinct possibilities and constraints*.

In relation to the growing availability of multimodal pieces of communication, multimodal corpora have been a theoretical and methodological reality for some time, with its own limitations. Allwood (2008, p. 207) provides differently narrowed definitions for a multimodal corpus, one of the broadest being “a computer-based collection of language and communication-related material drawing on more than one sensory modality or on more than one production modality.” If we assume that there are five or more sensory modalities (e.g., vision, hearing, touch, smell, and taste), only two of these have really been made use of so far in multimodal corpora, namely vision and hearing, which corresponds to the production modalities of gesture and speech in face-to-face communication, or writing (drawing, etc.) and recorded speech in indirect communication (Allwood, 2008, p. 208).

2.2 Multimodality and translation

In the terminology of translation and interpreting studies, semiotic multimodality should be clearly differentiated from intermodality, that is, the coexistence or collection of contrasting mediation modes. According to Stecconi (2009), mediation (speaking on behalf of another) is an existential condition of translation which differentiates it from other semiotic acts. Since mediated discourse can be written (translation) or spoken (interpretation), any given text in any language can be classified into one of four basic mediation modes (i.e., non-translated, non-interpreted, translated, or interpreted), plus their corresponding mediation sub-modes (i.e., sight translation, subtitling, dubbing, simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, etc.). However, a variety of translation and interpreting modes and sub-modes (intermodality) does not necessarily imply more than one sensory mode, nor their co-appearance with non-linguistic communication codes (multimodality). For example, one or more researchers could collect a series of raw written translations and transcribed interpretations from English into Spanish. This would constitute an intermodal corpus, but not a multimodal one since there would be only one sensory channel

(vision) and no other semiotic code apart from human language. Intermodality and multimodality do not need each other aprioristically, although experimentation can yield arguments for strong connections between them (see Section 4.4. of this paper as an example).¹

Multimodality has only started to attract the attention of translation scholars in the last two decades. This is reflected in the progressive addition of “multimodality” to the new editions of reference translation textbooks and encyclopaedias (e.g., van Leeuwen, 2011, 2023; Munday et al., 2022). Although translation and interpreting have been increasingly characterised by multimodality, translation and interpreting studies have been slow to bridge these two disciplines (Taylor, 2016). Pérez-González (2020) enumerates some strands of research within multimodal translation and interpreting studies: layout and typography, multimedia spaces such as theatres, cinemas, and museums, iconic-verbal links in printed texts, the translation of polyvocal texts in relation to digital technology, and embodied multimodality. Relying on the Chinese context, Wu and Pan (2024, p. 8) cite “the innovative use of new and richer modalities and multimodal elements in translation in the digital age” as an “emerging research area” in multimodal translation studies. As the authors note (Wu and Pan, 2024, p. 5):

The growing interest in multimodality in communication and translation studies is, to a great extent, due to the development and proliferation of (new) media technologies that support much richer forms of meaning making. [...] For example, video producers may use moving visual images, background music, voice-over, and subtitles in creating a video, while digital users may employ images, words, hashtags, and hyperlinks when composing social media posts. With the affordances and constraints of different modes, each mode contributes to the process of meaning making and communication.

2.3 Multimodal translation of short-form football videos

One of the new digital, multimodal forms with a greater impact on monolingual and multilingual communication alike are short-form videos (TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts). During the last few years, short-form video content has gained widespread popularity. Potrel (2022) gives five insights to the appeal of short-form video content in the current climate, including universal

¹ The concept of intermodality is strongly tied with corpora in translation and interpreting literature (see Bernardini, 2016).

accessibility: “there is a sense of universality to short-form content creation and consumption. Many popular creators make videos that don’t require individuals to speak a specific language to understand the video’s visual contents.” The wide array of video customisation tools offered by each platform contributes to breaking geographical barriers and allows communication in one or more languages.

The universality of short-form videos is powered by three main features: verticality, segmentation, and multi-layered visual semiotics. From the beginning of the 2020s, the portrait (vertical) screen format has progressively replaced the traditional landscape (horizontal) format to become the default for mobile video production and consumption (Cheng and Ye, 2020). Large-scale field studies together with experimental studies demonstrated that mobile vertical video ads increase consumer interest and engagement compared to horizontal video ads, as they are more fluently processed. Additionally, younger mobile users (Generation Z) process mobile vertical video ads more fluently than older users from Generations X and Y (Mulier et al., 2021). Furthermore, this type of video applies the segmentation principle, which advocates that the user understands the message more easily due to its short duration (Zhang et al., 2023). About visual semiotics, in a sample of 1,194 short videos from TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts, Navarro-Güere (2024) identified the preponderance of videos with superimposed visual elements divided into several categories: emojis, stickers, subtitles, logos, chyrons, and so on.

Among the major providers of multilingual short-form content, the two biggest Spanish football teams (Real Madrid and FC Barcelona) present one of the most interesting cases for multimodal analysis, with their global economic power as a first reason. In Forbes’s 2024 list of the world’s most valuable football teams, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona topped 1st and 3rd respectively, only contested by Manchester United (Ozanian and Teitelbaum, 2024). This market supremacy is connected to social media leadership. According to the Centre International d’Étude du Sport (CIES) Football Observatory, in June 2023 Real Madrid was the football club with the most followers on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok (362 million in total), ahead of its rival FC Barcelona with 342 million (Poli et al., 2023). In YouTube, however, FC Barcelona takes the leading role, with 17.3 million subscribers against 13.8 million subscribers of Real Madrid at the date of writing (22nd October 2024)². Both Spanish clubs are well ahead of

² In its YouTube account description, FC Barcelona describes itself as the first sports team in the world to reach 15 million subscribers on the platform.

the third team in the list, Liverpool FC, which has 10.1 million followers at the date of writing (7.2 million less than Barcelona and 3.7 million less than Madrid).

Both teams are also complementary in their different paths to communicative success. In the case of Real Madrid, one of the most recent reasons can be found in the cultivation of emotional attachment through digital marketing during the COVID-19 pandemic (Baena, 2023). On the other hand, the communicative processes tied to the (re)production, consumption, and enactment of FC Barcelona reveal an attempt to manage the tensions created by pursuing global aspirations while embodying Catalan nationalism (Kassing, 2021). Like other Spanish clubs, FC Barcelona has successfully explored communication and marketing practices committed to using its infrastructures as places of football brand consumption through tourism and event packages (Ginesta, 2017).

As a more specific reason for this choice, delving into the multilingual, multimodal practices of Real Madrid and FC Barcelona YTS means nourishing the academic production on football translation and interpreting. Alonso Araguás and Zapatero Santos (2019, p. 247) focus on the fact that nowadays several European football teams represent a “multilingual mosaic” with consequences not only regarding the internal communications—which can be solved by using English as a lingua franca or taking language courses, among others—, but also on the need for interpreters of press conferences. This involves infrastructure for interpreting booths, something that wide-ranging teams such as FC Barcelona and Real Madrid do have (Alonso Araguás and Zapatero Santos, 2019). Literature so far includes studies on such interpreting needs (Sandrelli, 2018; Suarez Lovelle, 2024), case studies on language gap perception inside football teams (Sandrelli, 2020), and Twitter/X translation (Baines, 2020), but few can be found on football translation in social media based on audiovisual formats. References on translation and interpreting inside the rising industry of women’s football are also missing, as well as the potential of linguistics and translation to transform gender inequalities in football as a blueprint for other societal domains, which is enhanced by multimodality and social media (Graf and Fleischhacker, 2023).

3. Methodology

The advantages of YTS accessibility for consumers contrasts with the methodological difficulties posed by their complex semiotic structure. The

simultaneous layering of different linguistic inputs (oral speeches, subtitles, copy text, superimposed titles, etc.) hardens the application of consolidated translation methods like corpus collection and annotation, and practically most kinds of automated data collection systems are normally not as advanced as to recognise linguistic and non-linguistic data simultaneously. In the YTS dataset of this article, such difficulties were represented by at least three factors:

- A considerable percentage of input could not be read by YouTube's public automatic transcription system, such as texts in boards and chyrons, or subtitles embedded in the uploaded Short.
- Written language was usually mixed with non-linguistic or hybrid signs, like emojis or hashtags. This was especially true for the copy text accompanying each video, frequently written in a hybrid language close to instant messaging.
- Serious multimodal analysis required annotating all the possible semiotic modes, which included fully non-linguistic elements, like logos or emojis.

The best researcher tools thus become careful phasing, observation, and annotation, described in Sections 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3.

3.1 Dataset

The selected YTS for this study were extracted from the official YouTube channels of the Spanish football teams Real Madrid³ and FC Barcelona.⁴ With the aim of having a broad sample and a temporal logic, it was decided to encompass Real Madrid and FC Barcelona's YTS published on the first full lap of LaLiga, between 11th August 2023 and 4th January 2024 (Malagón, 2023). The videos were hyperlinked in Google Sheets,⁵ and the following general parameters were introduced:

- Date of Short publication as appearing on YouTube.
- Team (Real Madrid or FC Barcelona);
- Men's/women's league.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/@realmadrid/shorts> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/@FCBarcelona/shorts> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

⁵ Final dataset uploaded to Zenodo (<https://zenodo.org/records/14008599>)

3.2 Linguistic annotation

In a first annotation round, the main goal was to detect the use of linguistic resources in each individual YTS. Here, “linguistic” is understood as using one or more of the human conventional codes referred to as “languages,” regardless of the production mode (written or oral). Broadly based on Navarro-Güere (2024), the identified linguistic resources are shown in Table 1:

Category	Semiotic resource	Description	Examples
Linguistic	Audible language	The perceivable oral language in the YTS, adopting different forms (fan songs, anthems, screams, interviews, etc.)	“We love you Barcelona!” (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/piMhBK_GJM0)
	Boards	Written language rendered on sized physical formats or digital formats mimicking the first: papersheets, cardboards, wood tables, etc.	Joao Félix es deixa estimar: “M’encantaria jugar al Barça” (Joao Félix lets the love come in: “I would love to play for Barça”) (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/3eEDT55tCGo)
	Chyrons	A caption in a digital band or box superimposed over the lower, top or side part of a video image. Originally used in TV programs for	LALIGA 2015/2016 vs Villarreal CF (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/tkyz80QqSv4)


		statements or key data related to the discussion topic, they make their presence on social networks to engage users or tell a story (Merriam Webster, 2017)	
	Copy	Accompanying text of an image or video on a social platform (in YTS, placed at the bottom of the video). It is normally introduced at the time of publication and can be edited afterwards	 A Lucas Vázquez header and top of the table! #RealMadrid #LaLigaHighlights (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/LnCNdwWjALw)
	Subtitles	Written text added to audiovisual media to concisely convey spoken messages, aiding in comprehension across languages and viewers with hearing impairments	Hola, Madridistas. Hello Madridistas. (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/XNrioKWRwkM)

Table 1. Linguistic resources in YTS

3.3. Non-linguistic annotation

In the second annotation round, semiotic resources were analysed at a wider scale, observing the non-linguistic or less language-specific communicative techniques by both teams. This procedure was also based on Navarro-Güere (2024) and included the modes or semiotic resources in Table 2:

Category	Semiotic resource	Description	Examples
Non-Linguistic	Emojis	Graphical icons representing words, concepts or attitudes widely employed in popular social media: the “lingua franca of digital age” (Leonardi, 2022: 22)	Receba 🏆 Pedri (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/PHcIfk4OZs4)
	Logos	The crest of each team, printed on the YTS to demarcate the authorship and property of the images	[Real Madrid, logo] (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qFvT6U-zTAI)
	Numbers	Numerical notations are semiotically and causally linked to, but distinct from, both the numeral words of their users’ languages and the writing systems used to encode language visually	Marc Guiu. ❤️❤️ 23 seconds. 1 dream come true. (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/SmybK0N2NaE)

Hybrid	Hashtags	Pound sign (#) followed by one or more letters excluding spaces which normally form a word or a phraseme	👉 ¡VAMOOOOOOS! #elclásico #realmadrid (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/EI_ZKaH4FqI)
	Proper names	Names from any language are signs that often function meaningfully in different ways simultaneously	👉 BELLING⚽⚽⚽L 👉 (https://www.youtube.com/shorts/QDM7sNxIVcM)

Table 2. Non-linguistic and hybrid resources in YTS

The category of hybrid semiotic resources is clarified before the analysis. Hashtags and proper names are labelled as hybrid resources because they both start from linguistic signifiers, but their semiosis reveals more functions or associations than the originally linguistic one. In the case of hashtags, writing one or more words without spaces and a pound sign creates in some digital environments a tag that not only indexes an individual message, but also makes it possible to store and consult the contributions of other people using the same characters. Therefore, clicking on a hashtag creates an interaction between network users which is impossible in traditional language (La Rocca, 2020). Regarding proper names, although they may function primarily as designators, they often express other meanings because of previous contexts of the word, existing associations with the referent, and/or simple prosodic suggestiveness (Smith, 2006). For instance, the name *Bellingham* is etymologically obscure even for English native speakers, but it creates associations for them and several other millions of humans speaking very different languages.⁶ Whereas common nouns provide a symbolic characterisation, proper nouns provide a symbolic identification, in the same manner a handmade sketch would differ from a

⁶ Review the example in Table 2, where the proper name *Bellingham* is associated not only with a Spanish noun, but with integrated emojis. This combination reinforces the sense that the semiosis of the name goes beyond its original Englishness (👉 BELLING⚽⚽⚽L 👉).

photograph (Hoffmann, 1999). This is an argument for a different semiotic behaviour, more flexible and universal than other linguistic units.⁷

4. Analysis

The analysis of the YTS dataset was divided into four subsections, reflecting the complex communicative nature of YTS. As a preamble, a general count is provided in Table 3. After this table, Sections 4.1. and 4.2. comment thoroughly on the linguistic resources employed by FC Barcelona and Real Madrid. Two features were analysed simultaneously: the type of linguistic resource (subtitle, copy, audio track, etc.) and the documented use of languages. Section 4.3. presents the compared data for non-linguistic and hybrid resources in each team (numbers, emojis, logos, proper names, and hashtags). Since linguistic, non-linguistic, and hybrid resources were superseded, the totals in Sections 4.1. to 4.3. do not represent a number of videos but of instances, that is, cases extracted from each video. For example, one video containing an English copy, emojis, proper names, and one team crest yielded a total of four instances, one per each category. This makes Sections 4.1.-4.3. the most fine-grained part of the analysis.

Section 4.4. focuses on translation. It analyses the treatment of subtitles and copies and assigns one of three categories accordingly: translation, non-translation, or a combination of both. The three groups were also linked to the occurrence of non-linguistic or hybrid units, to prove if specific associations can be found. The counts in Section 4.4. are on whole videos rather than instances: its objective is to provide an overview of translation usage in YTS. The categories in Section 4.4. are aligned with the conceptualisation of Stecconi (2009).

	Men's league	Women's league	Both leagues	Total
FC Barcelona	189	1	4	194
Real Madrid	131	4	0	135
				329

Table 3. Dataset overview

⁷ Another fact that supports universal semiosis is the frequent integration of names and hashtags. Hashtags were annotated as such regardless of their composition, but a closer look reveals that they are often formed by proper names in different languages (*#realmadrid*, *#ucl*, *#LaFábrica*, etc.). Names are a preferred resource for indexation, which can be interpreted as a feature of universality.

The dataset overview in Table 3 shows that the analysed teams published a total of 329 YTS during the first lap of LaLiga 2023-2024. Of all videos, 194 were published by FC Barcelona (59%) and 135 by Real Madrid (41%). If we consider that the total number of days in this period is 147, FC Barcelona published an average of 1.3 videos per day, and Real Madrid an average of 0.9. In gender terms, it is noteworthy that the vast majority of YTS from both teams were made up of content from the Spanish men’s league (320, 97%); the women’s league and few mixed content had a marginal representation in the dataset. The relative percentage of women’s content was slightly higher in Real Madrid (4 out of 135, 2.96%) than in Barcelona (5 out of 194, 2.58%).

4.1 Linguistic resources (FC Barcelona)

In FC Barcelona, linguistic resources covered a total of 265 semiotic instances among the 194 YTS (almost 1.4 linguistic instances per video). These were divided into 13 different language combinations, made of up to 10 languages: Basque, Catalan, Dutch, English, French, German, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, and Turkish⁸ (see Table 4). Standalone English was the most represented language (69.8%), followed by standalone Spanish (12.8%) and the English + Spanish combination (4.1%). Standalone Catalan ranked at fourth place (3.4%), followed by further combinations: Catalan + English, Catalan + Spanish, among others. These results indicate that Spanish is not the preferred language of FC Barcelona’s YTS, but neither is Catalan, therefore English is generally adopted as a halfway solution.

	Audible language	Boards	Chyrons	Copy	Subtitles	Total instances (language combinations)
English	9	1	7	152	16	185
Spanish	31	1	0	2	0	34
English + Spanish	4	1	0	5	1	11
Catalan	4	1	1	3	0	9
Portuguese	4	0	0	4	0	8
Catalan +	2	1	1	1	1	6

⁸ Natural languages (excluding Emoji).

English						
Catalan + Spanish	5	0	0	0	0	5
Catalan + English + Spanish	1	0	0	0	1	2
Basque + Catalan + Dutch + German + Polish + Portuguese + Spanish + Turkish	1	0	0	0	0	1
Catalan + English + Portuguese + Spanish	0	1	0	0	0	1
English + Emoji	0	0	0	1	0	1
English + French + German	1	0	0	0	0	1
French	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total instances (resource type)	63	6	9	168	19	TOTAL: 265 (in 194 YTS)

Table 4. FC Barcelona's linguistic resources

The prevailing type of linguistic resource in FC Barcelona were copies (63.4%) and audible language (23.8%). Within the audio tracks, the most heard language was standalone Spanish (31 instances out of 63), beating standalone English (9 out of 63). Catalan + Spanish, which was the third most frequent case of audible language (5 out of 63), outbeat both standalone Catalan and the rest of combinations. Subtitles, which were the third linguistic resource by frequency (7.2%), presented a similar distribution: the use of Catalan subtitles was marginal (2 out of 19) in favour of standalone English (16 out of 19), and Catalan was always subtitled in combination with other languages. These numbers are further proof of the inconsistent use of Catalan in FC Barcelona's YTS.

The use of chyrons (3.4%), where English is also predominant, deserves an illustration. Chyrons encourage greater comprehensibility among followers and

capture their attention. In the selected example (Figure 1), the chyron operated as a headline for a succession of ratings assigned to a player (Ferrán Torres) in his goal-shooting training.⁹ These ratings were expressed with numerated emojis, showing the use of linguistic and non-linguistic elements to convey meaning.

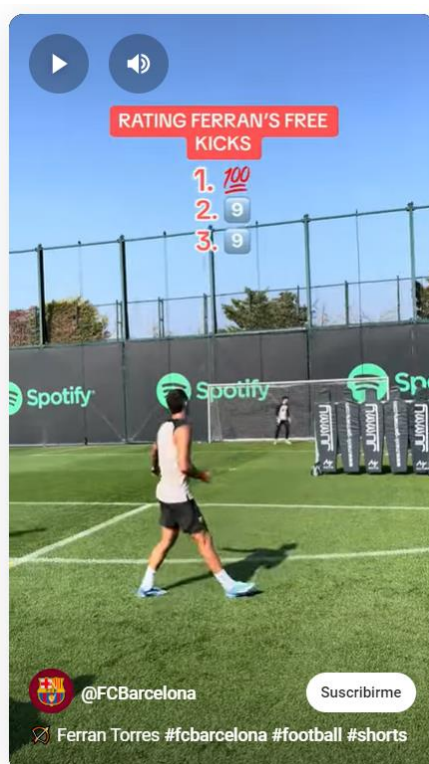


Figure 1. Chyron with emojis and numbers (FC Barcelona). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @FCBarcelona.

Boards were the least used but still documented type of linguistic resource (2.3%). Interestingly, this is the resource where language distribution was more balanced: each of the seven cases spotted presented a different distribution of standalone or mixed languages, with Catalan and Spanish equalling English. In

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/9HTSc1lgExE> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024).

the example shown in Figure 2,¹⁰ the Short did not contain audible language but a row of boards held by the player Pedri as the main meaning-maker element.



Figure 2. Board use (FC Barcelona). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @FCBarcelona.

A final linguistic example for FC Barcelona had only one hit in our dataset, but is of semiotic interest and was replicated in Real Madrid.¹¹ Figure 3 represents a case where an English copy was also composed of an emoji perfectly integrated in the language syntax.¹² The emoji of an animal appeared in place of the abbreviation GOAT (“Greatest Of All Time”) referred to Lionel Messi, making that emoji part of the noun phrase and thus of the sentence. Besides, Spanish was the only audible language in this Short which also displayed translated English subtitles, making the case for multilingualism altogether.

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/4ASrhj-Lj7A> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024).

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/shorts/tBdCLJSig_4 and <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/yXry7wmc6UA> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024).

¹² https://www.youtube.com/shorts/Mip5_CPeG54 (Last accessed: 22/10/2024).



Figure 3. English + Emoji copy (FC Barcelona). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @FCBarcelona.

4.2. Linguistic resources (Real Madrid)

As gathered in Table 5, Real Madrid's dataset presented a subtly higher density of linguistic instances per YTS (199 instances for 135 Shorts, around 1.5 per video). However, the number of linguistic combinations was strikingly lower than FC Barcelona's (five different combinations covering three natural languages plus emoji integration). As in the rival team, standalone English took the lead with 40.2% of the instances (80 out of 199). English + Spanish was more common than in FC Barcelona (30.1%), with standalone Spanish at third place (28.1%). It was surprising to observe that standalone Spanish was less prominent in Real Madrid than Barcelona, regardless of alleged political interests.

	Audible language	Boards	Chyrons	Copy	Subtitles	Total instances (language combinations)
English	11	0	0	67	2	80
English + Spanish	12	0	0	28	20	60
Spanish	46	0	0	9	1	56
English + Emoji	0	0	0	2	0	2
English + French	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total instances (resource type)	69	0	0	107	23	TOTAL: 199 (in 135 Shorts)

Table 5. Real Madrid linguistic resources

Moving to resource types, copies (53.8%) and audible language (34.7%) were again the most frequent cases before subtitling (11.5%). As in FC Barcelona, the vast majority of Madrid videos had their audible language in standalone Spanish (46 out of 69), and the preference for copies in standalone English was also noticeable (67 out of 107).

In contrast to FC Barcelona, no boards or chyrons were observed in Real Madrid YTS. However, there was a more significant presence of subtitles than in the Catalanian team. Double subtitling in English and Spanish was also a distinctive feature when compared to FC Barcelona, which had only one case against the 20 instances in Real Madrid. An example of this phenomenon is shown in Figure 4, a Short from the welcoming of goalkeeper Kepa.¹³ Audible language is Spanish only, and the copy is written in English.

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/shorts/q6pVte_wY74 (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

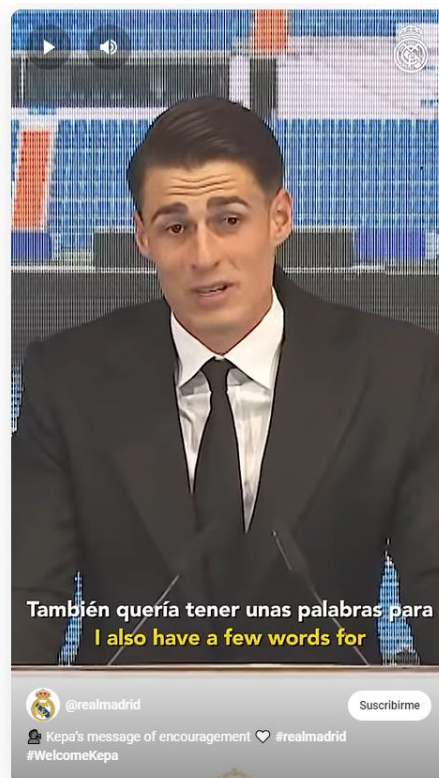


Figure 4. English + Spanish subtitles (Real Madrid). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @realmadrid.

The English + Spanish double writing was also present in Real Madrid copies, probably to boost universality. In the case of bilingual subtitles and copy represented in Figure 5, the emojis around the copy also provided meaning despite initially being non-linguistic elements.¹⁴ The laughing face emoji was placed before the beginning of the sentence, acting as a topic introducer and adding extra information not conveyed linguistically (humorous video). Closing the sequence, the Christmas tree emoji reinforced another topic of the video, functioning as an engaging or phatic element. This is a relevant note because copies also act as video titles in YouTube, visible before clicking and watching each Short. As a matter of fact, in Figure 5 emojis were only placed around the

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/uRyAePhLvE> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

English copy, which could be an extra indicator of universality and/or raw communicative economy.

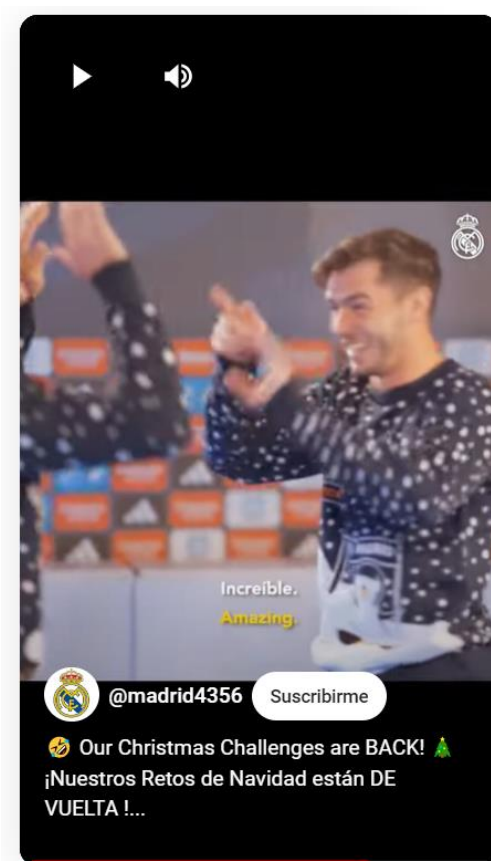


Figure 5. English + Spanish subtitles and copy (Real Madrid). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @madrid4356.

4.3. Non-linguistic and hybrid resources

Figure 6 reveals the use of non-linguistic resources —emojis, logos and numbers—, as well as hybrid resources —hashtags and proper names— in FC Barcelona and Real Madrid YTS. A total of 896 instances were found in the sum of both categories (493 in Barcelona, 433 in Real Madrid). Averagely, this made them more frequent than purely linguistic resources, with 2.5 occurrences per

video in FC Barcelona and 3.2 in Real Madrid. 51.3% of the resources were non-linguistic (460 instances) and 48.7% were hybrid (436 instances).

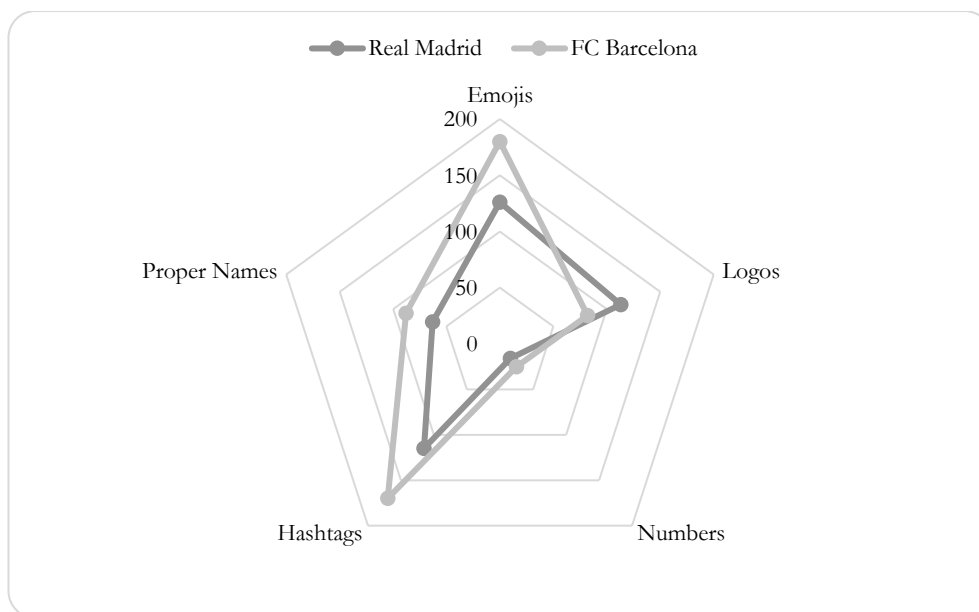


Figure 6. Non-linguistic and hybrid resources (Barcelona and Madrid)

The teams did not differ much in the communicative techniques used —mainly hashtags and emojis—, although they slightly changed their frequency of use. FC Barcelona used more hashtags (170 against 155 from Real Madrid), emojis (180 against 126), and proper names (88 against 23), while Real Madrid only surpassed FC Barcelona in the use of logos (133 against 82 in the Catalanian team). Numbers were the least frequent resource in these categories, although similarly represented: 25 cases in FC Barcelona and 16 in Real Madrid.

4.4. Translations and non-translations

The last study object was the presence of translation and/or non-translation together with non-linguistic and hybrid resources. For this comparison, the number of YTS obtained from both teams was structured in three large modes: Non-Translation (N-T), Translation (T), and Non-Translation + Translation (N-T + T). Figures 7 and 8 provide an overview of the total distributions for each

team. Figures 9 to 11 break down each of the three groups to show the co-occurrence of (non-)translations with non-linguistic or less linguistic resources.

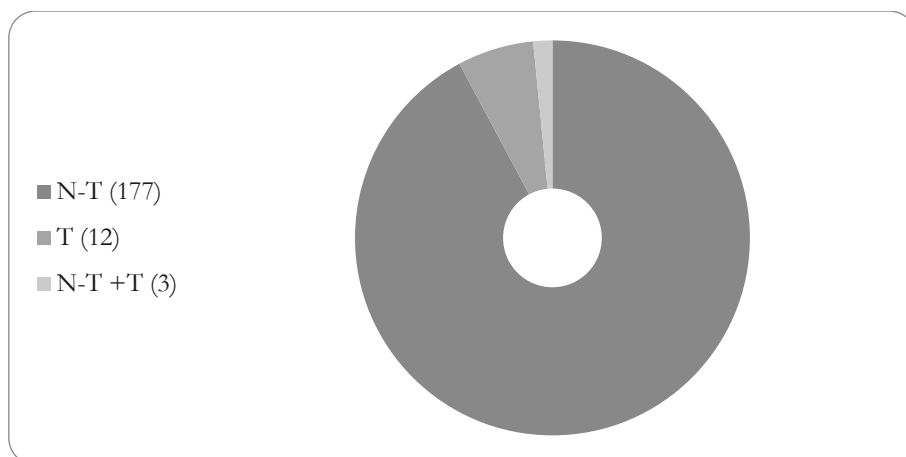


Figure 7. Translations and non-translations in FC Barcelona YTS

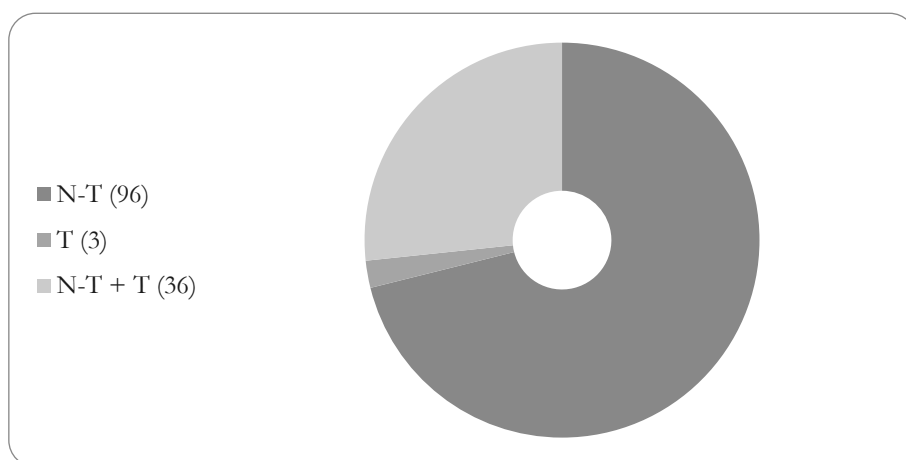


Figure 8. Translations and non-translations in Real Madrid YTS

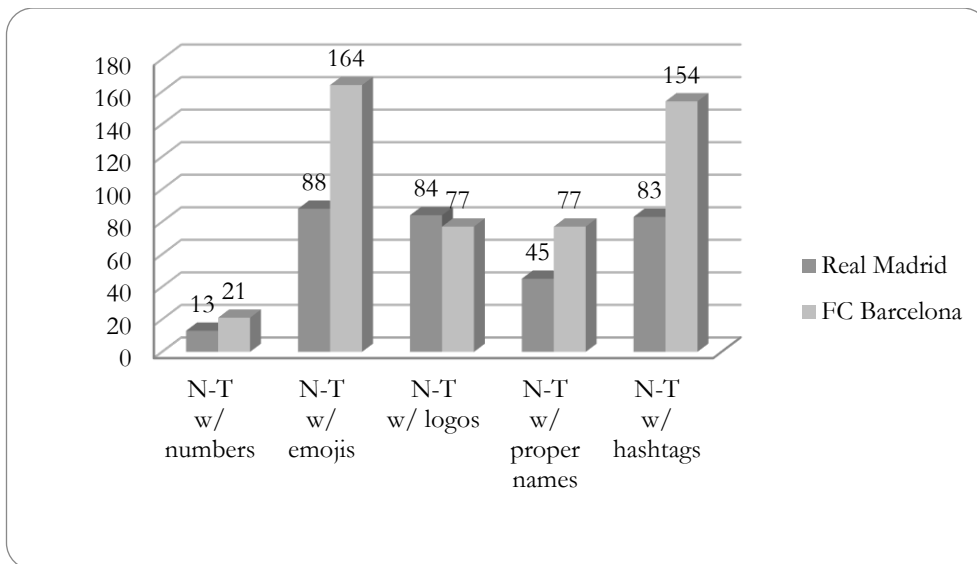


Figure 9. N-T with non-linguistic and hybrid resources

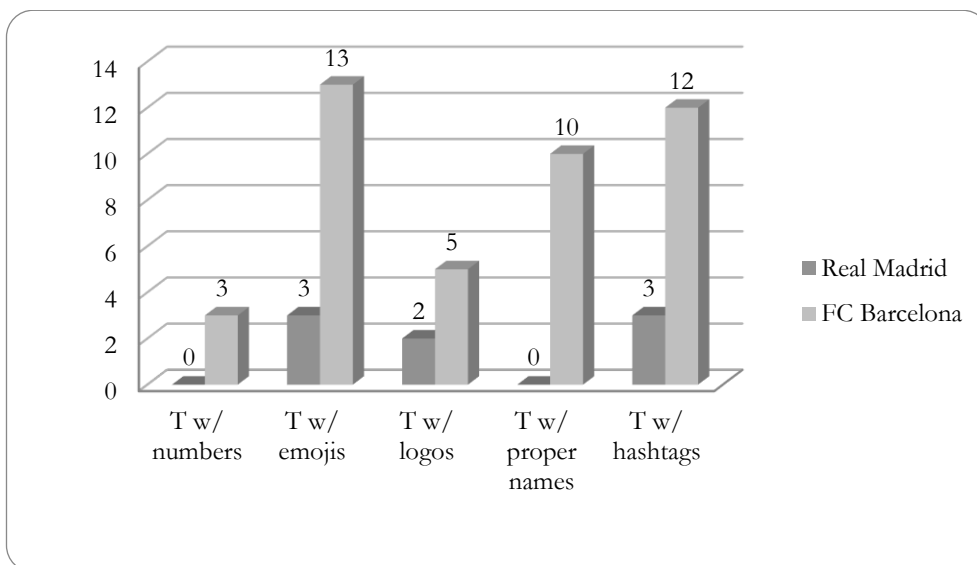


Figure 10. T with non-linguistic and hybrid resources

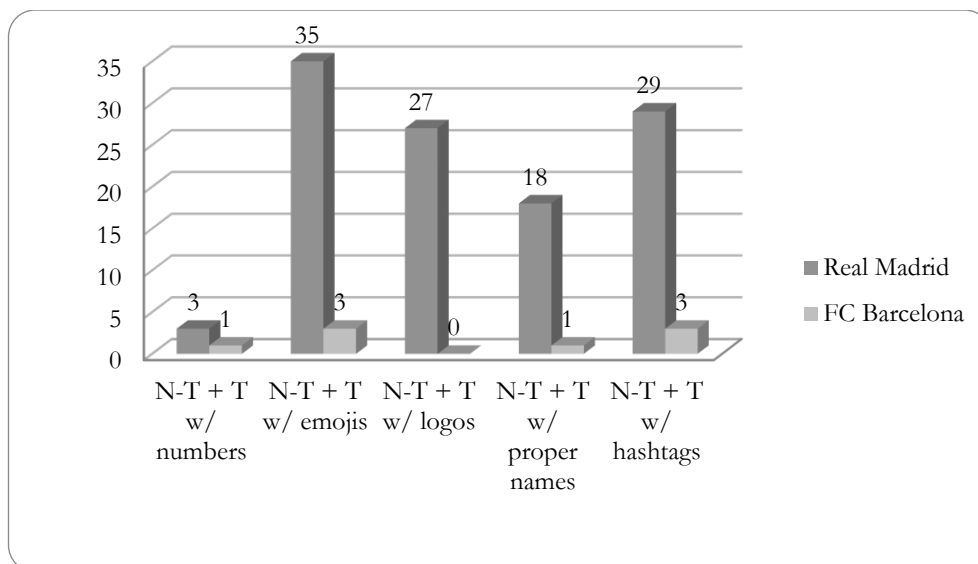


Figure 11. N-T + T with non-linguistic and hybrid resources

As shown in Figures 7 and 8, the total number of YTS with translations amounted to 54 out of 329 (16.4%). Among them, 15 YTS presented standalone translations (4.5%). These were mostly translated subtitles, from English to Spanish,¹⁵ Spanish to English,¹⁶ or other directions like Catalan to English.¹⁷ The other 39 YTS displayed translated and untranslated text simultaneously (11.9%). Although N-T + T was the preferred display among all YTS, Real Madrid was the team providing most cases (36 videos, 26.7% of its dataset), whereas FC Barcelona preferred T (12 videos, 6.2% of its dataset). In relation to Figures 9 to 11 (non-linguistic and hybrid resources), both T and N-T+T preferred appearance with emojis and hashtags. This is in line with the general frequencies presented in Section 4.3.

Some of the most suggestive examples of translation could be found in the N-T + T bilingual copies from both teams. Whereas translated subtitles tended to be more literal or straightforward, multilingual copies presented skilful pieces of idiomatic, creative translation which conveyed emphatic meanings in the small space available, without compromising naturality and attractiveness. In Figure 12, a talented goal by Real Madrid striker Vinicius Jr. made the English

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/zwfKSGiRSLI> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/RSv4v1rDNEc> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

¹⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/YF3rEr0qEgk> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

copywriter feel “speechless.”¹⁸ In absence of an easy equivalent adjective in Spanish, the translator (who may or may not be the same person) opted for a more descriptive solution using the verb phrase *dejar sin palabras a alguien* (lit. “leave someone without words”): *Cómo dejarte sin palabras*, by Vini Jr. The surrounding emojis of an explosion and a banging head are not as linguistically integrated as in Figure 3, but the translator may have leaned on their semiosis to render the Spanish message.



Figure 12. N-T + T copy (Real Madrid). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @realmadrid.

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/gvlzIPhzDik> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

In some copies, the integration of several languages, emojis, and other semiotic resources in the same string of text went as far as to push the boundaries of translation and non-translation, making it difficult to distinguish one from another. In Figure 13, FC Barcelona players and coaches celebrate the qualification to the Champions League knock-outs.¹⁹ The copy used Spanish first (*¡Vamos! Familia*) and then English (“Qualified!”), as well as different emojis and hashtags. It is not easy for an external observer to determine whether the second is a free translation of the first, or if the copy as a whole should be taken as a case of translingual writing. The chosen annotation was non-translation considering the general strategies used by FC Barcelona. There is also the fact that English added information not reflected in the footage or any other element (qualification as the reason for the team’s happiness).



Figure 13. N-T copy (FC Barcelona). Retrieved from the Instagram account of @FCBarcelona.

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/shorts/H9SAeMgK18A> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

5. Results

The results of our quantitative-qualitative analysis of 329 football YTS show that, in the analysed period, this was a form of audiovisual communication preferred by FC Barcelona (1.3 videos per day) over Real Madrid (0.9). Both teams, however, published around one video per day, which is a considerable effort bearing the semiotic complexity of their layout. The still marginal number of women's or genre-mixed content was impressive (3% of the total), even more so in the case of FC Barcelona, whose women's team has broken several world records²⁰. No other gender or LGBTQIA+ references were documented.

Linguistically, the two teams presented sharp differences. They both made extensive use of isolated English as their first language (69.8% FC Barcelona, 40.2% Real Madrid), but, at a second level, FC Barcelona used more standalone Spanish (12.8%) and Real Madrid preferred the English + Spanish combination (30.1%). Contrary to what could be expected, in FC Barcelona standalone Catalan had few hits (3.4%) and was preferred in combination with the other major languages (English and Spanish). Language combination and diversity was another major difference between FC Barcelona and Real Madrid: the Catalan team displayed eight more combinations and seven more natural languages than the team from the Spanish capital, which had a more uniform approach in this sense. It could be argued from the data that FC Barcelona adopts a more multilingual, inclusive take in YTS to directly appeal to a global audience, even when that means to compromise Spanish, or even the identifying use of Catalan seen in other communicative contexts. Although Real Madrid's frequent use of English also shows an effort to create a means of communication linguistically accessible for all, it is more strongly tied to the simultaneous use of Spanish as a strategy to strike a balance with Spain's identity.

The most frequent hybrid and non-linguistic resources in the sum of both teams were hashtags (325 cases) and emojis (306), followed by logos (215), proper names (111), and numbers (41). They were denser than linguistic resources (2.5. per video in FC Barcelona and 3.2. in Real Madrid). Hashtags were especially prevalent, as they appeared in 0.98 of all the videos. The aforementioned use of English is a gate of entrance to the global audience of YTS, and the high number of hashtags seems a sticking glue to retain consumers and build their loyalty. By interacting with hashtags, viewers can access deeper content of their favourite

²⁰ <https://www.fcbarcelona.es/es/futbol/femenino-a/noticias/4027693/el-primer-poquer-de-la-historia> (Last accessed: 22/10/2024)

team, and anchor key words and expressions showcasing the assets of the clubs (#ChampionsLeague, #JoaoFelix, #RMCity, #ElClasico, etc.). Interestingly enough, a wide range of hashtags happened to be proper names too.

Finally, in relation to translation practice, it was present in 16.4% of the YTS, although in different forms. The simultaneous display of original and translation (N-T + T), which is rare in other mainstream communicative products, was the rule in this dataset (11.9%). Standalone translations were scarcer (4.5%), mostly translated subtitles of audio tracks in other languages. Translations, either standalone or paired with their originals, preferred to appear with emojis rather than with hashtags, which speaks of a suitable integration between those icons and language(s). Once again, the eagerness to attract global followers generated noteworthy examples of communicative creativeness with blurred lines between different languages, or between linguistic and non-linguistic codes too.

6. Conclusions

This study aimed at being one of the first to relate translation to YTS, especially in the field of football communication. It developed a method for the communicative study of the highly multi-faceted YTS, which tried to extract all the linguistic and non-linguistic pieces of such complex puzzles and distribute them over the table. The result was a qualitative-quantitative overview of a recent dataset from two of the most followed YouTube accounts worldwide, that is, Real Madrid and FC Barcelona.

The most valuable contribution of this research is probably a methodological structure which can be easily applied to the semiotic study of YTS on completely different topics, but also to other short-form videos (Reels and TikTok), making room for multilingualism. This could represent a differentiating help for translation, linguistics, and communication researchers in a societal context where short-form verticality is increasingly favoured over the traditional screens of TV and cinema, and even over long-format internet videos. At the same time, we are aware that our method can be enriched with further semiotic types and leaves margin for improvement, especially in the division of linguistic, hybrid, and non-linguistic resources. Designing proper names as “hybrid” or emojis as “non-linguistic” was mostly a methodological choice to systematise our work, but practice revealed that such lines may be redrawn. Emojis presented cases of full integration into language and can be generated with combinations of

linguistic and paralinguistic signs, while some researchers may prefer to categorise proper names as wholly linguistic items. A different or refined taxonomy could serve as a first step to unveil a grammar of integrated linguistic and non-linguistic arrangements, with patterns repeating over time.

Translation and interpreting studies are fostered through this study to make transitions to the new short-form paradigm, as these audiovisual products address massive audiences worldwide and require a high degree of understandability regardless of their original language or context. In this sense, our own research could also evolve over time, with future studies looking for finer categories of audiovisual translation (dubbing, voice over, different forms of subtitling, etc.) and clearer trends of language pairs and directions within YouTube Shorts.

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