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Abstract

This study examines conflict talk and ‘othering discourse’ on Instagram involving the 2018 Winter Olympics hosted in Pyeongchang, South Korea. The disqualification of highly anticipated medalists in short track speed skating events elicited heated online arguments between Korean and Chinese sports fans. A content analysis of antagonistic texts featuring anti-Korea and anti-China posts reveals that ‘othering’ practices are predominantly performed by: (1) making reference to seemingly irrelevant details; (2) evoking stereotypical images of a race and/or a nation; and (3) utilizing overtly offensive language or transgressive language. Drawing upon linguistic strategies of encoding us vs. them dichotomies reported in earlier research, this study shows that explicit disparagement, disapproving representation of the other, stereotyping, and overgeneralization are readily utilized by both parties, who also occasionally engage in verbal reconciliation through lexical and syntactic mirroring.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Sports are a significant part of recreation and popular culture and have become important social activities for many who enjoy them as players and spectators. Sports are not just physical activities. Linguistic expressions used in sports have influenced our everyday vocabulary. However, linguistics has not paid much attention to sports with the exception of a few studies (Caldwell, Walsh, Vine, & Jureidini, 2017; Dreyfus & Jones, 2010; Ferguson, 1983; Lavric, Pisek, Skinner, & Stadler, 2008). Caldwell et al. (2017, p. ix) argue that sport should be researched as ‘a significant cultural discourse from a social linguistic perspective’. They assert that the study of sports ‘remains largely overlooked as a site of scholarly analysis’ mainly because ‘it has so often been dismissed as “just sport” and merely “entertainment”’ (Caldwell et al., 2017, p. ix). Ferguson (1983) and Cohen (2001) present linguistically focused analyses, but most research up to now tends to be concerned with professional discourse such as sports casting, generally overlooking spectator/fan discourse. Furthermore, most studies on sports are about football, ignoring less popular sports like speed skating, which is the sport discussed in this paper. Also, earlier studies mostly deal

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with broadcasting or print media, not addressing new modes of communication platforms such as Instagram, which will be covered in this paper. This study investigates heated arguments between Korean and Chinese sports fans on Instagram about short track speed skating events during the Winter Olympics which took place in Pyeongchang, South Korea in 2018. Drawing upon linguistic strategies of encoding us vs. them dichotomies reported in Pandey (2004), that is: (1) overt denigration (O'Barr, 1994; Riggins, 1997); (2) distance markers (Fairclough, 1994); (3) overgeneralizations and stereotypes (Essed, 1997; Karim, 1997; Riggins, 1997); and (4) positive self-representation vs. negative other presentation (Bhabha, 1994; van Dijk, 1993), this paper analyzes posts reacting to daily photo updates on the official 2018 Winter Olympics Instagram.

2 | EARLY RESEARCH ON SPORTS AND LINGUISTICS

Cohen (2001, p. 36) notes that 'a striking feature of the English-language discourse of negotiation and conflict resolution is the employment of sports and games similes' and provides examples such as 'level playing field,' 'play by the rules,' 'fair play,' 'way out in left field,' 'close call,' 'in the home stretch,' 'run with the ball,' and 'hit a home run.'. Ferguson's research (1983) is more structurally oriented than Cohen's (2001, p. 153) since it examines 'register variation' in sports casting by analyzing syntactic features including 'simplification (deletion of copula and sentence initial nominals), inversions, heavy modifiers, result expressions (*for* + noun, *to* + verb), and routines (e.g., giving the 'count').' Regarding the pragmatic and sociolinguistic use of sports-related expressions, Cohen (2001, p. 153) argues that 'using sports vocabulary reflects a profound Anglo-Saxon tendency to perceive and configure all kinds of contests, whether in the social or political arenas, as structured activities, governed by fairness and decency, and conducted within a framework of enforceable laws or rules of the game.' In terms of spectator sports, Dreyfus and Jones' (2010) 'appraisal theory' provides useful insights. They focus on 'how speakers and writers evaluate phenomena' and stress the importance of 'attitude, engagement and graduation' (Dreyfus & Jones, 2010. p. 118). They further argue that 'within attitude there are three subsystems: affect (relating to emotions), judgement (relating to evaluation of people and their behaviour) and appreciation (relating to evaluation of artefacts)' (Dreyfus & Jones, 2010. p. 118).

In sports, the notion of rivalry is essential, particularly in fandom. However, unlike sports marketing studies (Cobbs, Sparks, & Tyler, 2017), research on rivalry narratives and fan discourse is hardly explored in linguistics. Cobbs et al. (2007) discuss animosity expressed by sports fans towards their rivals in professional leagues such as Major League Baseball (MLB), Major League Soccer (MLS), National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL), and National Hockey League (NHL). They discuss 'schadenfreude, disidentification, prejudice, and relationship discrimination against rivals' as variables of animosity and argue that 'the propensity for animosity toward rivals is rooted in humans' neural responses to intergroup competition' (Cobbs et al, 2007, pp. 235, 237). They further assert that 'schadenfreude and rival disidentification encourage animosity and prejudice against rivals because rivals' misfortune is directly related to one's own self-enhancement' (Cobbs et al, 2007, p. 237). Popp, Germelmann, and Jung (2016, p. 352) emphasize Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory to discuss the connection between 'psychological processes and group cohesion.' By focusing on traits of Facebook-based anti-brand communities, Popp

et al. (2016, p. 363) suggest that ‘anti-brand communities may play a dual role, as they not only threaten the opposed sport brands, but also provide helpful information’ and further contend that ‘they also may serve as a means strengthening both rival fan relationships with their favourite team and the opposed team fan relationships with their team.’ Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel (2006, p. 50) argue that anti-brand communities often utilize a ‘doppelgänger brand image,’ referring to ‘a family of disparaging images and meanings about a brand that circulate throughout popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers, anti-brand activists, bloggers, and opinion leaders in the news and entertainment media.’

3 | BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONTROVERSY

Whannel (1992) asserts that national pride can be evoked by sports stars. No sports events more intensely demonstrate the interplay between national pride and star athletes than the Olympics. When South Korea hosted the Winter Olympics in 2018, Korean sports fans’ interest in short track speed skating events was particularly intense as South Korea is often viewed as ‘a short-track speed skating dynamo’ and ‘the world’s top short-track power’ (Harland, 2018). In the 2018 Winter Olympics, speed skating events received so much media attention because the host country (South Korea) was considered as the winning team. Many Korean sports fans had particularly high hopes for short-track events, and this positive outlook is echoed in professional discourse as well. For example, Baek (2018) reports that ‘among a total of 26 gold medals earned by South Korean athletes in the previous Winter Games, 21 medals came from the short track speed skating event. Among a total of eight gold medals in the short track, South Korean skaters have been strong in men and women’s 1,000 m and 1,500 m.’ Among the highly anticipated winners, Choi Min-jeong was at the heart of controversy. Ock (2018) notes that ‘Choi Min-jeong’s quest for an unprecedented gold medal sweep at Pyeongchang 2018 was spoiled at the start on Tuesday, as she was penalized in the women’s 500-meter final.’ She ‘was disqualified for interference after a photo finish with gold medal winner Arianna Fontana of Italy’ and details of the event reveal that ‘Choi, the world record holder in the event, broke away from the pack with four laps to go, crossing ahead of China’s Li Jinyu and Canada’s Kim Boutin who collected her second bronze to go along with the one she grabbed in the 500m (<https://www.pyeongchang2018.com/en/news/second-chance-for-choi-with-day-8-gold>).

Bak (2018) comments on ‘the country’s favorite Choi Min-jeong’s’ disqualification from the women’s 500-meter short track speed skating final ‘for interfering with Canadian skater Kim Boutin, who appeared to have done her share as well in pushing Choi away.’ As noted by Bak, interference was mutual even though Choi was the one disqualified, which provoked Korean fans concerned with unfair judge’s calls.

Controversies surrounding short track events are nothing new to Korean fans because they have drawn intense attention from the media before. Bak (2018) mentions notorious incidents that angered Korean sports fans including Shim Suk-hee’s disqualification controversy at the 2017 Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, Japan and Kim Dong-sung’s disqualification in the 1,500-meter final in Salt Lake City 2002. For Shim’s case, ‘during the 500 meters final, China’s Fan Kexin was seen grabbing Shim’s right knee with her left hand during the final lap. Both skaters were disqualified to everyone’s surprise’ (Bak, 2018). Korean fans were enraged that Shim was disqualified when a Chinese skater interfered

Shim. Chinese fans were infuriated as well because one of their star players was disqualified. Thus, the tension between Korean fans and Chinese fans has a precedence. For Kim's disqualification, his alleged cross-tracking and skating in front of the American skater Apolo Anton Ohno was the reason. As a result, Ohno won the gold. It is widely reported that 'the judges' decision raised a fuss at home and abroad, flooding the US Olympic Committee with so many emails that it shut down its website. The animosity toward Ohno became so heated that the skater and the entire American short track team in 2003 withdrew from a World Cup event held in Korea, citing death threats' (Bak, 2018). These relatively recent incidents, particularly the controversy regarding Kim and Ohno, show that reactions to a questionable judge's decision can be intense. The case to be discussed in the present paper is similar to the previous two cases mentioned above in that it is concerned with the disqualification of a highly anticipated winner and the public's criticism for the judge's evaluation of the event. However, in the present paper, we will focus on fan discourse, particularly antagonistic online discourse.

4 | ONLINE FAN DISCOURSE

Rettberg (2014, p. 14) argues that the main purpose of social media is to 'let everybody share their thoughts and discoveries online.'. In that sense, online is a meaningful sociolinguistic platform where personal thoughts can be instantly and effectively shared in public. Individuals with common interests, including sport fans, use online communities to participate in various activities building and marking fan identity. Phua (2010, p. 201) studied fan identity in four media types (print, broadcast, online, and mobile phones) and found that online media had 'the greatest impact on fan identification and collective self-esteem.' According to Lampe, Wash, Velasquez, and Ozkaya (2010, p. 1928), theories of social identity and organizational commitment can explain a sense of belonging or 'sense of attachment to group and intra-group dynamics that influence a person's behaviors within the group.' (In fan discourse, particularly in sports where competition and rivalry are inevitable, group membership and team affiliation are considerably significant. Fan identity is often affected by the team's overall performance. Phua (2010, p. 193) notes that 'fans' self-esteem varies depending on whether their team is winning or losing, as well as on their identification level with the particular team.' Sports fans can enhance their social identity by being associated with a well-performing team (Phua 2010).

Among the online venues readily available these days, Instagram occupies a powerful position. Citing Elliott (2015), Kim and Hull (2017, p. 216) assert that 'Instagram's per-follower engagement rate (or total number of likes, comments, or shares on a post) is more than ten times greater than Facebook and more than 100 times greater than Twitter.' This study will look at Instagram, which needs attention from sociolinguists considering its significant role in many online users' daily linguistic activities. Regarding sport fan identity, most studies discuss group sports and expert or quasi-expert discourse (see Cox, 2017 for research on sports blogging and the Detroit Red Wings hockey blog *Winging it in Motown*). Instead, this study will consider individually competed sports that are generally seasonally popular (as in short track skating events) and 'regular' participants who neither possess expert knowledge nor demonstrate professional writing skills.

5 | DATA

The 2018 Winter Olympics was hosted in Pyeongchang, Kangwon Province, in South Korea from February 9 through February 25, 2018. A total of 102 events were showcased covering 15 disciplines in seven sports including biathlon, bobsledding, curling, ice hockey, luge, skating, and skiing. Instagram, as a photo and video sharing social network platform, has been effective in featuring images of memorable games and fiercely competing athletes. Thirty-seven pictures on the official Pyeongchang 2018 Instagram were accessed, and Instagram users' posts commenting on the photos and other users' posts were collected, totaling 20,219 words in the data. Most pictures mainly feature sports events, particularly short track speed skating games, but occasionally show images of Korean cuisine as well. Among the posts collected, what was particularly intriguing was competing discourses between two groups of Instagram users regarding some controversial short track speed skating events. The analytic focus in this paper will be on conflict talk between Korean sports fans and Chinese sports fans. The original data contained posts written in Korean, Chinese, and English, but my discussion in this paper will be limited to posts written in English to focus on the theme of this special issue (digital communication and world Englishes). Some noticeable general tendencies will be discussed first followed by specific excerpts and corresponding analyses. For anonymity, participants' login names have been obscured by codes (as in A1, B2, C3, and D4). In parentheses, I provide English transliteration followed by English translation.

6 | DISCUSSION

Most research on the dichotomy between 'us' vs. 'them' tends to be about political discourse and serious print media (Pandey, 2004; Wodak, 2002). However, major frameworks and concepts discussed in earlier research on 'othering discourse' can be aptly applied to any discourse involving competitors, rivals, and opponents, including sports fans. In sport fan discourse, evaluative comments and conflicting narratives are quite common. In particular, competing and comparative discourses such as we vs. you and us vs. them appear frequently. The idea of group membership becomes an integral part of a conversation about us vs. them, the contrast between in-group and out-group. Popp et al. (2016 p. 356) observe that 'members of the online anti-brand community use dimensions in which the in-group is superior to the out-group. They use stereotyping to attribute negative characteristics to the out-group. This raises both the status of anti-brand community members and group cohesion.' They further argue that 'glorifying the in-group and bashing the out-group is common in anti-brand communities' (Popp et al., 2016, p. 357).

Not just explicit othering practices but also mere use of collective pronouns turns out to be effective in evoking positive and negative impressions of the other. Othering discourse is enabled through lexical choices, and pronouns in particular can be effective (Pandey, 2004). Riggins (1997, p. 8) argues that 'expressions that are most revealing of the boundaries separating Self and Other are inclusive and exclusive pronouns and possessives such as we and they, us and them, and ours and theirs.' Similarly, Pandey (2004, p. 162) asserts that pronouns are 'the most overt linguistic markers of alliance and distance.' In a similar vein, Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, M. B., and Tyler (1990, p. 483) argue that 'exposure to words such as us and them may bias the retrieval of evaluatively congruent material from semantic

memory, in an automatic process apparently outside the awareness of the perceiver.’ They further note that ‘positive traits were made more accessible (in relation to negative traits) by in-group-designating words; negative traits seemed to be comparatively more accessible after exposure to an outgroup-designating word’ (Perdue et al., 1990, p. 483). Along with pronouns representing the distinction between self and the opponent, ethnicity and race can become relevant in us vs. them discourse. According to Muller (2008, p. 20), ‘ethnonationalism draws much of its emotive power from the notion that the members of a nation are part of an extended family, ultimately united by ties of blood. It is the subjective belief in the reality of a common “we” that counts.’ Although the present study is not about racism per se, several posts in the data contain racist remarks or statements that can be construed as racist. Fozdar’s (2008, pp. 532–533) research on racism and anti-racism discusses rhetorical devices used to construct liberal and conservative arguments including: (1) presenting one’s position as the reasonable middle ground; (2) exemplification; (3) credentializing; (4) emphasizing the similarity between self and the audience; (5) using personal experience as proof of validity; (6) appealing to the ‘facts’; (7) dichotomizing: identifying two choices as the only options; (8) inversion; (9) deflection; (10) direct criticism of another position or individuals espousing that position; (11) extreme case formulation, overstatement, repetition, emphasis; and (12) delegitimation. This study does not show varied tactics discussed in Fozdar, mainly displaying the strategy of overt criticism for and ‘delegitimation’ of the opponent’s position.

It is noteworthy that an unneglectable number of posts make no direct reference to an event or an object featured in the image posted. Often heated arguments have little to no relevance to the content of an initial message accompanying the photo. According to Harmon and Wilson (2006), ‘red herring’ is one of the frequently used tactics in political discourse to turn attention from the main issue. Although this study does not feature political discourse per se, it seems that antagonistic discourse in general utilizes this rhetorical strategy. For example, some posts in this study comment on physical features of a particular national origin or an ethnic group and tend to feature unflattering discourse stereotyping a specific race when the original post and the picture are about a short-track speed skating event, not about ethnicity. Excerpt 1 is a case in point. Excerpt (1) features an interaction among four participants, which was initiated as an innocent comment on an athlete’s attractiveness and abruptly transformed into an overtly offensive and racially insensitive remark.

(1)

A1: 즐귀ㅋㅋ (cholkwī ㅋㅋ, ‘fucking adorable’)

B1: suck your language u all look and sound the same with those squinty ass eyes

C1: 한마디 한마디가 이쁘네요!! (han mati han matika ippwuneyyo, ‘Every word is a gem!! [in a sarcastic tone])

D1: well YOU all sound the same and look the same cuz you lack melanin in your skin lol catch skin cancer and die you dumbass

B1: dont you dare to threaten me.

A1 passionately expresses his/her admiration for a star athlete. The highly informal and possibly offensive Korean expression 즐귀 (cholkwī), which is composed of two initial letters abbreviated from 즐나게 귀여워 (cholnakye kwiyeowe, ‘fucking adorable’). This expression is

commonly used by young Korean netizens as well SNS users but mostly unknown to older Koreans. The meaning of the unabbreviated 'full version' would be intelligible to most Koreans, but the evaluation of its offensiveness may vary from generation to generation and from person to person, younger Koreans being more receptive and approving than older Koreans. B1, whose original login name is Anglo-Saxon, attacks the Korean language first and then snappishly issues a racial attack commenting specifically on a so-called stereotypical Asian feature ('squinty eyes'). B1's offensive remark is made more objectionable by the addition of the word 'ass.' C1's spurious complimenting feedback on the 'beauty' of B1's statement ('Every word is a gem') is offered as sarcasm pointedly criticizing B1's distasteful word choice. D1 adds a critical comment resembling B1's racially charged remark. Similar to B1 evoking 'Asian stereotypes,' D1 negatively comments on what s/he intends to mean white skin color. What is notable is that the original phrase ('lack melanin in your skin') refers to a skin condition called albinism, not white skin per se, and D1 is sure of B1's race even though the racial information about B1 is never revealed. S/he could easily be non-European American. Oversimplification, overgeneralization, and partial truths are used in this text, which are often summoned as part of linguistic manipulation in political discourse, according to Harmon and Wilson (2006). It is also noteworthy that D1 linguistically mirrors B1 by attacking the language first, then a physical feature but raises the stakes by issuing what is perceived as a 'death threat.' 'Mirroring' in psychology is reported to occur subconsciously when admiration and positive feelings produce similar gestures and linguistic behavior. However, in this context, 'linguistic' mirroring happens to return an ill will as a form of retaliation ('an eye for an eye').

The heated argument between B1 and D1 continues but results in conciliatory attempts in excerpt (2) below.

(2)

D1: remember this is an official account created by the people of OUR country not yours + the majority of the people commenting are koreans that are capable of beating you racist shithhead. Go play with the other racists and run away before you're beheaded in front of everyone

B1: Okay look, calm down i follow this page because i respect the olympics! I would just like to be able to read what they are saying so i know what is going on. If you could please stop and take your hate somewhere else :))

D1: if you respect the olympics then please respect the people of our country and other asians...i'm sorry if i were too emotional but remember to respect other races. we are the ones who are hated for being who we are and if you say such things that hurt us we feel we have to do the same. So watch. your. language. please.

D1's Korean identity is unequivocally emphasized when the distinction between 'OUR' and 'your' is made. Notice that D1's national identity is emphasized in capital letters (OUR country), which makes it visually empowering. National identity is often evoked to highlight the division between us and them (Lee, 2007). In narratively building national identity, the use of collective pronouns becomes critical. De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak (1999, p. 163) argue that the pronoun 'we' is 'of utmost importance in the discourse about nation and national identities.' D1's 'fellow' Koreans are portrayed powerfully through a violent behavior such as 'beating,' and their aggressive act is contrasted with the opponent's

passive behavior such as 'run away' and 'beheaded.' D1 also stresses the official status of the discourse space, which B1 concurs. B1's explanation reveals that his/her initial frustration had to do with B1's inability to understand Korean posts. B1's reconciliatory tone is initiated by a smiley face (:)), but D1 continues to engage in the we vs. you discourse. It is interesting that D1 demands respect for Koreans as well as 'other asians,' which are categorically viewed as 'us.' Also, it is worth mentioning that D1 uses a period, which is normally placed at the end of a sentence to mark the closure of a statement or turn. To enhance the seriousness of his/her warning, a total four periods are used by D1, one after each word, to index enunciation of each word.

Verbal reconciliation is occasionally attempted between the two opposing groups in this study. Bonelli (2015, p. 164) notes that mitigation in conflict talk can be performed in various dimensions of interaction, for example, 'prosodically (e.g., quieter tone of voice, less emphatic intonations), morpho-syntactically (e.g., impersonal and passive constructions), lexically (e.g., parentheticals, diminutives, modal adverbs aimed at expressing a minor degree of epistemic confidence), and on the conversational level (e.g., topic shifts, digressions).' Unlike mitigation in face-to-face conflict talk, mitigation in online conflict talk in this study relies heavily on what I term 'lexical and syntactic mirroring.' Sporadically a reconciliation gesture is offered in the form of an apology, and the opponent reciprocates an apology. Similar to verbal attacks, verbal reconciliation is also performed through the duplication of the opponent's turn, copying the previous turn verbatim and making the same lexical choices, or an enhanced rhetorical move featuring self-criticism and appreciation for the opponent's conciliatory gesture. For example, 'Excuse my words' was reciprocated by the verbatim duplication followed by an expression of gratitude, a self-reflecting evaluation, and a request for condonation as illustrated in excerpt (3).

(3)

B1: Okay, and I do respect you and your country but, i do not respect some hurtful words said to me. Please excuse my words and lets move on :)

D1: thank you so much. i was too harsh on you. excuse my words.

B1: Thank you. 🙏 🙏

B1: i was harsh also, please forgive me.

B1 attempts to reconcile by expressing respect first and then discontent for disrespectful language used by D1. B1's turn ends in an apology followed by a suggestion for moving forward. D1 reciprocates B1's conciliatory gesture by expressing gratitude first and then a critical evaluation of self-behavior and an almost verbatim replica of B1's apology ('excuse me') without the polite addition to a request 'please.' However, D1's admission of his/her own misconduct is not offered as a pure apology because 'too' indicates that B1 initiated an insult and D1 simply reacted. In reply, B1 expresses gratitude followed by an emoticon representing a person politely putting hands together and bowing. B1 admits his/her 'guilt' and asks for forgiveness in the immediately subsequent turn, which is no longer countered by D1.

In discussing linguistic devices encoding us vs. them discourse, Pandey (2004) focuses on: (1) overt denigration; (2) distance markers: voice and speaking space; (3) declaratives constructing semantic overgeneralizations and stereotypes; (4) linguistic contrasts and qualifications emphasizing positive self-representation vs. negative other presentation; and

(5) passive voice and other syntactic strategies mitigating and disguising othering practice (p. 161). This study, however, reveals that ‘overt denigration’ and ‘overgeneralization and stereotypes’ are most predominantly used in encoding us vs. them discourse. Overgeneralization and stereotypes are especially employed to accentuate collective national identities.

Not all interactions are resolved as amicably as excerpt 3. Offensive language is commonly found in online posts in this study. According to several scholars (Anderson, Yeo, Brossard, Scheufele, & Xeno, 2018; Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Lee & Pang, 2014), incivility in online communication is frequently triggered by the limited use of nonverbal cues, physical separation between interlocutors, and guaranteed anonymity. Anderson et al.’s (2018, p. 164) study argues that incivility can heighten more polarity. When verbal assault occurs, it is often retaliated by similar transgressive language either by copying the offender’s language verbatim, reduplicating exactly what was said or by issuing a partial duplication of the opponent’s confrontational remark. Hopkinson (2013, p. 7) argues that ‘online anonymity appears to lower participants’ inhibitions’ and as a consequence intensifies antagonism. Expressing condemnation using explicit insults is a common tactic in othering practice (Culpeper, 1996; Pandey, 2004). Pandey (2004, p; 164) lists epithets like ‘damn women’s suffrage movement’ and diminutives such as ‘sick little head’ as examples. Excerpt (4) below contains discourse about nationalized identities as well as offensive language.

(4)

A2: What foolish Chinese can do : endless jealousy of Korea HAHAHA

A2: 김태윤선수 감짝메달 감사합니다 수고하셨습니다 ♥♥ (Kim Tae Yoo senswu kkamccak medal kamsahapnita swukohasyosseyo, ‘Thank you for your surprising medal, Kim Tae Yoon. Job well done ♥♥’)

B2: Eat yo kimchee

B2: Shut the fuck up you dumbass Chosenjin

A2: Chinese who can only be jealous of Korea T T

B2: Chinese team is going Eliot Ness

Conflict talk in excerpt (4) is framed collectively and nationally (‘Chinese’ vs. ‘Korea’) revealing nationalistic discourse. A2 starts with an insult to Chinese by pointing out how ridiculous they are and how resentful they may feel towards Korea. The charged discourse in A2’s first turn is in sharp contrast with A2’s gentle and polite thank you not celebrating Kim Tae Yoon’s unexpectedly earned medal, which is written in Korean accompanied by double heart signs. B2 also issues a verbal attack by insulting a quintessential Korean dish first (‘kimchee’) and then fortifies the offensiveness of his/her insult by using overt transgressive language. B2 reciprocates A2’s ‘foolish’ with ‘dumbass’ and adds the notorious ethnic epithet ‘Chosenjin,’ which used to be used by Japanese to show contempt for Koreans during the colonial period (1909–1945). B2’s ethnicity is not known, but it is not a farfetched assumption that B2 is Chinese since his/her support for the Chinese team is unequivocally expressed in the last line. By evoking a legendary law enforcement figure who apprehended infamous criminals in Chicago, B2 predicts the final victory for the Chinese team and alludes that the Korean team is not ethical and therefore needs to be brought down. In response to B2’s insult, A2 repeats his/her first line of defense, indicating Chinese are bitter about Korea’s excellent performance in the Winter Olympics and expresses how

pathetic and sad the situation is. It is notable that A2's disapproval of B2 is enhanced through the use of an emoticon representing a crying face (T T), which has been popularized by a well-known Korean girl group's song title.

The most commonly noted, simplistic rhetorical tactic distinguishing us from them is the repeated contrast between 'the good' (us) and 'the bad' (them). Wodak's (2002, p. 159) idea of 'positive self-portrayal through devaluation and defamation of the opponent's viewpoint' is often mentioned as a typical strategy utilized in othering discourse. What occurs most frequently in the data is not a positive self-portrayal but 'defamation of the opponent's viewpoint.' Okta's (2001) discussion on strategies of constructing discourse of otherness focuses on specific ways in which the contrast between us and them is augmented. Okta (2001, p. 319) focuses on the following strategies: (1) express/emphasize information that is positive about us; (2) express/emphasize information that is negative about them; (3) suppress/de-emphasize information that is positive about them; (4) suppress/de-emphasize information that is negative about us). Similarly, van Dijk's (1998) discussion on decoding ideologically polarized discourse about us vs them suggests rhetorical moves analogous to Okar's (2001). For example, emphasizing positive properties/actions about us is contrasted with emphasizing negative properties/actions about them, which is further bolstered by mitigating negative properties/actions about us and mitigating positive properties/actions about them, which is empirically shown in Lee's (2007) analysis of newspaper articles about North Korea and South Korea. However, most antagonistic excerpts in this study tend to focus exclusively on emphasizing negative information about the opponent. Expressing positive information about us is rarely found. In short, online conflict talk in this study is rather single dimensional. A clear example of this is vividly illustrated in excerpt (5) below. The argument between A2 and B2 continues, but they both negatively comment on the other's behavior only, not addressing any positive traits of themselves and/or a nation they are supposedly defending.

(5)

A2: hahaha Chinese who can only be jealous of Korea

B2: Where does yo confidence come from?Oh,i got it!The ref!! lmao

B2: Sorry bitch,i am only jealous of the authentic winners not someone who relies on the ref hahaha

B2: I hate those dumbass Buckethead☺

A2: Of course China is committing a penalty and it shouldn't rely on judgment.
PUHAHAHA

A2: I feel sorry for the Chinese. There is only one gold medal. The referee shot straight.

A2's insult consists of 'hahaha' representing a mocking laugh and a verbatim replica of the previous turn. B2 responds by pointing out that Korea's confidence is groundless and not earned fairly because B2 believes that an unfair and biased judge's decision led to Korea's luck. B2's insulting laugh is dramatized in a well-known CMC acronym 'lmao,' which is contracted from the expression 'laughing my ass off.' B2 uses an offensive term insulting a female without knowing the gender of A2, which can be even more hateful if it is used towards males. B2's attack continues in three consecutive turns and ends in distasteful swearing ('dumbass Buckhead') accompanied by a mocking smile. A2 attacks by insinuating Chinese athletes' repeated foul plays and pointing out how dismissive they are of judge's

calls. A2's contempt is phonologically dramatized through an exaggerated burst of laughter, represented by aspirated 'PU' before 'hahaha,' which is arguably intended as an upgraded version of B2's 'hahaha.' It is also noteworthy that even the 'hahaha' part is embellished through capitalization.

Excerpt (6) below shows another conflict talk featuring nationalistic discourse and offensive language.

- (6)
- A3: Do you think this is your place to express your anger? Shame on you.
- B3: Who say i can't?
- B3: You US puppy
- B3: KR gov sucks us's Jimmy all the time
- B3: Up to you but it ain't change nothing tho
- A3: okay I'm done. have a nice day I don't wanna fight you 😊
- C3: KR👎KR👎 you mother fuck, me! Korea so dirty!

When a hostile post is criticized, the poster attacks the nation, not the individual, even though the other person's nationality is unknown based on what is posted. B3's linguistic behavior is reproved by A3, which causes B3 to assume that A3 is Korean. B3's attack is not directed individually at A3; B3 demeans Korea by labeling it 'us puppy.' It is worth noting that the United States of America is linguistically represented in a 'smaller' scale ('us not US'). B3 claims that Korea is America's 'puppy' implying that Korea follows the US's orders. B3's immediately subsequent message becomes increasingly concrete and offensive; not you but 'KR gov' is used, and not US but 'us's Jimmy' is used. By using a euphemized yet vulgar expression such as 'sucks us's Jimmy,' B3 launches another attack on Korea insinuating that it is subservient to the US and it tries to please the US. Korea and the US are written in small caps, which seems intentional. It cannot be argued to be a mere influence from CMC because B3 consistently capitalizes all first letters sentence initially with the exception of this one instance. When A3 decides to make the interaction civil by explicitly expressing that s/he has no desire to continue disparaging verbal exchanges with B3 anymore, another participant C3, who has been quiet so far suddenly issues a strong defamatory remark involving an emoticon indexing feces to possibly replace the word 'shit.' C3's antagonistic message exceeds the tastelessness of B3's initial verbal attack.

The official 2018 Winter Olympics Instagram account mainly lists sports event-related photos and posts, but occasionally pictures and messages about Korean cuisine appear as well. Anti-Korea rhetoric sometimes appears in the form of food critique as revealed in excerpt (7) below. Ostensibly, excerpt (7) appears to be an interesting but unrelated sequence of narratives but the disparaging spirit remains constant throughout. Disagreement about kimchi between A4 and B4 suddenly turns into a critical comment on foul plays by Chinese skaters. Five participants engage in this interaction; four of them offer positive comments on kimchi. Based on texts posted by D4 and E4 featuring contemporary Korean expressions in Korean script, we may assume that they are Korean or at least Korean speakers. A4 claims that arguably the most famous Korean food kimchi ('fermented cabbage') is a threat to health and groundlessly implies that eating kimchi affects one's mental state. A4 mentions 'medical research' as scientific evidence to alert the risk of eating

kimchi yet provides no evidence to make a leap from physical health ('cancer') to mental health ('mental damaged').

(7)

A4: modern medical research indicates that kimchi is a threat of causing cancer, and that's why this country exists so many mental damaged people

B4: I really want to see that MODERN MEDICAL RESEARCH you said. 😊😊 At least, I read a lot of articles that find dust is a threat of causing cancer...

C4: 😊😊kimchi!!! I love it so much!!!!!!!

D4: 맛있는 😊 (masissnun, 'tasty')

E4: 마싯쩍 😊 (masisceng, 'delicious')

B4: what's your problem? China should stop cheating during the play. It's not even first time you guys were caught cheating. And please stop copying "mental damaged people's" TV show and k-pop songs lol

B4: Even if Fan Kexin didn't get penalty he wouldn't get gold medal. That's the fact. Even Korean player got penalty too. But why people say it's unfair??Just don't cheat then!! I don't even know why Chinese people are everywhere to leave a shit comments.

Excerpt (7) shows the tendency of presenting widely-held, partially valid statements as absolute truths. Although concrete sources are not identified, both participants, A4 and B4, rely on expert discourse to put forward their positions; A4 cites 'modern medical research' to warn the danger of spicy food causing (gastric) cancer, whereas B4 incorporates 'a lot of articles' (newspaper) to heed the risk of fine dust, which is incorrectly spelled as 'find dust' causing (lung) cancer. Even though 'Gastric Cancer Epidemiology in Korea' has been reported (Kim, & Park, 2011), 'Helicobacter pylori infection and cigarette smoking are well-established risk factors' along with 'dietary factors, such as salted foods, fresh vegetables and fruits, soy foods, and processed or grilled meats' (Shin et al., 2011, p. 135). Any of these risk factors could have been mentioned, but A4 customizes his/her attack on Korea by selecting a food item undeniably representative of Korea. Similarly, B4 zeroes in on fine dust, which is often believed to come originally from China and causes pollution in Korea. According to Lee (2019), Koreans 'were taught in geography class at middle school that strong spring winds from the west sometimes carried a lot of yellow dust arising from the arid Gobi desert in Mongolia and China to the skies over our peninsula' when other factors such as 'the exhaust fumes from vehicles or the heavy traffic and industries' exist and cause lung cancer. Both parties recruit convenient truths to strengthen their points of contention. Fozdar (2008, p. 533) notes that claiming special knowledge and explicit use of factual detail are mentioned as devices for making liberal arguments.

Stereotyping is also a common strategy used in othering practice. Riggins (1997, p. 9) argues that 'through stereotypes, the self expresses ambivalence toward others.'. Pandey (2004, p. 167) also notes that writing 'short declarative statements' generalizing about a group is a syntactic strategy of constructing stereotypes. Excerpt (7) is a case in point. B4's second turn highlights the issue of China's infringement of intellectual properties through piracy as reported in the media (Rapoza, 2012). B4 also problematizes its impact on Korean pop culture products including music and dramas, which are reported to have created 'a craze in China' boasting '1 billion' to '2 billion 680 million' views on Iqiyi, which is a 'well-known video network platform' (Wei, 2016, p. 21). B4 shifts the focus from debate on

kimchi to 'cheating' done by Chinese athletes to pirating Korean pop culture products. Even though B4's transition from one topic to another appears rather unnatural and contrived, the main accusation remains consistent ('cheating'), which is intended to refer to unethical and dishonorable acts in general. B4's last turn delves into a specific violation committed by a Chinese short track star. It is worth mentioning that B4's statement makes a historical reference to a disqualification controversy surrounding Korea's Shim Suk-hee and China's Fan Kexin in the 2017 Asian Winter Games in Sapporo, Japan, not the 2018 Winter Olympics. According to Bak (2018), Fan 'was seen grabbing Shim's right knee with her left hand during the final lap. Both skaters were disqualified to everyone's surprise' (Bak, 2018). Many Koreans thought that it was an unfair decision for Shim because Fan was the one who was at fault. B4's attack in the last line features a discourse exaggerating an 'omnipresent' ('everywhere') nature of unpleasant messages ('leave a shit comments') written supposedly by Chinese Instagram users.

7 | CONCLUSION

Online conflict talk regarding controversies surrounding short track events in the 2018 Winter Olympics shows clear dichotomies between us and them. Othering practice in this study tends to rely on nationalism and essentialism, summoning caricature-like portrayals of the other. Texts about anti-Korea and anti-China are prevalent in the data; they frequently utilize offensive language including ethnophobias highlighting 'perceived' identifiable stereotypical features of a race and/or a nation. What is also intriguing is the liberal use of red herring tactics making reference to outwardly unrelated ideas and topics, enabling, for example, a discourse about athletic performance to morph into a heated debate about food or vice versa. In successfully promoting their own positions in the debate, many participants in this study do not seem to value logical discussion of the subject at hand as importantly as enumeration of all thinkable negative attributes of the other; regardless of how irrational and disjointed they may appear, intense verbal attacks seem to regularly occur in online conflict talk. Among the rhetorical devices constructing otherness reported in previous research, Instagram participants in this study utilize explicit defamation most frequently, failing to show the wide range and varied dimensions of antagonistic discourse and showing a rather unitary approach to verbal confrontation. The findings of the study indicate that linguistic strategies of encoding us vs. them dichotomies are pointedly executed through the means of explicit disparagement, disapproving representation of the other, and stereotypical overgeneralizations, which are occasionally conciliated through lexical and syntactic mirroring.

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