

“YOU WERE REALLY GOOD FOR FIRST TIME IN ENGLISH”: RACIOLINGUISTIC DISCOURSE, ACCOMMODATION, AND GATEKEEPING SURROUNDING HARNARAYAN SINGH’S ENGLISH CANADIAN NHL BROADCASTS*

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1. Introduction

This paper touches on multiculturalism and hockey, which have been labeled as two of the most emblematic elements of Canadian identity (Szto, 2016). However, they rarely intersect with one another. While Canada is a multicultural society, its racial and ethnic diversity is not reflected in the National Hockey League (NHL), where 97% of the players are White (Associated Press USA Today, 2018). Previous research has explored the economic factors leading to this discrepancy (i.e., the high costs of participation in hockey being a barrier for immigrants and ethnic minorities (Fitz-Gerald, 2019) as well as social factors. Pointedly, there seems to be a culture of racism in hockey, one example being former ice hockey commentator Don Cherry: not only did Cherry make racist comments on-air in 2019 on “Coach’s Corner”, but even though Sportsnet fired him for this, many hockey fans (and Sportsnet viewers) disagreed with his removal (O’Neil, 2019). More recently, Ethan Bear, an Indigenous player for the Edmonton Oilers, received racist comments after his team was eliminated from the 2021 playoffs, prompting the Oilers and the NHL to make public statements addressing the racism (NHL, 2021).

However, on January 13th, 2021, Harnarayan Singh became the first Sikh person to call play-by-play (PxP)¹ in English on a national NHL broadcast, a role traditionally held by White men. On that day, Singh called a game between the Vancouver Canucks and the Edmonton Oilers on Sportsnet. He also called the January 16th game on Hockey Night in Canada (HNIC). Before his English broadcasts, Singh had been a sportscaster on HNIC Punjabi since 2008. There, he became known for his enthusiastic calls.²

Singh was born in Brook, Alberta, Canada, and speaks English as a first language (Deziel, 2016), but as we will discuss in this paper, this does not preclude him from being racialized and linguistically profiled by viewers.

*We would like to thank Professor Philipp Angermeyer for his helpful insights, members of the CLA for their reviews and feedback, and our graduate student colleagues at York University for acting as a supportive sounding board.

¹ Play-by-play is a relay of the immediate action on the ice, functioning as an oral narration of the events of the game as they happen.

² See, for example, Singh’s viral “Bonino” call from 2016: <https://youtu.be/4RBtw01TZfo>

Sportscasting, and more specifically hockey PxP, is a register with recognizable linguistic characteristics. Therefore, NHL broadcast viewers have expectations of what an announcer will sound like. As Ferguson (1983) notes, perhaps the biggest linguistic clue that someone is a sportscaster is their prosodic pattern (tempo, rhythm—calls need to be made quickly *as they are happening* on the ice—loudness, and intonation). Viewers do not expect a sportscaster to be monotone and solemn; they expect energy, enthusiasm, and lots of confidence. This has to do with *enregisterment*, a term Agha (2005) uses to describe when distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users.

It is important to note here that Singh's English PxP audience members did not just have expectations about what he was going to sound like as a *hockey sportscaster*, but they also had expectations about what he was going to sound like as a *Sikh, Indian man*. This is because of *raciolinguistic enregisterment*, which refers to an ideological repetition of particular linguistic forms that correspond to racial categories, such that, as Rosa (2018) discusses, racialized people come to “look like a language and sound like a race”. Studies in raciolinguistics also look at the real-world consequences that arise when expectations of what people of certain races and ethnicities are going to sound like when they speak are not challenged.

Race/ethnicity—specifically, being a person of colour—affect how one is perceived, both in and outside of the broadcasting booth. Mastro et al (2012) found that sportscasters whose race was the same as most of the players of the sport they were commenting on were generally perceived more favourably by viewers than sportscasters who looked different from the players they were commenting on. Importantly for this paper, Mastro et al (2012) found that White male hockey sportscasters were rated more favorably in terms of experience and character than sportscasters of colour. Meanwhile, other research on language and race has repeatedly shown that one's race can affect how one's speech is perceived which can then impact how one's character or abilities are perceived. For example, non-White speakers have been subject to negative perceptions as English instructors (Ramjattan, 2019), English speakers (Rubin, 1992; Rosa, 2018), renters (Baugh, 2003), and credible witnesses in court (Rickford & King, 2016).

As Davis and Krawczyk (2010) note, “networks need to keep in mind the desires of their audience members when choosing which sportscasters to hire” (p. 18). In this sense, sportscast viewers act as gatekeepers, potentially informing broadcasting corporations about who they would prefer to see in these roles. If viewers do not like a particular sportscaster or think they are not qualified (because of the way they sound or look), then the sportscaster's job is on the line.

2. Research questions and methodology

This paper investigates the reception of, i.e., the public discourse surrounding, Singh's English broadcast. Specifically, we were interested in determining what viewers were commenting on, whether this included comments about Singh's language use or linguistic style, and whether the discourse was guided by raciolinguistic ideologies. With regards to

gatekeeping, we attempted to answer Sax's (2013) question as to whether "the wider hockey-watching public is ready to embrace a commentator with a beard and a turban?"

To answer these questions, we looked at responses to Singh's debut broadcast on Twitter. Following Szto's (2018) study where she looked at the same type of discourse on Twitter when HNIC Punjabi premiered, our study qualitatively examined five main tweets (MT) that explicitly called attention to Singh's English broadcasts between January 13 and 17, 2021: one by the NHL, Sportsnet, HNIC, each and two by Singh himself, shown below:

Table 1. Main tweets

Source	Main tweet
@NHL	YAMAMOTOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO. We're absolutely loving @IceSinghHNIC up in the booth! #NHLFaceOff : https://bit.ly/39yXdYv @Sportsnet : http://NHL.tv
@Sportsnet	"Nils Hoglander! It's time to hand out the sweets!" What a call. 🧡 Congratulations on your English play-by-play debut, @IceSinghHNIC! #NHLonSN #ItsOn
@hockeynight	Harnarayan Singh made his English play-by-play debut on Sportsnet during the Canucks and Oilers season opener on Wednesday Singh has called games for Hockey Night in Punjabi since 2008 (via @PunjabiHKYGirl + @HkyNightPunjabi)
@IceSinghHNIC	Began the week saying to @TonyBrarOTV, wouldn't it be unbelievable if we ended up doing a game together?! And wouldn't you know it! @hockeynight on Saturday & here we are! PS - @LouDeBrusk said he almost wore a maroon suit as well! LOL #HistoricNight on #hockeynight @Sportnet
@IceSinghHNIC	What a night that was! After calling 700 plus games for @HkyNightPunjabi, I did PxP for @sportsnet in English on opening night of the 21' @nhl season. I wouldn't be here without the support of so many 🙏 It wasn't perfect but I look fwd to putting in the work for the game I love!

We looked at the replies to the MTs, the retweets with comments to the MTs, and the replies to those, for a total of 494 tweets. Like Szto (2018), we chose to look at Twitter responses to Singh's broadcasts because Twitter provides uncensored, real-time data, which would have been difficult to elicit otherwise.

The data were first coded for their relevance to Singh and his broadcast and excluded irrelevant tweets. We were then left with 398 tweets, which we grouped into *positive*, *negative*, *neutral*, *ambiguous*, and *ambivalent* evaluations of Singh and his broadcast. The distribution of the tweets across the categories is shown in Table 2. *Positive* and *negative* tweets referred to approving and unfavorable evaluations of Singh's broadcast, respectively. *Neutral* tweets took no clear evaluative position of the broadcast. Tweets labelled *ambiguous* were those which could be interpreted both as positive and negative. Finally, comments that contain both positive and negative evaluation (e.g., began with a

positive tone but shifted to include criticism (constructive or otherwise)) were coded as *ambivalent*. The tweets were independently coded by both authors to ensure inter-rater reliability. The authors discussed any tweets whose categorization was not agreed upon.

Table 2. Distribution of tweets across the evaluative categories

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Ambiguous	Ambivalent	Total
Relevant	332	6	29	6	25	398
	83.4%	1.5%	7.3%	1.5%	6.3%	100%

As Table 2 shows, the majority of the tweets were positive. Only about 7% were negative, 6% were ambivalent, 1.5 % were neutral, and 1.5% were ambiguous. However, beyond these evaluations, we were interested in *what* was being evaluated and *how* the evaluations were discursively constructed, which is discussed below.

3. Analysis and findings

3.1 Unelaborated tweets

Almost half of the total tweets (n=187/398 or 48%) were brief comments like “good job!” or “congratulations!”, as shown below:

- (1) Congratulations!!
- (2) Good job!
- (3) Well done!

Although these tweets were overwhelmingly positive (93%), signaling an overall positive evaluation and alignment with Singh and his broadcasting, they do not comment on specific aspects or qualities of Singh or his English PxP calling. As such, they provide little to comment on in our investigation into *what* viewers are evaluating.

3.2 Comments on representation

There was a pattern of tweets that explicitly called attention to Singh’s race. Much of these commented on Singh’s representation for the South Asian community and the impact he is having on the hockey community, for example:

- (4) What great **representation for all the little brown kids who love hockey!** ❤️❤️❤️
- (5) Congratulations to @IceSinghHNIC for an outstanding job this evening on @Sportsnet .Sometimes you have to see it to be it, and I know that tonight **you’ve inspired hundreds** of young Canadians across the country to reach for their dreams. **RepresentationMatters**
- (6) He def popped off. **Always love it when a Sikh makes it somewhere where it’s usually dominated by the Caucasians**, like Jujhar Khaira getting on the oilers. **Makes me feel proud to be Sikh** (not that I already wasnt)

(7) **Brown Community Represent!** #HockeyisforEveryone

The underlying recognition of his race by the people tweeting about it is apparent here as he is discussed as being an inspiration and creating a sense of pride *because* he is racialized in this occupational role traditionally held by White men. Tweets such as these, focusing on Singh's race and the racialized population he represents, primarily evaluate Singh positively.

However, there were also tweets, such as example (8) below, which, although not an explicit reference to Singh's race, may have been racially motivated:

(8) Congratulations for stepping up the staircase of success. You have a long way to go! @IceSinghHNIC

This example is an instance of what was classified in our coding as *ambivalent*. The comment "congratulations for climbing the staircase of success" combined with "you have a long way to go" suggests that Singh has only made a marginal achievement, likely because his race is seen as a current and future obstacle.

3.3 Perceptions of difference

Similar to the examples above, we view comments that note that Singh's broadcast is "cool" or "dope" as recognitions that Singh is perceived as a deviation from the ideologically standardized norm in the Canadian hockey broadcasting booth. This is most clear in example (11) below where the author writes that Singh's broadcast is "cool to see"—a comment on a visual observation—despite the rest of the tweet commenting on his linguistic style.

(9) **So dope.**

(10) This is really, really, really fucking **cool**

(11) Got a couple texts that didn't like his style, but he did just fine. Was **cool to see**.

Of the 58 tweets that commented on Singh's racial difference, 48 were considered positive. This suggests that viewers see Singh's role and position as a positive advancement for representation in hockey and Canadian society. This aligns with Szto's (2018) findings of similar tweets, which she characterizes as "reproducing the notion of multiculturalism" (p. 213). However, Szto notes that "we can also read these uncritical notions of Canadian multiculturalism as an erasure of the inherent discrimination built into a game historically dominated by Canadians of European heritage" (2018, p. 213).

In addition to the less explicit tweets above, there were also tweets such as the ones below that explicitly oriented to Singh's racialized body.

(12) The only time Justin cares about Canada's game - when **a brown guy** is involved.

(13) I'm all for opportunities. I appreciate what he's doing and breaking down barriers. But come on he's not that good. The BEST man should get the job, not **because of**

his race. He was awful. Lots of choices out there that are much better.

In (12), there is a juxtaposition between “Canada’s game” and the presence of a “brown guy” being involved—so much so that it attracts the Prime Minister (Justin Trudeau’s) attention. Singh’s occupational role of a national sports broadcaster is therefore reduced to the colour of his skin and is ideologically positioned against a White standard. We can also see a type of reverse racism in (13) with the writer noting that although they are “all for opportunities”, Singh should not have gotten his job “because of his race”. This author’s evaluation of who the “BEST man” is clearly seems to take into consideration race as a variable (we also note the gendered preference). This is a typical discursive strategy of racism that van Dijk (1992) describes where a positive self-evaluation (“I’m all for opportunities”) is followed by a negative other-evaluation, introduced here with the contrastive conjunction “but”.

3.4 Comments on Singh’s PxP calling

There was also a pattern of tweets explicitly commenting on Singh’s PxP calling. These were generally unqualified comments in that they did not specify what about Singh’s calling was liked or disliked.

- (14) Very **solid calling** the game. Well done Harnarayan! Hope you hear you on the main networks again soon!
- (15) **Congrats on calling a great game.** Look forward for a lot more to come!
- (16) **Loved your call of the game.** Also you worked well with Louie. Love his work too. Hope this is the beginning of many more. Congratulations.

The majority of these were positive (n=41/53), again displaying signs of approval of Singh’s performance. Many of them anticipated future broadcasts (underlined above), demonstrating the position of the commentators as gatekeepers in that they make their opinion clear that they “look forward for a lot more”.

The negative tweets about Singh’s calls shown in examples (17)-(19) below also rarely state what the authors do not like about the call, but based on the tweets discussed above, we might make a connection that these comments rely on an ideological assumption of what makes a “good” announcer, especially when we see a comparison with, and preference for, White broadcasters such as Kevin Quinn. This reflects Mastro et al’s (2012) findings of a preference for White male announcers in hockey.

- (17) I can’t be the only one that thinking this. Holy fuck **that call was horrible.** Made me cringe.
- (18) **He sucks as announcer.** He’s a homer. **Fucking awful**
- (19) @[name] not sure what game these guys are watching but **Kevin quinn was far better.**

3.5 Comments on how Singh sounds

Another theme that we identified in our corpus was how Singh sounded, exemplified below. Again, these comments were typically unqualified in that they did not specify what about the sound the author liked or disliked, but they are interesting in that the writers are orienting to their perception of Singh's voice. This is a core insight of raciolinguistic ideologies that motivates us to look at how racialized people are heard, not necessarily focusing on how they speak.

- (20) Congrats 🎉 you **sounded great** !!
- (21) He is **a treat to listen to**.
- (22) What **a joy it was to listen to** @IceSinghHNIC call last night's game. Can't wait for the next! 🎯

In this sense, sounding good is equivalent to sounding right in that there is a perception that Singh has adhered to enregistered linguistic expectations of sports broadcasting. All 13 of these tweets were positive, again displaying a positive reception of Singh's broadcasting.

3.6 Singh's broadcasting style

There was also a pattern of tweets specifically commenting on Singh's broadcasting style. Unlike the tweets discussed in the sections above, these were generally elaborated upon and included both *positive* and *negative* evaluatives, presented separately below.

Positive comments:

- (23) @IceSinghHNIC Great call tonight! **So easy to listen to and understand compared to many others**. The **calm voice** also calms my nerves slightly even when the on ice results aren't what I had hoped for! Great work and looking forward to many others
- (24) **So calm, clear, and consistent!** Sounded really good, can't wait for more #gogetem
- (25) You killed it. **Very smooth**. Loved hearing you on the call.

Negative comments:

- (26) I get it was his first time in English or whatever but I did not like him, he was **super slow** on the play by play
- (27) I thought he was **a bit too flat** with his calls and he certainly seemed to favour the Oilers with his level of enthusiasm especially on Yamamoto's goal. He got a bit better as the game went on though.
- (28) To be honest I thought the play calling was **terrible and very boring**. I turned off sportsnet and turned to an alternative feed so I did not have to listen. It was the same thing on Saturday night against the Habs. I hope I don't have to listen to many

more with him.

Positive tweets in (23)-(25) praise Singh's "calm", "clear", and "smooth" voice. Negative tweets, on the other hand, seen in (26)-(28), characterize his voice as "slow", "flat", and "boring". These positive and negative tweets describe a seemingly similar linguistic style. That is, a calm voice is also slow, for example. However, we view the opposing evaluations of seemingly similar prosodic features as subjective views of what is a preferred and dispreferred way of speaking. Raciolinguistic literature suggests that these comments may represent value judgements of interpreted linguistic features that are guided by Singh's racialized body. That is, Singh's linguistic style may be interpreted by some people based on his physical appearance. Nonetheless, we note that these features are inconsistent with characteristics of a sports broadcasting register as discussed above, i.e., with fast-paced calls and dynamic prosodic features. But since viewers are likely to expect these entextualized features and judge a broadcaster according to these expectations, we might have expected more negative evaluations of Singh's speaking style if indeed he was not adhering to the expected linguistic norms. However, the tweets about his style are mainly positive (80%). This puts into question whether Singh's voice really was *slow, flat, and boring*, or whether these comments were guided by ideologies related to Singh's race. Kang (2010) has described perceptions of nonnative English speakers as "monotonous", "flat", and "boring" (p. 310), suggesting that viewers may perceive Singh's body as representative of a nonnative speaker, as nonnativeness is typically viewed as non-Whiteness (see, for example, Aneja's (2016) study revealing perceptions of an Indian speaker's "'Brownness' being associated with nonnativeness").

Lastly, like the tweets in section 3.4, the tweets in examples (23), (24), and (28) also refer to Singh's future calls, reinforcing the authors' positions as gatekeepers of who and what they want to hear.

In addition to these likely subjective evaluations, *which* features of Singh's calling these writers choose to comment on seemed to be subjective and ideologically motivated, discussed next.

3.7 Specific calls

3.7.1 "Yamamoto" call

In addition to comments on Singh's race and representation, sound, and style, there were specific calls that were singled out and commented upon by Twitter users. One of these calls was the "Yamamoto" call wherein Singh extended the last [oʊ] in Oilers player Kailer Yamamoto's last name and varied the pitch of his voice such that the extended [oʊ] had a musical tone to it.³ The call itself, as Singh explained in a media interview, was "kind of a signature on [his] Punjabi calls". He added:

³ See <https://twitter.com/NHL/status/1349578022786097158?s=20>

The more I get my feet wet here, then we'll start bringing in some more flavour as well. It's called a 'heyk' in Punjabi, where it's used to carry out the last syllable. It's something that singers do to show off their scales or to be competitive with one another to see who can hold the note the longest. I've always tried to beat out the arena goal horn. (McGran, 2021)

As Singh describes, his Yamamoto call is a prosodic feature indexical of his Punjabi-speaking identity and his South Asian ethnicity. Recall that Singh is a native English speaker born in Canada, so his generally "Standard" (dominant) Canadian accent does not function as an indexical feature of his race or ethnicity. Therefore, we suggest that Singh's proclaimed incorporation of a Punjabi-influenced speaking style functions as an identity marking feature while simultaneously displaying an orientation to a potentially diverse audience, one he is "representing" (see section 3.2), and the expectations that others might have of him because of his racialized body, as well as viewers' previous experiences with his Punjabi broadcasting.

The fact that one of the main tweets we analyzed explicitly refers to this call ("YAMAMOTOOOOOOOOOOOOO. We're absolutely loving @IceSinghHNIC up in the booth!") shows that this call stood out as something noticeably different from Singh's surrounding calls and from other broadcaster's calls. Thus, there is an uptake, or in Gal's (2016) terms, a "noticing" that is inherently ideological as speakers try to fit a linguistic feature into a cultural model of differentiation. Consider the examples below, where bold font is used to highlight quoting or repeating of Singh's call:

- (29) Awesome call! The Yamamoto goal call was spicy!
- (30) I really enjoyed your play by play! Singing Yamamoto's name when he scored made my night hahaha. Great work!
- (31) Not to mention that electric Yamamoto goal call @IceSinghHNIC 🙌🙌
- (32) Kailerrrrr **ya ma mo tooooo**
- (33) His **YamamotoOoooOooo** call is my new favourite thing
- (34) You were great! Loved the **yamamotoooooooooo** call

Comments specifically about this call were primarily positive, with comments describing it as "spicy", "electric", and "singing". Importantly, this is at odds with characterizations of his style from section 3.6 as "slow", "flat", and "boring". Furthermore, the orthographic representation of Singh's extended vowel pronunciation emphasizes the attention to the perceived difference. This quotative function has been described as "other-repetition" where an interlocutor repeats a linguistic feature from the other discourse participant (Tannen, 2007). Other-repetition has been described as a form of interactional involvement that calls attention to a lexical item "that is extracted from the current discourse because it is worthy to be commented on" because it is "a more or less strange, unexpected, or surprising feature" (Guardolia et al., 2012). As the isolation of this feature requires an ideological perspective of what (and who) is normalized in the dominant discourse, we are suggesting that the repetition here functions as a reinforcement of White hegemonic linguistic norms, while also reinforcing the racialization of Singh as the original producer of this feature. However, we generally view the repetition as a form of positive evaluation and alignment with Singh, which we call *affiliative copying*, where a marked

linguistic feature, in this case a prosodic feature, is positively evaluated through repetition or copying, aligning the producer of the repetition with the producer of the original utterance.

However, not all evaluations of this call were positive. The tweets below, (35a) and one of its replies, (35b), specifically indicate that Singh's call was not appropriate for Canadian, NHL PxP. That is, the authors identify this call as a feature of the wrong register.

- (35) a. I would rather listen to an amateur, American, Olympic Hockey broadcaster than @IceSinghHNIC on @Sportsnet. No away fan wants to hear a Yamamoto call like that. Stop trying to sound like he scored an insane soccer goal. Brutal.
@IceSinghHNIC @Sportsnet
- b. I agree. Juvenile beyond belief. Go call a soccer game.

Reflecting patterns in racist discourse, the author of (35a) bolsters their dislike of Singh's call by suggesting that other fans, not just themselves, do not want to "hear a [...] call like that". In this sense, a deviation from linguistic norms by White-speaking subjects is evaluated in terms of its appropriateness for the sport of hockey. The comparison to soccer broadcasting in (35b) may reflect a racialization of Latin American soccer broadcasting and players, creating (and reinforcing, as discussed in the introduction) a dichotomy between hockey as White and other sports, such as soccer, as non-White.

Similar to example (12) discussed in section 3.3 where "Canada's game" was juxtaposed with Singh's racial identity as a "brown guy", again we see a juxtaposition between hockey and a racialized linguistic feature from a non-White speaking subject, in this case a *hyke*.

In response to the MT commenting on the Yamamoto call, the author of (36a) refers to it as singing, equating it to an American Idol performance, but a reply to this tweet (36b) served as a correction—that it is like Singh is on *Indian* Idol, not American Idol.

- (36) a. The man is singing like he's in American Idol
b. Indian Idol*

Clearly, this is an orientation to Singh's race, but more importantly, it also represents an ideological position that people racialized as "Indian" are distinct from Americans, so much so that competing on American Idol would be incongruent with the nature of the show. This is clearly a racialized ideology that sees White dominance in (North) America as equivalent to national identity.

The noticing of this prosodic feature and the (positive and negative) discourse surrounding it is interesting as vowel lengthening appears to be a common feature of PxP calling when a goal is scored. For example, in a collection of "the top 50 calls of all time" by the NHL,⁴ sportscasters regularly extend the same (or similar) vowel sound as Singh does in words such as "goal" "score" and "overtime", yet none of these calls make this top

⁴ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0r71ckgr7J4> Note, for example, the uses at 9:06, 14:00, 24:13, 25:11, 30:12, 30:32, 32:47-33:05, 33:30-33:50, and 39:02

50 list because of their prosodic representation but rather because of the actions on the ice or the lexical content of the call. Thus, it appears that when Singh uses this linguistic feature it is perceived “as linguistically deviant even when engaging in linguistic practices positioned as normative [for] privileged White subjects” (Flores and Rosa, 2015, p. 150). That is, when White hockey sportscasters perform the same linguistic feature as Singh, it is not noticed, but rather normalized as a feature of the sportscasting register. This can be understood as a process of erasure (Irvine & Gal, 2000), rendering a (potentially) enregistered feature invisible when produced by White speaking subjects while differentiating a non-White speaking subject’s use of the same feature. Singh’s own characterization of his call as a feature of Punjabi reinforces the perception of the *feature* as different, but this may be guided by internalized raciolinguistic ideologies that perceive *Singh* as different.

3.7.2 “Time to hand out the sweets” call

Twitter users—including Sportsnet—also highlighted and commented on Singh’s “Time to hand out the sweets” call, a reference to South Asian cultures where handing out sweets is a form of celebration. The references to this tradition are highlighted in bold in the examples below.

- (37) **Hand out sweets** got me 🍯 @IceSinghHNIC
- (38) Loved the “**Hand out the sweets**” well done for ur first time! Cheers 🍷
- (39) **Time to pass out the sweets!!**
- (40) Every Desi watching smiled when @IceSinghHNIC said ‘**It’s time to hand out the sweets!**’ for Högländer’s first NHL goal. Representation is meaningful. Thanks, @Sportsnet #IfYouKnowThenYouKnow

Similar to the Yamamoto call, the sweets reference is an indexing of Singh’s cultural and racial identity. People on Twitter excerpted it, indicating that they identified it as something to comment on, “noticing” it (cf. Gal, 2016) as a deviation from a norm in sports broadcasting. In this sense, a similar form of other-repetition (and more specifically, *affiliative copying*) is seen here with a more discursive-pragmatic feature, as opposed to the prosodic feature of the Yamamoto call described above.

Yet although the inference of having sweets as a form of celebration may seem contextually obvious, it appears that the cultural reference may have created some (perceived) inter-cultural confusion. This is seen in the tweets below stating the call was “esoteric” and that the author had to explain the reference to people, and with another tweet asking for an explanation of the reference. These comments reflect a raciolinguistic ideology of perceiving language from non-White speaking subjects as unintelligible for White listening subjects (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

- (41) Great work last night. **I think your “bring out the sweets” comment was esoteric. I had to explain it to a few people today.**
- (42) **Does anyone get this reference ?**

In addition, there are also tweets that negatively evaluated the sweets comment.

- (43) We gunna **whip some Kit Kat's around ?** Prob not worst broadcast ever, sports net needs completion cause this would be easy to beat
- (44) This game was in Alberta , 🇸🇪 by a Swedish guy **useless reference no sweets will be chucked around**

In example (43), the author reframes the call, replacing the object “sweets” with “Kit Kats”. The replacement of “Kit Kats” imposes a dominant North American cultural perspective on a South Asian custom, while the interrogative form questions the acceptability of a custom that is something other than a White western norm. We also see the verb “hand out” in the MT (and by Singh) being replaced with “whip” in (43) and “chucked” in (44). Notably, both “whip” and “chucked” are semantically more violent terms than “hand out”. This reformulation can be seen as an ideologically motivated racialized association of minority races with violence (see, for example, Bucholtz, 1999). Example (44) also suggests that the location of the game—Alberta, Canada—and the Swedish nationality of the player who scored the goal warrants the South Asian reference “useless”. As such, it implies that non-White or “non-Canadian” cultural references do not have a place in hockey, or in Alberta and Canada more generally.

3.8 Singh broadcasting in English

The last thematic element of the Twitter comments we will discuss are comments about Singh broadcasting in English, exemplified by the comments below.

- (45) Harnarayan, congrats on the gig. **You were really good for first time in english.** Great to have a punjabi star on broadcast. Keep up great work and **continue improving.** You'll be top in no time.
- (46) **Must be challenging doing a game in a different language, even if it's your mother tongue.** But Harnarayan was awesome the other night!!
- (47) a. Considering he's done so many games in Punjabi **it's pretty impressive he's doing it in English now. I feel like I'd be accidentally slipping in words that aren't English**
- b. Yeah exactly like **props to this guy for doing a full English broadcast**

Once again, the reader will recall that Singh is a native English speaker; he speaks English fluently as well as Punjabi. But as Ramjattan (2019) states, “racialized groups can be generally perceived to not speak particular languages [...] well in spite of their actual proficiency” (p. 729). Thus, in these comments, Singh is not viewed as having a native expertise in English. Rather, Singh’s English broadcasting is viewed as inherently difficult for him and there is a perception that he would be more comfortable using Punjabi, despite English being his native language. We argue that this is not because it is his first time doing a national broadcast—indeed, as we mentioned in the introduction, Singh had been the host of HNIC Punjabi for years—but rather because he is racialized in this position.

3.9 Singh's accommodation

Having reviewed the themes in viewers' comments about Singh's January 13th and 16th English broadcasts, it is worth examining what Singh himself has to say about his English broadcasting style and how it conforms to and diverges from viewer expectations.

Linguistic accommodation refers to a speaker altering their communication patterns (e.g., phonological, lexical, or syntactic elements of speech), to align with or distance themselves from their interlocutor, or in Singh's case, his audience. Research has shown that the strategy of convergence yields positive social evaluations of the converging speaker (Giles et al., 1973). As discussed earlier, for a sportscaster, positive social evaluations are also important as a means for securing employment, since the audience acts as gatekeepers.

But, since it is hard for a sportscaster to align their speech in the moment with people they cannot see and with whom they are not currently interacting, sportscasters must create messages "with an idea both of the audience they are speaking to and of what it wants" (Mastro et al, 2012, p. 461). Presumably, Singh's English PxP audience is different from his HNIC Punjabi one, so it is interesting to see both how Singh navigates this and how that navigation is perceived by the audience.

Above, we noted the indexical functions of Singh's "Yamamoto" and "time to hand out the sweets" calls. We discussed these as Singh indexing his cultural and racial identity. Because these prosodic and pragmatic features are limited and seemingly identifiable amongst his otherwise "Standard" Canadian language use (and are less notably marked than if, for example, he used Punjabi terms or spoke in an Indian-accented English), it becomes clear that Singh has discursively navigated his identity, his audience, and his occupation. Since we find the majority of Singh's calls adhering to a hockey broadcaster register, we therefore view his adherence to broadcasting register norms as accommodation to White, hegemonic linguistic institutional norms and expectations. Yet, regardless of this, because he is racialized, there is an expectation that he will not sound the same as his White counterparts. As Rosa (2018) notes, racialized bodies "look like a language". By explicitly selecting which Indian cultural features to embed into his calling, we argue that Singh accommodates to this ideological perception that he should sound different. Singh's own comments about his English broadcasting support this, as he notes in a news interview that he is "bringing in some more flavour" and adding "spice or the masala" (Wagner, 2021) to the broadcasting booth.

4 Conclusion

To summarize, we can describe the discourse on Twitter surrounding Harnarayan Singh's English language broadcasting as generally positive. However, we have also described various race-related and raciolinguistic ideologies that are embedded in this discourse, specifically regarding the representation of minority communities and Singh's linguistic performance.

Similar to Szto's work, we find that "notions of resistance [to diversity] still percolate" (2016, p. 214), such that White hegemonic norms of hockey broadcasting still

dominate. However, whereas much raciolinguistic studies have reported on primarily negative consequences of raciolinguistic ideologies, we find that in this discourse, raciolinguistic ideologies are often used to positively align the authors with Singh.⁵ These positive evaluations from hockey broadcasting gatekeepers are socially important as they promote Singh maintaining his occupational role. In this sense, we can view the audience as challenging the racist discourse that has surrounded hockey in Canada. Thus, we see, in Ramjattan's (2019) terms, "raciolinguistic ideologies *at work*"—literally in the workplace and in action.

We also view Singh's personal orientation to converging his communication style to the viewers' expectations of a hockey broadcasting register, while strategically incorporating indexical linguistic features that he describes as "spice or the masala" (Wagner, 2021), as accommodating to linguistic expectations of his racialized body. Singh's accommodation to both sportscasting norms and racialized expectations requires a form of aesthetic labour in order to appeal to Canadian hockey viewers.

Singh's English language national hockey broadcasts have provided an opportunity to examine the relationship between two features of Canadian identity: multiculturalism and hockey. Our findings suggest a progressive negotiation of the two, but the fact that this is viewed as progressive highlights the discriminatory past of hockey in Canada. Although we've discussed Singh's broadcasting as marked because of his racialized body, his primarily positively evaluated racialized presence as a broadcaster in the surrounding discourse suggests an opportunity to encourage diversity in the sport.

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⁵ It is worth noting that in order to preserve the novelty (the 'coolness') of Singh in this position, the participation of racialized minorities in this labour market must remain restricted to only a few people who are perceived as going against the norm. This reinforces racism in hockey and the workplace.

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