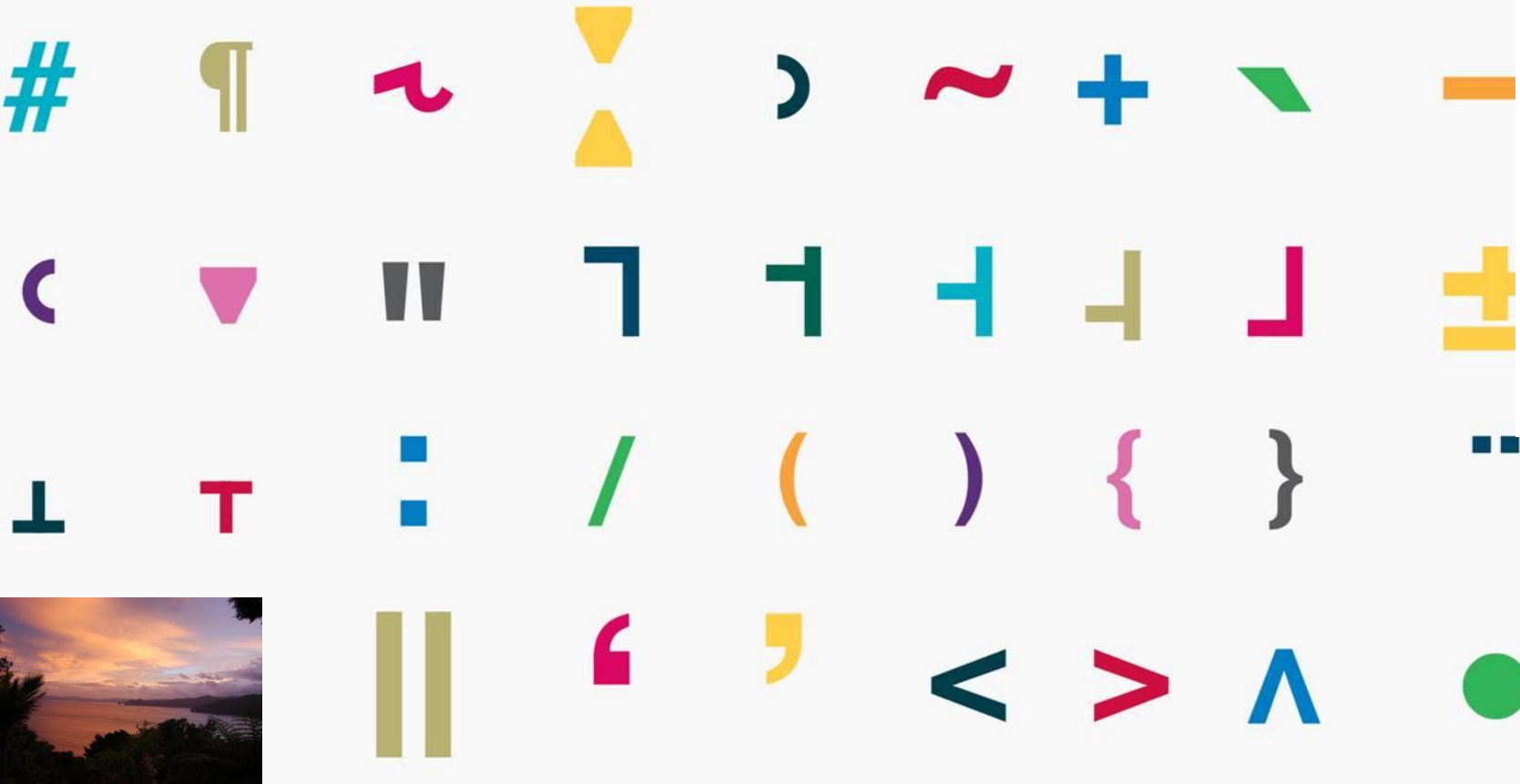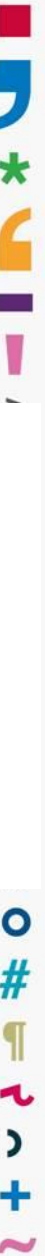# Actually sports commentaries are not (all that) boring.

Koenraad Kuiper
University of Canterbury

# What is to follow?

- A brief introduction to linguistics
- Why sports commentary is a domain for a linguist to investigate?
- What have we found?
- The life history of oral traditions

# Experiment 1

- What is this speaker saying?

- What does it sound like?

# Experiment 2

- What does this sound like?

- What is the speaker saying?

# Conclusions

- If you don't know the language code all you can pay attention to is the sound the speaker is making.

- If you do know the language code what you pay most attention to is what the speaker is saying.

- You can't help yourself listening for what the speaker is saying. You can't block it out and just listen to the mouth music.

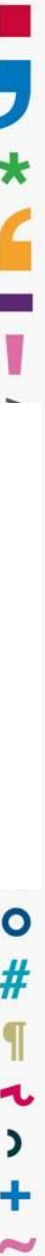- But we are totally unconscious of how we do this.

# Part I: What do linguists do?

- They model the language code that connects speech sound and meaning.
- and they study language use.
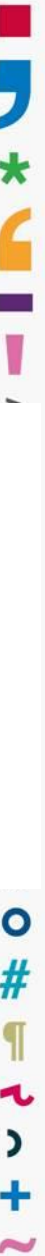
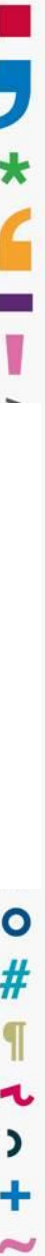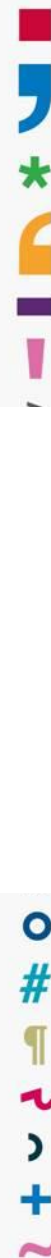# Grammars exist

# Lexica exist as a subcomponent of a grammar

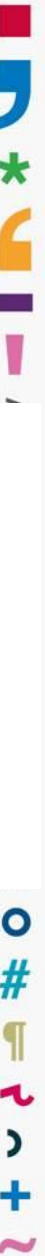# Language in the brain

# Psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics

# Part II: linguistics and sports commentary

How does at least one linguist get into looking at sports commentary?

# Testing Lord's theory

# Colour and play–by-play

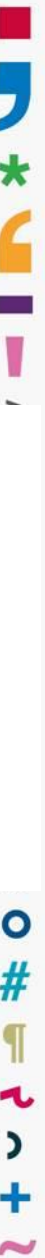# The Lineout

# Lineout formulae

- **Prelim:**
  - *Here they go (again)*

- **Assemble:**
  - *shortened lineout*
  - *not challenging in the lineout*
  - *(slightly) shorter in the lineout*

- **Throw**
  - *towards the back, front*
  - *(they) go deep (this time) (grab) one against the throw (to FORWARD)*
  - *go to the front/middle/back/FORWARD*
  - *down/to/towards the back (they/it go/es) (to FORWARD)*
  - *miss the throw*
  - *HOOKER to throw (to the/this lineout)*
  - *(go) short (for/to) FORWARD*
  - *HOOKER (easily) finding/finds FORWARD*
  - *FORWARD the target*
  - *heading toward the back*
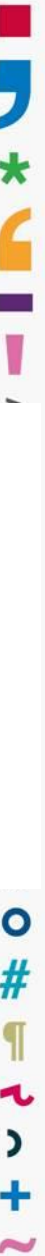  - *HOOKER looking for FORWARD*

- Jump:
  - *FORWARD goes up*
  - *FORWARD get high*
  - *FORWARD(S) (up there) contesting possession*

- Take:
  - *(taken) (AdjP)/win (the quick) one off the top*
  - *FORWARD/TEAM takes/drags it/one down/in*
  - *(beautifully) taken/dragged (down) (there) by FORWARD*
  - *FORWARD takes a two-handed ball*
  - *FORWARD takes the lineout (cleanly)*
  - *FORWARD it down two hands/ed ball*
  - *FORWARD two hands*
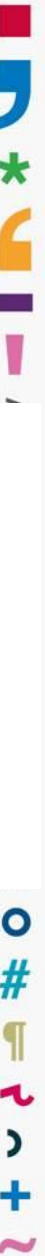  - *FORWARD tidies up*
  - *grabbed by FORWARD*
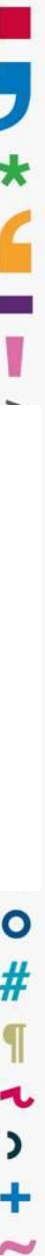
- **Dispatch:**
  - *quick delivery to HALFBACK*
  - *through to HALFBACK*
  - *it goes to HALFBACK*

- **Outcome:**
  - *one (go) against the throw/TEAM*
  - *go against the TEAM*
  - *advantage to TEAM*
  - *(grab) one against the throw*
  - *TEAM win the (defensive) lineout*
  - *win the possession from the lineout*
  - *win their own ball from the lineout*

# In general
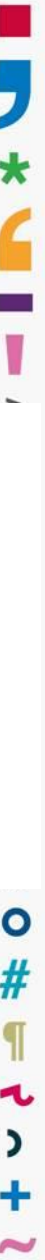
# Acquisition of an oral tradition

# Density of formulae

# Shape of formulae

# Football formulae in Persian and English

| English spoken football commentary | Clauses without PNA | Clauses with PNA | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subject clause initial | 20 | 75 | 95 |
| Subject non-clause-initial | 6 | 138 | 144 |
| Totals | 26 | 213 | 239 |

$\chi^2 = 16.8$; p < .0001, This result is significant at $p < .05$.

| Persian spoken football commentary | Clauses without PNA | Clauses with PNA | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Subject clause initial | 70 | 30 | 100 |
| Subject non-clause-initial | 25 | 65 | 90 |
| Totals | 95 | 95 | 190 |

$\chi^2 = 33.8$; $p < .0001$, This result is significant at $p < .05$.
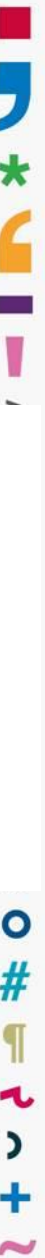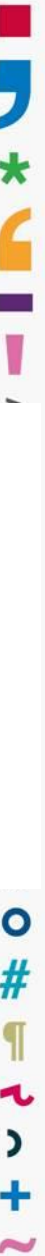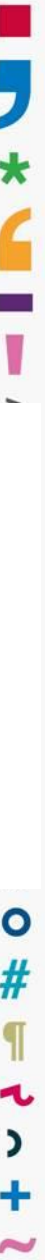
# Race calling in Japanese and English

- e.g. Japanese
- *First of all, as expected, number two Silport has taken the lead*
- *After the wonderful start, once the leader in the race, well, taking first, or holding its position, Delta Blues*

- English
- *They're being followed then by Preferment at the end of the field*
- *Out wide three wide Admire Deus starts to go on*

# Part III: So what?

# Becoming a social animal

# Social change and the death of oral traditions

# (Not so) light reading

- Kuiper, Koenraad 1996. *Smooth Talkers*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Kuiper, Koenraad 2009. *Formulaic Genres*, Houndsmill, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.