Exploring the Linguistic Relativity of Conceptualizations of Sport Event Legacy in Four Languages: A Multi-Lingual Literature Review

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Abstract 2018-337 Room: Sable C

Goals of the Symposium:
In 2002, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) amended its Charter to include a 14th mission statement “to promote a positive legacy from the Olympic Games to the host cities and host countries” (2015, p.19). By adding this mission statement, the IOC mandated all future bid committees and host committees of Olympic Games to include a legacy plan in the event’s bid and management. In the 15 years since these initial efforts, several conceptualizations of Olympic legacy have emerged in the English language, and yet, no universally-accepted definition has been found (Lienhard & Preuss, 2014). Finding a universally accepted definition of legacy, or a reliable base definition that can be tailored to the given context (Beesley & Chalip, 2011; Parent, MacDonald, & Goulet, 2014), is instrumental to facilitating knowledge transfer processes between event host organizations. This shared definition could lead to more congruent evaluation of host city bids and legacy performance.

Three reasons have been proposed to explain the failure in finding a universally accepted definition: language differences (Moragas et al., 2003), differences in perspective between practitioners and academics (Cashman, 2003; Leopkey & Parent, 2008; Chapellet, 2012; Sant, Mason, & Hinch, 2013; Orr & Jarvis, in press), and inconsistent use of shared terminology (Thomson, Schuilenker, & Schuilenkorf, 2013). The primary goal of this symposium is to provide insights into the first reason, language differences, by reviewing the literature on event legacy in four languages (English, French, Chinese and Japanese), and identifying a path toward future research that would produce a universally accepted definition. The secondary goal of the symposium is to explore the implications of linguistic differences in sport management scholarship, especially as it relates to international topics such as legacies.

Description of the Project:
Whilst three reasons have been cited for the failure to produce a universally accepted definition of legacy, only two have been explored empirically to identify their influence on legacy conceptualizations: the differences in perspective between practitioners and academics (Sant, Mason, & Hinch, 2013; Orr & Jarvis, in press; Orr & Inoue, 2017) and inconsistent use of shared terminology (Thomson et al. 2013). Previous studies on each of these two reasons presented discussions on the points of consistency and convergence, bringing the literature closer to finding that universally-accepted definition. Language differences, however, have yet to be empirically explored. To bridge the gap of language differences, a multi-lingual literature review was conducted in four Olympic host-country languages: Chinese, Japanese, French, and English. The literature review was grounded in the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic relativism (Sapir, 1929). This hypothesis states that the language in which persons communicate determines the way they perceive, understand, and categorize their experiences and the world around them (Lucy, 1992, 1997). For the discipline of sport management, and especially in those topics that are concerned with international or global phenomena where multiple languages may be involved, such as legacy work, this theory would suggest that each specific language has its uniqueness in understanding and operationalizing the concept at hand. Before finding a universal definition of legacy, we must understand the diverse conceptualizations of the term that are held in each of the relevant languages.

Before a comparison could be made, a framework was needed as a baseline. As English was the common language of the researchers, the English definition of legacy provided by Preuss (2007), which identifies five dimensions of legacy, was used: “all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sport event that remain longer than the event itself” (p. 211). Using this baseline, and applying the theory of
linguistic relativism, two research questions were developed: (1) In what ways do the host countries of the Olympic Games define ‘legacy’ in their native languages? (2) How do these definitions compare?

Four researchers, comprising four different linguistic backgrounds (French, Chinese, Japanese and English), conducted a multi-lingual, systematic literature review (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003). The four languages were selected strategically, as many recent and upcoming Olympic Games have (and will) take place in countries that use either of these languages: China (Beijing 2008, Beijing 2022), Japan (Tokyo 2020), the USA (Los Angeles 2028), the UK (London 2012), Canada (Vancouver 2010), and France (Paris 2024). Four simultaneous literature reviews were conducted in Chinese, Japanese and French using the following procedure. First, the broadest and most relevant databases were identified in each language: EBSCOhost and SportDISCUS in English; HAL and PERSÉE in French; CNKI in Chinese; and CiNii in Japanese. Second, using a keyword search of 'legacy' or its foreign-language equivalent, peer-reviewed articles, doctoral dissertations, and book chapters published between 1991 and 2016 were collected. Third, the abstracts of all collected academic papers and articles (381 in English, 177 in Japanese, 463 in Chinese, 134 in French) were analyzed for relevance to the study. For the review of English literature, 27 articles were retained for analysis, of which 14 were reviewed by Thompson et al.’s (2013), and 13 additional articles were identified for this review. For the other languages, all peer-reviewed articles that explicitly reference ‘legacy’ in the sport event context were included. In all, seven Japanese papers, 12 Chinese papers, and 23 French papers were retained for analysis.

The articles included for the current review were analyzed upon Preuss’s (2007) five dimensions of legacy conceptualization: (a) long-term or short-term; (b) positive or negative; (c) tangible or intangible; (d) local or global; and (e) planned or unplanned. In the first step of analysis, the articles in Japanese, Chinese and French were assessed for the mention or acknowledgment of each of Preuss’s five dimensions of Olympic legacy. Then, the findings of this step were used to compare the concept between languages, specifically, to identify which articles identify both poles of each dimension. Lastly, the articles in each language were assessed for context (what event[s] did the paper focus on?), discipline (what academic discipline was the paper published in?), and outstanding conceptualizations (dimensions or categorizations unmentioned in other languages).

The findings show some similarities in the association of legacy to events (e.g., causal nature of legacy), and the IOC’s definition of legacy is widely cited across all languages. However, none of the languages in the study conceptualizes ‘legacy’ in quite the same way. The five key dimensions of legacy that are identified in English literature do not appear uniformly in other languages, especially regarding the temporal dimension and the degree of tangibility. For example, the English literature has the widest scope of the conceptualization of legacy and identifies multiple dimensions (positive/negative, tangible/intangible, short-term/long-term, etc.) and categories (economic, social, cultural, etc.). In contrast, the French literature conceptualizes legacy in a more limited way: using two terms ('legs' and 'héritage'), the French discuss legacy as being only experienced in the long-term, in close geographic proximity to the event site, and as solely positive. Together, these findings point to incongruence in the use of concept that is mandated by the IOC for use by host jurisdictions of Olympic Games. If legacy is the justification for major public spending on events, it would be preferable to have a clear conceptualization of the term to avoid confusion, deception, and misuse.

Structure and Contributions of the Symposium:
This 60-minute symposium will review in closer detail the aforementioned methodology employed to conduct a multi-lingual literature review. Then, the findings of each language will be discussed and the tools used to explore the variance will be discussed. Finally, the authors intend to lead a discussion on the implications of linguistic relativity in legacy research, and sport management research more broadly.

Through this symposium, we seek to contribute a unique lens through which to understand the international, diverse features of this applied field of study by using a multi-lingual lens supported by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Lucy, 1992, 1997; Sapir, 1929). This hypothesis could later be used to address other global topics in sport management. The methodology is also unique and has the potential to be more broadly applied in sport management: multilingual literature reviews could be used to explore the linguistic variance between languages on topics as diverse as sport for development (Kidd, 2008; Levermore, 2008, 2009; Coalter, 2010; Lyras & Peachey, 2011; Schülenkorf, 2012) to fan experience (Laverie & Arnett, 2000; Crawford, 2004; Park, Mahoney & Kim, 2011; Inoue, Salo, Filo, Du & Funk,
Further, this symposium will add to the ever-growing body of research on legacies by offering a tool that allows researchers and practitioners of different languages to determine their country’s variance to the baseline (English) definition of legacy, and the conceptualizations held in French, Chinese, and Japanese. In knowing the variance between languages, future research on the management and measurement of the legacies of various sport events will be rendered much clearer and more cohesive. Future research is needed on this topic to expand the study to include more languages and more perspectives, and to include practitioner perspectives more directly.