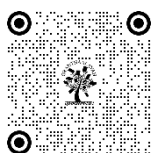


‘TERA ROOM NUMBER KYA HAI?’: DISCOURSE STRATEGIES IN CRICKET SLEDGING

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ABSTRACT

This study examines sledging in cricket as a complex linguistic event situated at the intersection of performance, power, and speech situations. Through the analysis of selected historical and contemporary sledging incidents—from Richard Nyren’s archaic banter to Shane Warne’s psychological edge over Daryl Cullinan—this paper makes use of a multi-theoretical approach incorporating Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis. It explores how utterances during high-stakes cricket matches function not merely as sports bravado but as performative speech acts intended to assert dominance, destabilize opponents, or negotiate power hierarchies. By foregrounding the linguistic function of these utterances and embedding them within cultural and historical frames, the study interrogates the ethical and sociolinguistic boundaries of verbal aggression in sport.

Keywords: Sledging, Speech Act Theory, Politeness Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, Verbal Aggression in Sport, Cultural Framing in Communication, Cricket Discourse

1. INTRODUCTION

Sledging—popularly defined as verbal provocation or banter directed at opponents in cricket—is a form of communicative interaction that has historically oscillated between humorous gamesmanship and targeted psychological warfare. Within the structural boundaries of a highly ritualized sport, sledging presents a paradox: it is both marginal to the formal rules and central to the game’s performative culture. Drawing from a critical-pragmatic idiom rooted in various linguistic theory, this paper interrogates sledging as a socially and culturally embedded practice. By analysing episodes involving figures such as WG Grace, Vivian Richards and Shane Warne, this study situates sledging within broader discourses of masculinity, authority, and sporting nationalism. These utterances, often brief and informal, function as micro-political acts that reinforce or subvert existing power relations on the field.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before an attempt is made to focus on the methods of analysis and discussion based on data, it is important to look into the studies that have gone into the research work conducted in this domain.

Chuck Summers (2007) argues that sledging functions as a means of gauging an opponent’s psychological resilience and dedication to the competitive encounter. When employed strategically, it serves to ensure that the contest remains genuinely challenging and that adversaries are pushed to their limits. Although it can sometimes unsettle or undermine

the opponent, such outcomes are viewed not as flaws in the tactic itself but as shortcomings in the opponent’s mental preparedness. While this stance may appear severe or uncompromising, Summers contends that he would prefer to be defeated by someone who can withstand all facets of competition—including psychological ones—rather than someone who crumbles when this mental dimension is put to the test.

Salomon J. Terreblanche (2007) offers a philosophical exploration of the relationship between cricket and cultural ideology, particularly analysing how the sport’s structure reflects liberalist principles. Originating in 19th-century Britain—a period that also saw the rise of liberal thought—cricket is argued to have developed in alignment with the ideological values of its cultural context. The essay examines how specific elements of the game mirror liberal ideals, focusing on three structural components: the coin toss as a symbol of fair opportunity, the umpire’s role as a constrained figure of authority, and the balance between individual performance and team objectives. Historically, cricket’s early phases aligned with Lockean liberalism, trusting players to embody gentlemanly conduct. However, this optimism proved flawed, as unregulated freedom often gave rise to self-serving behaviour, echoing Hobbesian pessimism.

Jonathan Evans (2007) observes that the emphasis on cultivating lasting moral character is not exclusive to virtue ethics; recent moral philosophy increasingly acknowledges that individuals who embody traits such as temperance, justice, or kindness are more likely to act ethically, regardless of the theoretical framework applied. When this principle is extended to evaluate various human pursuits—especially sports—it becomes apparent that elite-level competition, particularly in professional contexts, often presents moral challenges. While both amateur and professional forms of sport can foster ethical growth by requiring virtues for achievement, the issues arise not from the nature of sport itself but from how its norms and regulations are designed and enforced. What makes professional cricket morally valuable is not something intrinsic to the game but rather a combination of external factors: its codified rules, their proper implementation, and the broader historical and cultural environment within which the sport operates.

Davis, P.A., Davis, L., Wills, S., Appleby, R., and Nieuwenhuys, A. (2018) conducted a qualitative investigation into how professional cricketers perceive emotional exchanges with their opponents during matches. Through semi-structured interviews with 12 male athletes, the study explored how players experienced and engaged in emotionally charged moments, including intentional efforts—such as sledging—to provoke reactions. Participants portrayed sledging as deliberate verbal and behavioral tactics intended to unsettle rivals’ focus and manipulate their emotional state. Athletes reported feeling a range of emotional responses, including stress and irritation, when subjected to such tactics. Language analysis revealed the presence of both negative and positive emotions in these encounters. Players also described various coping mechanisms employed in response to these emotion-driven provocations. This research adds to the body of work on interpersonal emotion regulation by showing that elite cricketers are not only conscious of how emotions and thoughts influence performance but also actively seek to exploit these factors in their opponents to gain a competitive edge.

Christopher Ring, Maria Kavussanu, Ali Al-Yaaribi, Gershon Tenenbaum, and Nicholas Stanger (2019) investigate how verbally hostile behaviour in sports—commonly known as sledging—impacts athletes’ emotions, focus, and execution. While past research has linked performance shifts to emotional and cognitive factors, this study specifically tested the psychological and behavioural consequences of different verbal interactions during a competitive basketball free-throw task. Participants were exposed to three types of verbal input: insulting remarks aimed at provoking emotional distress, distracting comments intended to disrupt concentration, and neutral statements as a control. Success was measured through shot accuracy and a points-based system, while participants’ levels of anger and attentional focus were evaluated afterward. The findings revealed that insults elicited significantly more anger than the other two conditions, and both insulting and distracting speech led to diminished self-focus and heightened distraction. Although performance was not directly affected by the verbal conditions, further analysis indicated that anger indirectly hindered performance by increasing distraction.

Samuel Duncan (2019) undertakes a detailed investigation into the nature of sledging in sport, posing a central question: is sledging a legitimate aspect of gameplay, or does it signify a deterioration of its ethical foundation? The analysis is rooted in Johan Huizinga’s theory of play, which positions play as an essential, morally significant element even within professional sports, especially in upholding values such as fairness and mutual respect. Through various case studies, the discussion illustrates how the evolution of sledging may undermine the foundational principles of sportsmanship. The study integrates perspectives from both academic discourse in sports philosophy and empirical feedback from fans and non-professional players, providing insights into contemporary attitudes towards sledging. This

dual approach clarifies the distinction between sledging that maintains the playful essence of sport and that which distorts or degrades its core values.

Matthew Wade (2019) examines the complex role cricket plays within Australia's national consciousness—a sport shaped by its colonial legacy yet also bound to the nation's contemporary multicultural ideals. Within the ranks of Australia's national team, a volatile blend of nationalism, moral judgment, hyper-masculinity, and rule-bending pragmatism gave rise to a ruthless mentality prioritizing victory above integrity. This attitude led not only to open violations of the rules and international fallout but also to deliberate psychological targeting of opponents through aggressive behaviour. Such conduct was tacitly enabled by official institutions focused on performance while overlooking ethical boundaries. In the absence of firm regulation, players assumed authority over what was deemed acceptable, resulting in damaging practices involving ridicule, dominance, and collective verbal assaults.

Josh Leota and Michael-John Turp (2020) challenge the prevailing notion in sports ethics that gamesmanship stands apart from legitimate competitive tactics. Contrary to this widespread assumption, they argue that gamesmanship should be viewed as a legitimate form of strategic prowess intrinsic to competitive play. Drawing on Howe's prominent analysis, which typifies the dominant stance on the topic, they demonstrate that the debate relies on a flawed premise that does not hold up under detailed critique. The writers contend that Howe's normative assessment of gamesmanship loses coherence. Offering a different interpretation, they advocate for a more favourable view—framing gamesmanship as a display of strategic ingenuity that remains within the acceptable norms of sport. The article concludes by exploring how this view interacts with broader ideals like the 'spirit of sport' and responds to critiques that liken gamesmanship to unethical behaviour in professional fields where such tactics are unequivocally condemned.

Surya Nandana and S.P. Dhanavel (2025) explore the underlying semiotic mechanisms present in cricket, drawing upon Roland Barthes' concepts of signification, denotation/connotation, and myth. By aligning this theoretical lens with modern-day cricket, the paper demonstrates how the sport incorporates similar symbolic systems through its spatial-temporal dynamics, athlete embodiment, media portrayals, visual aesthetics, performance patterns, and audience engagement. It further investigates the ethical narratives embedded in cricket—particularly themes of valour, fairness, and dramatization—tracing these back to classical theatrical traditions. Concluding with the proposition that Barthes' interpretation of wrestling as a semiotic performance can extend to analysing other contemporary sports, the study opens avenues for broader scholarly inquiry.

This reveals a gap wherein linguistic analysis of cricketers' words are seldom taken up for close study.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A practical framework that one can use for each sledging comment is listed hereunder:

- 1) Contextual Background
- 2) Linguistic Form
- 3) Intent/Purpose
- 4) Immediate Reaction
- 5) Power Dynamics
- 6) Cultural Framing
- 7) Ethical Boundaries

In a Tabular Format, it can be Presented in the Following Way:

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Key Players	Who said it and to whom? When was it said? Cultural/Social Context	Type of utterance	What was the sledge trying to achieve?	How did the opponent react?	Was the speaker in a dominant position or a weaker position? How did the power	Does the comment reflect particular cultural norms or national styles of communication?	Was the comment considered acceptable, borderline, or unacceptable

					relations shape the comment?		
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4. DISCUSSION

For the sake of sampling, 10 different instances are taken up for analysis.

- 1) Ian Botham and Rod Marsh: During the England vs Australia series in 1982-83, Australian wicket-keeper Rod Marsh asked England’s Ian Botham, “How’s your wife and my two kids?” Botham replied promptly, “The wife’s fine, the kids are retarded though.” (“Top Sledging Comebacks”)

In the 1982–83 Ashes series, a period steeped in the storied rivalry between England and Australia, Rod Marsh’s quip to Ian Botham exemplified the era’s cultural tolerance for sharp-witted banter—a verbal joust delivered under the guise of humour. Linguistically, the utterance functioned as an expressive speech act laced with a veiled assertive edge, employing off-record politeness strategies to deliver an indirect insult cloaked in colloquial, suggestively humorous language. The intent was less to offend than to unnerve with a grin, aiming to humorously provoke and subtly destabilize the opponent’s composure. Botham, unfazed, underscoring a symmetrical power dynamic between two seasoned cricketers engaged in a battle of egos. Rooted in the British-Australian tradition of repartee where verbal wit is currency, the exchange straddled the ethical line—acceptable as locker-room humour then, though potentially contentious by contemporary standards.

Analysed through Speech Act Theory, Marsh’s opening jab functions as a face-threatening, bald-on-record directive disguised as a question, aiming to undermine Botham’s composure. Botham’s immediate, equally caustic retort reclaims power, functioning as an expressive and commissive act of defiance. Politeness Theory reveals that neither party attempts redressive action, reflecting a high-tolerance, masculinized discourse where verbal aggression is normalized. From a Critical Discourse Analysis lens, this exchange reinforces dominant ideologies of masculine bravado and national rivalry, while also exposing ethical tensions—especially through the use of ableist language, which would be deemed problematic in contemporary sporting ethics.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Botham & Marsh	1982-83 Ashes; intense rivalry	Insult, humor, bald-on-record, informal	Personal jab, provoke	Botham replied with humor	Even footing, verbal joust	Aus/Eng humor-laced sledging	Borderline

- 2) Steve Waugh and Parthiv Patel: This was during Steve Waugh’s last test match in India. As he came out to bat, India’s Parthiv Patel said, “Come on, just one more of the famous slog-sweeps before you finish”. Patel got it back from Waugh as he replied, “Respect Me...for when I made my test debut You were still in your nappies”. (“Best of Sledges”)

In what was Steve Waugh’s swan song Test in India, the seasoned Australian icon responded to a cheeky sledge from the young Parthiv Patel with a sharp-tongued comeback that blended teasing with a boast, deftly reasserting his seniority. Delivered with an assertive and expressive tone, Waugh’s remark employed off-record politeness laced with mild positive strategies—reminding the rookie, through colloquial and metaphorical language like “nappies,” of the gulf in experience and stature. The speech act served both to re-establish the pecking order and to silence youthful impudence with veteran poise. Patel reportedly backed off, conceding the verbal high ground to the legend. The exchange reflected the Australian cultural trope of earned authority and respect for hierarchy, with Waugh comfortably occupying the moral and professional high ground. Ethically, it remained within the bounds of acceptable banter—firm, witty, and non-abusive, a classic example of putting a youngster in his place without crossing the line.

This interaction between Steve Waugh and Parthiv Patel during Waugh’s final Test in India exemplifies a generational and hierarchical tension expressed through cricket sledging. Speech Act Theory helps identify Patel’s remark as a directive (covertly mocking and pressuring Waugh to play a rash shot), couched in teasing humor. Waugh’s reply functions as both an assertive (reaffirming his seniority and experience) and a commissive (demanding respect and asserting dominance). Politeness Theory reveals Patel’s comment as a bald-on-record face-threatening act, risking disrespect toward a senior player. Waugh’s comeback similarly dismisses any effort at politeness, aiming to restore face and seniority through age-based authority. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, this exchange reflects not just competitive banter but also the hierarchical structures of respect, age, and legacy in cricket.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Waugh & Patel	Waugh's last Test; nostalgic moment	Tease, assertive, positive politeness, informal	Reinforce seniority, counter taunt	No known reply	Waugh senior; Patel junior	Indian respect for seniority	Acceptable

- 3) Ravi Shastri and Mike Whitney: When Ravi Shastri hit the ball towards Australia's Mike Whitney, who was the 12th man, and tried to get a single, Whitney said, "If you leave the crease I'll break your f***ing head". Shastri retorted promptly, "If you could bat as well as you can talk you wouldn't be the f***ing 12th man". ("Best Cricket Sledges")

In a sharp exchange on the field, Ravi Shastri delivered a cutting retort to Australia's 12th man Mike Whitney, who had sledged him despite not being part of the playing XI—a move that invited swift verbal retaliation. Shastri's comeback, framed as an expressive and assertive speech act, employed a bald-on-record strategy with no attempt at softening the blow, relying on sarcastic and colloquial language to question Whitney's cricketing credentials. The intent was clear: to shut down the unsolicited provocation and reassert his own standing with biting wit. The power dynamic tilted in Shastri's favour, as he stood his ground against a non-playing provocateur, effectively silencing further commentary. The moment reflects a broader cultural shift where Indian players began meeting fire with fire, countering traditional Australian sledging with equal verbal dexterity. Ethically, the exchange stayed within the bounds of acceptability—an in-kind response that was sharp but proportionate.

The Shastri-Whitney exchange represents an intense moment of role-based conflict in cricket, analysed through Speech Act Theory as mutual threats and assertions of dominance. Politeness Theory reveals an absence of mitigating strategies, with both players engaging in direct, face-threatening speech. Critical Discourse Analysis highlights how this confrontation is embedded in broader narratives of masculinity, hierarchy, and symbolic control on the cricket field, where verbal aggression becomes a tool for asserting legitimacy and psychological edge.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Shastri & Whitney	Whitney 12th man; casual encounter	Insult, retort, bald-on-record, humorous	Undermine each other humorously	Shastri mocked Whitney's status	Shastri active; Whitney not playing	Humor, hierarchy in sports	Acceptable

- 4) This incident took place during a county championship match between Glamorgan and Somerset. Glamorgan quickie Greg Thomas had beaten Viv Richards' bat a couple of times and informed the legendary West Indian ace: "It's red, round and weighs about five ounces, in case you were wondering." The very next ball was given the King Viv treatment and smashed out of the ground, into a river - at which point Richards piped up: "Greg, you know what it looks like. Now go and find it. ("Fun Cricket Sayings")

In a county match marked by a string of plays-and-misses, Viv Richards turned the tables on Greg Thomas with a legendary quip that showcased his trademark Caribbean wit and unshakable swagger. The retort—an expressive and assertive speech act delivered off-record—employed humour as a face-saving device, laced with informal, metaphorical phrasing like "you know what it looks like," subtly mocking Thomas's sledging attempt while reasserting dominance. Though framed as light-hearted, the boast carried a punch, reminding the bowler of the gulf in stature and skill. Thomas, reportedly left speechless, bore witness to Richards's verbal and cricketing authority. The exchange reflects the cultural flair of West Indian cricket, where flamboyant confidence and clever repartee go hand-in-hand. Ethically, the remark was well within bounds—witty, pointed, but never crossing into abuse, making it a timeless example of verbal mastery on the field.

The Richards-Thomas exchange exemplifies cricketing sledging as a performative assertion of skill and identity. Speech Act Theory reveals directive and assertive moves designed to shame and counter-shame. Politeness Theory identifies both as unmitigated face-threatening acts. Critical Discourse Analysis reveals deeper tensions: colonial history, racial pride, and the assertion of dominance through language and action. Richards' retort is a masterstroke of psychological and symbolic power in sport.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
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Greg Thomas & Viv Richards	County match; Richards beaten by balls	Sarcasm, directive, metaphor, humorous	Embarrass, provoke	Richards hit ball out, witty reply	Richards reasserted dominance	West Indian wit	Acceptable
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- 5) Gavaskar had decided to relinquish his opening position and come in at no 4 for that test. But, Malcolm Marshall fired out Anshuman Gaekwad and Dilip Vengsarkar for ducks, setting the stage for Gavaskar to walk in at 0/2. And he thought there would be less pressure! Viv Richards says "Man, it don't matter where you come in to bat, the score is still zero." ("Best of Sledges")

In a moment charged with subtle gamesmanship, Viv Richards delivered a teasing, off-record remark to Sunil Gavaskar after early wickets fell and Gavaskar chose to drop down the order—a move Richards playfully framed as futile. Using an assertive yet expressive speech act, Richards deployed indirect mockery wrapped in informal, rhythmic phrasing, embodying the Caribbean brand of cool confidence and disarming wit. Though cloaked as a casual observation, the intent was clear: to poke holes in Gavaskar’s tactical retreat and reassert psychological dominance. The remark, though playful, carried strategic weight, nudging pressure back onto the Indian camp as Gavaskar walked into an already precarious situation. With Richards riding the momentum and holding the upper hand, the exchange highlighted a respectful rivalry shaped as much by verbal craft as by on-field skill. Ethically, the sledge stayed well within bounds—clever, clean, and a masterclass in mind games without malice. Gavaskar has made a mention about this incident a few times while giving commentary making use of the West Indian accent of Viv Richards ("No matter...no matter...no matter").

Under Speech Act Theory, Richards' utterance operates as a representative/assertive speech act: it presents a factual observation on the scoreboard while simultaneously functioning as a strategic psychological sledge. It carries expressive undertones that subtly mock Gavaskar’s tactical change in batting order by reasserting the futility of such a move under West Indies' intense bowling pressure. From the standpoint of Politeness Theory, Richards’ statement is a bald-on-record face-threatening act—direct and unfiltered, targeting Gavaskar’s strategic decision and mental preparation. There's no softening of the statement, reflecting West Indian sledging style which relies more on economy of language and cool sarcasm than outright aggression. A Critical Discourse Analysis reveals layered power dynamics and cultural framing. The West Indian side, at its peak, often used relaxed, confident banter to reassert dominance not just physically but psychologically. Richards’ comment, delivered in Caribbean vernacular ("Man, it don't matter..."), reinforces his own identity and style—laid-back but lethal.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Viv Richards to Gavaskar	WI vs India; Gavaskar comes out to bat at No.4	Humor, rhetorical, assertive	Mock batting change	Gavaskar responded with century	Richards asserting dominance	Caribbean verbal flair	Acceptable

- 6) Shane Warne at The Oval in '93. As I came out to bat, I was needing a score to get on the tour of the West Indies and a plane was flying overhead. Warnie said, 'You'd best get some runs mate, or you won't be getting on one of those this winter,' pointing at the plane. It completely threw me. (Whiting and Kenna 77)

In the heat of the 1993 Oval Test, Shane Warne unleashed a classic piece of psychological warfare on Matthew Maynard fighting for his place on the touring squad, delivering a veiled threat wrapped in off-record sarcasm and metaphorical flair—suggesting he might “get him a ticket for the next flight.” The speech act, blending a commissive undertone with a subtle directive, was delivered in Warne’s trademark colloquial style, weaponizing the batter’s insecurity with a jab aimed squarely at his mental composure. The comment, though seemingly casual, was a calculated move to seed doubt and crank up the pressure, and it worked—the batter later admitted it rattled him.

Warne’s comment illustrates how language can be weaponized with subtlety. As a speech act, it operates on multiple levels—directive, expressive, and commissive—while being a bald, face-threatening remark under Politeness Theory. CDA reveals how the utterance draws on cultural expectations, performance anxiety, and intra-team competition, making it a powerful tool of psychological gamesmanship in cricket.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
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Warne vs Matthew Maynard	Warne to batter needing selection; Oval 1993	Threat, commissive, off-record, metaphorical	Create pressure, self-doubt	Batter mentally affected	Warne dominant psychologically	Aussie 'mental disintegration'	Borderline
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- 7) Javed Miandad, a Pakistani star, was known for his sense of humor and ability to unsettle opponents with his unique banter. Former Indian left-arm spinner Dilip Doshi remembered an instance in which Miandad repeatedly inquired about his room number. Elaborating on the incident, the former player said:

"When you restrict him from playing his shots, he would try to get you off your concentration... That day what he was trying to do in Bangalore on my recall Test. He was asking me, 'Tera room number kya hai? (what is your room number?). This was repeated after each over. Later when quipped about the reason, he said 'I wanna hit you there'. It became a legendary thing, many people have repeated that, with some added spices, but it's fine, it was all in good banter", he added. ("India-Pakistan Rivalry")

During a tense passage of play in the 1980s Bangalore Test, Javed Miandad famously directed a cheeky quip at Dilip Doshi, whose tight bowling was probably testing the Pakistani line-up—an off-record, humour-laced jibe that masked a camouflaged threat beneath a playful tone. Delivered in code-switched Hindi/Urdu, rich with regional flavour and informal charm, the remark functioned as both a directive and an expressive speech act, designed to rattle Doshi's rhythm without breaching decorum. Though Doshi recognized the comment for what it was—humorous and strategically timed—the psychological upper hand briefly tilted toward Miandad, who used wit as a weapon in the subcontinental mind game. The exchange remains within the bounds of ethical sledging: sharp, localized, and legendary, with no real malice—just cricketing theatre at its finest. The title of this paper is based on this incident.

Miandad's humorous repetition, "Tera room number kya hai?", illustrates a layered speech act with underlying intent to distract and dominate. Miandad's repeated question is, on the surface, an interrogative, but in illocutionary terms, it functions as an expressive (mocking amusement) and a directive with perlocutionary intent: to irritate or distract the bowler. His follow-up comment — "I wanna hit you there" — can be seen as a commissive, suggesting a future act (hitting a six "into his room") in metaphorical form, likely to unnerve Doshi further. Viewed through politeness theory, it is a bald, face-threatening act, but softened by cultural in-group humor. The informal code-switching ("Tera room number kya hai?" in Hindi/Urdu) adds local cultural flavor and reduces formal distance, creating an in-group effect. His repeated questioning reclaims discursive power—Miandad, though under pressure due to tight bowling, shifts the psychological frame onto the bowler, subtly asserting dominance.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Miandad to Doshi	Miandad to Doshi, 1980s India-Pak Test	Tease, directive, off-record, code-switching (Hindi)	Distract bowler, disrupt focus	Taken as humorous	Miandad dominant, using mental games	Indo-Pak verbal play	Acceptable

- 8) Richard Nyren is the first known player to use sledging in cricket, according to cricket author Alan Tyers. Representing Men of Hampshire XXII in a match against XXX Red Hot Hampshire Men, Nyren got into an altercation with batter John Small shouted at his bowler: "Bowl hymme a harpsichord, see if he can playeth that." (Tyers)

In the spirited atmosphere of 18th-century cricket, Richard Nyren, captain of Hampshire XXII, delivered a delightfully barbed remark aimed at John Small, whose repeated misses at the crease drew a sarcastic directive from Nyren to "bowl hymme a harpsichord," mocking the batter's ineffectiveness with a flourish of exaggerated wit. Framed as an off-record utterance steeped in archaic English and metaphor, the statement blended directive and expressive speech acts, functioning as both a rhetorical jab and a comic spectacle for teammates. With its indirect sarcasm and performative flair, the quip reflected the gentlemanly, competitive spirit of the pre-professional era, where public humor and social sport went hand-in-hand. Though Small's reaction is lost to history, such banter was par for the course in early cricket culture, likely earning laughs rather than offense. Nyren's status as team leader lent the comment added weight, reinforcing his control over the field and the tone of play. Ethically, the exchange was well within bounds—clever, non-threatening, and fully aligned with the era's taste for theatrical, good-natured ribbing.

Richard Nyren’s quip represents one of the earliest documented sledges, revealing how language was used performatively to exert social and psychological dominance in early cricket. Through directive and expressive speech acts, off-record politeness, and symbolic metaphor, Nyren undermined his opponent within the acceptable norms of 18th-century cricket culture. The statement showcases how socio-linguistic creativity, rather than crudeness, marked early sledging—reinforcing cricket’s dual identity as a site of both competition and theatrical verbal exchange.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Nyren to John Small	18th-century match; Nyren captaining Hampshire XXII, Small batting poorly	Sarcasm, rhetorical challenge; directive & expressive speech act; off-record politeness strategy; archaic metaphor (“harpsichord”)	Mock batter’s incompetence; entertain team; provoke mistake	Not recorded; likely laughter or humorous banter	Nyren as captain asserting dominance with wit	Reflects early British sporting wit and banter; gentleman-amateur culture	Acceptable (clever, witty, non-threatening)

- 9) Dr WG Grace was the man who did more than any other player to make cricket a popular spectacle as well as a healthy pastime. This is proved by a well known incident, when early in an innings, Grace being probably out by an excellent stumping, was declared 'not out'. After a loud appeal from the wicket-keeper, the umpire retorted, "These people have come to see Dr Grace bat and not to watch your monkey tricks." (“WG Grace: A Life”)

In a telling moment from the late 19th century, an umpire brushed aside a stumping appeal against the legendary Dr. W.G. Grace with a sarcastic, bald-on-record remark about not letting the crowd be “disappointed by monkey tricks,” a loaded phrase that mocked the appeal and reinforced Grace’s untouchable status. This declarative and expressive speech act served less as an impartial ruling than as a theatrical assertion of control, privileging entertainment over fairness. With no politeness strategy to cushion the blow, the umpire’s comment reflected both a cultural deference to celebrity and a tacit understanding that Grace, as the sport’s foremost figure, was bigger than the game itself. The fielding side was likely left simmering under the weight of institutional bias, while the crowd, swept up in the spectacle, may have welcomed the drama. The exchange underscores the Victorian-era blending of class privilege, sport, and public performance—where figures like Grace operated above reproach and where rules could be bent in service of reputation.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Grace on being bowled out	1800s match; Grace bowled and bail removed; tried to dismiss dismissal	Humor, sarcasm, expressive speech act; off-record politeness strategy; archaic/formal tone	Deflect embarrassment; retain authority and public image	Umpire replied with equal sarcasm; humorous exchange	Grace = dominant figure; trying to override umpire with persona	Reflects Victorian-era gentleman wit; performative status roles	Borderline (charming but questions umpire’s authority)

- 10) Another sledging incident in which Shane Warne was involved was against South Africa batter Daryl Cullinan. Cullinan was always Warne’s bunny dismissing him on four out of seven occasions. The batter this time around was returning after a long layoff due to injury and Warne did let him know after he came out to bat that he was waiting to dismiss him. “I’ve been waiting two years for the opportunity to humiliate you in front of your own crowd.” To this, Cullinan also had a smart response as he said, “Looks like you spent it eating.” (“Jackson”)

In a charged encounter steeped in past dominance, Shane Warne greeted Daryll Cullinan’s return from injury with a bald-on-record threat, dripping in sarcasm and psychological edge, aiming to reopen old wounds from a history of dismissals. The remark, commissive in nature, was met head-on by Cullinan with an expressive and assertive insult of his own, shifting the exchange into a verbal tug-of-war that flirted with body-shaming and personal jabs. Both players abandoned polite conventions, opting instead for a direct, no-holds-barred confrontation that underscored the mental battles underpinning high-stakes cricket. While Warne clearly held the upper hand in terms of cricketing record and psychological presence, Cullinan’s reply marked a refusal to be cowed, reflecting South Africa’s growing resolve against

Australia's trademark "mental disintegration" tactics. Though the moment created palpable tension, it stayed just shy of outright abuse, dwelling in that grey area where intense rivalry meets the rough-and-tumble theatre of elite sport.

Incident	Context	Linguistic Form	Intent	Reaction	Power	Culture	Ethics
Warne vs. Cullinan ("2 years" exchange)	Cullinan returning after absence; prior psychological dominance by Warne	Threat (Warne), insult (Cullinan); commissive and expressive speech acts; bald-on-record	Warne: unnerve and reassert control; Cullinan: defend pride, hit back	Created verbal tension; no physical escalation noted	Warne = dominant sledger with record over Cullinan; Cullinan = resisting	Aussie hard sledging vs. SA verbal resistance tradition	Borderline; sharp, personal, but within competitive norms

5. FINDINGS

Based on these layered socio-linguistic performance, one can identify four interrelated dimensions. They include;

- 1) Illocutionary Multiplicity:** Speech acts in sledging often serve multiple functions simultaneously—directive, expressive, commissive, or assertive—crafted to psychologically destabilize the opponent.
- 2) Cultural Encoding:** The form and acceptability of sledges are shaped by local cultural scripts (e.g., humour in Indo-Pak banter, cool sarcasm in West Indian sledging, class-based entitlement in Victorian England).
- 3) Power and Politeness Interplay:** Sledging frequently involves bald-on-record face-threatening acts with minimal redressive effort, mirroring masculinized, hierarchical, and competitive discourses.
- 4) Spectacle and Symbolism:** Beyond immediate psychological gains, sledging often functions performatively—projecting identity, asserting legacy, or enacting resistance—thus contributing to the broader narrative theatre of elite sport.

6. CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals sledging as more than mere verbal sparring—it is a discursively loaded performance that operates on multiple pragmatic levels: asserting power, constructing player identity, and managing on-field tension. Through the lens of linguistic pragmatics and critical discourse theory, sledging emerges as a strategic form of interpersonal communication where language is weaponized under the guise of humour or tradition. Moreover, sledging reflects larger cultural scripts—such as the Australian valorisation of verbal aggression or the English tradition of ironic wit—which inform the boundaries of acceptability. While some utterances remain within the realm of performative jest, others verge on moral transgression, thereby challenging the "spirit of cricket" ideal. Ultimately, this study calls for a nuanced understanding of sledging as a linguistic event shaped by context, culture, and power, rather than reducing it to a simple dichotomy of sportsmanship versus misconduct.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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Most of the evidence are taken from public domains and websites that discuss cricket and stories related to specific events. Their contribution is hereby acknowledged. Further previous studies are worth following in multiple contexts.

LIMITATIONS

The stories may have minor variations though structurally they are similar. The study depends on the websites generally considered authentic. The data cannot beyond a size for analysis.

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