

## A Pragmatic Analysis of Figures of Speech in English Top Matches Football Commentary

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To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i4/25189> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v15-i4/25189

**Published Date:** 07 April 2025

### Abstract

Football is not solely maintaining the frontline in the sports world, but bringing uncountable followers to the sport industry on a daily basis. Low number of these football lovers prefer to visit stadiums to watch these football matches, while some would rather opt for either watching the broadcast audibly or visually. Meanwhile, the most important segment for many football lovers is the verbal commentaries carried out by the commentator. The speaking skills portrayed by the commentator while reporting the football moves and events attract linguists to explore the commentator's mode of switching figures of speech in the football commentaries. As such, the current study attempts to analyze the switch and usage of figures of speech during football commentaries. The study delves into the kinds of figures of speech used in describing football moves and activities. To gather the necessary and accurate information, observation, questionnaire and semi-structured interviews were adopted. The outcome of the study underscores that sport-commentary is basically and naturally a journalistic role to explain, criticize, analyze and describe sport events to those absent and physically present at the sport-field. The study emphasizes the importance of ensuring that English grammatical rules are adhered to while reporting sport activities. It concludes that talent, actions, tone of voice, language proficiency and quality journalism training guarantee the commentator's acceptance in the eyes of football lovers.

**Keywords:** Football, Commentaries, Commentator, Metaphors, Similes and Idioms

### Introduction

Figures of speech, in addition to being a tool of communication, have great cultural and civilizational importance, and their disappearance means the loss of unique traditions, knowledge, heritage and memories of ancestors. Figurative language is a vital factor in entertaining audiences, a carrier of cultural ideas and values, and the main means of

understanding the cultural aspects of society and its nuances (Yoni, 2024). Figures of speech expresses man and his perception of actions, events, incidents and happenings. It is also capable of introspection and talking about its system; it is also the expression of a set of theoretical and applied human sciences, such as history and geography, sociolinguistics or linguistic sociology, psycholinguistics, linguistic psychology, and other fields of modern theoretical and applied sciences (Al-Shamsan, 2015).

Sports are a vital and necessary activity in the lives of youth and the general public, and they play an important role in developing the body and mind and enhancing general health. Sports exercises help enhance physical fitness and general health for adolescents, activate positive thinking, discipline and perseverance, enhance emotional fitness, reduce stress and mental depression, develop self-esteem and self-confidence, have a great impact on student's mental and psychological abilities and improve his levels of academic achievement (Mansouri, 2024).

Figures of speech constitute the means of expressing oneself in a lively and interesting manner, while football is a part of human culture on the other hand. Language undoubtedly occupies a major position in the world of sports at its various levels, whether in the physical practice itself, or at the level of following its news and various events, especially football. Accordingly, the exchange of influence between language and sports undoubtedly exists in this regard (Massinissa, 2015). As a result of this, the study analyzes how figures of speech could complement and promote football worldwide.

#### *The Concept of Sports Commentary*

Sports commentary is primarily a linguistic activity, as it is a narrative discourse based on the improvised and immediate use of speech units and storytelling mechanisms in order to describe an event taking place in front of the eyes, and it may not be an objective description because it goes beyond game plans and other movements taking place on the field, to become criticism and evaluation, with what it imposes of subjective intervention in events and the imposition of imaginary burdens on them (Khalaf, 2022). Some defined sports commentary based on its ethical aspect as honesty, objectivity and integrity (Al-Awis, 1998).

Sports commentary is divided into an introduction, a text and a conclusion. As for the introduction, it must be exciting and attractive, with its interesting style and the way it is presented to the audience. In the text, the commentator mentions the most important notes and information serving his topic. The conclusion is brief and strong, and its boundaries are hardly apparent from the text of the commentary due to its importance; Which often makes this conclusion linked to what was mentioned in the introduction of questions, data and expectations before the match in linking ideas and opinions to each other, to extract the most important logical results resulting from the analysis and opinion (Khadour, 1994).

The art of commentating on football matches began with the emergence of radio broadcasting on air in the mid-twenties of the last century in the continents of Europe and Latin America. Egypt had the merit of cutting the tape of audio transmission in Arabic in the mid-thirties (Al-Zaalouk, 2017). By the beginning of the thirties, the commentary was purely Arabic at the hands of Egyptian radio as well, and when football appeared in Egypt, the goal was called (injury), and the sports editor had to convey the atmosphere of the game to the

reader as if he was a commentator. "Mohamed Latif", the former star of the Egyptian national team, is considered a pioneer in the art of commenting on football in Egypt and the Arab world, and he continued on the radio broadcasting matches until 1960 AD (Al-Desouki, 2022).

A media professional believes that commentating on matches means honesty, integrity, and a conscious study of all the match's effects, which includes analyzing the role of each of the players, referees, and fans, with an analysis of those roles covering the entire event for the recipient, supported by information with the requirement of neutrality in the description. Commenting is based on certain tools, which are: the sender (commentator), the recipient of the message, who is the listener or viewer, and the medium, which is the channel transmitting the message or the media service represented in placing the listener or viewer at the heart of the event (Al-Desouki, 2022).

#### *Differences between Commentating Via Radio and Television Waves*

Commentating on football matches differs between being transmitted via radio broadcast and its television counterpart in that each of them has some features and characteristics; as in the audible radio commentary, the sports commentator relies on an accurate description of the matches, transferring the ball from one area to another, following the smallest details, reminding people about the remaining time for the game, and reminding audiences of the match-scores to make the listener focus on the match. On television, the sports commentator is associated with conveying the complete picture, as the commentator does not have to provide the most minute details like a radio announcer. Television has given the sports commentator space to fill his mind with information and statistics he wants to present to the viewer. As for the internal commentary inside the stadium, it means describing the match to the audience and its scope is limited to the place only (Al-Desouky, 2022).

#### *Manifestations of the Importance of Sports Commentary and its Effects on the Popularity and Spread of the Game*

Sports commentary is one of the most influential sports media, and the fastest to reach the recipient, whether a viewer or a listener, due to its ability to describe events in an easy and simple way, and add more excitement and suspense to them with the beautiful sentences and phrases it adds in conveying important information to its listeners (Farouk, 2019).

The sports match gains its importance in football because it includes a great deal of excitement, vitality and attractiveness, as it is a rich and diverse event and enjoys a significant amount of popularity. This is due to the fact that matches in general have taken on the character of influential drama, and due to the acquisition of football's economic and commercial character, as it has become a popular commodity in recent decades with the development of television transmission methods. Sports commentary on matches has become very popular, and commentators have occupied a high and accurate position in transmitting the events of various football competitions, and for this reason we may find some of the names of our English and Arab commentators more famous and influential than many of the players themselves (Khadour, 1994).

Sports commentary is either an audible commentary only through the audio broadcast - radio. There is also visual commentary, which is done via the television screen, and through it the glow of broadcasting matches has increased and its fame has spread. There are

differences between the two types that have been discussed. There is also another type of commentary called internal commentary, which is done from inside the stadium or sports hall for the spectators present only (Hosni, 2022). There is a commentary by one commentator, and commentary by two commentators. There is commentary that is biased towards one side, and commentary from two sides, i.e. balanced, and neutral commentary that is less focused and intense for the receiving audience to get bored.

### *Difficulties of the Commentary Profession*

Many people may think that the sports commentary profession is easy and simple, but in fact it is one of the most difficult media professions ever, because the commentator must have the element of talent, taste, the art of creativity, and the elements of intellectual, psychological, and sports enjoyment to satisfy his audience who follows him, and to attract him to stay on the channel broadcasting the match. The difficulty of the commentary task is that it is not studied or taught, unlike any other profession in the media, such as journalism or directing, as commentary is a point of view that reflects the talent and abilities of its owner.

In the same context, Saeed Al-Kaabi, one of the most prominent sports commentators in the Arab world currently, states that commentary is a talent in the first place, but it always needs development, growth, and attention, and it is enough to prove its difficulty that it requires good preparation and attention to details, no matter how small (Farouk, 2019). This is in addition to the fact that the sports commentary task is a live work with all the hardships related to the unexpected surprise and expressions that may betray the speaker, no matter how experienced and professional he is. It is a profession without a scenario, based on instantaneous talk based on improvisation and intelligence, and its practitioner must know the extent of the responsibility that falls on his shoulders (Hamila, 2022).

### **Problem Statement**

A certain number of commentators have been found using some figures of speech different to the language and understanding of the audience. This indeed influences the interpretation of non-native audiences towards commentators' usage of figures of speech, and affects the transfer, encoding and decoding of the message passed by the commentator to the audience.

The current study perceives commentators switching figures of speech as a distraction to the audiences. The study bothers on whether audiences are considered by the commentators while using different figures of speech to describe happenings and report commentaries. The research problem lies in the commentators' violation of communication and linguistic rules while reporting, which in turn affects non-native English audience interpretation of football commentaries. Hence, making these concerns a research topic would enhance the accessibility and comprehension of football commentaries in English language.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The study intends to facilitate audience suspense, humor and anxiety in football commentaries. It would support and expose language learners to diverse strategies that could be used to grasp commentators' language. It could serve as communication practices to ESL learners striving to be fluent in English other than local languages. In essence, the study shall protect the Arab audiences from ambiguous comprehension of English commentaries.

### *Pragmatics*

Pragmatics is defined to mean the study of interpreting meaning. Pragmatic choices are made by the participants in a conversation to indicate time, position and cultural factors including gender, age and power. The significance of pragmatics is to provide a theoretical framework that connects language, cultural settings and linguistic choice together. It identifies speakers' intended meaning in a conversation.

Pragmatics as a concept focuses on social interaction, actual situation of a communication, locutionary acts, grammatical principles, illocutionary acts, perlocutionary acts, relevance, quantity, quality and manner of the speaker. Pragmatics also takes social behaviour and speaker's countenance into consideration while conveying information and reporting football commentaries (Scotto, 2022). In a nutshell, pragmatics identifies the factors that affect a speaker's language in a social interaction.

### *English Football Live Matches*

Across Europe, football tournaments are the most-largely watched sport among others through television coverage and all other media platforms (Gerhard, 2014). 29.85 million viewers recorded by German television for the ZDF broadcast gave them a championship award. As such, television broadcasts drastically increase the number of live football viewers (LiveProduction, 2016).

Broadcasters were strictly allowed to use cameras during halftime, pre and post-match reporting, unlike other previous tournaments. The restriction of the production of images facilitates the football live commentaries. Since then, verbal commentary examination has become an area of interest (Desmarais, 2009).

### *Pragmatic Function of Figures of Speech in Football Live Commentaries*

The function of language could easily be understood when context, speaker, content and audience are jointly considered at once. The four elements such as context, speaker, content and audience constitute communication. Each element is connected with one another in such a way that the occurrence of changes in an element directly affects the other.

Live reports influence audiences' perception and attitude towards the commentator (Cheung et al., 2020). Pragmatic function of simile, metaphors and idioms could be perceived in creating a rhyme in one's speech. While metaphor allows commentators to report serious events with jokes, simile on the other hand gives room for comparative sentences. Commentators may use figures of speech to shape the audience's perception of the content of a football comment. With the aid of commentators, commentaries may be entertaining, relaxing or dramatic in nature. Figures of speech simplify complicated messages and quickly capture points in reports. The power in the figures of speech is quite unique in such a way that it triggers an individual's sensory and memory capacities. Similarly, it increases an individual's motivation to learn more and likewise shortens an individual's communication cycles (Chovanec, 2016).

An example of this is the phrase "step up to the plate" which means standing firmly for a task with courage. Similarly, "trust everyone, but cut the cards" is another proverb used to caution someone to believe no one and safeguarding oneself extraordinarily. Additionally, "turnabout

is fair play” is equally in sport referred to as claiming one’s time after the other party had used his own chance (Titelman, 2000).

“Win this one for the Gipper” is another phrase used to encourage a contestant to consider a reason to win a game or battle. Also, the phrase “before you can run, one has to learn to work” is mostly introduced to prepare people for more advanced tasks ahead of them. The phrase conveys broad meaning as it can also be interpreted as following the proper steps accordingly without thinking of flying or running before walking (Titelman, 2000). When an accurate and well known scorer is at the box–18 in a football match, an English idiom like “a fox in the box” is used by the commentator to motivate the striker and put the audience into a suspense. This idiomatic expression is used when there is a high probability that an all-time scorer is highly expected to shake the goal-post with a goal. In a similar vein, another idiomatic expression such as “to move the goal post” is often uttered by the commentator when an unfair judgment emanates from the referee or an opponent team in a football match (Titelman, 2000).

Hence, it is noteworthy that some figures of speech like metaphors and similes also apply to other sports beyond football matches. Idioms on the opposite side, might not convey any phrases related to the actual event in a football match, but mostly introduced to exaggerate comments about an event. The construction of idioms may pose interpretation challenges for non-native audiences due to its unrelated forms and contents (Fomenko et al, 2020). Therefore, commentators largely use similes and metaphors in commentaries as compared to idioms which are rarely adopted in live football commentaries.

### **Concluding Thought**

Therefore, figures of speech are an integral area of interest in language acquisition. Its use in football reporting requires that both the speaker (commentator) and the audiences acquire sufficient knowledge about its usage in football live commentaries. Figures of speech create different context, thinking, interpretation and comprehension for audiences. It simplifies football live commentaries for one-time football fans. In a situation where a commentator sticks to a plain language for live reporting, without adopting figures of speech, it would be difficult for a newly-football fans to comprehend football terminologies in the live commentaries.

The extent of figures of speech usage in a live commentary often determine the expected audiences in the subsequent matches. It draws audiences attention to the match and makes it more lively and interesting. In fact, figurative language assists commentators in expressing emotions and controlling biased comments.



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