UNIJERPS
Unizik Journal of Educational Research and Policy Studies VOL.19 (2);
January-June, 2025 https://unijerps.org
2023 Impact Factor:* 6.834;** 2022 ***Impact Factor: 5.156; ***2021 Impact Factor: 5.641;***
2020 Impact Factor: 5.355. *Indexing and Impact Factor URL:* http://sjifactor.com/passport.php?id=21363

STYLISTIC STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF SPORTS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

Okoro Gladys Onyinyechi
&
Okereke Jane Chinatu PhD

School Of General Studies, Imo State Polytechnic,
Omuma, Imo State, Nigeria

EMAIL: wilfred.chukwuemeka2020@gmail.com and janeokereke@imopoly.net

ABSTRACT

This work investigates the stylistics study of the language of sports in selected Nigerian Newspapers. The study followed an analytical pattern of investigation on the different levels of stylistics. The theoretical framework that influenced the work is the theory of Systematical Functional Linguistics propounded by J.R Firth and duly developed by M.A, K. Halliday. The theory focuses on the notion of language function. It attempts to understand the manner by which language is utilized for various reasons and in various scenarios; thus, serving as a communicative motivation in the learning of language. The research design was descriptive in nature, as only secondary data were sourced and used. The data were collected from two randomly selected Nigerian newspapers. Data were also analysed using content analysis method, since the study is qualitative in nature. In the cause of this investigation, it was discovered that the sports columnists have their kind of style of writing which includes: boldening, underlining, lesser use of punctuation marks, colours, pictures and images and the use of capital letters. The conclusion from the investigations was that the language of sports is learnt as part of growing up exercises of young people. It was recommended that the columnists should not use ambiguous words, but used simple and short sentences to avoid boredom and allow the people either literate or non-literate to understand quickly and easily.

Keywords: Language, Sports, Newspapers, and Columnists.

Introduction

Language is very vital to human existence. Language in literature therefore possesses an understanding quality because it is rational, non-instinctive and basically made up of speech sounds.

Anderson (2021) often assert that style and language always go together as soul and body. This implies that one of them depends on the other for existence. Language is very closely related to the mind. It is the means by which we conceptualize and think, so that we normally cannot think without language. Man dreams and thinks in the language through which they acquire their first experience of life. Language is thus used to convey their experiences, ideas,

feelings, aspirations, whishes, thought and frustrations. All these are embedded in communication (Darwin, 2020). It is only when communication breaks down that perhaps we became aware of the relevance of language. Popular attitudes towards language and communication ranges from the positive to the negative thus, we praise language one day for making possible human understanding.

According to Okere, (2015) language is the expression of idea, by means of speech sounds combined into sentences, combination answering, to that idea into thoughts. According to Darwin (2020) language is the code or system of rules common to the users of a language e.g. Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa Looking closely at this definition above, one observes that an idea undergoes a lot of processes before meaning is achieved. Linguist think of language as being primarily a system of articulated sounds, language apart from serving as communicative purpose performs other functions. For instance, it is used to influence people an instrument of action. In written languages and communication, there exist different styles which people adopt to achieve their objectives.

According to Gbadessy (2019) Style is derived from the distinction made between langue and parole. Style therefore pertains to parole and can be applied to all varieties of language. Basically, it is the way a speaker or writer selects and employs his words, phrases and sentences to achieve his desired effect in any given context. In this study, style is the man issue.

According to Winter (2022) "a style maybe said to be characterized by a pattern or recurrent selection from the inventory of optional features of a language". Specifically, this involves "selection from the phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic elements". It includes complete exclusion of an optional element, obligatory inclusion of a feature optional elsewhere and varying degrees of inclusion of a specific variant without complete elimination of competing features.

The word 'style' according to McCrimmon (2021) has many meanings ranging from the way a man lives to the latest cut in dressing. When applied to writing. It can refer to the philosophy and personality of the writer. In the words of Izuagba and Onwukanjo (2022) "style is the man" in his choice of words and the way he combines clauses into sentences. "Style is associated with the manner in which the language of a work is expressed in order to achieve a striking effect". (Ebeogu 2014:206). Style is thus a distinctive way of saying, writing or doing things. Style is therefore a kind of act, both inherent and acquired and often imagination.

Style is the peculiar way a writer puts language in use. According to Ebeogu (2014), the style of an individual is his choice. His choice is sub-divided into preverbal and verbal choice. Pre-verbial choices can be cultural, psychological and inspirational or all the three combined. Cultural preverbial choices arise from the fact that an author belongs to a speech community which has guiding rules governing their use of language. These rules indirectly affect the writers' style or his use of language because his environment overtimes, becomes part of the man. Osuafor (2021) focuses on style from the perspective that would be

beneficial to their interpretation of the literary text, thus Osuafor sees style essentially as the linguistics appropriate to the speaker, occasion and the dignity of its literary genre. It is the concept of style that has given birth to the discipline of stylistic.

Stylistics is a broad term that has assumed different meanings from different linguistics scholars. But it can simply be said to be the study of style. Style on it's own as defined by Lucas, (2019) is the effective use of statements or to rouse emotions. It involves first of all the power to put fact with clarity and brevity. The term is applied to the realm of linguistics and literary science which studies peculiarities of a writer's individual manner of using language means to achieve his goals of influencing the reader. The term 'STYLE' originated from the Latin 'Stilus' which means a pen used by the Romans for writing on wax, tablets. In the course of time, it developed several meanings each one applied to a specific study of language elements and their use in speech.

This work focused on stylistics which is defined as a study of the different styles that are present in either a given utterance or a written text or document. The consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in a speech, an utterance or in a given text is one of the major concern of stylistics. Stylistics requires the use of traditional levels of linguistics description such as sounds, form, structure and meaning. It then follows that the consistent appearance of certain structures, items and elements in speech utterances or in a given text is one of the major concerns of stylistics. The essence and the usefulness of stylistics is that it enables the immediate understanding of utterances and texts, thereby maximizing our enjoyment of the texts.

From the foregoing, stylistics can be said to be the techniques of explication which allows us to define objectively, what an author has done in his use of language (Crystal & Davy, 2018).

Basically, Language and communication have different styles and varieties for different purposes. Thus, English has a variety of stylistics in Journalism, Sports, Advertising, Engineering, Politics, Science and Technology etc. The purpose of this work is to analyse the Stylistic study of the language of sports in selected Nigerian newspapers

The focal point of this work is sports. According to Gbadessy (2019) the language of soccer is not learned consciously as compared with the language of science and technology or that of legal documents". The language of sports, therefore is learnt as part of growing up exercises of young boys and girls. This is further corroborated by Miller (2015), as he states that sports is taken seriously in a child's life from his/her school days. He further states that the tremendous publicity given sports, especially those capable of attracting thousands of spectators, worry many people. This is probably due to the fact that sports reporters choose concrete words to the neglect of abstract ones. These concrete words are simple and devoid of complexities to distort meaning. Sequel to this, Osborn (2024) comments that in the sports report, concrete words are generally preferred to abstract ones because they create vivid pictures for the audience and

not only this, they go on to enhance understanding for them.

Commenting on the Written Sports Language, Miller (2015) says that the sports reporter should avoid too much "technical writing". Because to him, it shows off grandly what he knows, but it limits the number of his readers. He goes on to comment that such pitfalls should be avoided by the reporter in doling out his vocabulary. In coining new lexical words for sports reports, the intelligent use of slang is advised. Slang adds beauty to a piece of writing. However, reporters should be cautious of devising natural slang, a practice referred to as barbaric. Also, slangs that people have to spend time to understand is weak and should be avoided (Darwin, 2020). Where is also the use of collocation in sports reporting. According to Gbadessy (2019) the word 'ball' collocates much more frequently with the definite article 'the' than with 'a'. Again the 'ball' collocates with a team's name very frequently and also the word 'managers'.

In sports reporting however, irrespective of the room for creativity a reporter is given, he should be sparse in his opinionating in a game. To do this scathingly without thought for the player who might not have been experienced is cruel. Even the professional who is experienced and who commits a blunder does not deserve the language's most torrid epithet.

Today, sports reports have so much attracted a lot of readers due to the rise in sports fellowship in Nigeria. The more Nigerians are sports loving people, the more it creates room for sports reporters to write on current sports activities happening around our environment are more likely to interest people either locally or internationally. In this way, newspapers draw a large readership from people of different ages, educational and social backgrounds. The general acceptance of sports made it possible for it to become a vehicle for promoting peace and unity.

Statement of the Problem

Sports essentially are designed to create excitement and leisure. As a tool for recreation, it creates and recreates that exciting part of human existence. Sports reporting on the other hand goes beyond this, it is meant to inform, educate and entertain at the same time-all demanding endeavours in their own right. For it to achieve these objectives, it needs to effectively communicate. Several scholar researches have been carried out on the areas of mass media generally, especially newspapers. Also, more works have been carried out on stylistics. For instance, Abimbola (2017) examined the stylistic study of language of Advertising by GSM network providers in Nigerian newspapers. Other works have been on reports of oral renditions such as welcome addresses, speech and plays, but not much work have been done concerning sports columns in the newspapers, hence, this essay aims at filling this gap.

Purpose of the Study

The major objective of this work focused on Stylistic study of the language of sports in selected Nigerian newspapers. The specific objectives are to:

1 examine the Language of sports in journalism.
2 identify the choice of language used in sports columns.

3 Investigate the extent the language of sports has effect on the target audience.

Scope of the Study

The content scope covered Stylistic study of the language of sports in selected Nigerian newspapers. Almost all newspapers in Nigeria report sports. However, this study restricts itself to only two (2) newspapers: The Punch and complete sports. The period of January – April of 2024 was chosen for the study because no major sports competitions or event in the month of world-cup of any single sports take place at that time.

Research questions

The following Research questions will help in carrying out the study.

1. What is the Language of sports in journalism?
2. What is the choice of language used in sports columns?
3. To what extent does the language of sports have effect on the target audience?

Review of Related Literature

The language of sports has caught the attention of many scholars of journalism. No doubt most of them have tried to study the style of the language of sports. Osuafor (2021) is of the opinion that language is the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among one another and the primary function of language is to convey ideas from one person to another be it information, command or entreaty. The source also opines that language is a system of vocal and linguistic symbols used in a particular language society and is essentially a social institution. For Osuafor (2021) language can also be said to be personal. Just as the experiences of each person within a speech community will be different, so each person's language will differ to some extent in what is called idiolectal, it is also regional or dialectal, social or occupational, capable of being varied in a large number of unrelated contexts. Just the same, language is a social institution and communication through which language takes place within the context of a social activity such as religion, law, advertising, officialdom, sports, medicine etc.

The writer strongly believes that all these varieties have something in common that differentiates them as variants of the same language. At the same time, that each variant is definably distinct from all others, a distinction based on the social activity and context in which the language is used. He calls them the ideational and the context where each of the social activities has its peculiar characteristics in terms of ideas and how these ideas are communicated. This source goes further to explain that the language user is constantly matching ideation and verbalization as are appropriate to particular social activities. His communicativeness is measured not so much by his verbal dexterity, but by his ability to vary language according to contexts.

Osuafor (2013:20) concludes by saying that every variety is determined by context, characteristics that can be easily noticed either by its fossilized forms like that of the law and it's coupling of near synonyms and antonyms, repetition of nouns etc., or like that of the advertisements that makes use of pscho-langauge by appealing to the emotion

instead of appealing to the logical being of the customer. The material states that such is the language of sports columns with its special stylistic variation e.g. 'first-half', centerline etc. This material focused on the communicative function of language and did not attempt a stylistic study of the language of sports columns, hence this research work.

Darwin (2020) follows Osuafor's line of argument by asserting that "the power of communication between the member of the same tribe by means of language has been of paramount importance in the development of man…" The source implies that the human language is a social entity for the conveyance of human behavior and experience. This, coupled with the fact that our attitudes and experience display vividly lots of variations makes feasible the concept of language variations as previously cited.

The writer further argued that the concept of language variations also includes the concept of style which means the characteristic manner of expression a writer or an individual conveys information. This implies that the vast concept called language is hydra-headed. That is, it has within its framework, relative and non-relative language. According to the source, these languages are termed aptly as varieties. The source opines that these varieties among other things give us due to the often-complex diversities of human culture. Darwin (2020) concludes that it is part of the nature of language, or of human culture in general, that there should be individual, differences in performance and differences in the performances of an individual in various situations. To further illustrate this, the writer says that a speaker normally has favourite expressions", words, phrases, constructions which he uses more frequently that other speakers. Also, any adult speaker uses different kinds of speech in participating in religious worship, chatting with old friends and so on. This material focused on language variations but did not go into details of the language of sports columns which this research work tends to carry out.

Anderson (2021) in discussing registers, comments that registers are characterized by linguistic properties and that such features co-occur regularly in specific language situations. The source viewed register as a term which has constantly "been applied to varieties of language in an almost indiscriminate manner…" According to the source, the language of newspaper headlines, religion, songs, sports columns, advertising amongst others have all been referred to as registers in one work.

For Anderson (2021), each register has the characteristics of sharing some peculiar linguistic properties. These linguistic properties according to Anderson (2021) co-occur regularly in specified language situations. The writer further maintained that registers may be functionally characterized with respect to a writer's/speaker's aims, or phonologically and lexically, syntactically and semantically. The writer is of the view that if these linguistic devices or features are absent in a register, then effective communication might be difficult to achieve. This material focused it's analysis on registers while this research work focuses on the stylistic study of sports columns.

Crystal and Davy (2018) in an attempt to analyse the language of sports columns asserts that "the most noticeable device of the writing style is it's heading: the functioning of which must kindle an interest in the potential reader". The source also said that another prominent feature is paragraphing; the way in which the narrative as a whole is split into smaller units. This, they say makes for easy readability. Writing sports columns cannot be wholly accomplished without a good lead. The lead is usually in the first paragraph and it determines the overall pattern and prowess of the write-up. The lead works hard, it compresses into one or two paragraphs and gives a summary of the whole story. This they say, enables a reader to decide in a moment whether he wishes to follow through and pick up the details or whether the few words satisfy him.

For Crystal and Davy (2018) the lead is built upon five questions: "who?", "what", "where?", "when?", "why?", and when these five W's have been answered, the story is outlined and nothing remains to be given except details. The lead should not be cumbersome and must be coherent. Sports columns are not mainly predicated on the lead paragraph however. There is also the use of comma punctuating. This according to the source, is made use of in inverted commas for quotations or to spotlight terms for particular attention because they are being used in a technical way. The source also says that in this style of writing, commas are usually omitted in some places where they would normally be expected. For instance, initially placed adverbials, between co-ordination or between sequences of adjectives.

The source goes further to explain that structurally, sports columns are massed together by a vast network of grammatical features. Crystal and Davy (2018) in defining the structure of sports columns state: "the three most significant features within the broad category of statement type concern the position of the subject in relation to the rest, the position of the adverbials within the clause, and the types of phrase and clause structure which may occur within any given sentences". They say that the normal SP word order becomes PS eg. "said Dr Tunde" instead of "Dr Tunde said".

Crystal and Davy (2018) conclude by commenting that Adverbials are also common in sports columns. They state that apart from the small groups of adverts which have a fixed or relatively fixed position before the rest, adverbials tend to come towards the end of a clause, either after the rest, or at the very end when everything else has been said. They also state that not only the beginning position are very common for adverbials, but one regularly finds that no reliance can be made on the preceding context to explain why this is so. They insisted that – conciseness, short sentence, simple words – all these characteristics of journalism have one primary goal, which is to provide information clearly. And for it to be remarkably done, it's rudiments have to be adhered to strictly. Crystal and Davey (2018) focused on the language of sports columns, they however, did not give details of how the lexis of sports columns should be, hence this research work.

Gbadessy (2019) in commenting on the lexis of sports columns explained that the language of sports is not learned consciously as compared with the

language of science and technology or that of legal documents. This implies that the language of sports therefore is learnt as part of growing up exercises of young boys and girls. It should be noted that the language of sports is arbitrary. One does not undertake a study of it as one would do in understanding other languages.

Miller (2015) however, follows Gbadessy's line of argument and stated this… college, and even high school sports, have become critical area…." Here he states that sports is taken seriously in a child's life from his/her school days. The source further states that the tremendous publicity given sports, especially those capable of attracting thousands of spectators worry many people. The writer went further to explain that sports columnist choose concrete words to the neglect of abstract ones. These concrete words are simple and devoid of complexities to distort meaning. The source explained that the concrete words generally preferred to abstract ones because they create vivid pictures for your audience and not only this, they go on to enhance understanding for them.

Still stressing on the lexis of sports columns, Miller (2015) says that the sports columnists should avoid too much "technical writing". He stressed that too much use of technically writing shows off grandly what he knows, but however limits the number of his readers. The writer goes on to comment that such pitfalls should be avoided by the reporter is doling out his vocabulary.

Furthermore, the writer warns against opinionating in his write-up. He asserts: "…a topic can be presented to the public in very different heights: and it is up to us to judge to what extent this colouring is obscuring the truth of a situation. There is always the danger of bias… in any writing: the attitude of the writer towards his subject tends to creep in". The source concludes by saying that the sports columnists should take time in choosing words for the activities and events in a game. This is because of the limited space that is not too much, but allow for an overall analysis of the game. This source concentrated on the lexis of sports columns stating that concrete words other than abstract words should be used, but did not exemplify on the concrete words to be used. This research work however, is on the stylistics study of sports columns.

Osborn and Osborn (2024) in their own words while commenting on the lexis of sports columns stated that "the language and lexical nature of sports columns is actually one that is not the type of every day usage". This implies that words like "half-time", which ordinarily means "a little time" is seen in the language of sports as "bi-segment of time in a game". The source furthered his argument by mentioning the effective use of collocation in sports columns. They stated that the word "ball" collocates much more frequently with the definite article 'the' than with 'a'. They stated also that the word 'defense' collocates with a team's name very frequently. All these make the language unique.

The writer agrees with Miller (2015) by stating that irrespective of the room for creativity a reporter is given, he should be sparse in his opinionating in a game". He says to do this scathingly without thought for the player who might not have been experienced is cruel. He goes further to say that even the

professional who is experienced, who committed a blunder 'does not deserve the language's most torrid epithet". The source concludes by noting that adverbial especially the one-word-ly category should be rampant. He made mention of adverbs like "superbly", "brilliantly", "dangerously" etc. The material focus on the lexis of sports columns, exemplifying the type of word to be used by columnists. However, this research work seeks to carry out a stylistics study of the language of sports columns.

Miller (2015) commenting on the syntactic nature of sports columns opines that "writing sports news involves four main points: Accuracy, fairness, analysis, structure". The source states that the columnist has no excuse for having to guess why the home team lost, he should know the signal code. He should also know how to keep scores for the various games. By accuracy, the source means being able to explain certain parts of the game. For example, why was a penalty given during the game. Fairness, the source states means, in effect: "do not turn a defeat for the home team into a moral victory". This implies the fact that some sports columnists believe the visitors win, not because of being the better team, but only because luck was in their favour.

The source maintains that structure is the one that demands planning a story so that readers can anticipate what is coming next. For example, four goals were scored. Immediately after the card, the story explains how three goals were scored leaving one out to make readers wonder why that last goal was not included in the summary. Analysis according to the source, "is the way the columnist strives to get the story across as interesting and informing as possible with not only a variety of short and long sentences, but with simple ones also".

Miller (2015) advising on the right choice of syntactic structure to be employed by sports columnists, instructs that, reporters should make their meaning clear by using simple short sentences. These sentences should be simple. He however, state that some games might be intricate enough to require long sentences and therefore to create that variety in sentence length, he suggests a use of short and long sentences which will create an overall structure of information and entertainment for the readers. Furthermore, the writer insists that the sports columnist should study the phraseology (stylistic features) of the game as this will enhance his conveyance of information to the audience. Miller (2015) also cautions…that this could be misleading and could defeat the purpose.

The source concluded by insisting that though the past tense is prominent in sports, the opportunity for the use of tense that is to predict actions of a game are sometimes available. According to the source, when a columnist gets into the sports department, he exults at the chance for 'dope writing' in which he predicts how Saturday's game will develop and why. For instance, the word 'will' is often used. It is not unused therefore to see in sports columns syntactic structures like "going by this performance this afternoon, the super eagles will surely defeat the Cameroonian team next week". This material carried out a syntactic analysis of sports columns while this research work focuses on a general stylistic analysis of sports columns.

According to Crystal (in Osuagwu et al 1997) syntax is a traditional term for the study of rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language. It is opposed to morphology; the study of the interrelationships between elements of sentence structure, and of the rules governing the arrangement of sentences in sequence in this use, one might then talk of the syntax of the word.
In generative linguistics, syntax components is one of the three major organizational units within a grammer containing the phrase structure and transformational for structure.

The source goes further to define syntax as the structural use and meaning as well as with the combinatorial property of such words and so trespasses upon the territory of morphology, lexis and semantics. The source says syntax is often not about the individual's lexis or morphology which are features of the structure in a sentence but rather trespasses upon these and focuses on the stringing of these individuals' properties for these special effects and formation called the syntax structure

Writing on syntax still, the source state that the only way to look into the functions of the individual words in the sentence and how the words are related is by classifying the words into functions of words by grouping them into syntactic categories. A syntactic category according to him "is a group of words which can be substituted for one another in the same position in a sentence without affecting the grammaticality". It is assumed that the word which can be substituted for one – another fulfill the same function eg. 'the ball was kicked'. Therefore, "man", "ball", "girl" all belong to the same category which is called noun (N), while 'kicked', 'ate', belong to a different category called verb (V).

For Crystal (1997:80) studied a constituent is another part of a sentence. It is grouped into progressively larger constituents. Eg. (the man) and (the ball) are constituents because in each case the determiner 'the' modifies the noun next to it. We can then group (on (the table) as one larger constituent and (put (the bag) as an even larger constituent because 'the bag' is the object of the verb and 'on the table' modifies 'put'. The who sentence can be divided as (the boy) (put (the bag) (on (the table)).

The source concludes by saying that the nature of the language of sports column has a lot in common and can be analysed under the categories pointed out above. It states that the language of sports columns can also be analysed as phrases, clauses, sentence (periodic, loose, parallel) etc. Eg. "Okorocha dribbles past the goal-keeper and scored a goal". This material focused on the syntactic level of analysis while this research work is focused on the stylistics study of language of sports columns.

Palmer (2021:1) commenting on the semantic nature of sports columns defines the term 'semantics' as "…the technical term used to refer to the study of meaning. And since meaning is a part of linguistics". He also sees it as the study of the semantic properties of natural language as opposed to language.

The writer goes further to comment that semantics is central to those studies of communication and as communication becomes more and more a crucial factor in social organization, the need to understand it becomes more and more pressing.

Semantics according to him is the center of the study of human mind, thought process, cognition, and conceptualization. All these are intricately bound up with the way in which we classify and convey our experiences of the world through language.

The writer stressed that in these ways semantics has become focal point in man's study of man and has been the meeting place of various cross-segments of thinking and various disciplines of study, philosophy, etymology etc. By etymology; the diachronic study of word, meaning the study of the origins and historical development of words eg "salt money" "man" "philosophy" "chief driver" etc.

Anyanwu and Otagburuagu (2022) corroborated this by stating another level of semantics called the sentential and cultural levels. By sentential, they mean the higher unit of meaning than either the morpheme or the lexeme. Each sentence is made up of many of those lower units. They say that the sentence emerges when we linearly structure words according to their selectional rules so that each word enjoys the company of every other word in the sentence in order to give us an acceptable sentence and meaning.

The source furthers it's argument saying that in addition, that the cultural meaning is a great area of meaning but probably not in the sense of the morpheme, the lexeme and syntagm. For Palmer (2021:5) the English expression: "Good morning" does not mean that the morning is good. At best we may say that the speaker is wishing someone a good morning, but it does not reflect the actual state of the morning. It is simply a cultural way of meeting and greeting. The source insists that our culture helps us to interpret signs and symbols: a cry means misfortune, thunderclaps are endured with all kinds of symbolic action, dressing, eating and dancing follow cultural pattern. In each case for him, language interprets the culture in what is now referred to as "Dominance Configuration"

Palmer (2021:10) concludes that idiomatic expressions are fixed expressions with cultural meaning not logically found in the structure or lexis of the expression. The source says that it is the culture that interprets, for example; she has kicked the bucket as: she is dead. Again, that cultural meaning therefore resides in and explains most of our actions, utterances, aspirations and sanctions.

This material focused on the semantic level of analysis, stating that as much as language differs from culture to culture, individual to individual and filed to field, so does the language of sports columns differs from others. This research work however, is on the stylistics study of the language of sports columns.

Ojinah (2018:1) did a painstaking study of the semantic features of language of sports columns. He noticed that 'conciseness and simple words should be employed in news reporting and that all these characteristics have one primary goal: to provide information clearly". Ideally, in every discourse, there must be distinctive techniques of organizing meanings and communicating such meanings are the main aim of language. This, according to the author is the art of efficient structuring. Here, he emphasizes the importance of the lead in the sports page. The lead, according to him is the summary intended for the casual reader

who will not follow or read the story through unless it captures his interest.

The author further lists five possibilities of the lead the sports columnists might utilize to aid instant and adequate visual impression of the event and of their setting. The five responsibilities are first; how the scores were made and by whom; second, a tie-in between the result of the game and the features which produced that result; thirdly, a comparison of the teams and players; fourth, a focusing upon the stars (if-any) with an explanation of how they starred and lastly; a picture of the crowd. Furthermore, he maintains that the rest of the story comes with a high-spotting of the highlights of the game.

The source maintains that it is important to remember to avoid 'technical' or 'obscure' writing. The sports columnist should not assume the audience knows the words and begin to use them arbitrarily. He consequently says since not only the fans would be interested in the review of the game, but also casual readers, he should explain these terms "compactly" to these readers. If however, he uses words or phrases, both are designed to further crystallize that air of geniabity the columnist wants to establish with his audience.

Still on the semantic organization of information by sports columnists, the source asserts that a good sports columnist must establish a standard for judging how significant a game must be to receive mention". This he says, requires allotting his space logically. This blends the elements of the game available into a meaningful summary of what took place, giving his story brevity and verve. The source makes it clear that in order to distort meaning and to be effective, a columnist should not imitate another writers style. He maintains that a reporter can only convey information successfully by using his own method and style. Also, even though expression of opinion is allowed in sports commentary, sport column is clinical in its own report.

The source concludes by commenting that sports columns require an analysis that is wholesome and not inadequate of random guessing". He says here, that a columnist should pay attention to the game and be able to decipher the important details that leads to the moment he finally records what he considers important. For instance, the statement: "it could have been 2-0" could be used. The source says diversity is essential. This according to him means that "every group, players, watchers, school children etc have to be attracted" to the sports page. It must be all encompassing. Accordingly, a balance of presentation should be given by him so as for his reporter to appeal to all readers. This material focused on the semantic organization of sports information in sports columns stating the type of words to be used semantically while this research work is strictly on all levels of stylistic analysis of sports columns.

Bamgbose (2021:57) posits that lexico-semantic variations are 'Nigerianised' aspects of the English language lexis, phrases and idioms resulting from the relationship of language to societal realities: that is, efforts to make the English language cater for social realities in the Nigerian context which may not exist in native English communities. The author maintains that the Nigerian English Lexical usage ranges from mother

tongue interference to attribution of special meaning to existing English words. He further identified three approaches to Nigerian English usage to include interference, the deviation and the creativity approaches. The creativity approach pertinent to the current study pertain the exploitation of the resources in Nigerian language and English to create novel idioms and expressions.

The writer rightly draws our attention to the newspaper medium which, according to him, is full of what a linguist defined as "rule-bending creativity", (functional shift), back formation, archaic forms and mother tongue interference. The writer observed that most differences between Nigerian English and other most forms of English are to be found in the innovations of lexical items and idioms and meaning. He also observed five lexico-semantic variations categories (transfer, analogy, acronyms, semantic shift or extension, and coinages or neologisms) and attributed their occurrence to factors such as: socio-cultural differences between the English and Nigerian people, pragmatic aspects of the dynamics of a multi-lingual context, the experiences of different discourse constants, the indomitable pervasive and omnipresent influence of the media, the standardization of idiosyncrasies and errors, and the predominantly formal medium of the acquisition of English.

The writer noted that the notable features of Nigerian English include local coinages with standard English morphological principles, extended on restricted meaning of existing standard English words or expressions, fore-grounded standard English words or expressions, words and expressions derived from pidgin, loan words, and expressions, slangs as well as stylistic usage that differs from standard English usage. The source suggested a further classification of lexico-semantic variation in Nigeria English to include loan shift, semantic under differentiation, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping, acronyms, translation equivalent, analogical creation and coinages.

Bamgbose (2021:70) concluded by commenting that the implication of the Nigerian lexico-semantic variation is that they are liable to bring about reduced intelligibility at the international level. This material focused on lexico-semantic variations but did not focus on the different domains of life where the lexico-semantic variations operate or their communicative purpose and effect in such domains. This research study therefore focuses on the field of sports in order to investigate the implications of lexico-semantic variations in sports columns.

Theoretical Framework

This study is influenced by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) which is a theory of language that centers on the view of language function.

Systemic Functional Linguistics is a theory of language that centers on the notion of language function. It is an interface between choices of words and how they are structured and the meaning made by these words. Systemic functional linguistics accounts for the syntactic structure of language and places the function of language as central (what it does and how it does it). Systemic Functional Linguistics looks at how language acts upon social context and how

it is constrained by it. It explores how language is used in social context to achieve a particular goal.

This theory grew out of the work of J.R Firth, a British Linguist of the thirties but was later developed in the early sixties by M.A.K Halliday who studied under him. Systemic Functional Linguists attempts to understand the manner by which language is utilized for various reasons and in various situations thus serving as a communicative motivation in the learning of language.

A central notion of Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) is "stratification". This implies that language is analysed in terms of strata which are context, semantics, lexico-grammar, phono-graphology etc. The study aims at analyzing the language of sports columns based on the models of language stratification mentioned above.

Methodology

The research Design used in this study is the Descriptive research design. Descriptive research is one in which the researcher is solely interested in describing the situation or case under his/her research design which is created by gathering, analyzing and presenting collected data.

Bearing in mind the research questions and the objectives of this study, the population of this study comprises of a total of five (5) sports comments of varying lengths and sources which are randomly selected for analysis from two selected newspapers: The Punch and Complete Sports. The newspapers were chosen because they contain the data relevant for this study.

Citing Bhattacherjee (2012) in Haulofu (2017) sample is defined as the actual units selected for observation. Sampling is a way of selecting a number of things from a larger group for the purpose of getting invaluable information. For the purpose of this, focus is on the stylistic analysis of sports columns in two newspapers. Five sports comments in Nigeria newspapers were chosen from each newspapers making a total amount of ten (10) samples.

This study used purposive sampling technique to ensure that the researcher obtains the required information for this study. Purposive sampling technique is a non-scientific sampling technique which implies the deliberate picking of samples to cater for the researchers need. This study is focused on the stylistic analysis of sports columns in Nigerian newspapers, therefore, the researcher deliberately used newspapers that contain sport commentaries for the ease of the research.

The instrument for data collection in this study was only secondary data (ie, the newspaper). The purpose was to find out their various opinions of columnist on sports news/reports. Other secondary data (apart from the new papers) include published works such as textbooks, online resources, articles, journals, theses, dictionaries, and so on which help to support and provide referential sources for the study.

The researcher used content analysis methods, which is qualitative in nature. Here, researcher analysed the sports comments in Nigerian newspapers by carefully examining the general stylistic features of the comments. The basis of the analysis is on the different levels of

stylistic analysis such as: graphology, semantic, syntactic and lexical levels of analysis.

Data Analysis

Data Presentation and Analysis

a) Graphological Features

Graphology is the study of a language's writing system and the formalized rules of spelling in texts while graphetics is the study of written or printed shapes in texts. Features such as punctuation, capitalization, orthography, elipses, font style and size, picture and images, emphatic devices, emboldening, block letters are the basis of graphological analysis.

Text 1:

Etuhu happy with UEFA

The columnist made use of the boldening in the effect in text above. The effect of boldening in the above data is that on the first glance of the readers on the newspaper, it captures their attention, it arrests their eyes thereby, convincing them to either buy the newspaper or rent it. Either way, the reader is to read on into the content. The effect is also used as a tool of exaggeration because the headlines are in bold print to attract the readers. For instance, Etuhu happy with UEFA (Text 1)

After reading the content, it is realized that 'Etuhu is just a player and was not happy with UEFA as an association. He was just happy that his club could make it to the semi-final as he said in his statement '…we're very happy to be in the semi-finale…'

Text II

NPL sanctions Kwara Utd, others

The above sample shows the use of Gothic writing by the columnist to capture the reader's attention so that when he sees it, he would be interested. It is always used to attract readers as fancy things are usually captivating. Gothic writing is used for emphasis because it's beauty will remain in the readers mind for a long time. Thereby making the reader remember what the writer has written. Gothic writing is also used to show level of importance in a paragraph.

Text III

If we don't care, our elite athlete may not care

"…Obafemi Martins will be given a cold shoulder…"

The above sample refers to the columnist use of ellipsis. These be at the beginning or at the end of a sentence. It is used in this data to cut off something said but to avoid boredom. The cut off words are done so because of their level of importance.

According to Collin and Hollo (2002) Ellipsis is the omission of words in grammar of a sentence or phrase where these can be recovered from either the immediate context or the surrounding text on the basis of our knowledge of the grammar of English.

b) Lexical Analysis

Generally, in sport columns (football), the headline is of great importance. This is due to the fact that it is the facet of the report that first catches the attention of the reader. Therefore, this analysis shall see how important the headline is to the sports report.

The headlines have a prowess of making the reader interested or not interested in a report. This is because since it is the part of the report most likely to compel the potential reader, it must make

appropriate and effective use of lexical items and linguistic devices.

Text IV:

" Cameroun Crashes Out"

Perhaps, the most striking feature one notices about the sports report headline is their use of present tense so as to make the report fresh. This is the use of the historic present tense in which past events are treated as if they were in the present. This is achieved with the use of a past tense with a perfective tense. Equally important is the fact that looking at the headlines, one sees a fundamental lexical agreement in the subject-verb agreement. For instance: Cameroun agrees with the verb crashes**.**

In looking at the body of the sports reports, it is evident from the data collected that the sports (football reporters make use of concrete words, instead of abstract ones. This is deemed necessary because lexical items that would create semantic immediacy in the readers are preferred. This is so since the reporter might not at first, have lots of space to write his report and secondly, he might be writing for an audience that does not have a prior knowledge of the game. In this regard, simple Anglo Saxon words are employed.

Example: "Lions Silenced 3-0"

> *…Brazil held off all Morocco's fury into their box 18 effectively through junior Biano, Aldar, Cafa, Roberto Carlos and skipper Dung who after retrieving the ball in defense sends his attack on their way with crisp passes. On one of these occasions, Leonardo broke free and scored but it was ruled offside.*
> *Brazil got their first goal in the 4th minute from Ronaldo who cracked in a shot from Bebeto through pass after ceaseless attacking by the Brazilians on the Moroccan defence which was quite impressive in holding out Ronaldo and co. Rivaldo who had shone like a million stars in the Brazilian team slipped the ball past Morocco's keeper Benzekeri for goal number two…*

In Ln (5, 8, 9, 11) of the text above, we find some lexical items such as broke, scored, cracked, defense and slipped. There is a marked degree of collocating words in the text gathered for the analysis. Here, the definite article 'The' usually collocates with 'ball'. We find this in Ln3: "…Skipper Dung who after retrieving ***the ball*** …" and also in Ln 11: "…the Brazilian team slipped ***the ball*** past…"

Also of significance is the fact that a lot of compounding of lexical items are usually reflected in the sports (football) reporters vocabulary. This compounding are words brought together to make one unit and one meaning. To illustrate, we see an example in Ln 6**: Off-side.**

We note that words like this can individually stand on their own, but they are being brought together, that is, compounded to illustrate a pattern of activity during play.

Finally, in this section, we demonstrated that the lexis of sports (football reporting exhibits in it's headline, the use of Tense (historic present) simple words, and a pattern of the subject-verb agreement. In it's main text (body), it uses

concrete words, technical words, collocation, compounding and verbs. These are found in the data used for the analysis.

c) Syntactic Analysis

In linguistics, "syntax" refers to the rules that govern the ways in which words combine to form phrase, clauses and sentences. The term "syntax" comes from the Greek meaning "arrange together". The term is also used to mean the study of the syntactic properties of a language. thus, syntactically, the sports (football) reports headline is basically fragmentary as the sample collected for analysis shows.

Text V

"Cameroun Crashes Out"

There's a sense of completeness in it's structure but still it is not complete in the sense that it looks like an isolated structure taken out of context. In this regard, it might make little sense to a Layperson since it is non defining as to who/what cameroun is. In this sense therefore, it would not be said to be complete.

However, there is a basic noun verb structure in the headlines (N+V) for instance, we have "Cameroun Crashes…" we also see that the example above and generally all headlines are statements and not questions. This use of statement is a device that gives the report freshness and presentness. It also has a very strong impact on the reader. This research study shall look into the syntactic features of the body of sports report under variation.

Variation

It has been noted that sports (football) reporters make use of simple sentences that are devoid of complexities. This is for a marked measure of semantic clarity. They however, occasionally combine these simple and direct sentences with a few compound and complex ones. This makes for a splendid variety which the audience finds tremendously exciting in a newspaper. This is because it not only makes things clear, it also entertains the audience. For instance

> **'…***in fact, the indomitable lions played like a team without a coach, as the entire squad lacked co-ordination…'(Lns 1-5): "At exactly 9:45pm Nigerian time in faraway Mont Pellier, France, the heavens stood still, the sun refused to shine while African who have trooped out in thousands to cheer one of their own left the stadium disappointed…"*

It is noted in the above sample that the reporter uses a variety of log and short sentences. In the data collected for analysis, all shows a remarkable use of variety of syntactic structures, long and short. This makes the reports have a catchy appeal as it tends to make it lively and entertaining.

d) Semantic Analysis

In linguistics, semantic analysis is the process of relating syntactic structures from levels of phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs from the level of the writing as a whole to their language independent meaning. Semantic analysis also relates to concepts like connotation and collocation which is the particular

combination of words that can be or frequently surrounding a single word.

In analyzing the semantic features of sports headlines, it is evident that sports (football) reporters use nouns in the initial position. These nouns however refer to the football teams alone and should not be taken as to what they mean on face value. Thus, the use of 'Cameroun Crashes Out' means the Cameroun football team and not the country as an entity. Also, animal names could be used to name a football team. This is always connotatively used meaning the players are compared to the animal in question.

Text VI

"Lions Silenced 3-0"

This means the "Lions of Morocco, or simply put the Moroccan football team and not the animal itself. Similarity, verb use all will be interpreted not as grammatical words with the actual grammatical meanings, but words converted for the purpose of using them as football terms. These are used to show a state or past events. Therefore, these words are connotatively use. Hence, 'crashes, silenced, itches, etc. this visual imagery is to make the reader understand with clarity.

e) Lexico-Syntactic Analysis

Lexico syntactical is a word formed by the combination of two different words 'Lexis' and 'syntax'. Lexis is the total vocabularies that make up a language or the body of words known and used by a particular person. Tallerman (2018, p.1) defines syntax as "…sentence construction: how words group together to make phrases and sentences". Lexico-syntactic pattern may be obtained through various means which include unusual or inverted word order, omission of words and repetition. Lexico syntactic choices are obtained through devices such as piling of usual collocates, archaic words, particular parts of speech, metaphor, simile, oxymoron etc. The lexico-syntactic choices patterns include;

ANASTROPHE: This is the reversing of the normal or usual word order. It is a way of investing the natural or usual word order.

Text VII

"How better to mark the occasion than with a first African champion?"

The usual order should be "it would have been better for an African champion to emerge to mark the occasion".

All six of the African teams have their weakness".

The usual order is "All the six African teams have their weaknesses". Anastrophies are usually used to secure emphasis and focus the reader's attention because he/she would want to know the reason behind such inversion.

PARENTHESIS: This is the insertion of some verbal unit, the deliberate interruption of normal syntactic flow of sentences. It is used to mark a comment or a condition.

Text VIII

"They have to sort things out between themselves. I believe if things are right the players will be ready to play their hearts".

The normal syntactic flow is 'they have to sort things out between themselves, the players will be ready to play their hearts. The condition which is in

parenthesis is, 'if things are right", stating the reasons for which the players can play well.

HYPERBOLE: This is used to create humor to give emphasis and to draw or capture the reader's attention. To attract readers, exaggerated headlines are used by columnists and the reader realizes afterwards that, not much is in the comments in relation to the captivating and arresting headlines.

Text X:

"Bayelsa Massacre Tornadoes…"

'Massacre' as meant by the columnist is that Bayelsa won 4-0 over the Tornadoes in a match as opposed to the meaning of Massacre which is the cruel killing of people in a violent way.

Conclusion

This study has examined Stylistic study of the language of sports in selected Nigerian newspapers. It was discovered that sports columns are essential in newspapers as they are mostly and widely read sections in newspapers. It is being read by young, old, men and female and all class of people. in the cause of the study, it is realized that the columnist have their kind of style which are boldening, underlining, lesser use of punctuation marks, use of borders, colours, pictures and images but the most peculiar and vivid one is that capital letters are used as the initials of words and headlines, words are also boldened, this is done to lay emphasis on the readers mind and also make them remember each news piece. Some of the writers wrote their first paragraphs in bold and this is a bit deviating from the usual norm of writing, this is to lay emphasis and create a lasting effect on the reader. It also saves the reader the trouble of reading the whole news because the first paragraph alone bears the whole news.

Another finding is that the writers do not use big and ambiguous languages but simple and short sentences to avoid boredom and allow the people either, literate or non-literate understand quickly and easily. The columnists are straightforward and irrelevant talks are not used while reader friendly pages are used. Some of the columnists also use sarcastic statements and meaning carriers for lasting impressions.

In conclusion, because of people's interest in sports hence there was need for sports columns and the use of styles of writing was important for easy access and compression and to give way for people's opinion. Finally, it is important to state that from the studies carried out, sport columns writers have their mode of writing and use of words. Some make use of reader-friendly colour pages with simple non-complicated words in a straightforward way while some others use the normal black and white pages. They also have and use different sports registers and terms with pictures.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, this study recommends that:

1. The columnists should not use ambiguous words, but used simple and short sentences to avoid boredom and allow the people either literate or non-literate to understand quickly and easily.
2. The columnists should be very straightforward and always avoid irrelevant talks; hence the need to

use reader-friendly and sarcastic statements.

3. There is need for sports lovers to understand the language of sports so as to get the right information on what is been communicated.

REFERENCES

Akimbola, B. (2017) Introduction to Linguistics, Owerri, Cel-Bez and company.

Anderson, Elaine Slosberg. (2021). Speaking with Style. Padstow: JT press Ltd

Anyanwu P.A, (2022) Correctness and Style in the English language skill, Owerri: spring field publishers.

Bamgbose, E. T (2021:57). Lexico-semantic variations. Lagos: Blue ribbon Investment Ltd.

Collin and Hollo (2002). Lexus and structure. Sussex: the harvest press Ltd.

Crystal D & Daby D. (1997). Investigating English Style. New York: Longman group Ltd.

Crystal David (2018). The English Language. A guided tour of the language by the presenter of BBC Radio 4's English Now England: Penguin group.

Ebeogu, R. (2014) Communication Skills & Research Writing. Owerri: Ambix printers.

Gbadessy, M. (2019). Registers of Written English. London: pinter publisher.

Izuagba A. C. & Onwukanjo, M. (2022) Functional English and Communication Skill for higher Education Owerri: Versatile publishers.

Lucas, M. R.(2019). Style in Fiction: A Linguistics Introduction to English fictional Prose. Singapore: Longman.

McCrimmon T.J (2021). The Public Speaking Book USA: Scot, foreman and company.

Miller, R.M. (2015). Trasks Historical Linguistics. London: Hodder Arnold.

Ojinah, M. H. (2018) Modern English Structure II. Owerri: spring field publishers.

Okere, A (2015). The English language in Nigeria Owerri: Great Versatile publishers.

Osborn, M & Osborn, S. (2024). Public Speaking Third Edition U.S Houghton Mifflin company.

Osuafor , C. C (2013). Research Method for the Humanities, Owerri: Global press limited.

Osuafor, C. C (2003). Criticals of Discourse Analysis, Owerri: Global Press Limited.

Osuafor, C. C (2021). Aspect of Writing for General and Specialized Studies Owerri: Great versatile publishers.

Osuagwu, B, I, N & others (1997). Fundamental linguistics Owerri: Colon concepts Ltd.

Palmer, D (2021). The semantic nature of sports. London: Edward Arnold publishers Ltd.

Tallerman, R (2018). syntax pattern and sentence construction: London; Longman.