

The Simple Sentence as a Conveyer of Immediacy in Online Sports Commentary: A focus on the Super Eagles Matches at AFCON, 2013

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ABSTRACT This study examines the simple sentences used in the online commentaries of the Super Eagles of Nigeria matches at the AFCON 2013 Nations cup. The study uses an established electronic register methodological framework as the theoretical framework to investigate the nature of the language used. The study concludes that the major rationale behind the use of the simple sentence is to relate the idea of immediacy to the followers online. Using short simple sentences saves time for the writer in this case the commentator and the readers. The study also discovers that for the immediacy effect to fully take place, the background knowledge of the reader must be strong in the field of discourse. That study concludes that the followers need to be good in their knowledge of football.

Keywords: Sports commentary, sentence, language, AFCON 2013, football

Introduction

Sport is one of the many social activities that brings people together and in which they use language. Language is used in a sporting activity by players, officials and spectators for the sole purpose of communication. The breakthrough in technology makes it possible also for the mass media to relate current event happening at particular sport centres to others that are at home through the use of television pictures, radio signals and through the Internet for those who cannot access the first two. In relating the event, those in the mass media also employ the use of language. Though language is used in virtually all the activities, the participation of people in communication and the nature of language are not the same if one focuses on the domain of use. The situation and other sociological features make the language different in terms of the choice of lexical items, sentence structures and meaning. Halliday (1978) summarised the differences in three major aspects: the field, mode and tenor of discourse. Sport commentary is one of such instances of language use that have peculiarities because the field is different. Sport commentary also has subtypes in language use which are mainly determined by the medium of the commentary. Studies have been carried out on the nature of the language of sport commentary on the television and the radio. None has been done on internet sport commentary especially in the event of football. Arguably, football is the most popular sports in Nigeria. Accordingly, it is important to inquire into the nature and use of language features peculiar to football commentaries on the Internet with a focus on the matches played by the Super Eagles at the Africa Cup of Nations played in 2013. The main focus here is on the rationale behind the predominant use of the simple sentence as a look

in most of the samples reveals that it is the most commonly used sentence type. In doing this, the electronic register methodological framework by Biber and Conrad (2009) would serve as our theoretical framework.

Review of Related Literature

In this section, we would briefly highlight what others have done in this field. Lewandowski (2012) focused on the language of online sports commentary in a comparative perspective. Lewandowski's study aims to compare the register in question with other related varieties, i.e., written sports commentary (WSC) and sports announcer talk (SAT) in order to corroborate the hypothesis that the register of online commentary is a hybrid of spoken and written language. His study reveals that OSC shares some of its linguistic features with both SAT and WSC, and thus can be regarded as a hybrid of both of these registers. Quantitatively, it displays similarity to SAT in terms of the predominance of the Present Simple verb forms (this tense is even more pervasive in OSC) and copula is deletion. Finally, Lewandowski's study reveals that online commentary shares some of its characteristics with post-match press and online reports. This applies to the rates of occurrence for nouns and lack of the demonstrative *this* for identifying players on the pitch. Applying a qualitative perspective, we will also discover that despite various attempts at rendering oral forms in the OSC discourse, its syntactic patterns are more characteristic of WSC thanks to well-informed coordinate sentences. Regarding the second research question of Lewandowski's research which is: 'does the variety in question (which I also consider an example of an online register) exhibit any distinctive features that are not found in TV or written sports commentary?' The study found that the OSC register is marked by relatively low rates of occurrence for past tense verb forms compared to the other two registers. The investigated variety also displays some spelling and punctuation conventions which are characteristic of most electronic registers, and are non-existent in WSC. According to him, adopting a genre approach, the presence of other voices can be noticed in the OSC discourse, which can be co-constructed by other sportswriters and fans, giving their feedback or providing match statistics.

In another instance of study, Bergh (2011) focused on the comparison between online football commentary and war situation. That is a comparison between the words used for football online commentary and that used in a war situation. He is of the opinion that football commentaries on television, radio and the internet tend to refer to football as a war between two opponents but the difference between this and a war situation is that in football there is no shooting. Bergh's study deals majorly on the investigation into the use of war-inspired terminology in live football commentary. As shown by a sample of written minute-by-minute match reports from Euro 2008, according to him, there is a considerable conceptual transfer between the two domains, showing the validity of the master metaphor football war. He argued that such metaphorical mapping combines with a body of intensifying vocabulary to build a war scenario whereby commentators add nerves and pace to their match coverage. This strategy is thought to transform the action on the pitch into something which is easier to understand, viz, physical conflict, thereby addressing consumers on a more basic and emotional level.

Also, Wendy Tanner (2011) focused on how the words used in online sports commentary help the English user to differentiate the gender of the actors that is, the players. Some register delimiting items in commentary is gender centred therefore increasing the understanding of the audience. She focuses on the marginali-

zation and trivialization of female athletes and women's sports through commentator discourse with a focus on the ESPN's Sports Centre. Tanner (2011) explores the current landscape of how sports commentators discuss male and female athletes. Female athletes are often subjected to sexualizing and objectifying discourse while male athletes are lauded for their strength and power. Episodes of ESPN's Sports Centre that aired in 2010 were analyzed to determine how commentators speak about female athletes and women's Sports. The Sports Centre Twitter feed was also analyzed to determine if social media contains positive coverage of female athletes.

Tanner's research showed with disappointing results that the landscape for women's sports has not made substantial progress. In fact, coverage has started to decline in the broadcast realm since 2004 (Messner, et. al., 2010b). While some of the more common habits of sexualisation and objectification have declined substantially, the overall amount of coverage has almost vanished. Sports commentators are not necessarily using overtly negative language when speaking about female athletes, but they are also rarely speaking about them at all.

Also, Motson (2001) focused on football computer games and the commentary with a focus on a computational model of football commentary. According to him, "Computer games are big business, and football games are amongst the biggest titles released every year. They represent most aspects of football very well, with the exception of the commentary, which is static, limited, repetitive and ultimately boring" (Motson, 2001, p. 1). The aim of this project is to analyse real football commentary, and suggest a way of modelling it that would allow for the generation of more realistic and more interesting commentary, than can currently be found.

Motson (2001) in his research studied the language component of the computer game. The study reveals that commentary in computer football games is, according to him: 'to be blunt, not very good, and the main aim of this project was to propose a system that could be used within a game to produce commentary much closer to that of real football. And this aim has been achieved' (Motson,2001, p. 45).

Nijholt, Akker and de Jong (2009) in another instance of study, focused on language Interpretation and Generation for Football Commentary. The study is survey a number of research efforts that all deal with football commentary but for which the technology focus differs: retrieval, interpretation or generation of commentary and related, not necessarily language oriented, research. According to them, there were two reasons for this investigation. One obvious reason is to find out how the MUMIS technology and tools can be adapted to similar applications. The other is to see how the domain knowledge obtained for extraction purposes can be employed for other intelligent applications in the same domain (Nijholt, et al., 2009, p. 1). In general, one can say that Nijholt, et al.'s (2009) study is based on series of assumptions which can be summarised on the fact that there are mutual benefits when events interpretation, event retrieval and event generation, event retrieval and event generation are based on the same formal representation models and tools based on the models. Rather isolated research efforts that now occur in the domain of football can be brought together in order to obtain these benefits.

In another study, Chovanec (2009), posits that online sports commentary makes communication easier by providing avenues where the readers can interact with the writer spontaneously. According to him, the texts of a live text commentary integrate online discussion and allow for real, though mediated and non-spontaneous, interaction. He demonstrates this by analysing and extensive set of live text commentaries from the area of sports reporting, the texts are organized on two narrative layers: the primary layer and the secondary layer. The primary layer consists of the journalist's description of events, the secondary layer is essentially a

discussion form coordinated by the journalist, in which readers air their comments on the game as well as on quite unrelated topics. Within such a 'gossip layer', conversational threads develop over significant stretches of intervening text, with readers reacting to both another's and the commentator's comments. In Chovanec (2009) explanation, table 2 indicates that the two layers are structured differently. While the primary layer progress in the form of posts following a time line, the secondary layer is not sequenced in a similar temporal manner. It revolves around topics that are discussed by the journalist and his audience in their emails. Such online conversation (cf. North, 2007) sometimes leads to the development of several discussion threads, which are, in the case of online chat, also referred to as conversational threads (cf. North, 2006, 2007).

From the above, it is very obvious that many scholars in the past have studied extensively on the language of online sports commentary and that of football. Some of the studies focus on the features that make online sports commentaries peculiar while others focus on how the language of online sports commentaries is different from other speech situations. But known has focused on the predominant use of the simple sentence and the rationale behind it. This is the justification for this study.

Theoretical Framework

This research work is anchored on the Electronic Register Methodological Framework (FERM), proposed by Biber and Conrad (2009). In online register, they have emphasised the correlation between the situational characteristics and lexicogrammatical features of a particular language variety. Biber and Conrad (2009) looked at online language in a broader perspective, treating it as part of electronic communication. They elaborated on the situational and linguistic features of e-mails, text messages and e-forum postings, treating them as examples of electronic register. They have defined register as: "... a variety associated with a particular situation of use (including particular communicative purposes)" (Biber & Conrad, 2009, p. 6). Typical examples of registers include written and spoken occupational varieties and languages for register investigations proposed by the two authors. At the core of this approach is the conviction that linguistic features are functionally motivated. A register analysis consists of the following three stages: '(1) describing the situational characteristics of the register; (2) analyzing the typical linguistic characteristics of the register; and (3) identifying the functional forces that help to explain why those linguistic features tend to be associated with those situational characteristics' (Biber & Conrad 2009, p. 47).

In their approach, Biber and Conrad (2009) have emphasised the need for the identification of linguistic features that make a difference in language use according to speech situation. In other words, if a register analysis is to yield satisfactory findings, it is worthwhile to pick out the distinctive linguistic features that make it a different variety from the others. In this study, we would restrict ourselves to three linguistic Features: the lexical items, the sentence structure and the semantic implication of the language use in online football commentaries on the Super Eagles of Nigeria.

In the analysis of the situational factors that have an impact on the language of minute-by-minute reports which online football commentaries are structured on, the researcher shall refer to the set of seven register determinants postulated by Biber and Conrad (2009) for guidance. These seven register determiners are the reasons for the underlining lexical items, the grammatical structure and the semantic features.

They establish the speech situation whereby the lexical items, the sentence structure and the semantic implication will all be made meaning and for communication. Biber and Conrad (2009), presents the seven determiners as participants, relation among participants, channel, production circumstances, setting, communicative purpose and the topic which of course is football in this instance. So, in this present study, focus will be on the correlation between the situational characteristics and the lexicogrammatical features of a particular language variety.

Data Analysis

The Simple Sentence

The Simple Sentence is the type of sentence in which none of the functional element is realised by a clause. If the sentence itself is realised by an independent clause, it is also a simple sentence. Simple sentences are easy to understand for the readers and also easy to write in terms of speed since the writers are trying to relate everything (if possible) to the readers in real time. This makes the use of simple sentences inevitable in this language register. In Nigeria versus Zambia, the online commentary uses the simple sentences which occurred 25% some extracts are seen in the following constructions:

74' _ Zambia lose the ball.

73' _ Chansa shoots wide for Zambia.

72' _ Okonkwo clears the ball.

90+2' _ Ikechukwu Uche (Nigeria) scores!

90+1' _ Given Singuluma in for Zambia

90' _ Igiebor shot from distance wide off target.

90' _ Taiwo checks Chris Katongo on the right.

In the sample, above between the 72nd to 74th minutes, the online commentator uses four simple sentences in terms of their structure. 'Okonkwo clears the ball' as a sentence carries a lot of information that is not stated obviously but mostly understood from the context and former knowledge of both the commentator and the readers online. The sentence relates in a simple way what is happening as at the time of speaking. From the context, one understands that Nigeria was attacked and it was frenzy and quick as such, defender Okoronkwo had to clear. This is known because in the 71st minutes, the commentator says, 'Zambia attacks again' which prompts Okoronkwo to clear. This continues in this form in all the instances of using the simple sentence. A large chunk of information can be passed across in one or two simple sentences in online commentaries.

In Nigeria versus Ethiopia occurrence rate of the use of the simple sentence was 16.6% in sentences such as:

84' _ Addis Hints (Ethiopia) is cautioned.

85' _ Dangerous cross from the right for Ethiopia. The ball flies just ahead of Hinisa on the edge of the six-yard box.

89' _ Penalty awarded to Nigeria. Emenike is pulled down inside the box.

89' _ Aynalem Hailu (Ethiopia) is cautioned.

90' _ Emmanuel Emenike (Nigeria) takes a penalty kick on goal.

90+5' _ The referee blows the whistle for Full Time. Ethiopia 1-2 Nigeria.

If we are to pick the incident in minutes '89 Penalty awarded to Nigeria. Emenike is pulled down inside the box.' The first sentence: 'Penalty awarded to Nigeria' is used to present the situation without making it much complex and the subsequent simple sentence: 'Emenike is pulled down inside the box' helps to inform the followers what led to the situation. The truth is that any ardent follower of real

life football matches would understand what has been communicated. This explains the fact that tied to the immediacy effect of simple sentences is the background knowledge of the participants on the topic being presented.

Also, in Nigeria versus Mali, the simple sentences are used in a not too different fashion with a percentage of occurrence of 15.6 which we can see in:

10 min: Mali is giving Nigeria plenty to think about here.

9 min: Mahamane Traore sends the ball into the Nigeria penalty area from the corner. His delivery is a beauty.

8 min: Splendid play from Mali's Adama Tamboura, who skins his man for pace down the left wing before closing the ball into the Nigeria penalty area. Godfrey Oboabona heads the ball out for a corner.

6 min: An injury doubt before this game, Momo Sissoko, formerly of Liverpool, gets his first touch on the ball for Mali. He's off to Fiorentina at the end of this tournament, on loan from Paris Saint-Germain.

If we are to pick the first extract, 'Mali is giving Nigeria plenty to think about here' we would likely get the information of what is happening at the moment and a large room for imagination of the situation. How wide the room would be is greatly tied to the knowledge of the follower at that point in time. If team A is giving team B plenty to think about, it means team A is putting team B them on the edge in terms of attack in football. This does not just comes from one attack but a continuous one that might prompt the team on the edge to make mistakes maybe out of 'the thinking.' Again, the actions are all immediate and can be read quickly then move to the next action which would be related next.

Lastly, in Nigeria versus Burkina Faso the online commentary uses the simple sentences with an occurrence percentage of 17.9. Some of them are:

90+3Dagano wastes a good chance with an over hit free-kick...

90+2Ideye booked for handball....

90Abdoulrazak Traore replaces Djakaridja Kone.

89 Joseph Yobo replaces Sunday Mba

88 Banse misses the shot just wide

Each of the functional positions in the sentences above is not filled by clauses. By functional position the researcher means the subject, verbs, object, adverbial and complement. The different positions contain single words and in few other cases phrase. The major reason why simple sentence are used in online commentaries is the fact that there is time constrain and the writers need to relate what is happening on the pitch by play in real time. The use of other sentence might take a longer time to write and for the readers to understand. The simple sentence such as the provided in extracts above are easily understood for the short messages. There are also instances where long sentences that are also simple in structure are used which is clearly the case in the sentence structure used in the online commentary of Nigeria versus Mali but in most cases this is minimised so that readers online are not confused.

Conclusion

In this study, what we have done is to x-ray the simple sentences used in the online commentaries of the Super Eagles of Nigeria matches at the AFCON 2013 Nations cup. The study concludes that the major rationale behind the use of the simple sentence is to relate the idea of immediacy to the followers online. Using short simple sentences saves time for the writer in this case the commentator and the readers. The study also discovers that for the immediacy effect to fully take place, the background

knowledge of the reader must be strong in the field of discourse. That is, the followers need to be good in their knowledge of football.

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