

Functional Implications of Lexical Relationship in Selected Football Discourse

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Abstract

The paper examined the implication of lexical relationship in selected football discourse in selected Nigerian newspapers. It unravelled the functional linguistic content of text for a better understanding of football register as a sub-genre of language of sports. The study adopted both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised the reports of 2010 FIFA world cup football matches from three purposively selected Nigerian newspapers namely: Sporting Life, Soccer Star and Complete Sports. Each of these newspapers reported the world football events. 30lead reports each were used from each of the newspapers; giving a total of 90 reports from the data. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the internet. The data were collected and analysed based on the Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach. The study revealed that lexical relationship in text are significant for a better understanding of football discourse and also created more awareness that football has its own specific register. The study concluded that the study of lexical relationship of text enhanced the understanding of textual analysis and interpretation of football text collected for this work.

Key words: functional linguistics, textual analysis, football discourse, sub-genre, register

1. Introduction

Studying lexical relationship in football discourse goes beyond the vocabulary learning in English. Based on my recent works on football discourse and how best football register can be developed as a sub-genre of sports, the need for the understanding of lexical relationship in football discourse is very useful. This will further shed light on the language of football and further establish that football as a sub-genre of sports has its own specific register that need to be studied and developed. Football game being a component of globalization is a means of cementing bilateral relationship among the nations of the world. Language of football deserves scholarly attention because understanding of football language will go a long way in understanding what stands as a catalyst to global unity and peace, reconciliation and reconstruction among the nations of the world, symbol of national identity, eradication of poverty and awareness of diseases and eradication, among others. It is should be noted that football does not have the capacity to tackle solely the problem of disunity, war and national and territorial disputes, it can be very effective when it is part of a broad, holistic approach to addressing crisis, conflict and disunity ad even poverty via advocacy and fund raising activities across the globe. If football game is very important to human race like this, studying the language of football as a sub-genre of sports will not be out of place in linguistic scholarship.

2. Theoretical Foundation

There are three main approaches to genre analysis: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Genre as Social Interaction. The linguists that are associated

with SFL follow the framework proposed by Halliday (1994), Halliday and Hassan (1989) and Martin (1992) and Ansary and Babaii (2004). SFL is concerned with how language, spoken or written, is used to convey purposeful meaning in communicative events within specific social contexts. SFL is systemic because it regards language as 'a network of systems, or interrelated sets of options for making meaning' (Halliday, 1994:15). Its 'functional' dimension relates to its emphasis on the study of how language is used to generate specific meanings within a certain context, rather than on formulating a grammar of correct usage of the language at hand. Central to SFL is Halliday's metafunctions. Having the knowledge of metafunctions launched by Halliday in the 1960s further shed light on all the concepts employed in SFL such as genre and register. Halliday's systemic functional model has been widely adopted by discourse analysts because his classifications of different parts of clauses say something fundamental about the function, or even the purpose behind the organisation of clauses and sentences. It is very crucial to state that the metafunction model, the major communicative functions of language has to do with construing experience, enacting social relationships, and organising and communicating the message, respectively. The communicative functions operate at all strata corresponding to field, tenor and mode at the level of context and are realised at the lexicogrammatical stratum through systems that include transitivity, mood, and theme. The three metafunctions act simultaneously and not distinctly or independently in a text; in other words, mood (interpersonal), (transitivity), (ideational), and theme (textual) function interdependently in the language system.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary source comprised reports of 2010 FIFA world cup football match reports from three purposively selected Nigerian newspapers namely: *Sporting Life*, *Soccer Star* and *Complete Sports*. The world cup lasted for a period of one month and each of these newspapers reported the world football events. 30lead reports each were used from each of the newspapers; giving a total of 90 reports from the data. The secondary source included books, journal articles and the internet. The data were collected and analysed based on the Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach.

4.0 Analysis and Findings

4.1 Lexical Relationship

Lexical relationships in the football reports include antonymy, synonymy, collocation and lexical repetition. These are relationships of meaning holding between words and sentences in language. The next section is devoted to the explanation of each of the lexical relations identified in the texts.

4.1.1 Antonymy

Antonymy implies the relationship of oppositeness within or across sentences. It is the concept of oppositeness. Unlike synonyms, antonyms could be true or exact. Antonyms in the data are mostly complementary and relational opposites. Examples of antonyms are given below.

- 1 A win there would see then play either Uruguay, South Korea in the quarter- finals and the chance of becoming the first African country to reach the semi- finals Cameroun and Senegal having reached the last eight in 1990 and 2002 respectively. (Text A30, *Sporting Life*, June 26, 2010)
- 2 My brother, I have been in the national team for the past 16 years and I know the difference between white and black. (Text B11, *Complete Sports*, June 28, 2010)
- 3 It is a must win for us against Greece, said locomotive Moscow striker Osaze Odemwingie after the 1-0 loss to Argentina on Sunday. (Text C3, *Soccer Star*, June 14, 2010)

- 4 Nigeria, who have now gone five defeats and a draw since their last win at the World Cup in 1998, take on Greece in Bloemfontein on Thursday. (Text B15, *Complete Sports*, June 15, 2010)
- 5 With the goalkeeper ratings we try to strop out effect of the defense- it is not how many saves he makes but his performance once you have assessed how good/bad the defense is. (Text C6, *Soccer Star*, June 12, 2010).

4.1.2 Synonymy

Synonymy is the relationship of similar lexical items or lexemes. It is a concept of similarity, that is, sameness of meaning of words. Although there are no absolute or exact synonyms like antonyms because of collocational restriction but there must be some degree of nearness or proximity of meaning. There are no two terms with completely identical meaning. Examples of synonyms are given below.

- 6 “A new beginning, a new start in a new country promises so much of a challenge for me”, Martins declarEd. (Text A29, *Sporting Life*, July 10, 2010)
- 7 Till now it is still confounding, bizarre and baffling how a country that lost its first two group matches could still have qualified by winning the third and last with any score line. (Text B5, *Complete Sports*, June 26, 2010)
- 8 Today will mark the end of the ranging psychological warfare for the past few months as both teams file out in a titanic battle. (Text C6, *Soccer Star*, June 12, 2010)

4.2 Lexical Collocation

Collocation as a universal linguistic phenomenon is an important aspect of language study. It accounts for the relationship the words have with one another when they are used in a context. There are two types of collocation in English namely; free and fixed collocation. Wallace (1992:30) states that words seldom occur in isolation. There are instances of fixed collocation in the data. These are associated with the word ‘goal’. They are realised in Texts A-C. The word ‘goal’ is very significant when dealing with the language of football. It determines winning and losing the game. It is considered important to look into this phraseological units that are associated with football game because winning the tournament attracts rewards most times, while in some football league competitions, loosing attracts relegation of the team(s) involved. Examples of fixed collocation associated with the lexeme ‘goal’ will be given subsequently.

Shot at goal is an example of fixed collocation. It is used in football association. The word shot is a noun form of shooting. It is a specialised kicking technique mainly used by ‘forwards’. Shooting is a way for goals to be scored. It is done using feet or using the head, that is, heading the ball. The purpose of shooting the ball is to get the ball past the goal line. Although some shots may be made in order to win corners or force the keeper to defect the ball into the path of a team mate. This may be the case if scoring directly from the shot seems unlikely. A failed ‘shot at goal’ is called attempt. Below are examples from the data.

- 9 Holland’s first shot at goal came when Dirk Kuyt scuttled a 30-yard effort after Sergio Busquet to control a simple square pass, but the Liverpool wide man’s effort was easily gathered by Iker Casillas. (Text A16, *Sporting Life*, July 12, 2010)
- 10 “I was thinking of passing the ball when I should have shot at goal. The way Obafemi Martins was shouting on me to pass to him the ball, I thought he was in a better position. I lost

concentration and the chance,” he said. “Next time, I will just go for goal”. (Text C3, *Soccer Star*, June 14, 2010)

Face of goal is another example of fixed collocation associated with goal. It refers to the open front of the goal. Below is an example from the data.

11 Iniesta was perhaps lucky not to join them as the game once again threatened to deteriorate, his foul on Sneijder giving Robben the chance to swing in a free-kick toward Heitinga. The defender sent a header just across the face of goal, but had been flagged offside any case. (Text A16, *Sporting Life*, July 12, 2010)

Concede a goal - This refers to the opposite of score a goal. To concede a goal means inability to stop an opposition team or player from scoring. The player or team in the opposition gets the goal or point. After a goal is scored, the team which conceded the goal will kick-off to restart play. The team that scores the highest numbers of goal(s) wins the game. In football antonyms, ‘score a goal’ and ‘concede a goal’ are associated with winning and losing the game. Examples are presented below.

12 Asked if he had corrected the lapse of conceding a goal from set-piece against Argentina, Lagerback said: “We have been working on how to defend set-pieces. But this time around, we have taught the players other forms of defending it especially after what happened against Argentina. Defending set-pieces would not be a problem for us against Greece. I can assure you. (Text A17, *Sporting Life*, July 17, 2010)

13 We didn’t play as well in attack as we’d hoped, but it’s good that we only conceded the one goal. (Text B1, *Complete Sports*, June 17, 2010)

14 After a two year with West Broom, Kanu joined Portsmouth in 2006 and he played in two FA cup finals, scoring the winning goal against Cardiff in the 2008 show piece at Wembley. (Text B19, *Complete Sports*, June 26, 2010)

15 May be that is still surprising, He had made 20 saves, which was the second highest of any keeper but had conceded five goals, which was equal third worst. (Text C5, *Soccer Star*, July 8, 2010)

16 “I’m very positive, If we could just concede a goal against the big Argentina attack, it should be easier for us against the other teams. We just have to concentrate and score goals. (Text C3, *Soccer Star*, June 14, 2010)

4.3 Lexical Repetition

Lexical repetition refers to a concept of semantic relatedness in sentences or texts. It involves repeating the same lexical item many times (i.e recurrence) whether across sentence boundaries or within the same sentence. It is an instance where ‘a lexical item that has already occurred in a text is repeated with no greater alteration than is entirely explicable in terms of a closed grammatical paradigm’ (Hoey 1991:53)

17 We can talk about referencing decisions which, when you looked at the after the game, you could say were perhaps not good decisions. (Text B9, *Complete Sports*, July 8, 2010)

18 The reforms should include a new leadership for the football association, a permanent coach for the national team, a new generation of players for the national team, and a return to the football

development as a focus of Nigerian football for some years to come. (Text B5, *Complete Sports*, June 26, 2010)

- 19 If it was Nigeria coach that failed woefully at the World Cup, they will sack him from South Africa, But the NFF are begging the man because he is the only good coach in the World. (Text A22, *Sporting Life*, July 3, 2010)
- 20 According to FIFA: “if Argentina beats Greece and Korea Republic beats or draws with Nigeria, the South American will finish top and the Asians second”. (Text C1, *Soccer Star*, June 20, 2010)
- 21 A defender scored the goal that got Spain its first World Cup final, and any one of its fine substitutes could be summoned to score the defining goal in its history. (Text A7, *Sporting Life*, July 11, 2010)

5. Discussion of Results

Lexical relationship that characterised the data contributed in no small means to the understanding of the texts utilised for this study. The relationship that obtains between words, phrases and sentences in texts accounts for a better understanding and interpretation of text. They are the components of the structural and functional elements of texts. They are all realised across Texts A-C and have structural and functional implications for football texts.

6. Conclusion

This study has been able to do justice to the understanding of sports genre writing in general and in particular, the football written discourse by investigating into the lexico-semantic contents of texts produced within the Nigerian print media. The study accounts for both structural and functional implication of football register within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics approach to text analysis.

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