

# Attitudinal Positioning in Football Matches Live Text Commentaries

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## Abstract:

The present research aims at explicating the attitudinal positioning in the discourse of football matches live text commentaries in terms of Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (2005). To this end, a corpus of about (11927) words representing the live text commentaries of the top four matches of world cup 2018 was chosen. Results have shown that the Attitudinal System of the Appraisal Theory has a great explanatory power as it helps revealing not only the overt evaluations but also the covert ones. The categories of *judgment* and *appreciation* prevail pervasively in the discourse of live text commentaries. However, the *affect* category fails to appear actively.

**Keywords:** Appraisal theory, live text commentaries, attitude, affect, judgment, appreciation.

## تحديد المواقف في تعليقات كرة القدم النصية المباشرة

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### ملخص البحث:

يهدف البحث الحالي إلى شرح تحديد المواقف في التعليقات النصية المباشرة لمباريات كرة القدم وفقاً لنظرية التقييم لمارتن ووايت (٢٠٠٥). ولهذه الغاية، تم اختيار متن لغوي مكون من حوالي (١١٩٢٧) كلمة يمثل التعليقات النصية المباشرة لمباريات القمة الأربع في كأس العالم ٢٠١٨. أظهرت النتائج أن نظام المواقف في نظرية التقييم له قوة تفسيرية كبيرة لأنه لا يساعد في الكشف عن التقييمات العلنية فقط ولكن أيضاً عن التقييمات المضمرة. سادت عناصر الحكم والتقييم خطاب التعليقات النصية المباشرة على نطاق واسع بينما فشل عنصر التأثير في البروز بشكل فعال.

## **1. Introduction**

The discourse of football matches commentaries hasn't been the subject of research until the end of the first decade of the twenty first century. The work of Lavric et al (2008) "*The Linguistics of Football*" might be the first book that brought light into the live text commentary discourse of the world's most popular sport. Many studies exploring the depths of the language of sport in general and football commentary in particular followed later. Much attention has been directed towards the spoken discourse of sport, namely, sport announcer talk. However, the relatively new online written discourse, that is, live text commentary hasn't received that much amount of attention.

Sport commentary, among other discourses, is loosely considered a type of an unplanned discourse. This means that it lacks forethought and organizational preparation. As a matter of fact, it has been emphasized that the majority of discourses are located somewhere between planned and unplanned rather than on a specific or fixed point at these extremes. Thus, sport discourse may be unplanned in terms of the expressions and words employed and the order of these elements, but it is much planned in terms of knowing what to achieve by employing the very specific linguistic register. For instance, sport commentary is planned in terms of the already scheduled event, the selected speaker(s) / reporter(s), and the type of the sporting event which establishes the expectations of the speaker and the audience with respect to language structures and language kinds. So the language is spontaneous and unscripted (Delin, 2000: 42).

Football language occurs in different spoken and written situations that shape the linguistic choices of its users. A spoken situation, for instance, involves the interaction between the players and coaches, or the TV and radio online interviews with the players, and coaches, whereas written communication occurs, for instance, in 'soccer literature' that includes books on the history of football, guides to soccer events, player biographies, etc., and training resources e.g. books, and articles (Lewandowski, 2008, p. 25).

The focus of the present study is the discourse of football matches live text commentaries. This type of commentary is a "Computer mediated communication" form that has come into existence during the last years of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and it has introduced itself as a new mode of sports commentary.

## **2. Hypotheses of the Study**

The present study hypothesizes the following:

1. Due to the uniqueness of the language of football matches live text commentaries, the weight of the attitudinal categories varies accordingly. Hence, the affectual category of attitude alongside with the social sanction judgment category of attitude is expected to be the less weighted ones.

2. The appreciation category of attitude employed in the live text commentaries shares the same range of prevalence in the other types of discourse.

### 3. Limits of the study

The present study limits itself to use the attitudinal system of the Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory only as the tool of analysis. Thus, the other two systems of engagement and graduation are not going to be referred to in the analysis. In addition, the corpus is limited to the live text commentaries of four football matches within the 2018 world cup. These include the following matches: The Final match (France vs. Croatia), The Third-Place match (Belgium vs. England), The Semi-Final matches (France vs. Belgium) and (Croatia vs. England).

### 4. Martin and White's Appraisal Theory

The appraisal framework proposed by Martin and White (2005) is a multidimensional framework that incorporates three kinds of semantic resources. For Martin and White (2005), appraisal potentially exists in the semantic domain whose realization is prevalent in lexicogrammar through the sub-systems of Attitude, Engagement and Graduation. Each of these sub-systems can be broken down further to reflect greater levels of delicacy which will help us gain a well-refined analysis. (Hart, 2014:53).

#### 4.1 Attitude

Attitude is a sub-system of appraisal that helps provide an evaluative account of things, people's characters and their feelings. Attitude itself is divided into three categories: those that express emotions, those that provide judgment of character and those that value the worth of things. Technically, the resources responsible for expressing feelings are referred to as *affect*, while the ones that judge characters are termed as *judgment* and the ones that value the worth of things are termed as *appreciation* (Martin and Rose, 2007:27-28). Figure (1) below sets out the basic resources for the attitude sub-system of appraisal.

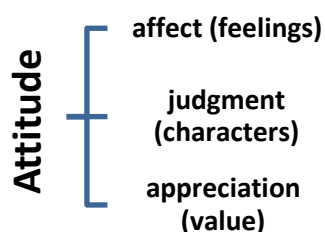


Figure (1) Basic Resources for Attitude

#### **4.1.1 Affect**

*Affect* deals with the speaker's/writer's emotional disposition which could be positive or negative. People's feelings can be explicit/direct or implicit/indirect. Consider the following examples that are extracted from the corpus of the study:

1. *Belgium are happy enough .....*(positive affect)
2. *He's not happy about it...* (negative affect)

#### **4.1.2 Judgment**

The attitudinal category of *Judgment* allows language users to articulate their positive or negative evaluation of some individuals' behavior or character. Whenever a speaker's/writer's assessment of an individual's acts or disposition is indicated, judgment is present.

Martin and Rose (2007:32) maintain that judgment is similar to *affect* in terms of positive/negative and explicit/implicit dichotomies. However, it is unlike affect, because there is a difference between personal and moral judgment. The personal judgment is represented by admiration or criticism (positive/negative), while moral judgment is represented by praise or condemnation.

Martin and White (2005:52) divide judgments into two categories: judgments that deal with "social esteem" and judgments that are oriented to "social sanctions". Social esteem judgments assess the individual's "normality", "capacity", and "tenacity". Normality has to do with how special, extraordinary or unusual someone is. Capacity is associated with explaining how capable someone is. Tenacity concerns itself with assessing how resolute someone is. Social sanctions judgments, however, deal with "propriety" and "veracity". Propriety has to do with assessing someone's ethics, i.e. how ethical s/he is. Veracity is associated with assessing an individual's credibility, i.e. how truthful s/he is. Consider the following examples that are extracted from the corpus of the study:

1. *Mario Mandzukic is too slow to react.....* (Judgment: negative capacity)
2. *France have been more accomplished side since half-time* (Judgment: positive capacity)
3. *Stones blocks bravely.* (Judgment: positive tenacity)
4. *England are becoming reckless in .....* (Judgment: negative tenacity)
5. *The striker shows his phenomenal speed.* (Judgment: positive normality)
6. *Both strikers have been scruffy today.* (Judgment: negative normality)

#### **4.1.3 Appreciation**

The attitudinal category of appreciation focuses on objects in the environment which the appraiser interacts with. Appreciation appraises the worthiness of things, i.e. how we evaluate things that we make and performances we give as well as the natural phenomena. Generally speaking, the division of appreciation is said to include "our reactions" to the things of our environment or that are available within the

situational context (do we find them attention getters; do we find them pleasing?), their "composition" (how balanced they are and how complex they are), and their "value" (how novel, genuine, recent ...etc.). Appreciation is not different from the other two categories of the attitudinal system; i.e. affect and judgment, where positive and negative evaluations are realized (Martin and White, 2005:56). Consider the following examples that are extracted from the corpus of the study:

1. *Perisic chases a beautifully weighted pass....* (positive appreciation)
2. *Croatia don't look comfortable at all.* (negative appreciation)

#### **4.2 Graduation**

Attitudes are distinctively gradable. That is to say, the adjectives that we use to describe things or people can express how strongly we feel about them. Some choices are placed at the top of the grading scale while others are placed at its bottom. In other words, those at the top of the scale are highly gradable, and those at the bottom are of a low grade. Martin and Rose (2007) discussed two types of amplification: "force" and "focus". Force includes intensification such as very/extremely/ really/ quite/ sharply, etc., and they can either turn the volume up or down. Also, force includes vocabulary items that consist of degrees of intensity like happy/delighted/ecstatic. These are referred to as attitudinal lexis. The second type of graduation is focus which includes "sharpening" or "softening" groups of people and things. It includes words such as real/sort of / kind of, etc. Focus makes something that is inherently non-gradable gradable (Martin and Rose, 2007)

#### **4.3 Engagement**

Martin and Rose (2007:48-49) pointed out that engagement is a sub-system of appraisal theory which is used to present additional voices into a text. The sources of attitudes are investigated in this sub-system, that is to say, who are the evaluations coming from? The key choice is either one voice (monogloss) or more than one voice (heterogloss). They explained that the term "heteroglossia" refers to multiple voices in which the source of attitude is other than the writer or speaker. Monogloss, on the other hand, refers to a single voice in which the author is the source of attitude.

### **5. Data and Methodology**

The data consist of transcripts of the live text commentaries of the four top matches of World Cup 2018. The transcripts were copied from the website (<https://www.theguardian.com/tone/minutebyminute>) and they were pasted into newly opened word documents for ease of analysis. The total number of words in the selected corpus is (11927) words.

With respect to the methodology, the analysis has been informed by the attitudinal system of Martin and White's Appraisal Theory (2005).

## 6. Data Analysis and Discussion

Data analysis shows that the total number of the commentators' attitudinal positioning in the live text commentaries of the four matches under study is 144.

The *affect* category occurs (5) times only which makes a percentage of 3.47% of the total number of attitudinal occurrences. Table (1) below summarizes the occurrences of *affect* in the selected corpus:

**Table (1) Distribution of the *Affect* category**

Affect			
Match No.	Positive	Negative	Total
Match No.1	1	0	1
Match No.2	0	3	3
Match No.3	1	0	1
Match No.4	0	0	0
Total	2	3	5

As it is indicated by Table (1) above, the distribution of *affect* in the four matches live text commentaries is fairly little; in match four, no *affect* is revealed. The scarcity of affectual attitude could be a result of the nature of this kind of discourse where people's feelings of happiness, sadness, sympathy and empathy might not have a place.

The frequency of the *judgment* category is fairly higher than that of the *affect* category where it recurred (43) times, which makes a percentage of 29.86% the total number of attitudinal occurrences. Table (2) below summarizes the distribution of judgmental attitude along the corpus:

**Table (2) Distribution of the *Judgment* category**

Judgment					
Match No.	Social Esteem		Social Sanction		Total
	positive	Negative	positive	Negative	
Match No.1	16	3	0	0	19
Match No.2	9	5	0	0	14
Match No.3	5	2	0	0	7
Match No.4	1	2	0	0	3
Total	31	12	0	0	43

As it is indicated by table (2) above, the distribution of *judgment* reveals that the social esteem judgments were the only ones used. If we know that social sanction provides judgments in terms of morality, we won't be surprised not to find a single occurrence of social sanction in the live text commentaries under study. Owing to the fact that footballers' performance inside the football field could be described in terms of normality, capacity and tenacity, it is found that the positive social esteem judgments occurred (31) times while the negative ones occurred (12) times only.

The frequency of *appreciation* category outnumbers that of *affect* and *judgment* collectively. The total number of appreciation occurrences is (96), and this makes 66.67% of the total number of attitudinal occurrences. Table (3) below summarizes the distribution of appreciative attitude along the corpus:

**Table (3) Distribution of the *Appreciation* category**

Appreciation			
Match No.	Positive	Negative	Total
Match No.1	19	6	25
Match No.2	32	10	42
Match No.3	17	0	17
Match No.4	12	0	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>96</b>

Since *appreciation* involves people's attitudes about books, paintings, buildings, houses....etc. and performances of any kind, live text commentators while they comment on the minute-by-minute events of the match involve a lot of appreciation of the footballers' performances and the general atmosphere of the football field. Hence, positive/negative appreciations of the footballers' performances are expected to prevail pervasively. This is actually what the analysis has revealed as it is indicated in table (3) above.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis of the selected corpus of live text commentaries has revealed a pervasive prevalence of the attitudinal categories of *judgment* and *appreciation* and a scarcity of the attitudinal category of *affect*. This leads us to draw the following conclusions:

1. The discourse of football matches live text commentaries is perhaps more devoid of the affectual attitude than other discourses. This could be a result of the nature of this kind of discourse where people's feelings of happiness, sadness, sympathy and empathy might not have a place.
2. The discourse of football matches live text commentaries is probably freer of social sanction judgments than other genres of discourse. This could be an outcome of the codification of social sanction as a moral assessment of people's

compliance to decrees, rules, regulations and laws. Live text commentary writers seem to drive their judgments away from moral terms.

3. When it comes to appreciating things and people, the discourse of football matches live text commentaries is like other discourses in that it includes a wide range of attitudes that are charged with feelings.

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