FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN FOOTBALL COMMENTARIES: A NEUTRALITY BIAS ANALYSIS OF THE 2022 FIFA WORLD CUP FINAL

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Abstract

This thesis explores the intricate relationship between figurative language and neutrality bias in football commentaries, focusing on the context of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final. The study aims to analyze how biases in figurative expressions contribute to creating an entertaining match. Drawing upon Baleria's (2021) theory on neutrality bias, the study investigates how commentators' linguistic choices shape narratives, particularly focusing on the portrayal of key players such as Messi and Mbappe. By examining the historical context, social media discourse, and tournament dynamics, the research highlights the influence of biases in favoring certain teams and players over others. Through a qualitative content analysis, the study reveals a pronounced neutrality bias, with positive expressions predominantly favoring Argentina over France in the commentaries. The findings underscore the nuanced interplay between linguistic devices, biases, and narrative construction in sports commentary, emphasizing the importance of transparency and awareness in mitigating neutrality bias for fair and accurate representation.

Key words: *Figurative language, Neutrality bias, Football commentary*

A. INTRODUCTION

Language serves as a global medium for communication, facilitating the exchange of ideas, messages, and information. In social interactions, it plays a pivotal role in conveying thoughts and essential details, adhering to specific rules like sentence structure, practical usage, word forms, and meanings (syntax, pragmatics, morphology, and semantics). Deciphering word meanings,

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especially in contexts, can be challenging, with figurative language emerging as a suitable tool due to its ability to imbue words with diverse meanings through their arrangement and usage. Figurative language is commonly employed in both spoken and written communication, adding depth and emotional resonance, particularly in literature, poetry, and songwriting.

Figurative language, as defined by Johnson and Arp (2018, p.774), involves the use of figures of speech and should not be taken solely literally. It deviates from conventional meanings to convey deeper significance or a more powerful impact, emphasizing the importance of context and interpretation for understanding. This linguistic device, rich in metaphors, hyperboles, epithets, and metonymy, significantly contributes to semantics, the study of meaning, as highlighted by Lyons (1995, p.3). In the realm of commentary, a form of expression that provides additional insight or analysis, figurative language finds widespread usage. Whether in literature, politics, or sports, commentators offer perspectives and interpretations, enriching audience comprehension.

The tradition of commentary, dating back centuries, spans written and spoken forms. From classical scholars crafting commentaries on philosophical treatises to sports commentators enhancing the live experience, this practice has evolved. Sports commentary, in particular, has grown into a distinct profession, with roles like play-by-play announcers and color analysts. In football commentary, a linguistic phenomenon, figurative language adds sophistication, contributing to the unique register of sports broadcasting. Understanding the nuanced meanings of commentary lines, often specific to the context of a game, becomes crucial for viewers. The challenge of neutrality bias in sports commentary, as discussed by Baleria (2021), highlights the need for a nuanced approach. Achieving complete objectivity may be elusive, but transparency and awareness of biases, especially in the use of figurative language, are imperative.

The researcher focuses on the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final, a pinnacle event in football, for a thorough analysis of figurative language and neutrality bias in sports commentary. The choice is rooted in the match's global significance, its unique narrative, and the richness it offers for linguistic exploration. The research aims to unravel patterns and insights, contributing to the understanding of how figurative language and neutrality bias shape football commentaries. Recognizing the evolving nature of language, the study delves into recent events, addressing the notable gap in the exploration of linguistic elements in football commentaries. By scrutinizing the intricacies of figurative language in the context of high-stakes sporting events, the research aims to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of sports commentary, shedding light on the role of bias in narrative interpretations. Addressing neutrality bias is crucial for accurate and fair representation, preventing misinterpretation and enhancing the audience's understanding of the story's importance. The research, titled "Figurative Language in Football Commentaries: A Neutrality Bias Analysis of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final," seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the linguistic aspects of sports communication.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This thesis employs qualitative content analysis, a method focused on collecting descriptive stories and non-numeric visual information to grasp phenomena, as described by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2011:381). The primary objective is to investigate and comprehend the use of neutrality bias in figurative language within the commentaries of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final. The study specifically analyzing the role of neutrality bias in these expressions. The ultimate goal is to deepen our understanding and interpretation of the circumstances surrounding the creation and delivery of these commentaries.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION
1. Neutrality Bias in Figurative Language Analysis

In this study, the researcher conducted an analysis of the primary subjects in each commentary phrase or clause extracted from the commentaries of the 2022 FIFA World Cup final. Specifically, the researcher identified and recorded the team most frequently mentioned as the subject in each instance of figurative language. This comprehensive categorization serves as a foundation for examining neutrality bias in the identified phrases and clauses during the data analysis phase.

No.	Type of Figurative Language	Frequency	Mostly used to-	Amount of line used to Argentina	Amount of line used to France
1.	Metaphor	47	Argentina	29	18
2.	Hyperbole	7	Argentina	5	2
3.	Epithet	4	Argentina	4	0
4.	Metonymy	2	France	0	2
5.	Euphemism	1	France	0	1
6.	Personification	1	Argentina	1	0

The third research question focused on scrutinizing how commentators leverage biases within the figurative language employed in the commentaries of the 2022 FIFA World Cup final. To address this question, a detailed examination was conducted, utilizing the table provided above, which meticulously outlines the predominant team mentioned in each type of figurative language utilized in the commentaries of the final match. For instance, metaphors, the most prevalent form of figurative language with 47 instances, were predominantly employed in commentaries pertaining to Argentina (29 occurrences) and France (18 occurrences). Similarly, hyperboles, occurring 7 times, were primarily associated with Argentina (5 occurrences), albeit to a lesser extent with France (2 occurrences). Epithets, observed 4 times, and personifications, occurring once, were exclusively found in commentaries related to Argentina. Conversely, metonymies, identified in 2 instances, and euphemisms, occurring once, were solely utilized in commentaries associated with France. For the explanation of

examples of each type of figurative language showcasing neutrality bias found in the commentaries, the following is provided:

A. Metaphor

Based on the findings in the first question, this type of figurative language is equally used in phrases/clauses that show bias towards both clubs. The examples for each team are as follows:

1. The complete utopian narrative demands of Messi that he also wins the World Cup

The metaphorical use of "the complete utopian narrative" in the commentary emphasizes Messi's football journey as an idealized and perfect storyline, with winning the World Cup seen as the ultimate fulfillment. This figurative language reflects the weight of expectations and aspirations tied to Messi's career, particularly in light of past near misses in previous World Cups. The commentator underscores the desire for Messi to overcome these disappointments and achieve success, highlighting a prevailing positive bias towards Messi and the elevated expectations surrounding his performance.

By strategically choosing the term "utopian" over "dystopian," the commentator accentuates the optimistic and idealistic viewpoint prevalent in the narrative, further emphasizing the elevated expectations for Messi's performance and World Cup success. This nuanced analysis of the commentary's tone reveals the underlying biases and the broader discourse surrounding Messi's football legacy, where the ongoing pursuit of a World Cup title symbolizes a symbolic journey towards perfection in his career.

2. It was going to be Messi's World Cup final, but Mbappe ripped up that script

The use of the metaphor "ripped up that script" in the commentary illustrates a departure from the expected storyline centered around Messi's role in the World Cup final. It suggests that Mbappe's outstanding performance disrupted the predetermined narrative, emphasizing unexpected twists and dynamic shifts in the football context. By depicting Mbappe as a disruptor who defied expectations and altered the match's trajectory, the metaphor underscores the unpredictability inherent in football and the fleeting nature of predetermined outcomes.

Furthermore, the commentator strategically employs the metaphor to portray Mbappe as an unwelcome disruptor who spoiled what was anticipated to be Messi's moment of triumph. This exaggerated portrayal contrasts Mbappe with Messi's protagonist persona, framing him as the antagonist who challenged Messi's dominance on the world stage. The commentator's bias for Messi is evident as they lament Mbappe's interruption of what should have been a celebration, reflecting a narrative filled with heightened emotions and framing Mbappe as the one who disrupted the festivities.

B. Hyperbole

Hyperbole, was found 7 times, predominantly linked to Argentina (5 instances) and, to a lesser degree, to France (2 instances). This form of figurative language appears in phrases or clauses concerning both teams. Here are examples for each team:

1. Messi will be sainted

The commentator employs hyperbole with the phrase "Messi will be sainted" to emphasize Messi's potential achievement of winning the World Cup and the profound impact it would have on football. This exaggerated statement likens Messi to a saint, highlighting the overwhelming admiration and adulation he receives from fans. By using this figurative language, the commentator underscores the belief that Messi's influence transcends typical athletic achievements, portraying him as a figure of almost mythical stature in the sport.

Drawing parallels with literary and cultural contexts, such as the use of "sainted" in Russian literature to describe revered individuals, the commentator imbues Messi with a similar aura of reverence and divine significance. This choice of hyperbole emphasizes Messi's exceptional qualities and his profound impact on the footballing world, portraying him not just as a player but as a symbol of virtue and significance in the sport. The hyperbolic assertion reflects the immense adoration and reverence Messi commands, portraying him as the central figure around whom the narrative of the World Cup final revolves and solidifying his status as a legendary figure in football history.

2. Mbappe trying desperately to find some way to get into his game

In the commentary of the 2022 World Cup final, the hyperbole "Mbappe trying desperately to find some way to get into his game" magnifies the intensity of Mbappe's efforts to influence the match, particularly as France trails 0-2 to Argentina late in the second half. This exaggerated statement accentuates the urgency and determination with which Mbappe strives to assert himself on the field amidst mounting pressure and expectations. It underscores the weight of responsibility on Mbappe's shoulders, emphasizing his pivotal role as one of football's most talented players and highlighting the significance of his contributions in such a critical moment.

As Argentina maintains their lead, Mbappe's struggle to make an impact becomes more pronounced, reflecting the broader narrative of the match and the emotional stakes involved. Despite facing considerable obstacles, including the opposition's dominance and high expectations, Mbappe's resilience shines through as he endeavors to turn the tide in his team's favor. The commentator's portrayal of Mbappe's battle against adversity adds depth to the dramatic tension of the World Cup final, illustrating the gravity of each moment on the field and the lasting impression it leaves on football fans worldwide.

C. Epithet

Based on the findings in the first question, this type of figurative language is primarily associated with commentaries related to Argentina, appearing 4 times. The example is as follow:

Argentina's number 10, Maradona, Messi, each in his turn near supernaturally great

In the commentary, the epithet "Argentina's number 10" is used to honor the historical significance and iconic status associated with players who have worn this jersey number for the Argentine national team, such as Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi. By employing this figurative language, the commentator highlights the symbolic importance of the number 10 position and the greatness attributed to players who have donned it. This serves to underscore the historical reverence and admiration accorded to legendary figures like Maradona and Messi, portraying them as central icons of Argentine football with transcendent skill and influence.

The use of the epithet within the context of players like Maradona and Messi emphasizes their near-mythical status and the awe-inspiring talent they possess. It pays homage to their enduring legacy and profound impact on the sport, enriching the commentary with historical context and celebrating the iconic players who have left an indelible mark on Argentine football history. Ultimately, the epithet "Argentina's number 10" serves as a powerful testament to the enduring greatness of Maradona and Messi, as well as the rich tradition of excellence in Argentine football, resonating with fans worldwide.

D. Metonymy

Based on the findings in the first question, this type of figurative language identified in two instances, exclusively used in commentaries related to France. The example is as follows:

They can't yet get Mbappe properly in the game

The commentator's use of metonymy in referring to "getting Mbappe properly in the game" symbolizes the French team's overall performance and their reliance on Mbappe's influence in the 2022 World Cup final. By using "Mbappe" as a metonym for the team, the commentator subtly suggests that the team's success is closely linked to Mbappe's performance and involvement. This figurative language emphasizes the importance of optimizing Mbappe's contribution to enhance the team's overall performance, implying that the team's success hinges on unlocking his potential.

However, the commentator's focus on Mbappe as a representative figure for the team may downplay the influence of other French players and overemphasize Mbappe's role in the match. With Argentina leading 2-0, the commentator's sole mention of Mbappe implies an overreliance on him to single-handedly turn the tide of the match, despite the challenges posed by Argentina's dominance. This narrative suggests a dependence on one player rather than a

collective team effort, highlighting the pressure on Mbappe to perform and the team's struggle to find a way back into the game despite the unfavorable scoreline.

E. Euphemism

Based on the findings in the first question, this type of figurative language is associated with a commentary phrase related to France, appearing once. The example is as follows:

The opportunity was there that he couldn't resist Upamecano, just leave a little bit on Lionel Messi

The commentator employs euphemism by saying "just leave a little bit on Lionel Messi," subtly referring to a potentially aggressive or physical action against Messi during the 2022 World Cup final. This softened language cushions the impact of describing a forceful play against Messi, implying Upamecano had an opportunity to challenge him assertively without explicitly stating it. This figurative language contributes to the broader narrative of the strategic and physical aspects of the game, using euphemistic language to convey competitive intensity without harsh wording.

In the context of Argentina leading and Messi being a pivotal player, the commentator's euphemism suggests heightened tension and physicality on the field. By alluding to Upamecano's strategic decision to challenge Messi without explicitly stating it, the commentator adds nuance to the commentary, portraying the competitive nature of football and the tactical decisions players must make under pressure. This use of euphemism allows the commentator to describe on-field events with tact and subtlety while still conveying the intensity of the moment.

F. Personification

Based on the findings in the first question, this type of figurative language is associated with a commentary phrase related to Argentina, appearing once. The example is as follows:

The destiny dictated that the little man, Messi would lift it

The commentator employs personification in describing destiny as dictating Lionel Messi's triumph, likely in the World Cup, imbuing it with human-like qualities and suggesting it orchestrates outcomes. This figurative language elevates Messi's quest to cosmic proportions, framing his success as predetermined and guided by a mystical force. By attributing agency to destiny, the commentator intensifies the drama and anticipation surrounding Messi's pursuit of a major trophy, emphasizing its inevitability beyond individual effort or chance.

Off the pitch, Messi's journey carries significant weight, marked by obstacles and near-misses, particularly in previous World Cup tournaments. The commentator's reference to destiny reflects a shared sentiment among fans and pundits that Messi's fate is intertwined with clinching the World Cup, completing the narrative of his career and solidifying his legacy. This portrayal underscores

Messi's resilience and unwavering dedication, positioning his potential triumph as a culmination of years of sacrifice and perseverance, inspiring admiration and reverence in the hearts of football enthusiasts worldwide.

2. Discussion

The use of figurative language in commentary on the 2022 World Cup final reveals a bias towards Messi over Mbappe, suggesting a preference for Messi's victory. This bias, as discussed by Baleria (2021), influences journalistic storytelling decisions, including which sides to cover, sources to interview, and words to use. Positive expressions portraying Messi's destiny for triumph contrast sharply with more negative portrayals of Mbappe's disruptive potential. This language choice reflects the prevailing opinion that Messi is destined for success, while Mbappe is cast as an underdog capable of shattering hopes.

Several factors prompt commentators to choose their stance and the language they use to narrate the story, which are:

1. Historical context

The historical context of footballing nations like Argentina and France profoundly influences the narratives crafted by commentators. Argentina's rich footballing heritage, marked by iconic moments such as Diego Maradona's legendary goals in the 1986 World Cup, establishes a tradition of glory and dominance in Argentine football. This legacy is often evoked by commentators to underscore Argentina's esteemed status as a footballing powerhouse and to accentuate the significance of Lionel Messi's pursuit of World Cup glory. In contrast, while France has experienced recent successes, notably winning the 2018 World Cup, its footballing legacy may not carry the same weight as Argentina's storied history. This disparity in historical narratives may lead commentators to emphasize Argentina's illustrious past, framing Messi's quest for the World Cup as the culmination of a longstanding tradition of football excellence.

2. Social media context

In today's era of social media dominance, platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook serve as central hubs for football-related discussions, debates, and fan interactions. As the 2022 World Cup final approaches, these platforms buzz with conversations revolving around the participating teams and players. Lionel Messi's overwhelming popularity on social media, boasting millions of followers across various platforms, fosters a vast network of fans eager to witness his triumph on football's grandest stage. This online fervor surrounding Messi intensifies narratives of his exceptionalism and bolsters the desire for him to clinch the World Cup title, potentially swaying commentators' biases in favor of Argentina. Conversely, although Kylian Mbappe may command a significant presence on social media, his following and engagement levels might not rival Messi's. Consequently, the online discourse surrounding Mbappe and the French national team may lack the same level of anticipation and enthusiasm observed for

Messi and Argentina. This contrast in social media influence could contribute to a less pronounced bias in favor of France within commentators' narratives.

3. Tournament context (Qatar and FIFA)

The 2022 FIFA World Cup, held in Qatar under FIFA's jurisdiction, introduces further intricacies into commentators' narratives. The tournament's backdrop in Qatar, amidst controversy over the bid process and human rights concerns, alongside FIFA's role as the governing body of international football, infuses commentators' perspectives with added complexity. Messi's exceptional performances and the frequent favorable decisions by referees throughout the tournament, coupled with his significant social media following, contribute to a prevailing bias favoring Argentina, amplifying narratives of Messi's greatness. Conversely, Kylian Mbappe's achievements, though notable, do not evoke the same historical reverence or online fervor, resulting in a comparatively muted bias in favor of France. Moreover, the scrutiny of refereeing decisions and perceptions of FIFA's favoritism towards certain players, such as Messi, further shape commentators' narratives, highlighting the delicate balance they navigate between celebrating the spectacle of the World Cup and addressing underlying issues of fairness and integrity. Renowned commentator Peter Drury's approach underscores the perpetual challenge of describing Messi's unparalleled brilliance through language, reflecting a continual quest for linguistic innovation in sports broadcasting. In essence, the discussion illuminates the intricate dynamics at play in shaping commentators' narratives, emphasizing the need for transparency and awareness in mitigating neutrality bias for fair and accurate representation.

D. CONCLUSION

The study examined Figurative Language in Football Commentaries: A Neutrality Bias Analysis of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final, drawing from Baleria's (2021) neutrality bias theory. Metaphors, which emerged as a dominant form of figurative language, shaping the narrative around key players like Messi and Mbappe and emphasizing the stakes of the match. Hyperbole heightened the portrayal of players' performances, while epithets underscored the iconic status of players like Maradona and Messi. Metonymy and euphemism contributed to nuanced descriptions of team dynamics and on-field actions, while personification added depth to the narrative by attributing human-like qualities to abstract concepts like destiny.

Neutrality bias, as discussed by Baleria (2021), influenced the choice of figurative expressions, favoring Argentina over France in the commentaries. Positive expressions for Messi contrasted with those for Mbappe, reflecting biases towards Argentina. Various factors, including historical context and social media discourse, contributed to commentators' biases. Argentina's footballing heritage and Messi's social media influence amplified narratives of his greatness, while France's historical legacy and Mbappe's lesser social media presence led to a less pronounced bias. Additionally, the tournament context, held in Qatar under

FIFA's auspices, influenced commentators' perceptions and attitudes towards participating teams and players.

In summary, the analysis of figurative language in the 2022 FIFA World Cup final commentaries highlighted the intricate relationship between linguistic devices, biases, and narrative construction. Through metaphors, hyperbole, epithets, and other figurative devices, commentators crafted a rich portrayal of the match, shaping perceptions of players, teams, and the event's broader significance. These findings underscored the importance of figurative language in engaging audiences and conveying emotion and meaning in sports commentary.

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