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СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОГО СПОРТИВНОГО ДИСКУРСА

В то время как коммуникативные и функциональные аспекты спортивного дискурса относятся к широко изученным научным проблемам, стилистическими характеристиками данного типа дискурса уделяется меньше внимания. Настоящая статья направлена на устранение данного пробела путем выявления стилистических характеристик англоязычного спортивного дискурса и анализа их функционирования в различных медиа, включая печатные издания, трансляции (прямой эфир) и цифровые платформы. В исследовании использован корпус объемом 300 000 слов, скомпилированный с использованием различных источников с целью определения ключевых стилистических приемов, таких как аллитерация, метафора, перифраз, эпитеты, градация, эвфемизмы, сравнения и риторические вопросы. Как показали результаты исследования, данные стилистические средства способствуют эмоциональной и описательной насыщенности

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спортивных текстов, при этом в разных медиа наблюдается характерная специфика их употребления: печатные издания склонны к детализированному и рефлексивному языку, прямые трансляции акцентируют внимание на скорости передачи информации, в то время как цифровые платформы ориентированы на краткость и интерактивность. Проведенное исследование продемонстрировало, каким образом идентифицированные стилистические элементы повышают эффективность спортивного дискурса, привлекая внимание аудитории и обогащая процесс повествования. Выводы исследования подчеркивают стилистическое богатство спортивного дискурса и акцентируют внимание на важности интеграции стилистического анализа в более широкие исследования дискурса.

Ключевые слова: спортивный дискурс, стилистический прием, метафоризация, аллитерация, эвфемизация, риторическая стратегия

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STYLISTIC FEATURES OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SPORTS DISCOURSE

While the communicative and functional dimensions of sports discourse have been widely studied, less attention has been given to its stylistic aspects. This article intends to address that gap by identifying the stylistic features of English-language sports discourse and examining how they function across different mediums, including print media, broadcast (live) commentary, and digital platforms. The study uses a 300,000-word corpus from diverse sources to identify key stylistic devices such as alliteration, metaphor, periphrasis, epithets, gradation, euphemism, similes, and rhetorical questions. The findings suggest that these stylistic tools contribute to the emotional and descriptive calibre of sports narratives, with distinct patterns emerging across mediums: print media leans toward detailed and reflective language, live commentary emphasises immediacy, and digital platforms prioritise concise and

interactive expression. The analysis has shown how these stylistic elements contribute to the effectiveness of sports discourse by garnering audience's attention and enriching the storytelling process. The findings bring to the fore the stylistic richness of sports discourse and place emphasis on the importance of integrating stylistic analysis into broader discourse studies.

Key words: sports discourse, stylistic device, metaphorisation, alliteration, euphemisation, rhetorical strategy

Introduction

The language used in the context of sports, such as live commentary, interviews, reports, articles, and media posts, is referred to as sports discourse (Caldwell, 2020). This type of discourse stands out for frequently combining persuasive, emotive, and descriptive elements (Oates & Pauly, 2007). Sports discourse is a tool for shaping public perceptions and fostering community identities in English-speaking contexts, in addition to reflecting cultural values and societal trends. Sports are an important topic for linguistic research because of their widespread appeal, which attests to the importance of this type of discourse.

While considerable attention has been given to the functional and communicative aspects of sports language (Adams et al., 2010; Olimat et al., 2023; Alkhamash, 2021), its stylistic dimensions remain underexplored. Existing studies often focus on rhetorical strategies (Harris & Adams, 2016) or narrative structures (Wagner & Sveinson, 2024), leaving a gap in comprehending the stylistic devices that contribute to the uniqueness of sports discourse. This study intends to address this gap by identifying the stylistic features specific to English-language sports discourse, with an emphasis on how these features enhance its communicative impact and audience engagement across three distinct genres of print media, digital media and broadcast commentary.

The aim of this research is to identify the stylistic characteristics of English-language sports discourse, considering their role in moulding the distinct identity of its most prominent genres of print media, digital media and broadcast commentary.

Literature review

The linguistic study of sports discourse has garnered growing attention over the past decades due to the global significance of sports as a cultural and social phenomenon. Scholars have analysed sports discourse from various perspectives, including its functional (McGannon, 2016), communicative (Moustakas, 2023), and rhetorical aspects (Mauro, 2020; Malyuga & Akopova, 2021), focusing on how it makes an appeal to audiences, conveys information, and helps build a sense of community.

Early studies in sports linguistics concentrated on the communicative functions of sports language, such as its ability to inform, entertain, and persuade. For instance, Ferguson (1983) described the “sport announcer talk” genre, identifying its distinctive grammatical simplifications, formulaic expressions, and rapid-fire delivery as key elements in live commentary. Later, Kuiper and Haggio (1985) explored the use of formulaic language in sports commentary to show how commentators rely on pre-established phrases to maintain fluency and rhythm in real-time speech.

A few studies have examined rhetorical and narrative strategies in sports media. Billings (2016) analysed how sports journalists craft narratives that affect public perceptions of athletes and teams, often employing metaphors, hyperboles, and dramatic tension to boost audience engagement. Similarly, Wenner (2015) emphasised the role of sports discourse in constructing national and cultural identities, noting how stylistic devices like alliteration and parallelism contribute to the emotive power of sports narratives. Notably, while these works point out the rhetorical richness of sports discourse, their primary focus is on the broader socio-cultural implications rather than on a detailed stylistic analysis.

Stylistic studies of sports discourse have primarily been confined to specific genres, such as sports commentary or journalistic reports. Alzawaydeh and Alghazo (2018) investigated the use of metaphors in football commentary, illustrating how these linguistic devices create memorable imagery and emotional resonance. Aull and Brown (2013) employed corpus-based methods to analyse lexical choices in sports reporting, revealing patterns in word frequency and collocation. Although these studies touch upon stylistic features, they once again lack a systemic framework for categorising and interpreting these elements across the broader spectrum of sports discourse.

Thus, despite the advancements, a comprehensive and systemic analysis of the stylistic features of English-language sports discourse remains limited, with existing research often addressing stylistic elements only tangentially or within specific sub-genres. Hence, a significant gap persists, with most studies either isolating specific stylistic devices or confining their scope to sub-genres, thus neglecting the overarching stylistic patterns that characterise sports discourse as a unified linguistic phenomenon. Furthermore, few studies explore how stylistic elements interact with the communicative and cultural dimensions of sports language to create its distinctive identity.

This study seeks to address the identified gap by singling out the stylistic features of English-language sports discourse. Through the examination of a diverse corpus of sports-related texts, including broadcast commentary, print and digital media, this research aims to develop a systemic framework for understanding the stylistic strategies that underpin this type of discourse.

Material and methods

The study's source material is a broad collection of English-language sports texts from a range of platforms, including print media, broadcast (live) commentary, and online sources. Prominent newspapers and magazines like "The Guardian", "The Observer", "Sky Sports", "Daily Mirror", and "The Times" were among the sources covering a broad spectrum of sports discourse texts. The oral stylistic elements of broadcast commentary were preserved through transcription, while current trends were reflected through the inclusion of digital content such as blogs, media posts, and articles from well-known sports websites. Based on the corpus's volume of roughly 300,000 words, stylistic variation across various platforms and formats has been fully represented. The texts spanning the time period of five years were chosen to ascertain recent stylistic advancements in sports discourse.

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used in the study to analyse the stylistic elements registered in the material collected. A methodical approach to data collection was taken to guarantee diversity among sports, including basketball, tennis, and football. The goal of qualitative analysis was to pinpoint important stylistic components, such as rhetorical devices, syntactic patterns, and word choices. Figurative language, including alliteration, similes, and metaphors, as well as syntactic structures like rhetorical questions, received particular attention

The qualitative analysis was supplemented by quantitative methods. The frequency of stylistic devices in the corpus was ascertained through frequency analysis. Cross-referencing the results with previous research helped to confirm interpretations and identify new contributions. The method provided an all-encompassing viewpoint on the stylistic elements of sports discourse. Diverse sources and formats were used to guarantee that the analysis captured the complexity of English-language sports discourse, and the comparative analysis attested to the stylistic variations among genres and subgenres.

Study results

The study of the stylistic devices in English-language sports discourse identified a number of linguistic and rhetorical techniques that support the discourse's expressiveness, emotional resonance, and efficacy as a medium. The study's findings are presented in the section below, which focuses on important stylistic devices and their purposes, backed up by corpus examples.

Alliteration

Alliteration is a stylistic technique used to establish rhythm, direct attention, and elevate the visual appeal of language. It is defined as the repetition of the initial consonant sounds in closely related words (Grishechko & Akopova, 2015). Alliteration works especially well in sports discourse to draw in viewers and create memorable narratives. Alliteration reinforces important themes or feelings connected to the story by laying emphasis on sound patterns and directing the reader's or listener's attention to specific passages (Grishechko et al., 2015). Alliteration was found to be a common stylistic element in this study, especially in print media headlines where it is used to immediately grab the reader's attention. The following examples show how alliteration can be used to convey dynamism and intensity, two qualities that are intrinsic to sports narratives.

In "*Robson and Rush Raise Rackets in Rematch*", for example, the /r/ sound is repeated to create a rhythmic flow that reflects the match's intensity and competitive tension. The /t/ sound is also used in "*Tiger Tackles Tough Terrain*" to put a focus on the athlete's struggle and support the story of tenacity and grit. The use of nouns like "terrain" and verbs like "tackles" supports the image of the action-packed setting of sports reporting. In "*Federer Faces Fierce Finals*", the /f/ sound steers the attention towards the event's importance while also portraying it as a

dramatic and intense moment. Readers are drawn in by the situation's increased drama and recurring sound. With the /b/ sound reflecting the aggressive and resolute nature of the team's efforts, "*Bulls Battle Back Brilliantly*" perfectly encapsulates the spirit of a comeback. In a similar vein, "*Sprint Stars Shine Spectacularly*" uses /s/ to accentuate performance and excellence, fitting in with the lively tone of the speech.

Alliteration's distribution across media formats suggests that it can be used in a variety of communicative contexts. Alliteration is a common technique in print media, especially headlines, because it can distil intricate stories into powerful and memorable sentences. Headlines frequently need to grab attention fast, and alliteration accomplishes this by producing a rhythmic and evocative wordplay that is visually and aurally striking.

However, alliteration is used less frequently in live commentary. Deliberate stylistic construction is less feasible in spoken discourse due to its spontaneity and the requirement for real-time reporting. When alliteration occurs in commentary, it usually happens accidentally or organically in descriptive passages. In the midst of action, a commentator might say, "*Brilliant break by the Blues!*" The /b/ sound is repeated, emphasising the event's speed and intensity.

Alliteration finds a compromise in digital media. It is commonly utilised in short-form content, hashtags, and captions where impact and conciseness are crucial. It can be useful in digital posts while adhering to character limits, as demonstrated by examples such as "*Game Grit Gone!*" and "*Superb Striker Scores*". Digital media frequently levels up the impact of alliteration by mixing textual and visual components, combining rhythmic phrases with visually arresting images or videos.

As a result, alliteration's function in sports discourse differs greatly depending on the format, and its adaptability as a stylistic device demonstrates how well it supports the discourse's ability to communicate ideas, which adds to its lively character.

Metaphorisation

Metaphor, as posited by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), refers to the cognitive process of comprehending one conceptual framework through the lens of another, serving as an essential cognitive and linguistic instrument for elucidating abstract or complex ideas by employing more concrete or relatable terminology. In sports discourse, the process of metaphorisation operates to conceptualise athletic events, participants,

and teams through the utilisation of imagery derived from domains such as warfare, struggle, and motion, thereby intensifying the narrative's emotional and dramatic resonance. The examination of the corpus indicated that metaphor constitutes one of the most prevalent stylistic devices, employed to articulate the fervour, stakes, and dynamism intrinsic to sports.

Metaphorisation is demonstrated in the diverse uses of metaphor within sports discourse. Conceptualising competition as warfare, the phrase "*The battle for the top spot*" marks its combative essence and conjures up associations with strategic planning and conflict. The verb "rages" amplifies the metaphor's intensity, implying sustained and highly contentious disputes. Such metaphors can come in handy, as sports are often seen as battlegrounds where high-pressure confrontations take place, and winning or losing has substantial importance.

The phrase "*The team suffered a crushing defeat*" uses a metaphor that equates physical destruction with the emotional impact of losing. The word "crushing" intensifies the severity of the loss by drawing on a common, visceral experience of physical force or collapse. This type of metaphor is highly effective in creating empathy or triggering emotional responses among its listeners.

Players are portrayed as tactical invaders who blend skill and aggression in "*Storming the pitch with precision*", which blends metaphors of motion and war. The contrast between "storming" and "precision" illustrates the need for both force and dexterity in sports. Similar to this, "*Climbing the ladder of success*" expands on the motion metaphor by portraying athletic success as an ascent that calls for work, perseverance, and advancement. This extended metaphor is frequently used in print media because of the format's reflective qualities, which enable the creation of imagery that gives stories depth and coherence.

Lastly, framing an unexpected performance as a military operation is the phrase "*The underdog launched a last-minute offensive*". The metaphor builds on the event's strategic and unexpected aspects, working so as to heighten the story's drama and excitement.

The way metaphorisation is used in various media formats shows how flexible it is to meet various communication requirements. Deeper narrative construction is made possible by the frequent extension and layering of metaphors in print media. In feature or analytical articles,

phrases like “overcoming insurmountable odds” or “climbing the ladder of success” are common because they help to work towards thematic depth and reader engagement. Such elaboration is made possible by the reflective and interpretive nature of print media, which makes metaphor an essential tool for writing gripping sports narratives.

Metaphors are typically more vivid and shorter in broadcast commentary to fit the urgency of live reporting. Examples such as “*They’re going for the jugular*” or “*That shot was an absolute missile*” reference action and emotion while offering engrossing and descriptive real-time commentary. To convey the intensity and speed of sporting events, these metaphors frequently reference physical or combative domains, striking a chord with viewers who are visually engrossed in the action.

Metaphorisation in digital media is modified to fit the format’s multimodality and brevity. Commonly used metaphors in social media posts and captions are succinct but powerful, like “*This team is on fire!*” or “*A nail-biting finish to the game*”. Adding images, hashtags, or emojis to a message can intensify its use of metaphor by reinforcing its imagery and emotional tone.

The prevalence of metaphors in sports discourse is indicative of their emotional and cognitive value. Metaphors give abstract ideas like competition and success a relatable and vivid quality by drawing on well-known contexts like motion, war, and physicality. They exhibit their versatility through their distribution across media formats, each of which makes use of the device in ways that complement its unique communicative objectives and limitations.

Periphrasis

Periphrasis, defined as the use of a descriptive phrase or indirect expression to convey an idea that could otherwise be stated more succinctly (Akopova, 2016), serves both a stylistic and functional role in discourse. According to Grischechko (2021), periphrasis can be used for rhetorical or poetic purposes, adding depth, variety, or a touch of elegance to language. In sports discourse, it enriches descriptions, avoids repetition, and sustains audience engagement by introducing creative and novel ways of referring to familiar concepts.

For instance, basketball is imaginatively identified in “*The game of the orange ball*” without being specifically named. By adding visual imagery, this periphrastic reference marks the sport’s distinctive

qualities and evokes its defining feature. In addition to keeping conversation interesting, the expression's indirectness engages the reader with a poetic touch.

In a similar vein, "*The sport of white lines*" alludes to tennis by referencing the distinctive court boundaries. This periphrasis turns a commonplace feature into a descriptive one by encapsulating a crucial aspect of the game's identity. These kinds of allusions are typical in print media, where the goal is to create visually striking stories that keep readers interested.

One well-known periphrasis for football (soccer) is "*the beautiful game*", which alludes to the sport's aesthetic and cultural importance. The phrase goes beyond the game's technical features to portray it as a cultural phenomenon by putting a focus on its artistry and universal appeal. Audiences respond emotionally to this kind of periphrasis, which fits with sports' larger symbolic and social connotations.

Tradition and decorum are used to describe golf in "*The Gentleman's Pursuit*". In keeping with its historical and cultural connotations, this periphrasis alludes the sport's association with refinement and sportsmanship. The use of such language supports journalistic attempts to present the sport as more than just a physical competition and appeals to readers' perceptions of its ethos.

Lastly, "*Clash of Titans*" depicts a high-stakes contest between two fierce rivals. This phrase heightens the event's drama and significance by fusing mythological imagery with sports narratives. It is a popular choice for texts in print and digital media because of its grandeur, which captures the passion and excitement of such encounters.

The fact that periphrasis is used in a variety of media formats attests to its versatility and particular communication purposes. Periphrasis is widely used in print media to increase narrative variety and depth. These descriptive paraphrases are frequently used in feature articles, profiles, and match analyses to keep readers interested throughout lengthy texts by introducing layers of imagery and thematic resonance. A feature about a tennis match, for instance, might switch between using the sport's name directly and using periphrastic phrases like "*the white-lined battleground*".

Periphrasis is less common but purposefully used in broadcast commentary to add variation during slower game segments. For example, to break up the monotony or inject some originality into their

story, a commentator may call a basketball game “*the orange court showdown*”. However, more straightforward language is frequently preferred in commentary due to its immediacy and real-time nature.

Periphrasis naturally occurs in captions, hashtags, and headlines in digital media, where impact and brevity must be balanced. Media posts and digital journalism frequently use phrases like “*The titans meet again*” or “*The beautiful game on display tonight*”. These short yet evocative phrases make use of the multimodal nature of digital platforms to increase their impact by combining captivating images with vivid text.

To sum up, periphrasis acts as a stylistic link between creativity and description, enabling sports discourse to go beyond simple reporting.

Epithets

According to Grischechko (2011a), epithets are adjectives or descriptive phrases that emphasise attributes of a noun. They are a crucial stylistic tool for expressing metaphorical, emotive, or evaluative meaning. Crystal (2017) argues that epithets add subjectivity to descriptions, allowing the writer or speaker to express judgments or convey feelings. Sports discourse has been observed to use epithets to add a dramatic tone and convey the emotional intensity of competition, as evidenced by examples from the corpus.

The adjective “phenomenal”, for instance, encourages the audience to appreciate the moment’s importance as it draws the attention to both the skill and its emotional impact, as in “*A phenomenal save*”. In a similar fashion, “*The relentless attack*” conveys the ferocity and perseverance of a team’s offensive strategy. The epithet “thrilling” in “*A thrilling finale*” describes the event as emotionally charged and unforgettable, evoking a common sense of drama and suspense. On the other hand, “*A reckless challenge*” criticises a player’s choice as “reckless” and signals the possibility of harm or disciplinary action. The evaluative application of epithets can be viewed as a clear example of how they frame player and game action perceptions.

Sports reporting often relies on emotionally charged language to refer to achievements or failures. Positive descriptors like “spectacular”, “heroic”, and “elegant” serve to elevate the significance of athletic feats. For instance, phrases such as “an elegant strike” focus on the skill and artistry of a play, while “a spectacular performance” can be said to reference both technical excellence and visual appeal. Conversely, negative terms like “disastrous” or “underwhelming” are used to point

out mistakes or shortcomings, reflecting the competitive nature and high expectations of the field. Similarly, expressions like “a sensational comeback” shift the focus towards perseverance and victory, as the word “sensational” is associated with the emotional and dramatic impact of overcoming challenges.

The use of epithets varies significantly across different media. Epithets in print media are typically more complex and introspective, which fits with the format’s focus on in-depth analysis and narrative. Phrases like “*the enduring brilliance of Federer’s performance*” or “*the extraordinary tactical acumen displayed by the coach*” are commonly used in feature articles, match reports, and profiles to offer assessments. In print media, epithets frequently contribute to the story’s richness and depth of interpretation, making it more layered.

Epithets used in broadcast commentary are brief and frequently impromptu in order to convey the urgency of the situation. Phrases like “*That was a reckless foul!*” and “*What a phenomenal goal!*” contribute to emotional involvement and real-time assessment. These epithets’ impact and conciseness appeal to the fast-paced, descriptive economy-focused nature of live commentary. These phrases frequently turn into catchy soundbites, adding to the sports industry’s timeless lexicon.

Epithets in digital media adjust to the multimodality and brevity of the platform. Impactful and visually supported phrases like “*A thrilling match!*” or “*A disastrous defeat for the home team*” are frequently used in media posts, captions, and headlines. Incorporating hashtags (e.g., #SensationalVictory) heighten the emotional resonance of epithets in this situation by combining textual and visual elements in a synergistic way.

Epithets in sports discourse therefore fulfil a number of vital purposes. They are the main way that people express their opinions, which helps authors and presenters influence how people view athletes, groups, and events. Epithets influence the focus of the story by steering the focus towards specific attributes, such as drama, failure, or moments of exceptional performance. For example, digital and broadcast media frequently employ epithets with positive connotations, which reflects the genre’s propensity to maintain audience enthusiasm and celebrate accomplishment. Although they are less frequent, epithets with negative connotations, on the other hand, provide contrast and criticism while preserving a fair depiction of events.

Gradation

Glazko (2021) defined gradation as the placement of concepts or components in a decreasing or increasing order of importance. Gradation is used to establish a story's progression and intensity. In order to influence the audience's emotional reaction and increase or decrease the perceived impact of events, it is frequently used as a rhetorical device. Gradation in sports discourse secures anticipation and excitement or points out contrasts to support the dramatic arc of a game or player's performance to keep the audience interested. Gradation works by using an ascending sequence of evaluative adjectives, as in "*The team's performance went from good to great to exceptional*". This progression mimics the dynamics of a typical sports narrative, where performances build toward a peak, and it reflects the team's evolving quality of play. Here, the use of gradation inspires readers or viewers to concentrate on the event's upward trajectory while also generating a sense of optimism and momentum.

Another illustration of gradation using action verbs that depict a temporal and qualitative progression is "*They started hesitantly, grew into the game, and finished in complete control*". This phrasing aligns the language with the sense of steady advancement by tracing the stages of improvement and producing a rhythmic cadence. Because it references the team's growing dominance, the gradation effectively tells the match's story and makes it vivid and relatable for the audience.

Gradation appears in "*From a stumble to a sprint to an electrifying victory*" in both structural and metaphorical contexts. With the imagery of movement (stumbling, sprinting) giving way to the competitive and emotional climax of "electrifying victory", the sequence conveys an increasing sense of effort and success. This development captures the drama that is inherent in a sporting event while preserving narrative coherence, reflecting its highs and lows.

The way that different media use gradation in sports discourse varies. Because it keeps viewers interested and involved in real time, gradation is especially common in broadcast commentary. The use of gradation in commentary phrases such as "*He's getting closer, closer, and now he's passed the leader!*" demonstrates how gradation fits in with the urgency of live reporting, creating tension and mirroring the action's development. Gradation frequently happens on its own during crucial

plays or intense competitions, when commentators try to time their speech to the drama of the situation.

In print media, gradation is employed more purposefully, frequently in narratives that are analytical or contemplative. The longer-term perspective provided by this format is reflected in match reports and feature articles with statements such as “*The player progressed from a promising rookie to a reliable team leader and ultimately to an iconic figure in the sport*”. When narrating a player’s career path or a team’s season-long journey, print media use gradation to give stories depth and structure.

Gradation in digital media is modified for impact and conciseness. Concise gradations are frequently used in media posts and captions to produce shareable content. For example, a message might say: “*From underdogs to contenders to champions – what a journey!*” This format’s condensed nature fulfils the platform’s requirements while maintaining the fundamental purpose of gradation, which is to point out progress. Furthermore, digital media frequently combines textual gradation with visual components, like pictures or videos, to heighten its emotional impact.

Gradation works well as a rhetorical device to engage audiences because it mimics the pacing and organisation of sports narratives. The action is defined by climactic moments and momentum changes, which is reflected in its ascending or descending sequences. Overall, the use of gradation in sports discourse exposes the genre’s dependence on linguistic intensity to reflect the competitive and emotional stakes of events, and its distribution across media formats demonstrates how versatile it is as a stylistic device that can improve both in-the-moment reporting and retrospective narratives.

Euphemisation

In sports discourse, euphemisation – defined by Allan and Burridge (1991) as the substitution of indirect or softer expressions for those that might be harsh, disagreeable, or offensive – plays a significant role. Euphemisms preserve a neutral or constructive tone, lessen the impact of unfavourable assessments, and soften criticism. In sports discourse, euphemisms generally ensure that the language remains appropriate and appealing to diverse audiences, while also safeguarding the reputations of players, teams, and officials.

For instance, the term “physical” is often used to describe aggressive or borderline unsportsmanlike behaviour, as in the phrase, “It was a physical game”. This way, the focus is diverted from actions that viewers may find upsetting. This kind of evasive description is especially productive in live commentary, where it is required to maintain a neutral stance when describing events.

Euphemisms can be helpful when the task at hand is to avoid being critical – for example, when talking about underperformance. Thus, the phrase “*The team did not play up to their usual standard*” manages to convey disappointment but does so without resorting to harsh language or direct accusations. This is particularly common in print media, where analysis of sporting events should be calculated in terms to language used so as to not undermine athletes’ achievements.

In live broadcasts, presenters are often faced with the task of commenting on fouls or penalties. In this case, a commenter might say, “*There was a bit of contact in the box*”, which does a good job avoiding direct references to infractions. “Contact” is a rather obscure term to be used in this context, which is why it efficiently helps to move away from any kind of precise detailing of the incident and, hence, avoid premature judgments and leave room for interpretation.

Based on study results, there is a difference in the way euphemisation occurs in different media. In live commentary, it has been registered as a productive device to diffuse conceivable tension. Thus, when a commentator is required to report on an aggressive foul, he might describe it as “*a bit of a reckless challenge*” rather than “perilous” or “unsportsmanlike” to keep to a neutral tone and avoid coming across as biased.

As to print media, it commonly incorporates euphemisms that are more purposeful in nature and designed to sustain interest. For example, rather than stating outwardly that someone “played poorly”, match reports and opinion pieces would instead settle on “*struggled to find their rhythm*”. The journalistic objective of preserving credibility while honouring the athletes’ and teams’ professional efforts is in line with this softer tone. Additionally, euphemisms in print enable analysis without sensationalism, appealing to a more sophisticated and perceptive readership.

Even though euphemisms are less common in digital media, they still shape public opinion, especially in headlines, captions, and media posts.

Digital media does use softer terms to lessen negativity in high-visibility posts, but brevity frequently restricts the use of complex euphemistic phrasing. For example, to explain a defeat without offending supporters, a media post might read, “*A challenging game for the home side*”. Because digital platforms are interactive, euphemisms can also be purposefully employed to avoid contentious comments or debates.

In sports discourse, euphemism reflects its function as a tool that strikes a balance between inclusivity, celebration, and critique. Euphemisms help preserve the upbeat and captivating tone that characterises sports narratives by softening potentially harsh assessments, guaranteeing that the conversation is still interesting to a wide range of listeners. Euphemisation in sports discourse is a prime example of how language can be modified to suit the communicative demands of particular situations

Similes

In sports discourse, similes – which are defined as explicit comparisons between two different things using connecting words like “like” or “as” (Grishechko, 2011b) – are a potent tool for producing relatable descriptions and vivid imagery. Malyuga (2019) asserts that similes relate abstract or difficult concepts to well-known experiences, which makes them more approachable and interesting for the reader. Similes in sports writing help readers and viewers picture the action by using familiar images. They connect the intensity and skill of athletes to everyday concepts or cultural references that are easy to understand.

For instance, saying “*The match was as intense as a chess game*” compares the calculated strategies of chess to the planning and high stakes of the game. This comparison draws attention to the mental effort behind the physical competition and makes it accessible to a broad audience.

“*The goalkeeper dived like a cat to save that shot*”, in its turn, may serve as a good example of simile that is intended to build associations with agility and quick delivery. The association is with a cat’s swift movements in this case, which works well in live commentary specifically, as in this medium the imagery needs to be simple and easy to grasp.

Another example is “*He runs like a machine*”, whereby “machine” is put in place to stimulate associations with productivity and break-free

performance. The athlete is hence described as almost unbreakable and highly competitive.

Another context in which similes can be used in sports discourse is the context of failures. For example, the phrase “*The team collapsed like a house of cards*” brings the message home to describe how quickly and irreversibly things went downhill. A comparison to a house of cards does a great job invoking the image of instability, as well as imminence. This type of phrasing can often be found in print media specifically, because it is here that the writers have the opportunity – and obligation – to explore the details of what went wrong.

Rhetorical questions

A potent stylistic tool, rhetorical questions are those that are asked to highlight a point, stimulate discussion, or engage the audience rather than to elicit an answer (Malyuga, 2010). Rhetorical questions, as posited by Malyuga (2007), serve as an interactional technique to frame important elements of the story and elicit emotional and cognitive engagement from the audience. Rhetorical questions in sports discourse intensify drama, stimulate conjecture, and encourage involvement, bringing the audience closer to the action.

Thus, the question “*Can they pull off a miracle?*” illustrates the elevated stakes of a pivotal moment. Suspense is introduced by the rhetorical question, which also asks the audience to speculate and join in the excitement. The question raises the event’s significance and presents the situation as extraordinary, bringing the audience’s feelings into line with the story’s dramatic arc.

The rhetorical question in “*Is this the greatest comeback of all time?*” functions as a hyperbolic device, placing the incident in a larger historical framework. It encourages audience participation and raises the event’s perceived significance by asking them to assess and contrast the current situation with previous occurrences. This tactic works especially well in digital media and live commentary, where encouraging quick responses is essential.

“*How much more can this team endure?*” is another example that adds dramatic tension and an empathetic note. The question invites the audience to empathise with the athletes’ struggle by focusing on the mental and physical toll they endure. In addition to improving the story, this rhetorical device brings a focus on the tenacity and resolve that are essential to sports narratives.

A sense of rivalry and expectation is generated by the rhetorical question in *“Who will rise to the challenge?”*. In order to stimulate conjecture and emotional involvement and bring the audience into line with the developing drama, it presents the event as an open-ended challenge.

Rhetorical questions found in live broadcasts typically occur spontaneously, as they are a result of the commentator’s on-the-spot reactions, as in *“Can they hold onto the lead?”* or *“What were they thinking there?”*. This may be very helpful when the task at hand is to support the suspense of the outcome of the game and instil excitement.

At the same time, rhetorical questions registered in print media appear to be more calculated, as in *“Is this the end of an era?”*, which sets the stage for a more comprehensive discussion.

Digital media, on the other hand, need to stimulate comments and shares, which is why they typically tend to use short rhetorical questions, like *“What’s next?”*.

Table 1
Key stylistic devices in English-language sports discourse

Device	Description	Examples	Prevalence
Alliteration	Repetition of initial sounds for rhythm and emphasis	“Robson and Rush Raise Rackets”	High in print headlines, moderate in digital captions, rare in live commentary
Metaphorisation	Conceptual representation of sports through figurative language	“Battle for supremacy”, “crushing defeat”	High across all formats; extended in print, vivid in broadcast and digital
Periphrasis	Descriptive paraphrasing to avoid repetition	“The orange ball game”	Common in print and digital media, less frequent

			in commentary
Epithets	Evaluative adjectives conveying emotion	“Phenomenal save”, “thrilling match”	High across all formats
Gradation	Progressive intensification of meaning	“Good to great to extraordinary”	Frequent in commentary, occasional in print and digital
Euphemisation	Substitution of softer terms for harsher realities	“Physical game”, “below their usual standard”	Common across all formats
Similes	Relating sports actions to familiar references	“Runs like a machine”, “as intense as chess”	Frequent in print and digital, moderate in commentary
Rhetorical questions	Questions posed for engagement without expecting an answer	“Can they make history?”	High in headlines and commentary

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate how English-language sports discourse uses a wide range of stylistic devices, showcasing the genre’s adaptive function in modern language use. This study has exposed how stylistic techniques are used in various media formats to captivate audiences, elicit strong feelings, and organise stories. The frequent use of stylistic devices such as alliteration and metaphorisation demonstrates how performative sports discourse is by nature. Sports language uses these resources to accomplish a variety of communication objectives because it is a genre that sits at the nexus of entertainment, information, and culture. For instance, according to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980)

conceptual metaphor theory, metaphors that depict sports as conflicts or journeys appeal to viewers because they evoke well-known cognitive frameworks.

Similarly, the need for immediacy and memorability in media communication is in line with the frequent use of alliteration, especially in headlines. Alliteration's phonetic and rhythmic appeal frames important narratives and increases the marketability of sports stories. These results extend the conversation by showing how stylistic devices adjust to the stylistic requirements of various media formats, while also confirming previous findings by Billings (2016) regarding the influence of stylistic devices on how the general public views sporting events.

The interactive and immersive nature of sports discourse is emphasised through the use of gradation, similes, and rhetorical questions. The audience becomes an active participant in the story thanks to these techniques, which create a dialogic connection with them. For instance, rhetorical questions in headlines and commentary serve to both pique readers' interest and frame the discussion in ways that influence how the audience interprets it. These tactics demonstrate the dialogic character of sports communication, which is consistent with the view on institutional interaction as a dialogic continuum (Malyuga, 2008).

The study's conclusions have important ramifications for our comprehension of how stylistic devices influence discourse genres. They first show how stylistic decisions are adjusted to meet the requirements of sports discourse, including the need to communicate action, emotion, and narrative coherence. The adaptability of linguistic strategies in reacting to various communicative contexts is attested to by this adaptive quality.

Second, the comparison of various media formats demonstrates how cultural and technological changes have impacted stylistic practices. As an illustration of broader trends in digital communication, the brevity and multimodality of digital media have resulted in a greater reliance on succinct metaphors, hashtags, and emoticons. These results imply that the changing character of media platforms and their influence on language use must be taken into consideration in stylistic analysis.

Third, by exposing the stylistic diversity of sports discourse, the study advances the larger field of genre analysis. This study reveals notable stylistic differences among subgenres, including print journalism, broadcast commentary, and digital media, despite the fact that sports

discourse is frequently treated as a single genre. This observation calls for more thorough approaches to genre studies and challenges oversimplified classifications.

Lastly, the results have educational ramifications for discourse and language instruction. In educational contexts, the imaginative and expressive use of stylistic devices in sports discourse offers a wealth of material for investigating rhetorical techniques, figurative language, and audience engagement. Examining these tools, students might be able to better understand how language works in everyday situations, especially in communication and the media.

This study has limitations even though it offers a thorough examination of stylistic devices in sports discourse. The findings may not be as applicable to other linguistic and cultural contexts due to the emphasis on English-language texts. Comparative analyses of the stylistic elements of sports discourse in various languages and cultures may provide intriguing observations regarding the adaptability and universality of these tactics. Additionally, the study's primary focus was on written and transcribed texts might not adequately represent the multimodal character of sports discourse, especially in digital media. To provide a more comprehensive laying out of stylistic practices, future research could examine the relationship between linguistic and visual elements, such as infographics, videos, and memes.

This study establishes sports discourse as a productive platform for investigating the relationship among language, culture, and media, and how language changes to accommodate various audiences and situations. Sports serve as a unifying force and a platform for cultural expression in society, and these stylistic techniques ultimately support this function by framing sporting events as dramatic, emotive, and culturally significant narratives. The results of this study, in summary, reveal the nature of linguistic creativity ingrained in sports communication and add to the expanding corpus of research on stylistics and discourse analysis.

Conclusion

In order to determine the distinctive identity and efficacy of the genre, this study sought to identify the stylistic devices that define English-language sports discourse. The study analysed a corpus of roughly 300,000 words gathered from various sources, such as digital platforms, print media, and broadcast commentary. While comparative analyses across media formats produced information about the variability of their

use in various contexts, qualitative and quantitative methods offered a thorough analysis of stylistic elements.

The research outcomes indicate that stylistic devices are fundamental to the expressive and emotive dimensions of sports discourse. Alliteration is a notable feature in print headlines. It creates a rhythmic structure and makes phrases easier to remember. Metaphors are present in all forms of sports media. They often describe sports as battles, journeys, or competitions, and reference familiar concepts to communicate the emotional weight of the events. In print, extended metaphors are common and allow for a more comprehensive exploration of the narrative. Broadcast and digital media, however, prefer shorter metaphors suited to the immediacy of their formats.

Periphrasis adds creative variation to descriptions. This device often introduces a poetic tone in journalistic writing. Epithets remain central to sports discourse across media formats and add emotional depth to reporting. Gradation is a frequent method in live commentary. It intensifies the drama and builds suspense by escalating descriptions in steps. Euphemisms reduce the harshness of controversial or negative moments. They align the tone of the discourse with audience expectations. Similes compare athletic achievements to relatable experiences and make descriptions more accessible. Rhetorical questions add dynamism and encourage the audience to think about events as they unfold.

Each medium adapts these stylistic tools to its specific demands. Print media often relies on detailed and thoughtful techniques to hold a reader's attention and analyse events. Broadcast commentary focuses on delivering dramatic and immediate descriptions that match the fast pace of the game. Digital platforms prioritise brevity and interaction in the form of concise expressions that stimulate audience participation.

The analysis shows how these stylistic devices contribute to the cultural and communicative power of sports reporting. Each format uses them differently to meet the needs of its audience. The research exposes the importance of stylistic devices as essential instruments that define the efficacy and attraction of sports discourse, rather than only as ornamental components, by placing these findings within larger linguistic and media trends. These findings lay the groundwork for future research into the stylistic and cultural aspects of sports discourse.

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