

Utilization of Slang in English Premier League Commentary

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Kansainvälinen näkyvyys ja korkea kilpailullinen taso tekevät Englannin Valioliigasta yhden maailman suosituimmista jalkapalloliigoista. Laadukkaan pelin lisäksi selostus nähdään tärkeänä osana jalkapallo-lähetystä. Selostajan tehtävänä on luoda otteluun tunnelmaa, tunnetta, jännitystä ja draamaa, jonka takia tehtävä nähdäänkin haastavana ja vaativana. Selostajat hyödyntävät puheessaan monipuolista sanastoa, esimerkiksi sanontoja, metaforia ja slangia.</p> <p>Tässä tutkielmassa pyritään selvittämään, miten Valioliigan selostajat käyttävät kieltä sekä mitä sanavalintoja he käyttävät puheessaan. Tutkielman keskiössä on selostajien slangin käyttö. Tämä tutkielma keskittyy lajikohtaisiin, jalkapallolle tyypillisiin, slangisanoihin sekä -sanontoihin. Tutkielmassa pyritään vastaamaan siihen, kuinka usein selostajat käyttävät slangia, missä tilanteissa slangia hyödynnetään, sekä mikä on slangin tarkoitus jalkapalloselostuksessa. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu kolmesta Valioliigaottelusta, joita analysoidaan diskurssianalyysin avulla. Aineistosta identifioidaan slangisanat ja -sanonnat, jonka jälkeen ne kategorisoidaan.</p> <p>Tuloksien mukaan slangia käytetään eniten viidessä eri tilanteessa: kentän ja sen mittojen kuvauksessa, pelaajien esitellessä henkilökohtaisia taitojaan, selostajien tehdessä yleisiä huomioita, pelaajien taistellessa pallosta, ja pelaajien päästessä maalintekotilanteisiin. Näissä tilanteissa slangia hyödynnetään selvästi eniten kentän mittojen, ulottuvuuksien, pallon sekä pelaajien positioiden kuvaamisessa. Tutkimustulokset osoittivat, että slangin käytöllä on monia tarkoituksia: selostajat käyttävät slangia ollakseen sanastollisesti monipuolisia, sillä monipuolinen ja vapaasti virtaava puhe vaikuttaa katsojien kokemukseen myönteisellä tavalla. Lisäksi slangin kommunikoi ottelun nyanssit paremmin kuin formaalimpi kieli, joten slangin avulla selostajat säästävät aikaa ja välttävät pidemmän selityksen. Slangi voi olla tehokkaampi tapa kommunikoida selostustilanteessa, sillä se on nopeampi ja tehokkaampi tapa ilmaista monimutkaisia asioita, joita jalkapallokentällä tapahtuu.</p> <p>Tulevaisuudessa tutkimukset voisivat analysoida suuremman määrän Valioliigaotteluita, jolloin kuva selostajien slangin käytöstä tarkentuisi huomattavasti. Tulevaisuudessa voitaisiin tutkia lajikohtaisten slangisanojen sekä -sanontojen lisäksi myös muissa urheilulajeissa esiintyvien slangisanojen ja -sanontojen käyttöä jalkapalloselostuksessa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The sport of football gathers a massive global audience as it is arguably the most influential and famous sport in the world. Furthermore, football possesses a huge universal appeal due to its prominence and simplicity. The English Premier League (also known as the EPL) is the pinnacle of professional football and one of the most prestigious football leagues in the world. Consequently, the Premier League can be regarded as the best football league in the world due to its high competitive level and the vast international appeal.

In football matches, commentators play a vital role in enhancing the overall experience for the viewers and fans. Their commentary not only provides valuable insights into the game, but also adds excitement and emotion to the actions on the pitch. Firstly, the commentators' job can be seen as demanding and challenging due to the nature of sportscasting: commentators face pressure during high-intensity moments when they have to describe the game without hesitation. Furthermore, commentators must have the ability to entertain the viewers at the same time. Secondly, football commentators possess a rich and diverse vocabulary, consisting of metaphors, idioms and slang words. Thus, their diverse and unique use of language presents an intriguing subject of study.

The commentators' use of slang has been analyzed in the context of football, however, to a small extent (Humpolík, 2014; Bergström, 2020). There has been no research regarding the use of slang by English Premier League commentators. Additionally, the chosen matches for this study have not been analyzed before. This piece of research aims to investigate how English Premier League commentators use language, specifically slang words and expressions. Moreover, the aim of this study is to find out the situations where slang is most often used, and the purpose of its use as a part of commentary discourse. The data of the current study is collected from three Premier League matches from the ongoing 2023/2024 season. Furthermore, slang is analyzed using discourse analysis, which offers a way of examining language in spoken communication (Jones, 2012). To summarize, the current study aims to analyze the use of slang, its purpose and frequency as a part of commentary discourse.

The current study is divided into six chapters and their supporting subsections. Chapter two presents previous research in the field of study and sets out the theoretical framework relevant to this research. Moreover, chapter three introduces the research questions, data and the method of study. The data of the current study is examined further in chapter four, where the analysis of the data is presented. The results are summarized and discussed in chapter five, along with comparison with previous research and suggestions for future research. Lastly, a table including every instance of slang found in the data can be found in the appendix.

2 BACKGROUND

This section aims to review and summarize previous research regarding football commentary and language. In this section, football terminology is defined, and its significance and prominence are described. Furthermore, football language and its dialects are explained. Additionally, English Premier League is discussed. Lastly, football commentary and its features are briefly discussed along with vocabulary and word choices.

2.1 The status of football

Football, the “beautiful game”, is by far the most popular sport on earth due to its global and cross-cultural appeal (Bergh & Ohler, 2018). In other words, it is considered by many to be the most popular sport in the world (Humpolík, 2014). Furthermore, football in particular has always been a common form of entertainment; Football has a massive fan base and it attracts millions of viewers and fans worldwide.

Furthermore, due to its large prominence in the world, it is argued that football should not be seen as only a mere sport, but also as a pop cultural phenomenon (Bergh & Ohler, 2018). Humpolík (2014) refers to football as a common “form of popular culture”, whereas Amadi and Harcourt (2022) see the sport as an international phenomenon, which is immensely a part of social and cultural aspects of different societies, regions and countries. Additionally, it is an instrument of peace and relations, and it plays a significant role in media (TV, radio, press) industries.

Regarding the historical significance of football, its roots can be traced to Britain. For hundreds of years, football was known as folk football, which was played in small towns and villages in Britain. Moreover, the sport had two different variations, one being rugby football and the other being association football. According to Taylor (2013), in the case of association football (i.e., modern day football) the foundation of the FA (Football Association) in 1863 serves as a starting point for the sport of football. Therefore, it can be concluded that football originated from Britain in the mid-1800s, or as Barros & Leach (2006) simply phrase it: England is the country where football was

born. Still to this day, football is by far the most prominent and popular sport in Britain (Taylor, 2013). This is largely due to its popularity and prominence in British society. The sport has become a central part of British culture, engaging individuals and communities.

The visibility of football has increased significantly over the past few decades (Veltheim, 2015). This is due to the ever-increasing accessibility facilitated by the advancements in technology and media. As mentioned by Humpolík (2014), football has become more and more commercialized with the rise of television broadcasts in the last few decades. Nowadays, football games are broadcasted on television networks and online streaming platforms globally. Additionally, television broadcasts offer viewers and fans visual delight and variety, which is not present in radio broadcasts (Veltheim, 2015). Football's ever-increasing visibility is also noticed by Lee et al. (2016): in recent years, televised sports have increasingly been among the most consumed and valued television programs. Furthermore, the popularity has been confirmed by the noteworthy audiences engaged and by the money spent on tv rights fees and advertising opportunities (Lee, et al., 2016). Thus, it is safe to say that football is everywhere.

In Britain, the visibility of football can be seen in various ways. Firstly, football clubs can be seen as representatives of different localities. For example, when Leicester City won the English Premier League in 2016, the victory was viewed as a triumph for the city and people of Leicester (Taylor, 2013). Secondly, England possesses the best football league in the world: the English Premier League. It is the first division, and it consists of the best 20 clubs in England (Barros & Leach, 2006). The EPL has the most successful, high value clubs, which bring a massive global fan base. Matches are played and broadcasted almost every weekend and sometimes during weekdays, gathering a massive domestic and global audience.

The first division in England can be regarded as the best football league in the world for several reasons (Taylor, 2013). According to Barros & Leach (2006), England is the European country with the most entrenched tradition in football and with the most competitive clubs. The top English clubs (i.e., the big six) claim an enormous amount of fans, revenue and interest (see Barros & Leach, 2006). The big six refers to the best football clubs in England, which are Manchester United FC, Manchester City FC, Chelsea FC,

Arsenal FC, Liverpool FC and Tottenham Hotspur FC. Furthermore, The English Premier League is the most entertaining league in the world due to the high level of skill on display and the passion involved in the game. The EPL is also known for its unpredictability, as smaller teams can sometimes pose a huge challenge for bigger teams. This adds high intensity and suspense around the game, keeping viewers at the edge of their seat. Lastly, with iconic chants and intense rivalries, the emotional investment of the fans creates a strong passion for the sport.

2.2 Football language

For many decades, the increasing popularity of sports, in particular football, is a quite a phenomenon as an event for socializing and media. It is a function of various media platforms such as the press, the radio, the TV, and the internet media with language playing a crucial role (Amadi & Harcourt, 2022). Thus, the term “football language” emerged as a result of the immense and persistent popularity of football. Furthermore, football language can be considered the dominant genre in sports discourse (Amadi & Harcourt, 2022).

Football language (also known as language of football) is a specialized variety of a language used in football contexts by sport collaborators and participants (e.g. players, supporters, commentators, reporting agencies such as the print press, radio, TV, and internet) (Amadi & Harcourt, 2022). In other words, football language refers to the various forms of communication associated with football. Moreover, the language is the linguistic representation of football activities: its technical or professional vocabulary and expressions identified in general usage. Football language is also seen as a specialized language that has features which can be examined at different linguistic levels. This is because football language contains specific lexis, phonological patterns and distinct grammatical constructions (Amadi & Harcourt, 2022). In a broader sense, football language could be described as a global language which fosters a sense of unity.

According to Lewandowski (2008), football language has a number of subdomains. They can be described as different varieties of football language; for instance, the language the coaching staff use differs from the written language of football journalism,

which then again differs from the language the commentators utilize when describing the game. Whereas Bergh & Ohler (2018) see it as a language with many dialects – the idea is that the language used by participants involved in football, such as players, coaches, fans, and commentators, differs from each other. Each of these dialects share a common core of football terms. However, there are differences in vocabulary, grammar, phonology and the level of formality (Amadi & Harcourt, 2022). In the current study, the focus lies on the commentators and the language they utilize. Hence it is important to portray the idea of them possessing a specific type of dialect in the language of football.

2.3 Football commentary

Commentary refers to the action of describing an event that is broadcast on television or radio while the event is taking place (HarperCollins, 2023). In other words, it could be described as the act of live narration of an event. Another popular definition by Ferguson (1983) portrays commentary as an oral reporting of an ongoing sport activity. In football, commentary takes place during live games and provides information of the ongoing events.

Lee et al. (2016) recognize two types of commentary: judgmental and historical. The judgmental type concentrates on describing game situations and players. On the other hand, the historical type aims to describe statistics of teams and players. Additionally, Ferguson (1983) refers to play by play commentary and color commentary. The former type of commentary focuses on reporting action, for example goals, players and shots. The latter type of commentary offers insights and deeper analysis of the game. Color commentary also provides a deeper understanding of tactics or strategies of the game.

In sport broadcasting, the commentators play an important role. According to Humpolík (2014), their mission is to provide commentary about the game and entertain the viewers at the same time. Likewise, Lee et al. (2016) emphasize the aspect of entertainment in televised sports: commentators' job is not only to provide viewers with factual or descriptive information but also to enhance the enjoyment aspects of televised sports. Both

Humpolík (2014) and Kunert et al. (2023) agree that commentators must be quick to react during matches. According to Humpolík (2014), commentators have to deal with the unfolding events on the pitch linguistically without hesitation. Similarly, according to Kunert et al. (2023), the commentator must be able to absorb information quickly, that is, being quick to act, and attempting to transfer his or her sensory impressions into words. This is not often easy as football is a fast sport. Moreover, the unusual linguistic setting is what makes the commentator's speech so specific (Humpolík, 2014). To conclude, the commentator's role in football broadcasting can be seen as challenging and demanding due to the high load and pressure the commentators face during broadcasts.

2.4 Vocabulary and word choices

Previous research has explored how commentators use language and what kinds of word choices they utilize. A qualitative study by Veltheim (2015) utilized content analysis to examine and compare football commentaries. Whereas Humpolík (2014) analyzed specific features of football language with the help of a qualitative linguistic analysis. Furthermore, commentators' use of language has been analyzed by Kunert et al. (2023), using a qualitative interview analysis to examine how commentators use language and how they see their important role. Likewise, Bergström (2020) analyzed commentators' speech with the help of discourse analysis, to examine the ways in which commentators articulate and use language during broadcasts.

According to Spolsky (2010), our linguistic repertoire is made up from a wide variety of features that are associated with numerous social groupings. In other words, football language may be seen as a subset of an individual's linguistic resources. In the football community, football language is a shared part of the participants' linguistic resources, in other words, their linguistic repertoire. Furthermore, the commentators possess a specific linguistic repertoire. This means that their language, including word choices and vocabulary, is different from the language used by the fans in the stadium or from the language used by coaches and players during matches. The key takeaway here is that the commentators have their own language, which includes specific sport-related vocabulary.

The commentators maximize the audiences' enjoyment and perceptions by making the experience more suspenseful and thrilling through dramatic explanations, elaborations, and even embellishments (Lee et al., 2016). Furthermore, according to a register analysis study by Lewandowski (2012), this includes the use of specific expressions and word choices, for example, metaphors, slang, adverbs, and demonstrative pronouns. In other words, the commentators utilize specific linguistic choices to make the experience more magical for the fans and people watching. These word choices include expressions related to football language, a phenomenon mentioned in section 2.2.

Football possesses specific sport-related vocabulary due to its uniqueness and distinctiveness. Thus, the commentators use specific phrases and expressions during live matches. Moreover, in order to sound interesting, the commentators choose very vivid and rich vocabulary, which is otherwise very uncommon in spoken language (Humpolík, 2014). Additionally, according to Ferguson (1983), the commentators use technical terminology of the sport including numerous idioms and slang words.

Football commentators' main mission is to describe the game and the events unfolding (Humpolík, 2014). Moreover, commentators use very vivid vocabulary, which often features aspects such as idioms, descriptive expressions and slang words. Alongside idioms and adjectives, the use of slang words in football commentary is common. According to Mattiello (2005), slang could be defined as an informal language which possesses special vocabulary and belongs to a specific social group. For instance, the words *howler* (i.e., a huge error made by a player), *gaffer* (i.e., the manager or the coach) and *rabona* (i.e., a specific technique of kicking a ball) are all slang words used in football contexts.

In commentary, slang is often used as a way of having a special form of communication with a subset of people, in this case, the viewers and football fanatics. In other words, football slang possesses special vocabulary, understood mainly by the people in the football community. Furthermore, the commentators use slang as a way of engaging with the viewers and creating a sense of unity. To conclude, slang words and slang expressions are integral components of football commentary, contributing significantly to its linguistic richness.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

This section presents the aim of the current study. The focus of the study is discussed alongside research questions. Furthermore, the data of the study is discussed in section 3.2. Lastly, the method of analysis is presented.

3.1 Research aim and questions

The aim of the current study is to explore how English Premier League commentators use language and what kind of word choices they utilize in their speech during live matches. Furthermore, the focus is on a specific feature of speech: slang words and slang expressions. Moreover, slang words and expressions are analyzed further by investigating how often and to what extent these specific words and expressions are used in English Premier League commentary. Furthermore, the purposes of the above-mentioned lexical choices will be discussed and analyzed. The current study aims to answer the following questions:

1. In which kind of situations are slang words and expressions utilized by English Premier League commentators?
2. What are their purposes and aims as specific features of speech?

In other words, the current study endeavors to achieve a better understanding of the word choices English Premier League commentators apply in their speech. By analyzing which kind of words are used and how often they are used, we can understand how sportscasters make use of language, and how it influences the way fans and viewers see the game.

Understanding the way commentators apply language is important. It provides insight into effective communication and the overall viewer experience. By analyzing the language use of the commentators, we can gain insight into how they capture and maintain the viewers' attention. Additionally, the way commentators utilize language affects the emotions and feelings of the fans, as football is a sport deeply tied to emotions and passion (Bairner, 2014; Doidge et al., 2020).

3.2 Description of data

The data of the current study consists of the commentaries of three English Premier League matches played during the 2023/2024 English Premier League season. The matches were chosen by including the best and most successful teams in the Premier League: Arsenal FC, Chelsea FC, Liverpool FC, Manchester City FC, Manchester United FC and Tottenham Hotspur FC. The amount of data was limited to three matches consisting of approximately 270 minutes of live commentary. The matches offer circa 90 minutes of live commentary and a 15-minute half-time break, which is disregarded in the analysis as the game is stopped during half-time. Moreover, the data was collected from the social media platform Youtube, from a channel called Radio Sports Commentary. The language of the commentaries is English, more precisely the British English (BrE) variety. The current study features the commentaries chosen from the following English three Premier League fixtures:

1. Arsenal FC versus Manchester United FC: 3rd of September, 2023.
2. Tottenham Hotspur FC versus Liverpool FC: 30th of September, 2023.
3. Chelsea FC versus Manchester City FC: 12th of November, 2023.

Due to the small scope of the study, the matches were chosen by including only the “big six” Premier League teams listed above. To elaborate, the term “big six” refers to the teams traditionally considered to be the best and most successful teams in England (Barros & Leach, 2006). Furthermore, to limit the angle of the study, a suitable amount of commentary was chosen: approximately 270-minutes, totaling three Premier League fixtures. Over 140 instances of slang were found in the data, and out of those 24 were analyzed further.

3.3 Method of analysis

In the context of the current study, Premier League commentators and their language use was analyzed with the help of discourse analysis, which according to Jones (2012), offers a way of examining language in spoken communication. Likewise, Gee (2010)

defines it simply as the study of language in-use: discourse analysis explores how language is used and what kinds of meanings and purposes specific word choices convey. Moreover, it is a way of looking at language that focuses on how people use it in specific situations, and to show that people belong to certain social groups (Jones, 2012). Language and word choices play a fundamental role in shaping discourse by influencing meaning and community norms (Gee, 2010). To elaborate, lexical choices shape the interpretation of discourse, and language complies to specific community conventions, such as slang. In other words, language and word choices are connected to discourse as they shape it in specific ways. Furthermore, by examining the speech of Premier League commentators, conclusions were drawn from their vocabulary use: about how they use language and what kinds of purposes their lexical choices convey.

Moreover, the analysis consisted of going through the commentaries of three chosen Premier League matches. During this process, firstly, slang words and expressions used by the commentators were identified. This process was conducted through listening and taking notes of the commentary, and if necessary, replaying and pausing the commentaries. Secondly, the aim was to present examples of key findings, which were analyzed more in-depth afterwards. Thirdly, slang was taken into discussion by analyzing its purpose and aim as a part of commentary discourse. Lastly, a table was constructed, revealing the frequency and extent of the use of slang in Premier League commentaries.

Due to limited time and thus, the narrow scope of the study, a thorough analysis of all aspects of speech is not possible. Therefore, the focus lies on a specific linguistic feature of vocabulary that was found most relevant. Furthermore, the examination of slang words and expressions would offer a clear image of the nature of football commentary in the English Premier League. In other words, regarding the analysis, the focus is on lexical choices, and particularly on slang words and utterances. Additionally, slang is identified, and its purpose and aim are discussed as a part of football commentary discourse.

In the current study, it is important to distinguish the line between slang and other sport-related terminology. Regarding the data, it was determined that slang words that are only related to the sport of football and only known by certain groups, in this case, football

enthusiasts, fans and players, were analyzed. On the contrary, terms often refer to commonly known words related to football, such as a “yellow card” or “nutmeg”. In other words, this research does not feature broadly known slang words, terms or expressions, but the focus is on sport-specific words and expressions that are only found in football commentary.

4 ANALYSIS

This section consists of the analysis. Furthermore, the use of slang is analyzed along with examples from live commentaries. The analysis is categorized into five different sections, which represent situations or areas where slang appeared most frequently in the data. The sections are the following: when commentators observe and perceive the match (4.1 General observations), when commentators describe the pitch and its dimensions (4.2 Describing the pitch), when teams get into scoring positions (4.3 Shooting and scoring situations), when players are fighting for the ball (4.4 Duels and one-on-ones), and when skill and technique is on display (4.5 Skills and technique). Lastly, the purposes and aims of slang expressions are considered in each of the sections.

4.1 General observations

The data clearly suggests that slang is often used when commentators use judgmental commentary. As Lee et al. (2016) pointed out, judgmental commentary is utilized when commentators observe and perceive the game: they use slang when they spot something interesting or captivating in the field, in the stands or on the bench. Furthermore, the analysis shows that these observations usually appear during replays or when the referee is in the spotlight. In the data, 20 examples of general observations were found. Moreover, the analysis indicates that the commentators observe the ongoing proceedings in diverse ways.

In football commentary, a lot of attention is directed towards the referee and his/her actions. The slang term “book” refers to the action of writing down a player’s name on a record when they have done something wrong. In fact, it originates from the practice that referees used to carry notebooks with them, in which they could write down offenses during matches. In football, the referee can give out yellow or red cards based on the seriousness of a foul. For instance, in excerpt 2, it implies that Robertson was booked, because he received a yellow card for his unfair actions on the pitch. In the data, the word “book” was the only slang term used by the commentators when observing the actions of

the referee. Excerpts 1 and 2 are from the matches Chelsea versus Manchester City and Tottenham versus Liverpool.

Excerpt 1

“The referee booked him for that dive”

Excerpt 2

“Robertson has been booked”

In football slang, diving refers to the action of deliberately exaggerating a fall or injury. Moreover, it is usually executed in order to trick and deceive the referee into awarding the diving player a free kick, a penalty or a card to the opposing team. Additionally, it is considered as unsportsmanlike conduct, thus resulting in heavy criticism. The slang word “dive” is derived from the way a player seems to fall or dive dramatically, as if they were diving into water. Excerpt 3 is from the match between Arsenal and Manchester United and excerpt 4 is from the match between Chelsea and Manchester City.

Excerpt 3

“It’s actually Diego Dalot diving”

Excerpt 4

“He’s shown Doku a yellow card for diving”

The commentators utilized slang numerous times when producing general observations. In these situations, the main purpose of using slang is that it offers the commentators a more concise and efficient way of communication. For example, in excerpt 1, the expression “booked him” is a shorter way of articulating a rather complex action by the referee. Furthermore, the efficient use of slang allows the commentators to make quick observations, even during high-tempo games. As Humpolík (2014) highlighted, football is a fast sport, and multiple things can unfold on a football pitch in seconds. Thus, the commentator must have the ability to react to those things, and at the same time provide viewers with engaging and entertaining commentary. In these situations, slang can be seen as an excellent tool. All in all, commentators utilize slang while making general observations to be more concise and efficient in their speech, and to maximize the enjoyment of the viewers.

4.2 Describing the pitch

The data implies that commentators actively describe the pitch in various ways to provide information for the viewers. Furthermore, commentators frequently describe the pitch, its dimensions and the positions of players, and the ball. In the data, over 60 instances were found where the commentators used slang to describe the playing field and its dimensions. The data shows that these kinds of descriptive utterances were most often used particularly in matches where the tempo was exceptionally high. For example, in the game between Chelsea and Manchester City, the intensity showed was very high, resulting in a match where the ball and players moved from one end to the other in quick succession. Therefore, the commentators had to describe the pitch repeatedly in order to keep the viewers up to date.

Excerpts 5 and 6 feature slang terms used to describe the dimensions and areas of the pitch. In these instances, the commentators use slang to describe what is happening near the penalty area, distinctively known as “the box”. In football, there are two penalty areas located at both ends of the pitch. Furthermore, these areas are marked with white lines, making them very noticeable, and therefore commentators use them actively to describe the position of the ball or players. In excerpt 5, Saka receives the ball at the edge of the penalty area, also known as the 18-yard box. Likewise, in excerpt 6, Ederson receives the ball in the goal area, also known as the six-yard box, which is the smaller area marked directly in front of the goal. The slang term “the box” was featured numerous times in the data, making it the most used slang word in the analysis. As mentioned before, this is due to the fact that the two penalty areas cover a large percentage of the field, making them very noticeable.

Excerpt 5

“Comes out to Saka on the edge of the box”

Excerpt 6

“Walker, who turns and plays it to Ederson in the six-yard box”

In football slang, the byline is a slang term referring to the boundary line, which marks the outermost limit of the playing field. However, it only refers to the long line at both

ends of the pitch where the goals are located. On the contrary, the longest two lines, running the length of the field, are called touchlines. Moreover, the commentators often use this expression when the ball is moved to one end of the pitch near the edge of the playing area. For instance, in excerpt 7, Tottenham was advancing up the field, when Kulusevski received the ball near the end of the playing area, gaining a corner kick for his team in the process.

Excerpt 7

“Here is Kulusevski, to the byline”

Excerpts 8 and 9 are from the fixture between Arsenal and Manchester United. The utterance “in the middle of the park” or “across the park” are common slang expressions utilized by football commentators. Firstly, the word “park” refers to the playing field, or in other words, the pitch. Secondly, the expression is derived from the fact that football is one of the many sports one can play in a park. Additionally, “park football” is a term used to describe informal or amateur football played in local parks or fields, often without formal teams or organization. Hence, it is common to hear this expression during football broadcasts, as commentators use it frequently to describe the position of the ball or players.

Excerpt 8

“The ball is bouncing about in the middle of the park”

Excerpt 9

“It was a poor touch by Saliba in that middle of the park”

The commentators utilized slang several times when describing the ongoing proceedings on the pitch. In these specific situations, slang is used because it communicates the action on the pitch, more quickly than formal language. For instance, it takes less effort to say “the six-yard box” than to formally explain the specific dimensions of the penalty area. As commentators must be quick to react to the ongoing proceedings on the pitch, slang has become a key tool, which is often utilized in these occasions. Moreover, the commentators utilize slang as it communicates nuances of meaning better than formal

language, allowing them to engage with the audience in a more dynamic way. To conclude, commentators utilize slang as an effective way of communication, because it provides a quick, dynamic way of conveying information.

4.3 Shooting and scoring situations

Play-to-play commentary is utilized during moments when players get into scoring positions, usually resulting in a shot, or a goal (Ferguson, 1983). The data shows that slang serves a purpose in these specific situations. As Mattiello (2005) pointed out, slang words add nuances of meaning to them. Therefore, the commentators utilize slang especially in shooting and scoring situations, as it communicates the nuances of the game better. To elaborate, specific informal words possess certain meanings that have no equivalents in standard language (Mattiello, 2005). Therefore, commentators can refer to very specific actions and events with the help of slang. Lastly, as mentioned before, slang is used as a way of being more efficient and concise in commentary.

In excerpt 10, Tottenham got into a scoring scenario and Son converted a goal from the back post. The slang term “tap-in” refers to the action of scoring a goal from close range, where the player barely taps the ball to score. Furthermore, in tap-in situations, the goal is usually wide open for the player to slot it into the empty net. In football, multiple verbs are used to describe the act of scoring, such as slotting, threading, smashing, and burying. In excerpt 11, the slang term “burying” emphasizes the effectiveness and finality of the goal, as if the ball is being “buried” in the net.

Excerpt 10

“It’s a simple tap-in for Son at the back post”

Excerpt 11

“Saka should be burying that”

Football language possesses slang terms to describe open goal chances, which are missed by the player. In these scenarios goals should be scored without difficulty, given the clear goal-scoring chance. Therefore, a sitter implies a clear scoring opportunity which is not

taken. Another football slang word for this phenomenon is “a howler”. Excerpt 12 is taken from the match between Arsenal and Manchester United.

Excerpt 12

“It’s that one sitter”

Football language possesses a wide range of different words for shooting a ball. For instance: having a crack, letting it fly, hitting it, having a pop, striking it, and booting it. In excerpt 13, Arsenal was attacking, and the commentator thought that their attacker Bukayo Saka was going to have a shot at goal. Whereas in excerpt 14, the commentator thought Manchester City’s defender Kyle Walker was going to shoot the ball.

Excerpt 13

“I thought Saka was going to have a pop there”

Excerpt 14

“Or is it Walker who is going to have a crack”

4.4 Duels and one-on-ones

Commentators use slang in situations where players are fighting for the ball or challenging the opposition. Moreover, these situations include scenarios where players are fouled, tackled, or dribbled past. The data shows that commentators utilize slang to an extent when duels or other challenges occur on the pitch. As these kinds of scenarios are common in football, the use of slang is apparent. The following four excerpts are from the matches Arsenal versus Manchester United and Tottenham versus Liverpool.

The expressions “drop a shoulder” and “shrug someone off” are used in similar situations where a player manages to come out on top from a battle or a tussle. Moreover, by dropping a shoulder, it implies that a player has been able to dribble past an opponent. In these situations, the players are usually up against each other, and the attacker manages to get around the defender and advance up the field. The word “shrug” refers to the action of raising one’s shoulder, as an indication of ignorance. However, in football slang, shrug

refers to a player's ability to shake off a defender, and to overcome the physical challenge opposed. For example, in excerpt 16, Saka overcame and resisted the physical challenge from Rashford, and collected the ball for his team.

Excerpt 15

“Drops a shoulder Maddison, as he gets it back”

Excerpt 16

“Saka shrugged Rashford off the ball there”

Football is a physical game and injuries are common. Duels and tussles for the ball more often lead to injuries or discomfort. Moreover, football possesses several slang words for injuries, such as a niggle (a small, minor injury) or a strain (a major injury, usually involving muscles). As shown by excerpts 17 and 18, the word “knock” is the most common slang term used to describe injuries in football. Firstly, it refers to minor injury where the player is hurt but is able to continue playing. Secondly, as the data suggests, the commentators use this term frequently when players are brought down and seem to experience pain and discomfort.

Excerpt 17

“It looks like he maybe has got a knock on his ankle”

Excerpt 18

“Martinez picked up the knock”

The data shows that commentators use slang in situations where the players get physical and fight for the ball. However, to a smaller extent, as the data implies that slang words and expressions were utilized only 13 times during over 285-minutes of commentary, averaging one instance every 22 minutes (See Appendix A). Furthermore, in these situations, slang is used to add color to the commentary and to create fluent, free-flowing and diverse oration. As (Veltheim, 2015) pointed out, a diverse, fluent, and captivating speech contributes positively to the viewing experience of fans and those interested. Thus, commentator's oration must be interesting, captivating and diverse to maintain the interest of the viewers.

4.5 Skills and technique

During matches, various skills and technical displays occur on the pitch. Likewise, the players contribute to the game by highlighting their technique and showcasing their skills. The data shows that commentators utilize slang in these kinds of scenarios. Mattiello (2005) highlighted the fact that slang differs greatly from standard language for its lack of formality. The aim of utilizing slang in these situations is the fact that slang communicates aspects of the game better than formal language. In football, formal words can fall short of capturing specific actions on the pitch. Thus, commentators use numerous slang terms for certain fancy maneuvers which require skill and technique from the player.

Excerpts 19 and 20 highlight a player's personal technique and skill. A roundhouse kick is a specific way of kicking a ball. This technique is performed by spinning around and hitting the ball from mid-air. On the other hand, flip flap, also known as an elastico, is performed on the ground, when a player quickly pushes the ball to one direction and then moves it back to another direction. Further, this skill move is used to deceive opponents by creating a sudden change in direction. The following excerpts are taken from Arsenal versus Manchester United and the game between Tottenham and Liverpool.

Excerpt 19

“Long roundhouse kick from Alisson downfield”

Excerpt 20

“A little flip flap there”

Excerpts 21 and 22 highlight specific skill moves. Firstly, excerpt 21 features a deceptive move – a chop, which involves a sudden change of direction, allowing the player to dribble past the opponent. This slang term was commonly used by the commentators in situations where the players were dribbling and showcasing their skills. Secondly, in excerpt 22, a shimmy is a slang term used to describe a move where the player feints their body and tricks the opponent into committing in the wrong direction. The term shimmy is derived from a specific way of dancing, characterized by a rapid shaking of hips and body. In other words, these specific movements performed on the pitch mimic the body feints

and movements in dancing. The following excerpts are from the match between Arsenal and Manchester United.

Excerpt 21

“As he just chops inside”

Excerpt 22

“Ball to Ødegaard on the edge of the box, shimmy from him”

The following excerpts are from the match between Tottenham and Liverpool. Both examples describe the way Tottenham’s midfielder Maddison kicks or hits the ball. In football slang, whipping is a word used to illustrate a specific way of kicking a ball, in which the ball is passed or crossed to set up scoring opportunities. Furthermore, “whipping” the ball implies delivering the ball with power and precision. On the other hand, “duffing” the ball indicates that the player mishits or misplaces the ball. Moreover, the verb “duff” is used to describe a clumsy or poor attempt to play the ball, often resulting in a mistake.

Excerpt 23

“Corner for Spurs, Maddison whips it in”

Excerpt 24

“Maddison is gonna hit it, but he’s duffed it”

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to explore and investigate how English Premier League commentators use language. Furthermore, the study focused on slang and its usage as a part of Premier League commentary discourse. In addition, the purpose was to identify the situations where slang words and expressions were most often used by the commentators. Lastly, the study also set out to explore what are the purposes and aims of slang words and expressions as specific features of speech.

Slang words and expressions were used in the following five situations: when commentators observe and perceive the match, when commentators describe the pitch and its dimensions, when teams get into scoring positions, when players are fighting for the ball, and when skill and technique is on display. The analysis showed that slang was utilized the most (44%) when the commentators described the pitch, its dimensions and the position of the players and the ball (see Appendix A). Moreover, commentators utilized slang when players displayed their skills and technique (21%) and when the commentators made general observations regarding the match (14%). Finally, slang was used the least in situations where teams got into scoring and shooting positions (12%) and where players were fighting for the ball (9%).

The analysis showed that slang serves numerous purposes in football commentary. Firstly, commentators use slang as a way of adding more color to the commentary. This makes their speech more entertaining for the viewers, contributing significantly to their viewing experience. Secondly, commentators use slang as they want to be versatile in their speech and to show off their rich vocabulary. A free-flowing and diverse commentary contributes to the viewing experience of the fans. Moreover, slang is utilized as it communicates the nuances of the game better than formal language. To elaborate, commentators use slang when formal words fall short of capturing specific actions, for example, skills such as a flip flap or a roundhouse kick. Lastly, the analysis showed that commentators utilize slang as it is a more effective way of communication in sportscasting situations, implying that slang helps commentators to be more precise and efficient in their speech, even during high-intensity moments.

Slang was utilized to a large extent when commentators described the pitch. This can be due to the pure nature of sport commentating, as the commentator's mission is to provide information about the position of the players or the ball to the viewers, to help them understand the flow of the game. Furthermore, commentators utilize different areas of the pitch in their commentary to describe positions to the viewers in a quick and easy manner. The fixture between Chelsea and Manchester City, resulting in a 4-4 draw, had the highest number of instances of slang, due to the fast tempo and the high number of goals. In this match, the commentator had to make use of different areas of the pitch in his oration, as the ball was moving from one end to the other in quick succession.

As English Premier League has a large coverage and a massive fan base, the league has been regarded as the best in the world. By analyzing the oration of commentators from one of the biggest, if not the biggest, football league in the world, this study is able to bring valuable insight into how slang is utilized in football commentary discourse, contributing significantly to the experience of football fans and viewers. Additionally, slang and its purpose has not been studied before in football commentary, specifically in the Premier League. Thus, the current study brings valuable information about the nature of the phenomenon with an English top-division football context.

Regarding previous research, the use of slang has been analyzed in a football context before, but there are only a few pieces of research focusing on the use of slang in sports commentary (Sedykh et al., 2022; Bergström, 2020). Bergström's (2020) discourse analysis study highlighted the active use of slang in football commentary, a same phenomenon this piece of research pointed out. Moreover, this research underlined that slang helps commentators to be more precise and efficient in their speech, as they can describe the events with a single word or a short phrase, a phenomenon Bergström (2020) also pointed out. Sedykh et al. (2022) pointed out that utilizing slang indicates a rich and varied vocabulary in sport contexts, corresponding to the findings of this research.

Compared to previous research presented in this study, English Premier League commentators possess a rich and a diverse vocabulary, a feature Humpolík (2014) highlighted. This diverse vocabulary features numerous slang words and expressions, which frequently appeared in the data of this study (see Appendix A). As mentioned by Amadi

and Harcourt (2022), commentators must have the ability to capture and portray the events in concise and effective manner during matches. In the current study, commentators utilized slang as a way of being more effective in their oration. This also suggests that the language of football makes use of simple, concise and effective syntactic features, for example slang, which often appears in commentary discourse.

This piece of research can benefit football commentators and broadcasters by enhancing their understanding of the language and slang used in football commentary. Furthermore, football fans and those interested in the sport can benefit from this study by understanding how commentators influence their viewing experience.

Some limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. Firstly, the limited number of existing research on slang usage in football poses a challenge in providing a comprehensive understanding of the findings of this study. Secondly, the small amount of data in this study may limit the generalizability of the findings. Therefore, future research should focus on expanding the study by selecting more Premier League matches to analyze. Three fixtures provide a general view of the slang usage in football commentary, whereas more than ten (10) matches of data, equaling over 900 minutes of commentary, would provide a more precise and accurate picture of slang usage in football commentary. Finally, the current study focused on slang words, which were specific to the sport of football. In the future, research could concentrate on slang words and expressions, which are prevalent not only in the sport of football, but also in various other sports.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

	ARS VS MUN (3.9.2023)	TOT VS LIV (30.9.2023)	CHE VS MCI (12.11.2023)	IN TOTAL
General observations	5	6	9	20 (14%)
Describing the pitch	14	16	32	62 (44%)
Shooting and scoring situations	7	2	8	17 (12%)
Duels and one-on-ones	4	6	3	13 (9%)
Skills and technique	7	14	8	29 (21%)
IN TOTAL	37 (26%)	44 (31%)	60 (43%)	= 141 (100%)

Appendix A. A Table of Slang Usage in English Premier League Commentary.