

A Lexico-Semantic Analysis of the Language of Sports Reporting in a Nigerian Sports Magazine

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Abstract: The paper examines the role of language in the successful communication of sports with particular focus on aspects of Lexico-semantic variations of Nigerian English, to identify the typologies, their essence and significance for sports communication. Using the Sports Magazine, *Complete Football International* as source of data, the findings reveal that apart from the conventional categories, the lexico-semantic variations employed on the sports pages include some distinct forms which may be traced to constraints of professional ethics, and the creative efforts of sport writers. Although most the typologies are derived from the English language lexical stock, they have been made to undergo various modifications to give them new forms and functions in the context of sports reporting. Examples of these include inflectional conversion, analogical creation of new idioms, coinages, conversion, loan-shift, acronyms, extension, ellipsis, elliptical conversion, inflections, and figurative expressions. The inquiry into what accounts for their occurrence reveals that they derive from the effort of Nigerians to indigenize the English language. Moreover, there is the functional dimension to their occurrence as they serve as creativity vent for sports writers to engender the varieties that enrich and enliven the sports pages, providing the interesting and dynamic language of the report that the sports reader finds so captivating.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Communication is central and paramount to the smooth running of day-to-day human activities. It runs through all human activities and endeavours and without proper and effective communication, there is bound to be misinformation or total communication breakdown in the society. The content and context of the message determine its organization and mode of transmission to the intended audience. The sports writer is often tasked with the rudiments of feature writing which requires creativity other than what obtains in news writing as it covers topics comprehensively, going further than mere hard news coverage by amplifying and explaining the most fascinating and vital aspects of a situation or incidence, allotting ample time and space to evoke imagery in the story, adding details about the circumstances and atmosphere (Ademola-Adegoke, 2014: 351-352).

The sports reporter therefore takes cognizance of the context of sports and its audience before he puts his messages on paper. These considerations culminate into giving the language of sports reporting its own distinct features from the everyday English language. The choice of words, phrases and sentences are strategically made and deployed to achieve particular effects on the audience; an essence for which many people still go after the written report even though they might have watched the game earlier. In the Nigeria multilingual setting, the English language (the nation's lingua franca) assumes the role of the most adequate tool for sports communication due to its ethnic neutrality, geographical coverage, and its adequacy in handling the technical terms and the professional jargons of sports.

The English language is acclaimed one of the most flexible and expressive languages in world, a language of subtle verbal inflections which enables the writer to project mood and emotion, to formulate thought and principle with clarity and impact. It is a reporter's language in which graphic words can be used to tell a story in a vivid detail (Hicks, 1998:1). Howbeit, the reporter needs to modulate his English language to one that cuts across social boundaries and suits the Nigeria context and taste in order to achieve effective communication, hence the various modifications and reflexifications of the English language characteristic of the sports pages.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Lexico-semantic variations in Nigerian English

The English language employed in Nigeria has been identified by Adegbite (2004) as being characterized by typologies that are regional, occupational, stylistic, attitudinal and social in nature. The regional variety known as Nigeria English has been identified as one which is neither pidgin nor of British standard as a result of the socio-cultural differences between the native and non-native users of the English language (Medubi, 1998:57; Aremu, 2005:187). Lexico-semantic variations are 'Nigerianised' aspects of the English language lexis, phrases, and idioms resulting from the relationship of language to societal realities; that is, efforts to make the English language cater for social realities in the Nigerian context which may not exist in Native English Communities.

Scholars like Bamgbose (1971, 1982) Willmot (1979), Adegbija (1989), Kujore (1990), Jowitt (1991) and Bamiro (1994), among others, have studied various aspects of Nigerian lexico-semantic variations, and according to Bamgbose (1971), the Nigerian English lexical usage ranges from mother tongue interference to attribution of special meaning to existing English words. He further identified three approaches to Nigerian English usage to include the interference, the deviation and the creativity approaches. The creativity approach pertinent to the current study pertain the exploitation of the resources in Nigerian languages and English to create novel idioms and expressions.

Willmott (1979) rightly draws our attention to the newspaper medium which, according to him, is full of what a linguist defined as "rule-bending creativity" (functional shift), back formation, archaic forms and mother tongue interference. Bamgbose (1982) observed that most differences between Nigerian English and other forms of English are to be found in the innovations of lexical items and idioms and their meaning. While Adegbija (1989) identified five lexico-semantic variation categories as Bamgbose (transfer, analogy, acronyms, semantic shift or extension, and coinages or neologisms) and attributed their occurrence to factors such as: socio-cultural differences between the English and Nigerian people, pragmatic aspects of the dynamics of a multilingual context, the experiences of different discourse constants, the indomitable pervasive and omnipresent influence of the media, the standardization of idiosyncrasies and errors, and the predominantly formal medium of the acquisition of English; Kujore (1990:8) pointed out that Nigeria English usage is characterized by the recasting, adaptation or reinterpretation of British standard forms and expressions. Jowitt (1991) however drew a line between errors and variations as he maintained that Adegbija (1989) mother tongue transfer from pidgin are errors rather than features of Nigerian English. He noted that in English as second language situation such as Nigeria, "common core" vocabulary and the indexical markers of the New English vocabulary co-exist in a complex relationship with a tendency for the former to feed the latter as more and more standard vocabulary is indigenized.

Overall, the notable features of Nigerian English include local coinages with Standard English morphological principles, extended or restricted meaning of existing standard English words or expressions, fore grounded Standard English words or expressions (extended/restricted or clichés), words and expressions derived from pidgin, loan words and expression, slag as well as stylistic usage that differs from standard English usage. Bamiro (1994:47) augmented earlier research by suggesting a further classification of lexico-semantic variation in Nigeria English to include loan shift, semantic under differentiation, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping, acronyms, translation equivalent, analogical creation and coinages.

As acknowledged by Adegbija (1989:161) and affirmed by Bamiro (1994:48), considerable overlap obtains in the typologies proposed above. Nevertheless, the foregoing provides evidence of Nigeria lexico-semantic variations as principally derived from the adaptation of the English language to a new social, linguistic and psychological environment. The general conclusion as to the implication of the Nigerian lexico-semantic variation is that they are liable to bring about reduced intelligibility at the international level.

It may however be noted that none of these research efforts actually focused on the different domains of life where the lexico-semantic variations operate or their communicative purpose and effect in such domains. This study therefore focuses on the field of sports in order to investigate the use and functions as well as the implications of lexico-semantic variations in sports reporting.

III. METHODOLOGY

Through a purposive sampling procedure, the monthly magazine, *Complete Football International* was selected, the 1998 editions precisely because that was the year the World Cup was played in France and the sports papers intensified their publications to meet up with what was required of the press concerning the championship. Through a systematic sampling procedure, two editions were selected each for the beginning of the year (before the World Cup was played), two papers for the middle of the year when the championship was on, and two editions for the end of the year after the tournament. The choice of the magazine is in view of its

edge over the newspaper sports column which includes space allotted to sport discourse and multifarious input from sports reporters to make for a wide range of the lexico-semantic features of Nigerian English.

The content analysis observes the descriptive mode where observable lexico-semantic features are extracted and objectively analyzed using the criteria identified by scholars like Adegbiya (1989) and Bamiro (1994) with further explanations provided on their meaning, derivational method as well as their function and implication in the context of their usage.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows a systematic procedure where extracts bearing evidence of Nigerian lexico-semantic variations are provided from our magazine sources and grouped according to their respective categories. For our current purpose, only five (5) samples are captured in each category with three (3) explicated and the rest presented in tabular form for the purpose of brevity. Excerpts are introduced with a dash in each case with the explanation provided marked with asterisk.

Acronyms

These are words or descriptive phrases formed from the initial letters of words or parts of words.

- FA: Football Association (CFI. May, 98 pg. 5)
- FC: Football Club. (CFI. May 98 pg. 6)
- CAF: Confederation of African Football (CFI. May, 98 pg 43)
- GFA: Ghana Football Association (CFI, May, 98 pg. 20)

Conversion

This occurs when the phonological and structural features of words are altered to transfer them from one word class to the other, sometimes without changes to their form.

- “Dreadlocked indomitable lion defender...” (CFI. May, 98, pg. 6)
- * “Dreadlocked” a Nigerian English word used as a noun has been converted to an adjective here.
- “But after a shock 4-0 defeat by Egypt things fell apart” (CFI. May, 98, pg. 32). * “shock” (noun) has been converted to an adjective (note that the adjective form “shocking” is not the one used here).
- “Alex Nyarko – Ghana’s own version of the Elegant Desire Job nut-megged two defenders including goal keeper Ongandzi, before setting the ball on the path of new comer Chene Kennedy”. (CFI. Nov, 98, pg. 8).
- * The noun “Nutmeg” is the name of a hard monocotyledon fruit, and in the above instance, the noun has been converted into a verb to imply outplaying two players as one or out playing two players at the same time.

Loan Shift

This category involves the use of original English words in ways that differ from their original English Usage. It also involves the borrowing of English words from different contexts and backgrounds to give them other meanings and applications.

- ... “now the White witch Doctor is set to repeat the magic” (CFI, May, 98, pg. 22).
- * The underlined expression refers to a white man who is an expert in football coaching.
- “I am optimistic that the Eagles can still prove doubting Thomases wrong again by going all the way to win” (CFI. May, 98, pg. 42).
- * The underlined expression is from a religious background (Christianity) and it refers to people who are not easily convinced.
- Star Gazer... Babangida (CFI. May, 98, pg. 42).
- * The original English meaning is “one who observes and makes predictions from stars” but in the above instance, the expression has been shifted to mean someone who gives accurate football predictions.

Analogical creation

These are words and expressions originating from a line of parallelism or likeness to other existing forms in English either by way of inflection, meaning or a sense of likeness in any realm.

- “While the domestic game in Africa seems to be developing at snail speed...” (CFI. May, 98, pg. 10).
- * The SBE form of the underline expression is “at a snail’s pace” but the common Nigerian version “snail speed” is as a result of the similarity of meaning between pace and speed. Hence in the above instance, the succession of football action or events on the home front in Africa is likened to the speed of a snail.
- “The cranes repaid the patience of their fans with a curtain raiser through Hassan Mubiu. (CFI. Nov., 98, pg. 16).
- * The phrase “Curtain raiser” in SBE refers to “a short piece performed before the Chief play” hence in the above instance, curtain raiser is used to mean the first goal of the game.

— “Okocha and two of Nigeria’s Spanish based players Mutiu Adepoyu and Finidi George were the tormentors in Chief of the game. (CFI. July, 98, pg. 14).

The underlined expression is an analogy to the military rank “Commander in Chief”. Here, the expression refers to top players who give their opponents a tough time.

Extension

This category involves English words which have been extended in their semantic scope and implication thereby gaining more meaning than their original standard British English meaning.

— “Spain...produced a world cup performance when they overran Sweden 4-0 (CFI. May, 98, pg. 8).

* In the above instance, the word “overran” which has a standard British English meaning of “go beyond limit”, has been extended to include “go ahead of” or “defeat” without the limiting semantic implication of “beyond limit”.

— “When they were knocked out in the preliminaries after selling bad soccer...” (CFI. May, 98, pg. 36)

* The word “sell” which has an original meaning of “give in exchange for money”, has been extended to mean “Playing”.

— There were high expectations that a coach of Bora’s calibre would be immune to interference from Nigerian Football officials and lobbyists. (CFI. Nov., 98, pg. 5).

* The standard British English word “lobby” which implies using one’s influence to persuade others to one’s side” has been given a negative connotation in Nigeria and extended to mean” + “bad” + “bribe” + “Negative” + “backdoor”.

Ellipsis

This category involves the deletion of the head word (Noun), and using modifiers or qualifiers in the place of the headword.

— Masembe: Yellow for you Nyathi”

* “Nyathi: And red for you from FIFA”. (CFI. May, 98, pg. 28).

The above represent instances where the noun (card) has been removed and the modifiers “red” and “yellow” used in place of the headword.

— “Billal Dziri equalized for the visitors and they were coasting to an away draw before Mubiru struck again”. (CFI. Nov., 98, pg. 16).

* In the above instance, words like “played”, “from home” which would have given us “ a game played away from home”, have been left out (“away” is modifying “played”).

— Shooting Stars Sports Club (3sc) of Ibadan will be aiming to go one better next season. (CFI. Nov., 98, pg. 17).

* In this instance, the word “step” (noun) has been omitted between “one” and better.

Elliptical conversion

— ... “against Japan in the first round and rifling home a 20-yarder against Mexico...”. (CFI August, 98, pg. 5)

* In the above instance, the adjective “a 20-yards wide” (shot) has been relieved of “s” and “wide”, and “er” has been added to make a noun – a 20-yarder.

Inflectional Conversion

This group involves inflecting words which are usually not inflected in their Standard British English form, and then taking such words to other grammatical categories or making them perform other grammatical functions through such inflections.

— “... scoring a twice-taken penalty goal against Japan in the first round and rifling home a 20 yarder against Mexico in the quarter final: (CFI. August, 98, pg. 5)

* In the above instance, the word riffle (gun with a long rifled barrel) has been inflected from its noun state to a verb state by the addition of “ing” and it is used above to capture or describe the velocity of the shot.

* The word “yard” is also inflected to yarder by the Addition of “er” thereby converting the noun ‘yard’ (which is adjectival in this case (20-yard-wide-shot) to derive the noun yarder.

Analogical creation of new idioms

This category involves new idioms created out of an effort to evolve the Nigerian version of existing English idioms. Others include idioms formed from their likeness in sense to the phenomenon they are trying to conceptualize. Idioms, according to Laurence Urdang, (1979) are fixed phrases or group of words with a special different meaning from the meaning of the separate words.

— “...African footballers who were born with a silver ball at their feet (CFI. May, 98 pg. 10).

* The underlined expression is an analogical creation from the idiom “born with a silver spoon in his/her mouth”. In this instance, the idiom implies footballers who made or recorded good success in football right from their teens or relatively younger days.

— With the championship decider going down to the wire on October 3, the NFA took extra measure to avoid...” (CFI Nov., '98 pg. 17).

* “Going down to the wire means “going to be played” that is, the game that would determine the winner is going to be played on October 3.

— “...it was the last straw that broke the romance between KFF (Kenya Football Federation) and Fabisch ...” (CFI August, '98 pg. 9).

The underlined expression comes from the English Idiom “the last straw that broke the Camel’s back”. In the above instance it’s used to imply “the last incident that destroyed the mutual relationship”.

Coinages

— “... in guiding Togo back to top flight but missed Burkina '98 when he Copped a last minute knee injury” (CFI Nov., '98 pg. 9).

* “Copped” here means “sustained” or “got”

— “Before now, the “headmaster” of Nigerian football had always been an automatic pick...” (Top 20 '98 pg. 15).

* “Headmaster” is the name given to a Nigerian player Mutiu Adipoju who specializes in nodding flying balls into the net. The name is equally applicable to players of the same habit from other countries.

— And so it looked like ended the reign of the “Goalfather” whose strikes had fetched Nigeria many conquests in the past”. (Top 20 '98 pg. 18).

* “Goalfather” is the name given to a player who comes by goals easily and has a record on this. In this particular instance, the Nigerian player, Rashidi Yekeni, is being referred to.

— “While the pass master blasted the living daylight out of them...” (CFINC. July, '98 pg. 21).

* “Passmaster” is the name given to a player who is very skilled and accurate in passing the ball to others. The Nigerian player Oliseh is being referred to here.

— “He is reputed for his controversial position in political issues being a Marxistlennist” (CFINC. May/June, '98 pg. 40).

* The underlined word is derived from the addition of “Marxist” (Marx the name of a German economist and Socialist) and “Lenient” meaning mercifulness or mercy shown. So the combination of both makes his stand a controversial one.

— “Sadly, it’s all on the individual level that the razzmatazz of this squad will be found”. (CFINC. May/June, '98 pg. 13).

* This expression is a coined word meaning “expertise”, “sportsmanship” or “talent”.

Figurative Expressions

This category refers to words which are orthographically English but whose meaning cannot be decoded literally. Nigerians are culturally rich in the employment of figurative expressions in which helps them say more things with fewer words, while at the same time sounding dramatic and creative.

— “The Burkinababes must be ruing their inability to clip the wings of a vastly weakened Eagles.” (CFI Nov., '98 pg. 13).

* This is a metaphorical expression because the Eagles are substituted with a live eagle with its power in its wings. Hence, the clipping of the wings will mean the “disarming” or the defeat of the team.

The table below provides supplementary details of aspects of the data that were not subjected to analytical descriptions here.

S/N	Expression	Category	Process	Source	Page
1.	West African Football Union	Acronym		CFI Nov., '98	p. 45
2.	Under 17, under 21	Acronym		CFI Nov., '98	p. 34
3.	Michel Dinzey emulated Akpoborie the following week by <u>nicking</u> a goal in 1860' brilliant 5-1 victory style	Conversion	Nick a noun (in the nick of time) is converted to a verb	CFI Nov., '98	p.20
4.	However, his ultimate dream of playing in the final went up in smoke as Raja threw away a second half – 2-1 lead <u>away</u> and allowed Yonga to come back into the game	Conversion	Adverb (played away from) made to function as a noun	CFI Nov., '98	p. 32
5.	“but after a shock 4-0 defeat by Egypt, <u>things fell apart</u> coach Zies was suspended	Loan shift	Literary theme applied to pragmatic incidence	CFI Nov., '98	
6.	Its all <u>square</u> in these groups as all teams stand level in all departments	Loan shift	Dimensional properties applied to group profiles	CFI Nov., '98	p.14
7.	His outstanding season was capped off with the Ebony award	Analogical creation	Derived from standard British English forms like “round off”, “kick off”	CFI May '98	p. 11
8.	With the championship <u>decider</u> going down to the wire on October 3...”	Analogical creation	Application of the English suffixation rule e.g. drive + er – driver, write + er – driver	CFI Nov., '98	p. 17
9	Billal Oziri equalized for the visitors and they were <u>coasting</u> to an away draw before Mubiru struck again.	Extension	The original standard British meaning of an effortless downward ride or slide is extended to mean envisaging or rejoicing in anticipation	CFI Nov., '98	p.16
10	Only last year, the free scoring club <u>crushed</u> African sports 6-1 on aggregate in the second round...”	Extension	The word “crushed” is semantically extended to include defeated, subdued or overcome	CFI Nov., '98	p. 33
11	It was obviously <u>a red</u>	Ellipsis	The phrase “card offense” which would have given the sentence a full grammatical status is left out.	CFI May '98	p. 8
12	Newly transferred South African forward, George Koumantarakis <u>found the net</u> for Luzern in week 4...”	Analogical creation of new idioms	Created in semblance to the standard British English “find its mark/target”	CFI Nov., '98	p. 29

S/N	Expression	Category	Process	Source	Page
13.	‘CAF further <u>wielded the big stick</u> by withdrawing all assistance to CECAFA’	Analogical creation of new idioms	A derivative of the standard British form “wielded a big stick: it implies ‘exercise authoritative discipline’.	CFI Nov., '98	p. 43
14.	But it was another France '98 <u>newsmaker</u> Shaun Bertlett who emerged the hero of the day.	coinages	Neologism	CFI Nov., '98	p. 12
15.	He was not prepared to <u>operate in</u>	Figurative	Metaphor	CFI May	p. 11

	<u>the shadow of goal scores</u>	expression		'98	
16.	But Raja leveled the score 11 minutes later when Rada Ereyahi <u>tucked in a penalty.</u>	Figurative expression	Euphemism	CFI Nov., '98	p. 32

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It may be observed that the language of the sports page is practical, full of imagery and action which helps the mind to capture a vivid picture of the scene being described or reported. Sport writers create the lexico-semantic varieties in order to carve a niche for themselves. The English language lexical and morphological rules are subjugated to the writer's creative incentive to evolve unconventional methods and products of language nativization. This may not be unconnected with expectations on the sports writers to be creative, unique and efficient. Moreover, the desire to create immediacy has resulted in the language of sports reporting violating some English language lexico-semantic and grammatical rules, giving rise to some peculiar categories discovered in this study, viz; inflectional conversion, analogical creation of new idioms, coinages, and figurative expressions. The presence of some regular categories such as acronyms, conversion, loan shift, analogical creation, extension, ellipsis and elliptical conversion attest to the peculiar interface between the native English and the Nigerian linguistic norm, and such efforts to make the English language cater for or conceptualize the socio-cultural reality of the Nigerian society has resulted in such forms as 'dread lock' (CFI May, 1998: p. 6), and 'Witch Doctor' (CFI May, 98: p. 22), among others.

The absence of such categories as translation equivalents and direct borrowing may be traced to the technical subject of football, the formality of the written medium – where the report is planned rather than spontaneous and sentences are structured as grammatically as possible, following the English language grammatical rules.

Overall, the lexico-semantic variations on our sports pages and in other linguistic interactions in Nigeria serve to indigenize the English language, giving Nigerians a sense of belonging with the language. This form of English therefore has a positive function in the society as it adequately caters for the effective and intelligible communication of sporting events to all ethnic groups in the society. Hence, the general attitude towards it should be that of acceptance and appreciation of the creative effort behind it as no natural language can remain 'pure' outside its indigenous environment.

Reporters however need to be careful of their various formations and usages so that effective communication, which is the greatest priority of the report can be achieved as reckless formation and use of lexico-semantic variations may result into reduced intelligibility within and outside the country.

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APPENDIX 1

Name of Magazine	Date	Page	Word/Expression Extracted
Complete Football International	March, 1998	9	a baptism of fire
	May, 1998	25	Africa Amsterdammers
		5	FA
		6	Dreadlocked
		8	A red
		8	overran
		10	snail speed
		10	born with a silver ball at their feet
		11	capped off. In the shadow of goal scorers
		20	G.F.A
		22	White witch doctor
		28	Massembe: Yellow for you Nyathi Nyathi: and red for you from FIFA
		32	a shock
		36	selling
		42	Doubting Thomases
		42	Star Gazer
		August, 1998	5
	42	42	a 20-yarder
	42	42	riffling
	42	9	The Last Straw that broke the drew deep from his armoury
	42	42	
	Nov., 1998	5	Buck-passing
	42	42	lobbyists
	42	8	nut megged
	42	9	copped
	42	12	newsmaker
	42	13	Clip the wings
	42	14	Square
	42	16	Curtain raiser
	42	42	Coasting
	42	42	Away
	42	42	Decider
	42	17	Go one better
	42	42	going down to the wire
	42	42	Nicking
	42	20	Found the net
	42	21	away
	42	32	Tucked in a penalty crushed
	42	33	U -17
	42	34	CAF
42	43	Wielded the big stick	
42	45	WAFU	

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