

## LEXICO-SEMANTIC ANALYSIS OF PETER DRURY'S FAMOUS FOOTBALL COMMENTARIES

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### **Abstract**

Language is used only by human beings for communication. Since these human beings consist of different groups characterized by the frequent use of different linguistic behaviors and other extra-linguistic norms that guide their social interaction, it is normal and expected that variation exists in their use of language across different situations. This research paper examines the various novel words and expressions used in sports discourse and their meanings in their contexts of usage. Specifically, corpus data were selected from the famous football commentaries of the British sports commentator Peter Drury, covering the period from 2010 to 2023. The data were analyzed with attention to the meanings embedded in each of the lexicons and expressions, as they relate to the referential theory of meaning. Lexical innovations are categorized on the basis of their peculiar references and patterns, while the semantic significance of such formations is examined in terms of their semantic properties (lexical semantics). We observe a careful manipulation of lexical properties to portray a person or an action at the figurative or metaphoric level of meaning. More importantly, the study acknowledges the fact that the football aura and environment have the potential to weave into the English language an identity that is unique and capable of enhancing the development of sports discourse.

**Keywords:** Lexico-Semantics, Language, Football Commentaries, Communication

### **Introduction:**

For over years most people sometimes overlook football commendations as they are actually much interested in the action in the field of play. But nowadays, we observe that people are now getting interested in the commendation when football is being played due to the aura and spice being added to it by the commentators. These commentaries are now being laced with wits, figurative expressions, humor, poetic languages, and ingenuity and so on and this play key role in attracting the attention of the football viewers and fans all around the world.

Ofoegbu (2012.7) defines language as “the human system of communication. It is a means by which humans alone communicate. Language is man and man is language. Man uses language for his everyday interaction”. According to Ofoegbu and Usar (2018.3), language is essentially a human system of communication that is shaped by both linguistic behaviour and extralinguistic norms across different social groups. Ofoegbu (2021.4) posits that the human language is very unique because it has its own structure and its own system of organizing its component units into meaningful patterns. This simply means that there are rules governing the organization of sentences in a language. Ofoegbu and Ishima (2024.2) opine that it is a means by which humans alone communicate. This means that language is purely a human attribute which, serves primarily as a means of communication. Language is a system and this means that it is an organised human behaviour built on inherent structures.

According to Ofoegbu (2022,1), language is the general human system of communication. He went further to state that language is a means by which humans alone communicate, it serves among other things as a binding factor for all humans. Language serves as a global medium for communication, facilitating the exchange of ideas, messages, and information. In social interactions it plays a pivotal role in conveying thoughts and essential details, adhering to specific rules like sentence structure, practical usage, word forms and meanings (syntax, pragmatics, morphology, and semantics). Deciphering word meanings, especially in contexts, can be challenging, with figurative language emerging as a suitable tool due to its ability to imbue words with diverse meanings through their arrangement and usage (Putra and Marlena, 2024, pp. 330-331)

This research paper looks into the study of the variety of novel words and expression which have emerged in the discourse of sports as expressed by the famous British commentator, Peter Drury, as well as the underlying meanings, allusions, wits and poetic languages applied in the context.

Lexis is the major tool in the communication process and thus, they are the primary tools of the writer or speaker in the task of capturing the essence of life by focusing on virtually all aspect of living.

This research study seeks to find out the motive and effect of Peter Drury's football commentaries on the spectators, football fans and the global world.

This study is carried out to expose the ingenuity used in the discourse of sports. Its usefulness is to acquaint the football enthusiasts who are interested in this aspect of language analysis with the mastery of use of words and their meanings in the context of usage in the sports setting. This research study is limited to ten of Peter Drury's commentaries from 2010 to 2023.

### **Definition of Terms.**

According to Opara (2012), a lexeme is a minimal unit such as a word stem (one word-lexeme) in the vocabulary of a language as opposed to basic grammatical unit (morpheme) (p.23). According to Umera-Okeke (2015) semantics is a broad field of enquiry seeking the meaning of meaning as expressed in a language. (p.1). Ofoegbu (2022), defined semantics as the study analysis of meaning and the meaning of a word is the idea a word conveys in the heart or mind of the speaker or hearer. (p.95).

Lexico-semantics refers to the interface and relationship between lexical items (words and vocabulary) and their semantic properties (meaning). It is a term widely used in linguistics to describe how word meanings are structured, interpreted, and interact within a language system.

In this sense, Opara (2015) opines that utterances combine to ensure prepositional development and that lexical cohesion, such as, collocation, repetition, synonyms, hyponyms and metonyms are used to combine utterances. She further stressed that these five types of lexical cohesion support not only the theme structure of the text but also link meanings and indicate registers of particular fields.

Figurative language as defined by Johnson and Arp (2018, p.774), involves the use of figures of speech and should not be taken solely literally. It deviates from conventional meanings to convey deeper significance or a more powerful impact, emphasizing the importance of context and interpretation for understanding. This linguistic device, rich in metaphors, hyperboles, epithets, and metonymy, significantly contributes to semantics, the study of meaning, as highlighted by Lyons (1995, p.3). In the realm of commentary, a form of expression that provides additional insight or analysis, figurative language finds widespread usage. Whether in literature, politics, or sports, commentators offer perspectives and interpretations, enriching audience comprehension. Umera-Okeke (2015), opines that figurative language is used to add a picturesque quality to writing or speaking. (p.12).

According to Putra and Marline (2024), the tradition of commentary, dates back centuries, spans written and spoken forms. From classical scholars crafting commentaries on philosophical treaties to sports commentators enhancing the live experience, this practice has evolved. Sports commentary, in particular, has grown into a distinct profession, with roles like play-by-play announcers and color analysts. In football commentary, a linguistic phenomenon, figurative language adds sophistication, contributing to the unique register of sports broadcasting. Understanding the nuanced meanings of commentary lines, often specific to the context of a game, becomes crucial for viewers.

Simply, football commentary provides live updates and analysis during a football match, aiming to inform and engage listeners or viewers. Commentators describe the action, analyze plays and add excitement to the game. They also provide context, background information on players and teams and build up anticipation for key moments. Notable English football commentators are : Jon Champion, Jim Beglin, Peter Drury, Martin Tyler, Alan Parry, Barry Davies, John Matson, Gary Neville and so on.

Peter Drury is a British sports commentator born on 24th September 1967. He currently works for Sky Sports in the United States as the lead commentator for their Premier League coverage.

### **Referential Theory of Meaning**

The referential theory of meaning posits that the meaning of a word is the object or concept it refers to in the external world. According to this theory, language functions as a set of labels attached to things, and understanding a word involves associating it with the correct referent. For example, the word 'cat' refers to the animal that people commonly recognize as a domestic feline. This approach to meaning is often associated with philosophers like Bertrand Russell (Lyons, 1995).

Fillip as cited in Umera-Okeke (2015, p. 16-17) stated that the basic tenet of this theory is that "meaning is reference to facts or objects in the world". "World" for Phillip encompasses that vast complex of things, situations and facts that words or sentences can be "about".

Frege as cited in Jeff (2010, p.10) stated that a theory of reference is that which does not pair expressions with their meanings, rather it pairs expressions with the contribution those expressions make to the determination of the truth-values of sentences in which they occur. Referential theories are concerned with what speakers use expressions to talk about in the world, that is, the relation of linguistic expressions and the world. The motivation factor behind this theory was the intuition that:

*One of the most important characteristics of natural language expressions is that they are about something in the world, they are something that is external to the concepts in our minds. They formulate a theory of meaning that makes no psychological claims about the speaker's state of the brain or his/her psychological grasp of the meanings of expression of his language, a theory of mental objects of some sort, concepts or thoughts in speaker's head, etc. (Phillip, 2008, p.50).*

### **Notable Peter Drury's Commentaries and their Lexico-semantic Analysis.**

#### **1. Sphiwe Tshabalala's goal for South Africa against Mexico at the opening match of 2010 World Cup.**

The year 2010 signified the first world cup in history to take place in Africa and what a way to kick start the tournament by South Africa's Sphiwe Tshabalala by scoring the tournament's opening goal. After giving the hosts the lead midway through the second half, the stadium erupted into joy which also brought Drury out in a frenzy.

Drury did his best to capture that on commentary with a call that summed up just how special the moment was:

*It's Tshabalala... Goal! Bafana Bafana! Goal for South Africa! Goal for all Africa! Jabulani, rejoice! Bafana Bafana have popped the first cork of their day of days!*

Here, Peter Drury aptly mentioned whom the goal were for - 'Bafana Bafana', 'South Africa', 'Africa'. 'Bafana Bafana'(the boys, the boys) is the name of the South African football team of which the goalscorer, Tshabalala was playing; South Africa is their country and the inclusion of 'Africa' indicates that the goal is not just only special for South Africa but also for every other African. Why? We mentioned before that the 2010 World Cup is the first hosted in African nation. So, prior to the tournament the whole African nations were in solidarity and with the spirit of brotherhood with the South Africans. Drury is trying to indicate that Tshabalala scoring the first goal of the tournament is not only for South Africa but also for the whole African nations. It is a price which they so desire for standing together in brotherhood to host the whole world.

By referring to Africa, Drury has successfully evoked the emotions of the Africans who were watching the game.

By mentioning 'Jabulani', was referring to the name of the official 2010 FIFA World Cup ball. It's from the South African language Zulu which means 'rejoice'. So he was trying to tell everyone to rejoice for what is yet to come from the tournament.

*...have popped the first cork of their day of days"*

Popping the first cork is simply referring to scoring their first goal and by 'day of days', Peter Drury is cheering the South Africans that more of the excitement of that day will still come; it will not be the last for them.

#### **2. Kostas Manolas' goal against Barcelona in 2018**

Peter Drury's craft in the word selection in the commentary of Kostas Manolas' goal against Barcelona in the 2018 Champions league was a turning point in the commentator's career. His description of one of the champion's league's most incredible moments of recent years catapulted him into the minds of football fans across the world.

The setting is this: Barcelona had beaten Roma 3-1 in Camp Nou their home turf and they looked certain to progress to the next round. The Italians had other ideas however, and produced a sensational come back to win 3-0 at home. Edin Dzeko opened the scoring early on at the Stadio Olimpico for the host Roma, before a Danielle De Rossi penalty just before the hour mark had Roma threatening to complete an improbable comeback, as an away-goals victory was suddenly within their grasp. Then, Greek center-back Manolas struck from a corner with around 10 minutes remaining to send his side through to the

semi-finals at Barcelona expense. Drury practically stole the limelight for himself, and this was his description of the events:

*... "Roma have risen from their ruins! Manolas, the Greek god in Rome! The unthinkable unfolds before our eyes! This was not meant to happen, this could not happen - this is happening!"*

The metaphor "Roma have risen from their ruins" implies Roma's resurgence from a difficult situation, emphasizing their determination and strength when they were already before the match being written off. The use of "ruins" creates a vivid image of decay and rebirth. Drury describes the goalscorer Kostas Manolas as "the Greek god in Rome" noting the fact that Manolas is a Greek and the club Roma is in the heart of the city of Rome. Thus, Drury through his use of wit and metaphor in communication likened Manolas to a mythological deity, and this highlights the extraordinary nature of the event.

### 3. **Bukayo Saka's Bravery**

On 9th October 2022, Arsenal beat Liverpool by three goals to two but the highlight was Bukayo Saka's goal from the penalty spot. Bukayo Saka's 76th - minute penalty settled the pulsating affair, as the Gunners defeated Liverpool and regained their spot at the top of the league table.

As Saka stepped up to take the spot kick, much of the focus was centralized around his miss in the penalty shootout of Euro 2020 final against Italy and whether he could bury those woes there. Here's how Peter Drury narrated the pressure penalty:

*Now this is one brave boy. Bukayo Saka; because this is one pressure penalty. He has experienced pressure from the spot like few others. He has suffered for that pressure, but now the Emirates braces itself for perhaps a pivotal kick of the football. These are broad shoulders. This is a courage. A sporting moment in time. Bukayo Saka, such poise! Such noise!*

With these words, Drury built up the occasion fabulously by commending the bravery of the young boy Bukayo Saka using the words "one brave boy", "broad shoulders", "such poise".

Also, Drury in his usual manner, flashed back and referred to Saka's miss in Euro 2020 final and how it affected him (Saka) as a person hence "He has suffered for that pressure".

The use of "Emirates" is a metonymy referring to the people inside the Emirates stadium, the home stadium of Arsenal football club and where the match was going on. According to Drury, they braced themselves. That is, they wait under pressure as Saka has once missed from that spot at a pivotal time in football.

As such, Drury in his last statement also seized the moment to showcase his ingenuity in poetry through the use of alliteration thus: "Bukayo Saka, such poise! Such noise". Here the consonant sound /s/ and /z/ were alliterated to enhance musicality in his commentary.

### 4. **Christiano Ronaldo returns to Manchester United, 11th September, 2021.**

It really felt like an enormous moment for Manchester United when they re-signed the superstar, Cristiano Ronaldo from Juventus. Having left Manchester United in 2009 as a hero in the making, Cristiano Ronaldo returned to the club as an accomplished man. The man once adored by the Manchester United fans could hardly have dreamt of a better return to Old Trafford than the one he made against Newcastle on 11th September 2021 as he scored twice to help his team to a 4-1 victory.

It was an opportunity for Peter Drury to indulge in one of his favorite exercises: embellishing the moment, attempting to capture the feelings and doing so in his usual poetic style thus:

*18years since that trembling teenager of touch and tease first tiptoed onto this storied stage. Now in his immaculate maturity, CR7 re-united. Guess who's there? Close your eyes and he never went away! Cristiano Ronaldo has stolen back the show! The Theatre lives its Dream! Its fantasy hero retreads the boards! A phenomenon! Hello again Stretford End: here I am*

Here, every word, every statement is embedded with deeper meaning of what that's at hand - the return of Cristiano Ronaldo. Eighteen years (18) ago, he (Cristiano Ronaldo) was a "trembling teenager", that means he was then a fledgling, a newbie. And he quietly "tiptoed" onto this "storied stage"; referring to the much acclaimed stadium of Manchester United - Old Trafford. He is now back, having conquered Europe and the world, he is now a world superstar, thus Drury stated "in his immaculate maturity".

"C.R.7 re-united" - C.R.7 (his initial from his name Cristiano Ronaldo and his iconic number 7) re-UNITES with Manchester UNITED; such master class and play-in-words by Peter Drury.

Peter Drury in his last statement seems as if he is reading the mind of C.Ronaldo and trying to announce to the stadium his message to them hence, "Hello again Stretford End: here I am!". The Stretford End is a significant part of the Old Trafford. So Drury is trying to be the mouthpiece of the superstar by giving his supporters in the field that message in order to build their ecstasy.

Needless to say that Drury in his first sentence alliterated the sound /t/ by the use of the following words "trembling", "teenager", "touch", "tease", "first", "tiptoed", "onto", "storied", "stage"; hence showcasing his poetic flare in commentary.

## 5. **Liverpool Utopia**

*Liverpool Utopia. An unimaginable zenith.*

*Inexplicable, illogical, irrational, scarcely digestible, barely conceivable. A story at Anfield of restored faith of restored verve; restored appetite. That is Liverpool as you remember them and that is Manchester United as they'd rather forget.*

This is how Peter Drury captured the unprecedented scenes in Anfield on 5th March 2023. Liverpool indeed defeated their bitter rivals, Manchester United 7-0. Immediately after the last goal and at the last minutes of the match, Peter Drury made this remarkable commentary of the match.

A look at the words used by Drury and their underlying meanings we can deduce that he aptly tried to capture the mixed emotions and awe that surrounds the stadium. Nobody would have believed that such could happen, even a Liverpool fan could not have dreamt of winning Manchester United with such a wide margin, hence the first statement of Drury "Liverpool Utopia" (A world in which everything and everyone works in perfect harmony). Drury went further to enumerate the utopian nature of the event with the words "inexplicable", "illogical", "irrational", "scarcely digestible", "barely conceivable".

We also deduce the repetition of the word "restored" which Drury used to lay emphasis that through that match Liverpool has reignited their belief as the best club in England (restored faith), they have re-awakened the excitement and ecstasy of being a Liverpool fan (restored verve), and they have also revived their hunger of winning the English league trophy (restored appetite).

Finally, Drury later concluded that the day will be an unforgettable moment for the Liverpool fans and a day to forget for their bitter rivals Manchester United.

### **Wits and Humour in Peter Drury's Commentaries:**

Peter Drury's commentaries are also renowned for their wits and humour and the interesting aspect of it is that they are impromptus and ingenious. This makes him one of the most beloved and respected football commentators. Here are some of his famous witty quotes.

1. "Jesus for Silva, a move Judas Iscariot will be proud of" - when Gabriel Jesus of Manchester City was substituted for David Silva his teammate, Drury used their names to make reference to Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus Christ with thirty pieces of silver.
2. When Gabriel Jesus of Manchester City scores from a cross, Drury exclaimed "And Jesus heads home from the cross" making reference to Jesus Christ's death on the cross.
3. When Peter Cech a goalkeeper of Arsenal saved Gabriel Jesus' shot, Peter Drury commented "And once again Peter denies Jesus", making reference to Peter in the Bible denying Jesus Christ. Also in the same match, Gabriel Jesus scored a goal that was disallowed by the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) and Drury has this to say "Jesus wept! Denied again! This time it's not by Peter, it's VAR". With this, he also made an allusion to the shortest verse in the Bible "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).
4. When Nick Pope a goalkeeper of Burnley saved Gabriel Jesus' shot, Peter Drury commented "And Pope saves from Jesus, Amen to that". Here, he highlighted the link between the Pope, the head of the Roman Catholic church and Jesus Christ whom he represents to the Christian world, thus, Drury said "Amen to that".
5. "Manchester United is the most consistent team, one win in August, one win in September, one win in October, one win in November, one win in December, it's just like a menstrual cycle! If they don't win in January, know that they are pregnant". Here, Drury was commenting on the poor run of form of Manchester

United at the beginning of 2021/2022 English Premier League season but the funny aspect of it is that he likened it to the normal menstrual cycle of women which comes once every month (and Manchester United were winning once every month) and if it did not come any month then that means the person is pregnant.

### **Conclusion:**

Football has truly attained the status of being more than just a sport in today's global world. There are many aspects of football that engage people beyond the actual play — such as football commentary and even betting. According to Steve Ogah (2022), in his professional entirety, Peter Drury is a master of the game who makes football more enjoyable, even on days when the match is dull and lacks on-field drama. Drury employs succinct sentences, apt adjectives, well-articulated syllables, and an oratorical flair that has made it difficult to dispute his place as the Cicero of world football. He uses his signature phrases to bring life and color to his coverage and remains mindful of the social and cultural context of the days the games are played, often weaving these references into his commentaries. His iconic moments continue to grow by the day and will likely do so for a long time to come. In all, we affirm that Peter Drury is the William Shakespeare of football commentary.

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