



Achieving Optimal Relevance through Maxims Flouting: A Pragma-Stylistic Study of British Commentary on FIFA World Cup 2022

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Abstract

This study investigates how British football radio commentators strategically flout Grice's conversational maxims to produce exaggerated and engaging commentary that achieves optimal relevance. The central problem lies in understanding how non-literal language, which superficially violates cooperative norms, enhances listener engagement and communicative efficiency. The study aims to explore the intersection of pragmatics and stylistics in live football commentary, particularly how flouted maxims and stylistic devices contribute to emotional and cognitive audience responses. The research hypothesises that (1) the flouting of Gricean maxims enhances emotional and cognitive engagement, and (2) stylistic exaggeration contributes directly to achieving optimal relevance. The data comprises selected excerpts from BBC radio commentaries during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Employing a qualitative pragma-stylistic methodology, the

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study combines Grice's maxims, Relevance Theory, and stylistic analysis. Although qualitative, the research incorporates frequency data to identify patterns and reinforce qualitative interpretations. Findings reveal that quality, quantity, and manner maxims are frequently flouted with stylistic devices such as metaphor, hyperbole, and exclamation. These strategies create utterances with high cognitive effects and low processing effort, producing vivid, emotionally resonant commentary. The study concludes that flouting maxims in live football discourse is not a failure but a deliberate strategy to engage and entertain the audience.

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List of Abbreviations	
Full Form	Abbreviation
Cognitive Effects	CE
Flouting Maxims	FM(s)
Optimal Relevance	OP
Processing Effort	PE
Stylistic Device	SD

1. Introduction

Live football commentary has developed as a mode of media discourse in its own right. It is highly descriptive, often full of emotion and wordplay, and heavily based on topographic context. Unlike traditional reporting of events, radio commentary, which is primary in the UK, has specific affordances that require commentators to create a space where listeners can construct mental images of what is happening rapidly and in real time. This highly spontaneous, performative use of language requires accuracy and rapidity to maintain listeners' allegiance and attention for the duration of the match, but also requires a level of innovation, stylistically and pragmatically, to engage listeners throughout the event.

Several studies have explored the language of football commentary from stylistic, pragmatic, and cross-cultural perspectives. Kostusiak et al. (2024) investigated the lexical and syntactic creativity in football media discourse, focusing on metaphorical and emotive language in Ukrainian texts to demonstrate how dynamic structures and informal vocabulary enhance relatability and reader engagement. Similarly, Abou Bakr et al. (2019) offered a contrastive analysis between British English and Egyptian Arabic football commentaries, revealing that while English commentary tends to be more factual and descriptive, Arabic commentary is more metaphorical, emotionally expressive, and reliant on speech acts and stylistic inversion. Shana et al. (2024) also explored cross-cultural patterns in football commentary through Conceptual Metaphor Theory, showing that although English and Arabic share universal metaphors such as FOOTBALL IS WAR, Arabic commentary displays greater cultural specificity and a wider range of metonymic references. On the other hand, al-Hindawi and Mirza (2017) examined the pragmatic structure of various sports news reports, employing an eclectic model that combines the cooperative principle, speech acts, and relevance theory to uncover common patterns across sports journalism. Building on these contributions, the current study adds a new dimension by focusing on British radio football commentary during

the 2022 FIFA World Cup and analysing how exaggeration functions as a pragma-stylistic device to achieve audience engagement. Unlike previous research, which often centres on written sports journalism or broader cross-linguistic comparisons, this study examines explicitly how flouting conversational maxims and using stylistic exaggeration serve a communicative purpose in real-time commentary. By integrating stylistic and pragmatic frameworks, this research fills a gap in existing scholarship and offers a focused investigation into live football commentary's entertaining, expressive, and engaging nature.

One defining aspect of such commentary is the routine way the practice deviates from literal or cooperative language use (Grice, 1975). Commonly, radio commentators generate implicatures by flouting conversational maxims, either reasoned or unreasoned, specifically maxims of quantity and manner. Commentators are routinely flouting quality maxims on the basis of exaggeration in a rhetorical sense, in Shakespearean comedy, by either exaggerating events for dramatic purposes or to leverage humour, and by emphasising the significance or emotional involvement that spectators should understand or feel. These flouting denote conversational implicatures that allow listeners to make deductions of intended meaning that would include far more than the commentator explicitly depicts.

This study looks at the relationship between these reference and context strategies and the Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995), which accounts for communication in terms of cognitive effects and processing effort. Within Relevance Theory, the flouting of maxims makes optimal relevance possible by ensuring that the listener appreciates their effort in return for significant contextual effects such as humour, suspense, or surprise.

Strategic flouting of maxims, combined with stylistic devices - including hyperbole, metaphor, exclamation, and repetition - can enhance discourse for listeners.

This paper will take a pragma-stylistic perspective, drawing on extracts from the FIFA World Cup 2022 British football radio commentary, to investigate how strategic flouting of maxims may be constructed in utterances that reflect the communicative engagement goal, using stylistically contextually distinct expressions to engender engagement with listeners.

By asking how relevance might be woefully maintained or improved upon with Gricean maxims flouted and hence relevant implicature easily drawn, this paper also aims to explore how a pragmatic form of exaggeration can be used as a device to engage cognitively and emotionally with audiences.

1. Which conversational maxims are most frequently broken in football commentary?
2. How does flouting work as a conscious tactic to attain the best possible relevance?
3. How do pragmatic implicature and stylistic exaggeration relate to audience engagement?

This study adds to the expanding subject of pragma-stylistics by showing how stylistic originality in spoken sports discourse is driven by pragmatic efficiency rather than simple deviance from norms. Additionally, it sheds light on the linguistic dynamics of live performance commentary and how language changes to reflect the intensity and immediacy of athletic events.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of pragmatics and stylistics in media discourse has drawn considerable scholarly attention, especially concerning how language works beyond the literal meaning to convey communicative meaning. In football commentary, this intersection is most fluidly realised as commentators have the spontaneity of real-time narratives about unpredictable and affectively invested events for an additionally invested audience. This literature review summarises key theories and previous research concerning conversational maxims, relevance theory, stylistic devices in media discourse, and the pragma-stylistic approach that has arisen in our attempts to engage with media discourse in a pragma-stylistic way.

2.1 Pragma-Stylistics

Pragma-stylistics represents an interdisciplinary approach that integrates principles from pragmatics and stylistics to examine how language operates in context. While stylistics focuses on the formal and rhetorical features of language, pragmatics explores how meaning is constructed through use, intention, and interaction. Pragma-stylistics combines these perspectives to analyse how linguistic choices achieve particular communicative functions, especially in spoken and performance-based discourse (Wales, 2014; Burke, 2010).

In live sports commentary, pragma-stylistics provides a robust framework for interpreting how commentators use expressive language to create emotional resonance. Commentators must capture fleeting, often unpredictable moments with immediacy and intensity, relying on both stylistic devices (such as metaphor and exclamation) and pragmatic strategies (such as implicature or contextual inference). As Simpson (2004) points out, media discourse—

especially in its performative forms—requires constant interplay between form and function. Pragma-stylistics allows us to trace how that interplay constructs meaning in real-time.

2.2 Grice's Cooperative Principle and Conversational Maxims H.P. Grice (1975) proposed that effective communication is guided by the Cooperative Principle, which is upheld by four maxims: quantity (provide the right amount of information), quality (be truthful), relation (be relevant), and manner (be clear). These maxims function as guidelines rather than rules, and speakers may deliberately flout them to create implicatures, or indirect meanings that listeners must infer.

In sports commentary, flouting maxims is not a communicative failure but a rhetorical technique. Commentators often exaggerate (violating quality), provide excessive detail (violating quantity), dramatise events with unrelated digressions (violating relation), or use figurative language that departs from clarity (violating manner). These violations are not accidental; they are used to heighten drama, inject humour, or stimulate emotional responses.

Thomas (1995) and Cutting (2002) argue that such flouting can be strategically employed to express emphasis, irony, or evaluation, especially in performance-based genres like sports broadcasting. The flouting of conversational maxims thus becomes a powerful mechanism for engagement and affective commentary.

2.3 Relevance Theory

Relevance Theory, developed by Sperber and Wilson (1995), reframes communication as an inferential process based on cognitive efficiency. The theory posits that every utterance carries a presumption of optimal relevance: it should provide significant cognitive effects for the listener while requiring minimal processing effort. In this framework, listeners interpret language not by decoding literal meanings but by drawing contextually rich inferences.

Wilson and Sperber (2004) identify three main concepts:

- a. Cognitive Effects (CE): These include changes in mental representations, contextual implications, or emotional resonance.
- b. Processing Effort (PE): The mental energy required to interpret an utterance.
- c. Optimal Relevance (OR): Achieved when high cognitive effects are delivered with low processing effort.

Radio football commentary is particularly suited to this model. With no visual cues, listeners rely entirely on linguistic stimuli. Thus, phrases like “He’s danced past the defenders” or “on cloud nine” deliver vivid images and strong emotional cues with minimal effort. These utterances often involve flouted maxims, but they are relevant because they stimulate rapid comprehension and emotional alignment.

In this way, Relevance Theory explains how exaggerated, non-literal expressions can still succeed as effective communication. They are not deviations from relevance—they are, in fact, strategies for achieving it. In prior research of the sport discourse landscape, works such as Furze (2017) and Richardson (2006) have investigated the performative and persuasive binary of commentary but limited themselves to analysing television, not radio. In radio commentary, with visual channels absent, demands are arguably heightened because radio commentators use language not only to imagine visual imagery for sport but also to mobilise an emotional state from an audience listener. When the lack of visual prompts and audience engagement is taken into account, the need to use pragmatic and stylistic choices increases.

Although studies like the ones above provide useful starting points, few of them have studied specifically the role that flouting conversational maxims play in exaggeration in reaching the optimal level of relevance in live football commentary. This paper addresses this gap by providing a pragma-stylistic analysis of commentary sections that illustrate how the apparent violations of the cooperative principles are reworked as strategies for creating engaging and consequential commentary.

2.4 Exaggeration and Engagement in Football Commentary

Exaggeration is a hallmark of media discourse, particularly in live sports commentary. It manifests through devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, repetition, exclamation, rhetorical questions, and pseudo-dialogue, each designed to amplify emotional response and create dramatic tension (Beard, 1998; Simpson, 2004).

These devices allow commentators to project intensity, construct narratives, and elicit shared emotional reactions from listeners. Hyperbole, for instance, transforms ordinary plays into extraordinary feats. Exclamations express surprise or joy, while metaphors elevate the action to almost mythical proportions. Rhetorical questions invite listener participation by implying shared judgments.

Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory further explains how evaluative language functions to express both attitude and engagement. In this model, exaggeration aligns speaker and audience emotions by highlighting significance and inviting affective agreement. For example, when a commentator says, "What a final we have in store!" the utterance doesn't merely inform—it galvanises excitement and frames the moment as historically significant.

Commentators frequently establish a dialogic environment that encourages listeners to engage as participants in the match's unfolding drama (Abanazir, 2020).

In summary, stylistic exaggeration in football commentary is not ornamental—it is essential. It bridges the gap between event and audience, performance and perception, language and emotion.

3. Methodology

In this paper, a qualitative pragma-stylistic analysis is adopted. This analysis will explore the ways in which football commentators flout conversational maxims to create optimal relevance and aid audience engagement. The research will implement a methodology that employs notions from both pragmatics and stylistics to theorise about discourse in a real-time spoken context, namely live radio football commentary. While the research is primarily interpretive, it also includes supportive statistical figures to highlight patterns in maxim flouting and stylistic device usage. These figures are not used for statistical generalisation but serve to reinforce the qualitative findings by indicating the recurrence of key phenomena across the data.

3.1 Research Approach

The study is situated within a qualitative paradigm, which is appropriate for understanding meaning-making in spontaneously created language. It allows for a rich exploration of how stylistic and pragmatic choices are involved in exaggerated representation and emotional affective components of commentary discourse. The study examines the role of linguistic features and how they can be interpreted based on their situated communicative context. Statistics of flouting occurrence support this.

3.2 Data Collection and Description

The corpus belongs to transcribed segments of British radio football commentary broadcast during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Radio commentary was selected for this research because it provides an opportunity for a commentator to use language exclusively to communicate the events happening in the game and inspire the imaginations of listeners anticipating action. The lack of visual reference forces a more linguistic, evocative and more energetic use of language, making radio an ideal space to manifest the subjective features of pragma-stylistic studies.

Segments for this analysis were purposely selected as they contained rich instances of non-literal, exaggerative, and emotive language. Six segments of five matches from different stages of the tournament were sourced, each with distinct examples of flouting the maxims alongside stylistic features.

3.3 Justification for Data Selection

The selected commentaries were chosen based on two criteria:

1. To capture the whole arc of a tournament's narrative and the varying pressure on commentators, I purposefully selected one match excerpt from each stage of the 2022 FIFA World Cup:

Group stage – to illustrate the opening dynamics and initial tone-setting commentary.

Round of 16 – where stakes rise and commentators begin to employ more dramatic language.

Quarter-final – to observe how increased tension influences pragmatic and stylistic choices.

Semi-final – representing near-final drama and peak emotional investment.

Final – the tournament's climax, where maximal relevance and audience engagement are critical.

This tournament-stage diversity ensures that we can compare how flouting strategies and stylistic exaggerations adapt as the competition's intensity and narrative significance grow. It not only provides dynamic variation in context but also guarantees a representative cross-section of live commentary under differing levels of competitive pressure.

2. Narrative intensity – moments that are high in emotional tension, such as goal celebrations, penalty kicks, or last-minute saves.

These criteria align with the aim of the study: to explore how commentators use language creatively and strategically to engage the audience. The decision to include matches from different tournament stages also ensures diversity in discourse types and emotional tones.

3.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis follows an eclectic pragma-stylistic model based on three main theoretical perspectives:

1. **Stylistic Analysis (Simpson, 2004) and (Leech & Short, 2007):** How stylistic devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, exclamation, climax, repletion, pseudo-dialogue and rhetorical questions contribute to exaggeration and narrative power. In addition to these scholars
2. **Grice's Conversational Maxims (Grice, 1975):** Which maxims (quantity, quality individually, relation, or manner) are flouted and how their implicature is interpreted.
3. **Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995):** How flouting relates to optimal relevance in terms of balancing cognitive effect and processing effort. Sperber & Wilson's Relevance theory models real-time communication (such as radio football commentary) as involving an inferential process relying on optimal relevance, maximising cognitive effects (meaningful changes to the listener's mental representation) relative to expected processing effort (the amount of mental work involved in comprehension) (Wilson & Sperber, 2004)

a. Positive cognitive effects

According to Wilson and Sperber (2004), "positive cognitive effect is a worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world—a true conclusion" (p. 251).

"CONTEXTUAL IMPLICATION, a conclusion deducible from the input and the context together, but from neither input nor context alone" (p. 251) is the most important kind of cognitive consequence attained by processing an input in a context. Since the listener must constantly integrate auditory cues, linguistic presumptions, and prior knowledge to comprehend what is happening, these implications are essential in radio. In radio commentary, positive cognitive effects occur when a statement encourages the listener to improve or revise their mental image of the game.

b. Processing effort

The "effort of perception, memory, and inference required" is referred to as processing effort (p. 253). Relevance decreases with effort: "Other things being equal, the more PROCESSING EFFORT required, the less relevant the input will be." Page 253. Radio is a medium that requires intuitive and vivid language since listeners have short attention spans and comprehension must be nearly instantaneous. "Oh, he's danced past one, two—brilliant!" is one example. For instance, "leaves them behind!" exemplifies minimum effort and high relevance. Football fans are accustomed to using evocative metaphors such as "danced past" and "leaves them in his wake." Without requiring additional effort, the visual aids enhance comprehension. Consequently, it maintains high relevance by combining strong effects with little work.

c. Optimal Relevance

When "a. It is relevant enough to be worth the audience's processing effort" and "b. It is the most relevant one compatible with the communicator's abilities and preferences," optimal relevance is reached (p. 257). A radio commentator maximises relevance by giving the listener high-value information with minimal cognitive effort.

Each example is approached through an organised interpretive procedure that recognises:

1. The stylistic device or strategy
2. The flouted maxim.
3. Relevance Theory:
 - a. Cognitive effects
 - b. Processing efforts
 - c. Optimal relevance
4. Exaggeration
5. Engagement

3.4 Justification of Method

This eclectic model gives a subtle sense of how language works in both structure and context. By treating maxim flouting not simply as error but instead as a stylistic and communicative choice, the analysis will show how commentators incorporate pragmatic violation and rhetorical style to achieve immediate emotion, evocative narration, and audience participation. This does lend itself to language that is spontaneous, expressive, and time-sensitive, particularly within the genre of football commentary.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

This section provides a pragma-stylistic analysis of chosen excerpts from the BBC Radio Sport football commentary at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. Each example is presented with a brief contextualisation of the stylistic device used, the conversational maxim that is being flouted, and the pragmatic and cognitive functions involved, based on relevance theory. The analysis has revealed that exaggerated or non-literal expressions flouting the cooperative principles are performed intentionally to enhance emotion and ensure effective communication and engagement. To analyse the pragma-stylistics of football commentary, six five-minute extracts were purposefully selected from 5 matches during the World Cup 2022. Each extract reflects a significant moment during the matches, such as the opening of the match, goals, penalties, or closing minutes. All extracts were fully transcribed to provide the primary data. A total of 110 stylistic examples were identified and categorised using seven stylistic devices - hyperbole, metaphor, repetition, climax, exclamation, rhetorical question and pseudo-dialogue. For the purposes of this research paper and due to the sheer number of examples, one purposive example was selected for each of the seven stylistic devices from across the six extracts, except for hyperbole and metaphor, two for each due to their prominent attendance. Each of these was individually analysed to show how the commentators' language maximally flouted one, some or several of Grice's cooperative maxims for a greater communicative effect. These floutings are analysed for relevance through a relevance theory framework, especially regarding how much exaggeration might influence emotional engagement and the cognitive effect. The purpose of the examples is to show how stylistic strategies are pragmatically used in relation to relevance for the commentator and their audience.

4.1 Pragma-stylistic analysis

- **Example 1:** (So Jude Bellingham, the Borussia Dortmund man, is... *is on cloud nine!*)

1. SD: Metaphor:

The commentator says that Bellingham is thrilled, like an idiom to say he is “on cloud nine,” which means blissful joy.

2. **FM: Quality:** it flouts the Maxim of Quality because Bellingham is not literally (or physically) on a cloud. The claim is figurative and hyperbolic about his happiness.

3. RT:

- a. **CE:** The image quickly and effectively utilises a sense to convey the great happiness for Bellingham in a way everyone will understand ‘being on a cloud’ implies ecstatic happiness.
- b. **PE:** There is a very low amount of processing effort, with “on a cloud nine” to connect to the idiom. Anyway, the idiom is a common upward direction and a meaning that invokes something blissful.
- c. **OR:** The statement provides optimal relevance by quickly communicating Bellingham's emotional state with a vivid image and something relatable. It improves the listener's understanding the meaning of the goal for the player.

4. **Exaggeration:** The use of the metaphor “on cloud nine” exaggerates Bellingham's happiness to imply his joy is almost unimaginable. This deeply describes his emotional condition and is far more powerful and precise than simply stating “he's pleased”.

5. **Engagement:** In using such an expressive metaphor, the commentator allows listeners to connect with Bellingham and his celebration on an emotional level. It conveys the significance of this moment for the young player. The idiom “on cloud nine” is universally understood, giving the commentator and listeners a shared emotional understanding.

- **Example 2:** (“*Thank you very much, thank you world—here I am!*”)

1. **SD: Pseudo-dialogue:**

The commentator speculates and cites the possible thoughts or statements Bellingham could be thinking or saying to the camera and the world.

2. **FM: Quality:** The commentator has no idea what Bellingham has said or thought. He flouts **Manner** by lacking directness in asserting that Bellingham is feeling grateful; instead, he chooses to dramatise the action using Pseudo dialogue.

3. **RT:**

- a. **CE:** Gives a more personal account of Bellingham and allows listeners to imagine his feelings and confidence mentally.
 - b. **PE:** Low since the imagined quote is very contextual, given the celebratory moment.
 - c. **OR:** Makes Bellingham more relatable, while contributing to the story of his emergence.
4. **Exaggeration:** The commentator creates an exaggerated understanding of Bellingham's confidence and sense of occasion by pretending to verbalise his words, making him a more inviting performance.
5. **Engagement:** Exalting Bellingham's confidence and dramatics, this commentator glorifies the athlete and converts viewers into active celebrators of his mythology, a significant method in keeping audiences engaged in a media-saturated environment.
- **Example 3:** (*“Stuttering run-up. And Neymar rolls it in. Neymar's first goal at this World Cup. He joins the scoring charts. And Brazil increase their lead. It's Brazil 2, South Korea nil.”*)

1. SD: Climax (The Penalty Goal Sequence):

Expanding phrases are built in order of intensity, moving from the initial action (run-up/shot) to the immediate outcome (goal) to larger implications (shift in the score line, individual/team milestones).

2. FM: Quantity: Over-explains a basic announcement of a scored goal (a detailed play-by-play of the action, the implications of the call, etc.) to heighten drama and involvement for the listener.

4. RT:

- a. **CE:** Factual continuity piece-making links the expectation (run-up) to the implications of the goal (score change, player legacy).
- b. **PE:** Presented clearly and in chronological order, allows the listeners to understand quickly, even though it is a rapid process.

- c. **OR:** Playing on the emotional payoff of the climactic structure by providing minimal processing effort for the listener.

5. Exaggeration: Heightens dramatic tension by deconstructing the penalty into actionable pieces (the action to result in significance), prolonging the stakes of the moment.

6. Engagement: Each stepping stone (climax) of attention continually adds tension for the listener, turning a simple update into a vivid, high-stakes story.

- **Example 4: (“Eyes in the back of his head.”)**

- 1. **SD: Metaphor:** The metaphor suggests Messi has almost supernatural awareness of passes others cannot see.

- 2. **FM: quality:** Uses figurative language for what could have been literally stated as exceptional awareness. The statement is not literally true. Messi does not have eyes on his back.

- 3. **RT:**

- a. **CE:** High, pictures future awareness of Messi as near magical, hence, of a higher order of genius.

- b. **PE:** Low, a common sports metaphor, easy to understand

- c. **OR:** High, vivid imagery at no effort.

- 4. **Exaggeration:** Elevates Messi's tactical skills to the realm of mythology.

- 5. **Engagement:** It enabled the audience to associate Messi with a sort of superhuman playmaker, deepening their admiration.

- **Example 5 (“Oh! Beats Amrabat, brilliant footwork”)**

- 1. **SD: Hyperbole:** This is all about exaggeration for effect. When the commentator describes Mbappé's skill as “brilliant footwork,” it’s a strong compliment that likely amplifies the actual quality of his abilities, showcasing the commentator's admiration.

- 2. **FM: Quality:** While it’s clear that Mbappé's footwork was impressive, calling it “brilliant” might stretch the truth a bit, flouting the maxim of quality (“Do not say what you believe to be false”) to express a strong personal opinion.

- 3. **RT:**

- a. **CE:** It instantly communicates the commentator's strong positive view of Mbappé's skill, shaping how the listener perceives the moment. It emphasises the impressive move that outsmarted the defender.
 - b. **PE:** Minimal, as “brilliant footwork” is a familiar phrase in sports commentary.
 - c. **OR:** It effectively delivers a significant cognitive effect (a strong positive evaluation, showcasing skill) through impactful language.
4. **Exaggeration:** The hyperbole in “brilliant” elevates the description from just very good to something truly exceptional, reflecting the commentator's deep admiration.
 5. **Engagement:** It captures the listener's attention by using strong, evaluative language that mirrors the commentator's perspective on the skill. This makes the commentary feel more opinionated and highlights the moment of individual brilliance, adding to the narrative of Mbappe's influence on the game.

- **Example 6 (“*what a final it is in prospect.*”)**

1. **SD: Exclamation:** The phrase uses an exclamatory structure (“what a...”) to signal a strong emotional stance (excitement/admiration) about the final.
2. **FM: quantity:** The commentator, through exclamation, provides subjective evaluation and emotional emphasis beyond what is necessary for a factual, neutral report. Give more description at the beginning of the match.
3. **RT:**
 - a. **CE:** Absence of ambiguity, as the event becomes more passionate and meaningful.
 - b. **PE:** Low, exclamatory syntax is universally known, and emotion is intuitively processed regardless of cultural or regional variations.
 - c. **OR:** Very high (cognitive effects ÷ processing effort = high emotionality ÷ low effort).
4. **Exaggeration:** The phrase (what a final) exaggerates the event's importance and represents the occasion as exceptionally special.

5. **Engagement:** Through emotional exaggeration, the commentator mentally drives her listeners into the storyline so they feel that the occasion is historic and exhilarating, and they will become increasingly engaged and excited.

• **Example 7 (“Great, great French disappointment”)**

1. **SD: Repetition:** The technique of repetition heightens the atmosphere and emotional impact of the moment, emphasises the sadness and disappointment of France's defeat.
2. **FM: quantity:** The emotional tone is enriched by the deliberate repetition of (great, great) to amplify the degree of disappointment.
3. **RT:**
 - a. **CE:** The repetition shows a high emotional level of empathy, which allows listeners to feel empathy for France's sadness.
 - b. **PE:** The listeners easily grasp the tone of extreme disappointment.
 - c. **OR:** High, it creates intense psychological images and profound emotional connections.
4. **Exaggeration:** The repetition of (great, great) exaggerates the state of sadness of the French team after losing the final.
5. **Engagement:** Building rapport with the listeners through amplifying the feeling of empathy.

• **Example 8 (“Drama of the highest standard”)**

1. **SD: Hyperbole:** This description reflects the intensity and quality of the match, which is legendary or epic, even more than it might have been.
2. **FM: Quality:** It overstates the match to the level of a drama, which is not literally so, and describes it with ‘highest standard’, which is a subjective judgment. All this to create a vivid impression of exceptionalism.
3. **RT:**
 - a. **CE:** Presents the event as very important to culture, like a significant milestone or landmark in sports history.

- b. **PE:** It's simple to understand because people often use exaggeration when talking about exciting events.
 - c. **OR:** High, the match's symbolic importance makes people accept the overstatement because it adds meaning.
 - 4. **Exaggeration:** Portrays the match as an unbeatable and unforgettable historic event that stands out.
 - 5. **Engagement:** This strategy encourages people to think of the game as something more than just a regular final match, making it seem extraordinary.
- **Example 10 ("Martínez was in the French players' heads, wasn't he?")**
 - 1. **SD: Rhetorical Question:** This isn't about getting an answer but reinforcing a point, inviting inferred agreement and fostering a shared understanding with the listeners.
 - 2. **FM: Quantity:** It is a question where the answer is already implied.
 - 3. **RT:**
 - a. **CE:** High, the listener is reassured that Martnez was mentally dominating
 - b. **PE:** Low, it is easy to see the expected agreement.
 - c. **OR:** High, it encourages emotional and mental alignment with the speaker.
 - 4. **Exaggeration:** It underscores Martnez's psychological influence.
 - 5. **Engagement:** The audience is brought into a shared perspective and emotional experience.

4.1 General Discussion

These examples illustrate how commentators flout conversant maxims not to create confusion but to enhance emotional, imaginative, and cognitive involvement. In all three cases, flouting the maxims of quality, quantity, and manner allows commentators to break the linguistic limits of language's literal meaning to achieve effectively resonant and engaging commentaries.

The analysis indicates that hyperbole, metaphor, rhetorical questions, exclamations, and metaphor are often the salient homo-unstable factors or forms of expression that, in conjunction with pragmatic means, result in richness of communicative effect, as stated by

Relevance Theory, by balancing maximal relevance through having at least a weak cognitive effect (e.g., shock, amusement, admiration) with minimal interpretive effort also to make the listener more relatable to the event.

Importantly, this pragma-stylistic hybridisation shows that flouting is not a violation of conversational norms but an intentional, contextually sensitive communicative behaviour that is consistent with the purpose of live sport narrations: entertainment, intensity, and emotional engagement. The results support the contention that radio commentators heavily utilise non-literal, imaginative language and provide justification from relevance and expectations of audiences, particularly in the emotion-packed space of live football commentary.

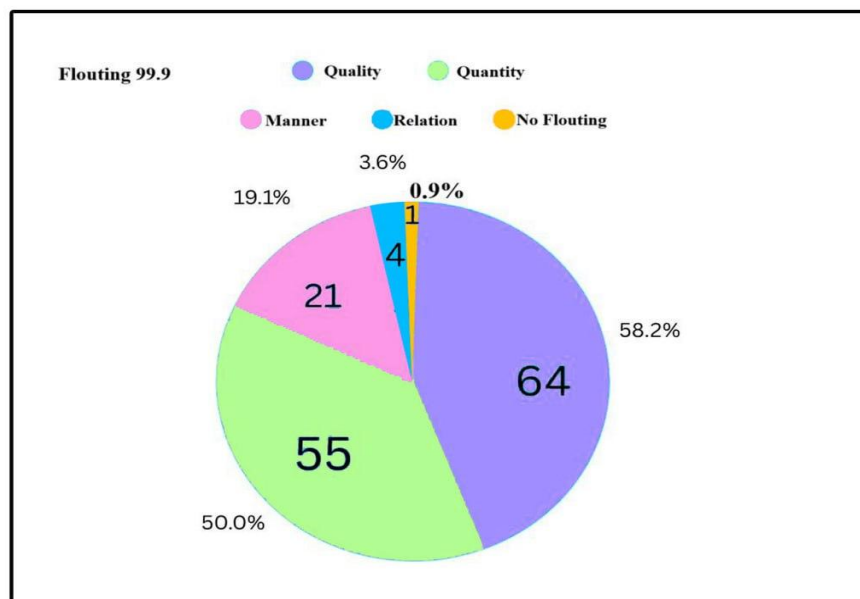
Flouting Maxims to Convey Implied Significance

Maxim flouting is prevalent, with 99.09% of instances containing at least one flouted maxim, averaging 1.32 flouted maxims per instance. This implies that audiences frequently need to interpret the underlying message to grasp the complete significance, enhancing the richness of the communication.

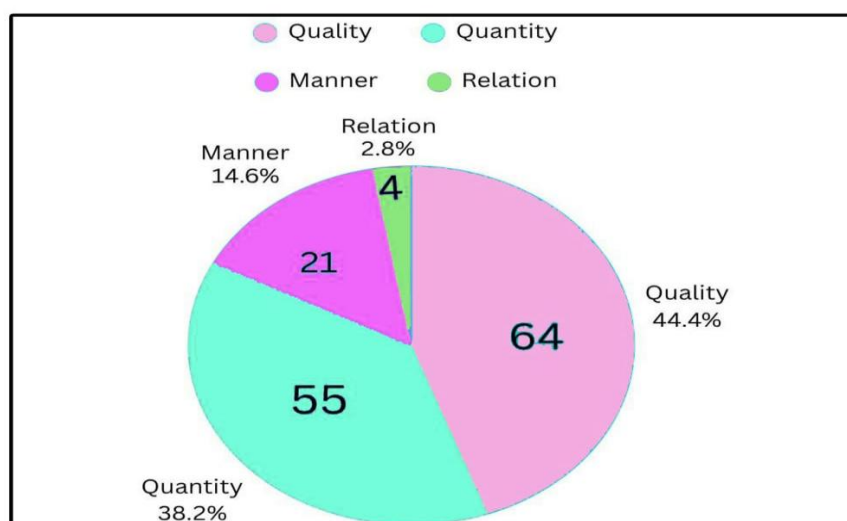
- **Quality (44.4% of violated maxims):** Commentators frequently make statements that are not literally accurate, employing hyperbole or metaphor to convey more intense emotions or critique. The audience perceives this as deliberate, interpreting the exaggeration or analogy behind the expression.
- **Quantity (38.2% of violated maxims):** This occurs when too much or too little information is provided than necessary, through redundancy, developing towards a conclusion, or emphatic remarks. This aids in highlighting concepts, generating suspense, or influencing the way the message is interpreted.
- **Manner (14.6% of flouted maxims):** In this case, language is less straightforward or more complex, such as employing fragments or fillers during informal conversations. This requires listeners to put in a little more effort to grasp the vibrancy or authentic emotion conveyed by the words.
- **Relation (2.8% of flouted maxims):** Although less common, providing additional details

that appear unrelated (such as personal anecdotes during critical moments) enhances emotional resonance or context, resulting in a more significant overall message. The following figure explains the frequencies and percentages of flouting maxims concerning 110 examples in the figure1 and their types in the figure 2.

Figure(1) shows how frequently each conversational maxim was flouted across the entire dataset of 110 stylistic examples.



Figure(2) illustrates the percentage share of each flouted maxim type, highlighting how they are proportionally represented in the total occurrences.



7. Conclusion

This study has explored how football radio commentators purposefully flout Gricean conversational maxims to achieve exaggerated, expressive and emotionally charged language that is optimal in terms of relevance. Pragma-stylistic analysis of examples from British commentary of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 shows that flouting is a rhetorical manoeuvre, rather than a communicative failure. It draws the audience closer to the emotion, drama and vividness of the narrative.

The findings show that the maxims of quality, quantity, and manner are the most commonly flouted. Flouting of the maxims typically occurs with stylistic devices such as hyperbole, metaphor, rhetorical questions, exclamations, etc., creating utterances with high cognitive effects and low processing effort—both of which are essential criteria for optimal relevance in Relevance Theory. Rather than strictly adhering to cooperative norms of conversation, communicators are able to manipulate language to the demands of live performance, creating a memorable dramatic impact on the audience.

Relevance Theory provides the best explanation for how these language elements interact. Commentators consistently strive for Optimal Relevance, seeking to generate the greatest effect while ensuring clarity. Effectively merging stylistic techniques and flouting conversational maxims generates vivid mental pictures, intense feelings, and

nuanced meanings. Simultaneously, they maintain simplicity for the audience by depending on common understanding, recognisable cues, and straightforward objectives, even when the communication is subtle. This equilibrium of effect and simplicity is what genuinely engages and maintains the listener's focus.

By using pragmatic with stylistic tools, this work provides a valuable contribution to the field of pragma-stylistics that may be useful for any future studies focused on how language works in situations that exhibit extreme time and affective pressure. This study also demonstrates that the considered flouting of linguistic norms can serve as a powerful strategy for narrative construction and eliciting engagement from the audience, particularly in sports commentary.

Although this study provides many avenues for thinking, the context used was a limited, small, time-bound, context-specific sample of British radio commentary. Future studies could explore commentary that was in a range of languages, whether their sporting or non-sporting related; whether audio or visual commentary; or perhaps the audience's reception of the commentator's sounds and the strategies they used; there is also potential for using this model on other forms of performance in public contexts, such as political speech, reality television, or live events for example.

Future research may build on this by:

1. Contrastive study of pragma-stylistic across different cultures and sports.
2. Conduct audience studies using surveys, interviews, or tracking their gaze.
3. Diachronic study of how commentary language has changed over time.
4. Multimodality analysis shows how the interplay of paralinguistic features and visual cues provides a better understanding of engagement.
5. Pragma-stylistic study of how commentators' language shapes the audience's opinion about players, teams, or sports events.

To conclude, this study reinforces the notion that in spoken sports discourse, communicative success is often found not when adhering to a literal norm that is

defined in strict terms, but rather when that norm is skilfully flouted, in which meaning is inferred, affective states are intensified, and engagement is optimised.

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Appendixes

1. **England vs Iran - FIFA World Cup Group Stage Match, 21st November 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt**
(https://youtu.be/1YPl_KfE98A?si=SGcG5PVKS21lbNEb)
2. **Brazil vs South Korea - FIFA World Cup Round of 16 Match, December 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt)**(<https://youtu.be/CE4c917dDco?si=Z4j0RO72zpYx7vv->)
3. **Argentina vs Netherlands - FIFA World Cup Quarter-Finals Match, 9 December 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt.**
(<https://youtu.be/OG8rAG1FB08?si=UC-GX2ImiTCwuJ2J>)
4. **France vs Morocco - FIFA World Cup Semi-Finals Match, 14 December 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt)**(https://youtu.be/yV1vHkzAJ_E?si=yB5RavZft5r1bfOn)
5. **Argentina vs France - FIFA World Cup the Final Match, 18 December 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt, Start of the match)** (<https://youtu.be/sS5XfguV0w4?si=yNX2XMgM8ciPAhZg>)

6. Argentina vs France - FIFA World Cup the Final Match, 18 December 2022 (BBC Radio Commentary Transcript Excerpt, part of penalties and the end of the match). (<https://youtu.be/sS5XfguV0w4?si=yNX2XMgM8ciPAhZg>)

المستخلص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة كيف يخرق معلقو كرة القدم البريطانيون في الإذاعة استراتيجياً مبادئ المحادثة عند غرايس (Grice) لإنتاج تعليق مبالغ فيه وجذاب يحقق الالتفات الأمثل (optimal relevance). تكمن المشكلة المركزية في فهم كيف يُعزّز اللغة غير الحرفية، التي تنتهك ظاهرياً أسس التعاونية، تفاعل المستمعين والكفاءة التواصلية. تهدف الدراسة إلى استكشاف تقاطع حقلي التداوليات (pragmatics) والأسلوبيات (stylistics) في التعليق الحي لمباريات كرة القدم، ولا سيما كيف تساهم مخالفة المبادئ (flouted maxims) والأدوات الأسلوبية في استجابات الجمهور العاطفية والإدراكية.

يفترض البحث فرضيتين رئيسيتين: (1) أن خرق المبادئ الغرايسية (Gricean maxims) يعزز التفاعل العاطفي والإدراكي، و(2) أن المبالغة الأسلوبية تساهم مباشرة في تحقيق الالتفات الأمثل. تتألف البيانات من نصوص مختارة من تعليقات إذاعة الـ (BBC) خلال كأس العالم FIFA قطر 2022. باستخدام منهجية تداولية أسلوبية نوعية (qualitative pragma-stylistic methodology)، تجمع الدراسة بين مبادئ غرايس، ونظرية الالتفات (Relevance Theory)، والتحليل الأسلوبي. ورغم طبيعتها النوعية، فإن البحث يدمج بيانات التكرار لتحديد الأنماط وتعزيز التفسيرات النوعية.

تكشف النتائج أن مبادئ النوعية (quality) والكمية (quantity) والطريقة (manner) تُخرق بشكل متكرر بالتزامن مع أدوات أسلوبية مثل الاستعارة والمبالغة والتعجب. تخلق هذه الاستراتيجيات نطقاً ذات تأثيرات إدراكية عالية

(high cognitive effects) وجهد معالجة منخفض (low processing effort)، مما يُنتج تعليقاً حيويّاً ذا صدى عاطفي (emotionally resonant). تستنتج الدراسة أن خرق المبادئ في الخطاب الحي لكرة القدم ليس إخفاً، بل هو إستراتيجية مقصودة لإشراك الجمهور وإمتاعه.