

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Commentaries on Nigeria's Super Eagles' Matches at the African Cup of Nations 2023

Elijah Ajigbotoluwa¹, Adetutu Aragbuwa, Ph.D², Samuel Oyeyemi Agbeleoba, Ph.D³, Oluwabusayo Foluso Fafiyebi⁴

^{1,2,3}Department of English and Literary Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti; ⁴Department of English and Literary Studies, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti

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*Corresponding Author: Samuel Oyeyemi Agbeleoba, Ph.D²

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This study examines the linguistic and discursive strategies employed in football commentary during the 2023 TotalEnergies Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), focusing on matches involving Nigeria against Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and Angola. The study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is a powerful tool for questioning existing power structures in sports management studies. It can be used to analyze how discursive practices support or constrain diversity and inclusion in sports organizations. The analysis explores how commentary constructs narratives, reflects socio-cultural contexts, and highlights power dynamics within the games. Commentators frame matches as high-stakes confrontations between nations, using historical context and player focus to emphasize shifts in power symmetry. Linguistic strategies such as emotive language, repetition, metaphorical imagery, and informal expressions heighten drama and engage audiences. Socio-cultural references, including national identity and shared football discourse, reinforce collective sentiments and cultural pride. The study also identifies subtle biases in commentary, where emphasis on historically dominant teams or standout players like Victor Osimhen and Ademola Lookman reveals subjective inclinations. Temporal and spatial awareness is effectively integrated into commentaries with a view to creating vivid mental images for viewers. Furthermore, individual players are spotlighted to construct identities and influence perceived power dynamics within teams. The analysis demonstrates that football commentary transcends factual reporting to become a narrative art form deeply intertwined with cultural values, emotional engagement, and national identity. This study highlights how language shapes audience perception of football matches while reflecting broader socio-cultural realities surrounding African football tournaments.

Keywords: CDA, AFCON, Commentaries, Discursive Practices, Linguistic Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Language usage conveys messages to the audience - a reality familiar to every space and discipline, including discourse analysis. The etymology of the term "discourse" is derived from the Latin verb "*Discursus*", meaning "running to and fro". This emphasises Brown and Yule's (1983:1) definition of discourse analysis as "...necessarily the analysis of language in use." Also, "language's communicative function" (Allot, 2010:1), helps in looking beyond sentential meaning to the instead underlying tones that affect them. As an extension of DA, Critical Discourse Analysis evaluates the

dimensions of power hierarchies expressed in language, ideologies, gender issues, and subtle layers of meaning.

Through the advancement in "...better filming technology" (Humpolik, 2014:6) during sporting events, game discourse, aimed at an "unknown, unseen, heterogeneous audience" (Ferguson, 1983: 150), has become an exciting discipline that relies on presenting sporting realities as they occur. In the narrower sense, football commentaries, a subset within this field, provide live reports of actions and commentary to engage listeners across board. As a result, game discourse has become a multifaceted

communication medium containing unique registers influenced by their immediate contexts.

The relevance of game discourse exemplified in the live commentaries of the AFCON 2023 and their evaluation is the focus of this research paper. Through the increased visibility of African football affairs after the South African World Cup 2010, the African Cup of Nations (AFCON), inaugurated in 1957, has gained more prominence. As a biannual football event, it has been instrumental in uniting African national football teams and increasing patriotic support across cultural boundaries. The 34th AFCON, hosted by Côte d'Ivoire in 2024, followed the 2022 World Cup (played in 2023) and marked the second implementation of the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology. The tournament highlighted noteworthy events, thrills, and upsets, which stressed the appeal and importance of sporting events in Africa.

Based on this, the commentaries had the expertise of seasoned football commentators who, amazingly, despite the game's electrifying pace, could employ the spontaneity of words and strings of utterances in accompaniment to the thrills. Consequently, this research paper will aim to elicit the linguistic choices of the commentaries that blanket ideological leanings, discursive strategies where used, and socio-cultural implied meanings in their contexts.

Obviously, the discourse surrounding football commentary, which is a subset of football and sport discourse, is a perfect example of how context-sensitive language is because it is characterized with distinctive language use different from any other discourse. Language can therefore be said to be context-bound, specific and sensitive as it can mostly be understood or interpreted based on context it is being used. Football commentaries discourse is one of many contexts where language is being used to describe the events on football pitches during football matches. Furthermore, Football is regarded as one of the most popular sports globally, as it captivates audiences worldwide with its thrilling matches, captivating narratives, and passionate commentary. Football commentaries, the verbal accompaniment to these matches, play a crucial role in shaping the audience's experience, providing insights into the game's intricacies, and fostering emotional connections with the players and teams. Therefore, the AFCON, being one

of the most watched events worldwide, presented a unique opportunity to scrutinize the discourse surrounding this genre.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach used to examine how language constructs and reinforces social and cultural ideologies. In the context of sports commentaries, CDA can reveal the ideological themes embedded in the language used by commentators. This review will explore related works on critical discourse analysis and critical stylistics in sports commentaries, highlighting their relevance to understanding the complex interplay between language, ideology, and sports culture.

In a CDA appraisal of selected tweets on petrol subsidy removal discourse, Edem (2023:269-280) highlights the ideological positioning of Nigerian netizens in their reaction to the removal of petrol subsidy in the nation. He integrated Halliday's Context of the Situation to underline the context situation of the analysis and Fairclough's Socio-functional approach to DA, which accounts for the ideologies and stances in the highlighted tweets. Hence, the corridor of ideological positioning is also relevant in socio-cyber interactions.

In political discourse, Agbeleoba et al. (2023:32-40) emphasized ideologies and power play in political discourse. While concentrating on the mantra of Bola Asiwaju Tinubu, "Emi lo kàn", they highlighted how political battles are fought at a reasonable time using strategic language and the public perception of such. The study uncovered the ideological underpinnings of power struggle and the manipulation of language therein.

Elsewhere on gendered discourse, Nyanta et al. (2023:184-196) considered selected newspaper headlines in Ghana to stress the relevance of CDA in analysing media communication. Through their study, they discovered that the male-dominated Ghana media often tilts toward ideologies portraying women negatively, regardless of their reported situation. Summarily, the descriptive research primarily focused on this front.

In his own research, Guluzadeh (2023) evaluates academic textbook texts in English through the lens of CDA. While identifying the value of imbibing language skills in students, it observes that

specific topics are omitted, not for their porosity in conveying language but for their sensitivity. Also, it identifies tendencies to follow after Western teaching. Hence, this descriptive approach is concise in describing the sensitive nature of academic texts to protect younger minds.

Also, Ahmed and Mahmood (2024:184-196) considered the ChatGPT discourse role in knowledge and power production. Using the Foucaultian approach to discourse analysis, with Fairclough's CDA, their attempt enumerated the biased nature of ChatGPT's response towards "capitalist discourse, established knowledge, and suppressed alternative options". In this qualitative approach, the reactions of ChatGPT defined communism as an economic and political ideology while defining capitalism as a monetary system. This contrasts the broader reality of both being intertwined with political and economic situations. Their analysis of the nature of ChatGPT's response as an artificial intelligence can take stances despite the perceived neutrality.

Similarly, Aminu et al. (2024) integrated the analysis of secessionist discourse by two theoretical frameworks with CDA - subsisting under political discourse - identifying ideological representations in online images and symbols within the Oduduwa secessionist movement. The study highlights polarization, betrayal and violence, secession advocacy, and Nigerian sovereignty delegitimization. The thrust of their research underlined the networking of text and symbols in both communicating meaning and capable of bearing ideologies and stances.

Jamel et al. (2024) attempted a critical discourse analysis of former US President Donald Trump's tweet concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. In their study, they highlighted the politicization of the pandemic through the stylistic and formal tendencies of the tweets' linguistic choices. As a result, they revealed "blame-shifting tactics" and metaphorical language. They combined their qualitative analysis with the quantitative approach, using tabular and frequency representations to validate their findings.

In sports discourse, Sabo (2022) reveals in game discourse that the language used by ABU players of the game of draughts mimics warfare and is bound up with "soft sadistic pleasure in witnessing domination" and a high incidence of coined words

common among them. More so, they often used language to make opponents "psychologically imbalanced, intimidated and demoralized". In like manner, the audience would be manipulated in their favour. The analysis stressed the heavy reliance on language use among players while complementing their movement on the board by focusing on word choices, sentential arrangement, grammatical peculiarity, style, and register.

Discourse analysis in sports communication involves examining linguistic features, understanding power dynamics, and considering ethical considerations. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a powerful tool for questioning existing power structures in sports management studies. It can be used to analyze how discursive practices support or constrain diversity and inclusion in sports organizations. For instance, CDA can reveal how language is used to justify or challenge dominant narratives in sports, such as the emphasis on strength and aggression as prized features in male sports.

A study on Iranian sports media used CDA to show how speakers use linguistic means to highlight desired viewpoints, establish power relations, and control readers' perceptions. Similarly, a corpus-based CDA of the 2024 Paris Olympic Games coverage by Chinese and American media outlets demonstrated how specific language patterns were used to depict political topics. These studies illustrate the potential of CDA in analyzing how media discourse shapes public opinion and reinforces ideological positions in sports.

A discourse analysis of selected football texts from Nigerian newspapers highlighted the importance of examining linguistic features in sports discourse. This study demonstrated how football texts can reflect broader societal issues and ideologies, emphasizing the need for critical analysis of sports media to understand its impact on public discourse. Research on the sport-politics nexus has used CDA to examine how sports stars and politicians seek legitimacy for their views. For example, a study on the "take the knee" debate applied CDA to analyze the social practices and institutions that legitimize certain phenomena in sports and politics. This research underscores the relevance of CDA in understanding the complex dynamics between sports, politics, and legitimacy.

METHODOLOGY

We were able to identify and record a representative samples of AFCON 2023 commentaries from various matches and media outlets. This could include live broadcasts, post-match analyses and online discussions. The selected commentaries were transcribed into written form to facilitate detailed analysis. The analysis is grounded in CDA theory developed by Fairclough or Foucault, which emphasizes the role of language in shaping social realities and power dynamics.

A qualitative approach was utilized to analyze the linguistic features and discursive strategies employed in the commentaries. We were able to code and categorize the data based on identified themes, such as representations of nationality, performance, or social power. These steps will help us to compare the discursive strategies used in AFCON commentaries with those in other international football competitions in order to highlight cultural and ideological differences as well as investigate how commentaries influence fan behavior, including cyber bullying and social media interactions.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Each transcribed commentary is presented in italics. The constituents that call for attention are underlined and evaluated in segments. Time stamps are included in line with the audio counterpart, which will help with cross-checking. In furtherance, their implication and discursive relevance are explained.

Data A.

Nigeria vs Equatorial Guinea
(TotalEnergiesAFCON2023 - MD1 Group Stage)

(0:04) *So, a chance now to have a look at the highlights.* (0:06) *Nigeria against Equatorial Guinea* (0:09) *at the Africa Cup of Nations Group A,* (0:12) *the second match after the opening game on Saturday night.* (0:17) *And there was a little bit of a surprise start.* (0:20) *Some good build-up play here from Equatorial Guinea.* (0:22) *Pass played inside by Machin [?] onto Ivan Salvador.* (0:26) *And a dream start here for Equatorial Guinea,* (0:30) *sticking the ball into the back of the net.*

(0:35) *Nigeria, however, did not take long to equalise.* (0:41) *120 seconds, in fact, to cross from Lookman,* (0:44) *finding Victor Osimhen he's the top goalscorer in the qualifiers.* (0:49) *Gets himself on the score sheet in the finals as well.*

(0:53) *However, there were to be quite a number of good opportunities squandered by the Super Eagles.* (0:59) *This was perhaps an excellent save from Moses Simon's effort.* (1:04) *It was a touch onto the woodwork made by goalkeeper Owono.*

(1:08) *He was named man of the match.* (1:11) *And then, towards the end in the second half,* (1:15) *Sanusi looking to place the ball rather than stick it in the back of the net.*

(1:20) *Lookman on the follow-up puts the ball over the top of the goal.*

(1:28) *Good opportunities, it must be said, for Equatorial Guinea.* (1:37) *But look at this chance here for Osimhen.* (1:39) *Gets away, Owono out bravely, making another excellent stop.*

(1:48) *Lookman, Aina involved here.*

(1:51) *Nigeria again pushing forward in search of the lead.* (1:54) *And again, denied by this 22-year-old La Liga-based goalkeeper.*

(2:00) *He's the second choice at Alaves.* (2:03) *This performance is certainly an opportunity for Oshimhen.* (2:08) *This was the best chance of the half for Osimhen.*

(2:11) *Exactly, the offside flag stayed down.* (2:14) *You saw he looked across at the linesman.* (2:17) *He somehow put that well wide of goal.*

(2:21) *So, final score, Nigeria 1, Equatorial Guinea 1*

- I. ***And there was a little bit of a surprise start***
In the 36th minute of the game, Equatorial Guinea took the lead. As a commentary overview of the game, we can derive the following:

- a. Socio-cultural Context: The commentator situates the game's introduction within the time context of the tournament. Besides, in African football, the Nigerian national team is perceived as a dominant team.
- b. Framing and Positional Stance: “*Surprise start*” portrays Equatorial Guinea as the underdogs and their lead against the perception of Nigeria's dominance. Also, it emphasises the commentator's commitment to neutrality and represents events as they are.
- c. Power Dynamics: Similarly, the phrase represents a tilt in power symmetry in favour of Equatorial Guinea against the shared belief of the Super Eagle's exceptionality.

II. ***And a dream start here for Equatorial Guinea, (0:30) sticking the ball into the back of the net.***

The commentary on the goal in the 36th minute of the game is confirmed. In this segment, we can derive the following:

- a. Ideological Positioning: The phrase “*dream start*” subtly reinforces the underdog perception of Equatorial Guinea. It also emphasises a positive turn of events for them, highlighting the tournament dynamics.
- b. Power Dynamics: The above highlight emphasises the change in power balances favouring Equatorial Guinea.
- c. Socio-cultural Context: (a) and (b) thrive on the sociocultural relativity of the event. Even more, “*sticking the ball into the net*” relies heavily on the acquaintance with sports discourse.

II. ***Nigeria, however, did not take long to equalise. (0:41) 120 seconds, in fact, to cross from Lookman, (0:44) finding Victor Osimhen. He's the top goalscorer in the qualifiers. (0:49) Gets himself on the score sheet in the finals as well***

Nigeria equalised in the 38th minute of the game, and we can infer the following:

- a. Bias: The phrase, “*Nigeria, however...*” suggests that as much as the commentator attempts to report events in the game as they are, there is a subtle emphasis on the broader perception of the Super Eagles and their equalising.
- b. Narrative Shift: “*However*” portrays a shift in the balance of the scoreline and power dynamics. It is emphasised by “*120 seconds, in fact...*” which adds temporal depth to the change in narrative.
- c. Construction of Identity: “*Victor Osimhen. He's the top goalscorer in the qualifiers. (0:49) Gets himself on the score sheet in the finals as well.*” paints Osimhen as a prolific and vital player, stressing individual success and thriving on sentiments.
- d. Power Dynamics: Similarly, “*top goalscorer*” elevates Osimhen's individual status in the game amongst other players, stressing an unequal power relationship between a “top” player and others.

IV. ***“However, there were to be quite a number of good opportunities squandered by the Super Eagles.”***

We can interpret this segment below:

- a. Framing: “*Squandered*” portrays Nigeria's dominance as more pronounced had they taken their chances. Hence, the more comprehensive socio-cultural reality associated with the team is emphasised.
- b. Positional Stance: The commentary offers a fair assessment of the Super Eagles' performance in front of the goal and tries to show neutrality.

V. ***“And denied, again by this 22-year-old La Liga-based goalkeeper.(2:00)He's the second choice at Alaves.(2:03)”***

In this segment, the following call for attention:

- a. Socio-cultural Context: In stressing the surprise performance of the keeper, “*22-year-old*”, “*LaLiga-based goalkeeper*”, and “*second*

choice at Alaves” all highlight the football context of age, experience, and competitive exposure that contribute to stellar performances.

- b. **Ideological Positioning:** The commentator subtly re-emphasises the view that young second-choice goalkeepers are less competitive. The adjective “this” emphasises the goalkeeper’s commendable display during the game and even becomes more impressive.
- c. **Power Dynamics:** With the phrase “denied again” the goalkeeper’s importance and rating in the game only becomes higher than others. This way, language has been used to increase his relevance.

Data B.

HIGHLIGHTS Nigeria Cameroon

@TotalEnergiesAFCON2023 - Round of 16

(0:00) Two great footballing nations confront each other today here in Abidjan. (0:05) The three-time AFCON champions,

Nigeria, [Emphatically] (0:08) take on the five-time [More Emphatically] winners, Cameroon, in the quarter-finals.

(0:12) And the delivery coming once again [Exclaiming] coming in by Lookman, (0:16) a great opportunity, on the edge of the penalty box, [Anticipatorily] (0:18) stopped there by Ondoa [Exclaiming], oh, it's gone in! [Shouting] (0:21) It's an offside call that we're looking at. (0:23) Yeah, no goal, yeah.

(0:26) Troost-Ekong at the back, and a little flick-on opportunity, (0:30) Magri, Magri, Magri, [Expectantly] the control running out of space there, (0:33) or visibility, oh straight to the hands of the goalkeeper; (0:37) Nwabali.

(0:38) Cameroon, oh [Surprisingly], it's Osimhen, Osimhen, Osimhen, [Expectantly] (0:42) can he find his

goal? Oh, it's a beautiful opportunity there! (0:46) Lookman has got it, they get the goal! [Exclaiming] (0:49) Unbelievable, the scenes here, the Nigerians jumping with joy, (0:53) and a doorbell at one moment it wasn't going to go in, (0:56) but cranky, they get the goal. [Exclaiming]

(0:59) We'll be back in a moment, but entertainment here is 1-0 (1:01) for the Super Eagles against Cameroon. (1:03) Lookman with a chance, Lookma-a-a-an! [Exclaiming] with a great shot (1:07) that goes just high over the bar.

(1:10) Watch out for Christopher Wooh as well, (1:12) the ball comes up, it's gone very hi-i-igh! [Exclaiming] (1:15) And it goes over the top, there's contact on the goalkeeper, (1:18) Nwabali, That's nicely done, nice little touch, (1:22) very nicely done, opportunities galore. (1:24) Oh, Moses Simon gets the ball, can they get a shot in? [Exclaiming] (1:27) Oh, Nigeria go for the shot and it's been blocked (1:29) over on that far side.

(1:33) Lookman, Lookman, Alex Iwobi gets the ball (1:35) out to the left-hand side, the delivery comes in, (1:37) oh, it's a great goal! [Exclaiming] (1:39) They've got a goal, Nigeria! (1:41) Goal number two, that is fabulous, fabulous play! (1:45) Oh, the follow-up, (1:47) Aina gets the ball across, is there anybody there? (1:50) Oh, it's shot in the back of the neck! (1:51) How he cleared. The Super Eagles have soared, (1:54) they are now flying, flying into the quarter-finals.

- I. **Two great footballing nations confront each other today here in Abidjan.** (0:05) **The three-time AFCON champions, Nigeria,** [Emphatically] (0:08) **take on the five-time**

[More Emphatically] *winner, Cameroon, in the quarter-finals.*

We can derive the following:

- a. Foregrounding: "Two *great footballing nations*" introduces the encounter as engaging. Similarly, the verb "*confront*" aligns with the more comprehensive sociocultural reality of the game's seriousness.
- b. Framing: The records of both footballing nations are placed side by side, although with varying levels of emphatic stress. It makes it possible to deduce which team is more robust.
- c. Power Imbalance: Due to (b) and the more emphatic stress on "*five-time winners*", the asymmetrical power relationship based on the historic success in the competition of both teams becomes obvious.
- d. Bias in Reporting: Although the commentator tries to maintain a neutral stance in reporting, it is palpable that the stance be positioned behind the more dominant team.
- e. Ideological shift: The noun "*winner*" and "*champion*" are used for both teams. Without repetition of either, it suggests that the diction positioning of the commentator supports a rich blend and variety of vocabulary.

II. *Cameroon, oh* [Surprisingly], *it's Osimhen, Osimhen, Osimhen*, [Expectantly](0:42) *can he find his goal? Oh, it's a beautiful opportunity there!* (0:46) *Lookman has got it, they get the goal!* (0:49) *Unbelievable, the scenes here, the Nigerians jumping with joy*, [Exclaiming](0:53) *and a doorbell at one moment it wasn't going to go in, (0:56) but cranky, they get the goal.*

We shall consider the following in this segment:

- a. Element of Surprise: The exclamation "*oh*" reflects the commentator's reaction to Cameroon being dispossessed easily. It is further emphasised through the adjective "*Unbelievable*".

- b. Discursive Strategy: Through repetition. "*Osimhen, Osimhen, Osimhen*" the commentator emphasises Osimhen's advantage over the defender. Similarly, the rhetorical question, "*Can he find his goal?*" scrutinizes if Nigeria's advantage will lead to a goal. The somewhat informal nature of "*doorbell at one moment*" and "*cranky*" shows the ability to bend commentary language conventions for effective delivery and narrative techniques.
- c. Power Relations: "*Nigerians jumping with joy*" emphasises Nigeria's dominance over the game. It also implies a shared identity between national supporters and their teams, suggesting that the Ivorians will be less joyful. Focusing on Osimhen means that certain players are perceived to play a more critical role in the game than others, increasing their dominance.

III. *They've got a goal, Nigeria!*(1:41) *Goal number two, that is fabulous, fabulous play!*(1:45)

In the 89th minute of the game, Nigeria nailed their dominance with a crucial goal. The following can be derived:

- a. Power Dominance: This segment reinforces Nigeria's dominance in the game. The exclamation and auditory effect of the commentator also assert their progression to the next stage of the competition as a result of this crucial goal.
- b. Discursive Strategy: Repetition and strong emphasis are ways through which (a) is emphasised.

IV. *The Super Eagles have soared, (1:54)they are now flying, flying into the quarter-finals.*

At the end of the match, the commentator delivers his final verdict. The following can be derived:

- a. Socio-cultural Context: In this segment, the commentator thrives on the sentiments around Nigeria's typical dominance in international football competitions. This is further

emphasised by the symbolic imagery of “soared” and “...flying, flying...”

- b. **Power Dominance:** “Flying into the quarter-finals” highlights Nigeria’s advantage over Cameroon as they progress into the tournament’s next stage.

Data C.

HIGHLIGHTS Nigeria vs Angola
(TotalEnergiesAFCON2023 - Quarter Finals)

(0:01)Nigeria, Angola, oh, just to get us off the ground, a pulsating confrontation between two nations vying (0:10) for a place in the semi-finals.

[Excited speech] Oh it's off the post! Look at this! [Exclaiming] It's the header there coming (0:17) from Gilberto, that should have been in the back of the net! Mabalulu, Oh it's a nice sneaky little (0:23) piece of play from that man Lookman, he's scored two goals, Simon has another chance to get the ball across Lookman!

(0:30) There's a cross, there's players at the far post as well, look at the header from Osimhen! [Exclaiming](0:35)He is super dangerous, that man

(0:41)That's a good opportunity, a little bit of space, Moses trying to down the left hand side, (0:46) can he get a shot in? Squares it, it's in the back of the net! [Exclaiming] Nigeria! It's Lookman, (0:51)Lookman's done it, he's got that goal! Beautiful work from the wingers, Nigeria take the lead (0:59) It's Nigeria 1, Angola nil.

(1:05) Ball comes over the top anybody at the end of it? (1:08) Troost-Ekong, it goes up, there's another chance, another header, [?]

(1:12) it's a little bit messy in the midfield, Show getting the ball through, oh Angola!, [Exclaiming] (1:16) Angola's come off the post and it's been cleared by Troost-Ekong, oh my word, how close was that? (1:22) super dangerous!

(1:24) There's the delivery into the penalty box, Osimhen, oh he's gone in!

(1:28) And look at this, is there an offside call, 1-0, no goal

(1:35) *And there he is, Lookman, (1:37) sets it up, oh, what was he thinking? Osimhen, Osimhen, oh he has his shot blocked.*

(1:43)*Lovumbu is very dangerous, puts it on his left foot, Lovumbu!* [Exclaiming] *Punches it away,*

(1:51)Nigeria on a mission to win their 4th Africa Cup of Nations, (1:57) but for Angola, it's the end of the road.

- I. **Nigeria, Angola, oh, just to get us off the ground, a pulsating confrontation between two nations vying (0:10) for a place in the semi-finals.**

In the introduction to the match, the following can be deduced:

- a. **Neutrality:** In the previous introduction to the commentaries earlier considered, we notice the historical success of both nations used to show the dominance of one over the other. However, in this commentary, “two nations vying for a place...” suggests a neutral positioning of the commentator.

- b. **Socio-cultural Context:** The stakes and importance of this game are high and heavily relied upon through the portrayal of “pulsating confrontation”. It infuses the seriousness of this stage of the tournament.

- II. **Oh it's a nice sneaky little (0:23) piece of play from that man Lookman, he's scored two goals,**

In the 7th minute of the game, Lookman tries to create a goal. The following are highlighted in this segment:

- a. **Power Relations:** So far in our analysis, Lookman has gained the spotlight for his noteworthy contribution to the game. As such, the commentator’s focus on “that man’s...two goals” in the tournament portrays him as more prominent than others.

- b. **Framing:** The informal language, “...a nice sneaky piece of play”, is an attempt to highlight (a).

- c. Positional Stance: “This segment emphasises an admiration for Lookman, as much as it comments on his records. As such, it portrays a subtle appreciation for the player.

III. ***Osimhen!*** [Exclaiming] (0:35) ***He is super dangerous, that man***

In the 23rd minute of the game, Nigeria threaten Angola’s goal. The following can be highlighted:

- a. Power Dominance: Framed as “*super dangerous*”, Osimhen is bestowed more power, relevance and prominence than others in the game. It also shows critical attention to prominent players.

IV. ***That's a good opportunity, a little bit of space, Moses trying to down the left hand side, (0:46) can he get a shot in? Squares it, it's in the back of the net!*** [Exclaiming] ***Nigeria! It's Lookman, (0:51)Lookman's done it, he's got that goal! Beautiful work from the wingers, Nigeria take the lead (0:59) It's Nigeria 1, Angola nil.***

In the 40th minute of the game, Nigeria make a successful goal attempt. We can infer the following:

- a. Power Relations: This segment highlight the dominant position of Nigeria, as well as the “*beautiful work from the wingers*” that ensures “*Nigeria take the lead*”. Recognising Moses and Lookman emphasises their dominance in the game.
- b. Discursive Strategy: The use of rhetorical questioning, “*can he get a shot in?*” ensures the dramatic nature of the encounter, as well as a neutral representation of the event.

V. ***Nigeria on a mission to win their 4th Africa Cup of Nations, (1:57) but for Angola, it's the end of the road.***

At the end of the match, the commentator gives a closing remark which is laced with the following:

- a. Framing and Power Relations: The contradictory clauses present an unequal power relation between both teams as it reinforces Nigeria’s

chances of being successful in the tournament

- b. Socio-cultural Context: This commentary segment thrives on Nigeria’s record of success in the competition. This presupposes that the audience understands the broader sociocultural.

Data D.

HIGHLIGHTS Nigeria vs South Africa (TotalEnergiesAFCON2023 - Semi Final)

(0:00) *Hello and welcome to the Stade de la Paix in Bouaké for this highly anticipated semi-final(0:04)clashbetween Nigeria and South Africa.*

Super Eagles and Bafana-Bafana battle for a coveted (0:10) place in the AFCON Final.

It's Sithol-e-e! [Exclaiming], *straight at Nwabali.*

In towards Zwane, they have such a (0:18) great understanding. Ball spills fre-e-e! [Exclaiming], *shot taken, but it's scuffed by Percy Tau. Moses Simon again (0:24) wreaking havoc. Iwobi. Great opportunity here, shot in towards Williams.*

Mvala(0:32) Searching for options, again an inviting ball. Makgop-a-a-a-a-a-a! [Screaming] *Denied by Nwabali! An opening 45 minutes (0:39) that has yet to yield a goal.*

It's nil-nil, but it is an electrifying encounter. Maintains (0:45) possession after a slightly awkward initial touch. Osimhen goes down, and penalty! [Exclaiming]

Nigeria will have the (0:50) opportunity from the penalty mark! Clear penalty. Referee needs no second look.

William Troost-Ekong. (1:02)Straight down the middle and Nigeria lead! Stellar sublime, soaring Super Eagles!(1:09)Is this the seminal moment in the game?

Modiba down that far flank, looking to combine. (1:15) Oh, lovely shot and it's just fizzed by, but it's Mahop[?].

South Africa have got numbers forward. (1:24) Tau was looking for a call in his favour. Nigeria escape with possession and they're on the charge. (1:28)Lookman again, Osimhen to his left, on his right, he's got a charging player as well. This is lovely(1:33)from Nigeria. Can they find a second? It's a tap-in for Osimhen! [Exclaiming] *There's a possible penalty there (1:38) for South Africa in the*

box. Yeah, this is going all the way back. Penalty to South Africa.

(1:48)Nwabali, potentially the Nigerian hero. In the 90th minute, Mukwena strikes firm!, He strikes true!

(1:54) and he strikes through the heart of Nigeria!, back on level terms in Bouaké.Nwabali will know the (2:00) danger.

Moukena-a-a-a-a-a [Screaming], the follow-up could be good![Shouting] and it's poked over by Mudau! [Shouting]. South Africa with a glorious chance to win it.(2:08)But through 90 minutes in this incredible scintillating semi-finalist.

(2:13) Players running on including Chukwueze and Williams with a save! [Exclaiming]

(2:19)Osimhen creates space! [Expectantly], powerful shot by Williams! [Exclaiming].

It's 1-1 through 120 minutes.

Penalties will determine (2:25) who goes through to the final.

Williams in the penalty shootout. Williams cannot make the save (2:32) as Moffi goes centrally.

(2:36)Saved by Nwabali-i-i-i-i-i [Screaming]

From the penalty mark against Nwabaliiii, ooohhNwabali saved again.(2:44)A scorer for Nigeria and Leicester City's Foxes. From a couple of steps away against Williiiaaams, (2:52)sends Nigeria into the final at the expense of South Africa!

I. ***Hello and welcome to the Stade de la Paix in Bouaké for this highly anticipated semi-final (0:04) clash between Nigeria and South Africa. Super Eagles and Bafana-Bafana battle for a coveted (0:10) place in the AFCON Final.***

In this section, the following are derived:

- a. **Socio-cultural Context**: "*Hello and welcome*" relates to the introductory moments before the action begins. Including the moniker of both teams also reemphasises the sociocultural context.
- b. **Framing**: Being a semi-final match, this segment contextually frames the game's gravity.
- c. **Power Relations and Ideology**: The use of dramatic elements, engagement techniques, and framing strategies emphasise the ideological positioning of the commentary, which

portrays a quest for power dominance of one team over the other.

II. ***It's nil-nil, but it is an electrifying encounter.***

The following can be derived in this segment:

- a. **Positional Stance and Reporting**: The commentator maintains a neutral stance when representing the first half events.

III. ***Nigeria will have the (0:50) opportunity from the penalty mark! Clear penalty. Referee needs no second look. William Troost-Ekong.(1:02) Straight down the middle and Nigeria lead! Stellar sublime, soaring Super Eagles! (1:09) Is this the seminal moment in the game?***

- a. **Power Relations**: The first exclamatory sentence tilts the possibility of power advantage in favour of Nigeria. It shows that within the game, the narrative of power symmetry is open and Nigeria can have it. "*Referee needs no second look*" also indicates his power over decision-making in the game. More certainly, "*and Nigeria lead!Stellar sublime, soaring Super Eagles*" emphasises this competitive edge. As a decisive event in the game, the rhetorical question, "*Is this the seminal moment of the game?*" also adds to power dynamics.
- b. **Construction of Identity**: An exclamatory description of Troost-Ekong's goal as "*Stellar sublime!*" validates his prowess and portrays him as a dominant force in critical moments. Consequently, "*soaring Super Eagles*" constructs the narrative of winning the game in favour of Nigeria.
- c. **Discursive Strategies**: Using alliteration with the "s" in "*Stellar sublime soaring Super Eagles*" is a grammatic strategy to entertain and emphasise the moment of dominance.
- d. **Bias and Positional Stance**: The use of rhetorical questions is also a dramatic and engagement strategy

that enables the attempt to maintain neutrality or otherwise.

IV. *This is lovely* (1:33) *from Nigeria. Can they find a second? It's a tap-in for Osimhen!* [Exclaiming] *There's a possible penalty there* (1:38) *for South Africa in the box. Yeah, this is going all the way back. Penalty to South Africa*

- a. Power Relations: Now having the lead and searching for a second, the Nigeria team is portrayed as the more dominant team at this point in the game. “*This is lovely from Nigeria.*”—similarly, the rhetorical question probs into the power dynamics in the game. Interestingly, the penalty for South Africa distorts the advantage of Nigeria, showing the flexibility of dominance expressed in game discourse. Ultimately, the VAR’s decision and the Referee’s call to action also emphasise power.
- b. Framing: “*This is lovely from Nigeria*”
- c. Discursive Strategies: The positive framing, “*This is lovely from Nigeria*”, use of the rhetorical question, “*Can they find a second?*”, and a switch in tonal excitement to South Africa’s possible penalty, all highlight several techniques in commentary delivery.

V. *Nwabali, potentially the Nigerian hero. In the 90th minute, Mukwena strikes firm!, He strikes true!* (1:54) *and he strikes through the heart of Nigeria!, back on level terms in Bouaké.*

We can derive the following in the commentary of the 90th minute of the game:

- a. Construction of Identity: By portraying the goalkeeper as “*potentially the Nigerian hero*”, the commentator emphasises the quality of Nwabali throughout the tournament. Subtly, the penalty taker, Mukwena, is also portrayed as a near-accurate shot-taker. Furthermore, this segment portrays a penalty kick as an almost certain chance of scoring a goal. Upon scoring the goal in “*the 90th minute*”, the “*hero*” identity is

rather transferred to Mukwena as, “*He strikes firm! He strikes true! He strikes through the heart of Nigeria!*”. This further engraves the importance of Mukwena.

- b. Power Dynamics: There is a shift in power play and dynamics as shown in “*back on level terms*”.

VI. *Saved by Nwabali-i-i-i-i* [Screaming]

We can derive the following in this segment:

- a. Construction of Identity: There has been a focus on Nwabali, and this time, the commentator's exclamation further demonstrates the identity of an impressive and crucial figure.
- b. Power Balances: This emphasises Nigerias’s advantage in the penalty shootout, as evident in the commentator’s exclamation.

VII. *From the penalty mark against Nwabali, ooohhNwabali saved again.*

We can derive the following in this segment:

- a. Power Dominance: “*Up against Nwabali*” portrays the goalkeeper as a more dominant figure in the game. The portrayal of Nwabali is further confirmed by the commentator’s prolonged excitement.

VIII. *A scorer for Nigeria and Leicester City's Foxes. From a couple of steps away against Williaaams, (2:52) sends Nigeria into the final at the expense of South Africa!*

At this crucial point of the penalty shootout, the player named earlier steps up to take the last spot-kick. The following can be derived:

- a. Construction of Identity: Portraying Iheanacho as “*a scorer for Nigeria and Leicester City's Foxes*” emphasises the quality needed for such a moment of the game. It foregrounds the player as capable of deciding such essential aspects of the game. Also, “*at the expense of South Africa!*” transfers a dramatic identity of triumph to Nigeria.
- b. Power Dominance: Again, Iheanacho is shown as a critical player who is key to Nigeria’s success and can decide the narrative of the game. The

last sentence upholds the victory status and the advantage Nigeria has gained.

Data E.

HIGHLIGHTS Nigeria vs Côte d'Ivoire (TotalEnergiesAFCON2023 - Final)

(0:00)The countdown begins for the big final.

Nigeria are three-time winners. (0:05)The Ivorians, twice winners, twice runners-up.

(0:11)There's a chance for the Ivorians! [Exclaiming]

(0:15) Chasing back too, yes, Seko Fofana, big fan favourite(0:21)Adingra, into the penalty area.

Adingra still![Expectantly]Maybe a little ambitious from that angle.

(0:27)Much higher ball to the back post, it's a strong header-r-r![Exclaiming](0:31)That's hit the side netting.

(0:35) Haler, Kessier, Adingra calling for it. (0:38) This is an excellent chance! [Exclaiming] Saved by Nwabali! [Exclaiming](0:42) That's a splendid stop!

(0:45) Kills it towards the near post, flick on from Chukwueze. (0:48)Troost Eko-o-ong!

[Expectantly]Go-o-oal! Goal Nigeria!(0:53)Troost Ekong's third in the tournament.(0:55)Strong header from a corner, and the Super Eagles are in the lead!

(1:02)Halftime score here at Alassane Ouattara Stadium. (1:05) It's Nigeria who lead the hosts by a goal to nil.

(1:10)Adingra, into the penalty area, gets the middle of Aina! [Expectantly](1:13) That's a wonderful chance, but goal! (1:15) Oh, blocked by Basse.

(1:19)Kossounou, they're all inside the Nigerian half. (1:21) Strike from range! Turned around the corner.

(1:25)Adingra will take the corner, the crowd are on their feet.(1:28)Here it comes, Nwabali, back post, chance, go-o-o-oal! [Excitedly] (1:33) Frank Kessier! (1:36) Côte d'Ivoire are back in the game!

(1:41) Pushing players forward here. (1:44) Troost Ekong again! [Exclaiming] (1:46) This time over the top.

(1:47) Here they come again, the Ivorians to the byline. (1:50) Here's Kessier, Adingra, Haler! [Expectantly] (1:55) If that was in, that would have been some goal.

(1:58) Adingra to attack Aina again. (2:00) Adingra, can he cross? It's a great ball, it's a go-o-oal!

[Exclaiming] (2:05) Gets the cross in, Haler got a little foot ahead of Troost Ekong. (2:09) That is a fabulous goal.

(2:10) There it is, it's all over! (2:14) Côte d'Ivoire are the African champions. (2:16) What a fairytale story here. (2:19) There they are, the champions of Africa!

(2:23) Côte d'Ivoire on home soil.

I. "The countdown begins for the big final"

In this segment, we can derive the following:

- a. Since this is the tournament's climax, the introductory phrase presupposes seriousness, indicating anticipation and excitement before kick-off. Essentially, the commentator identifies with any expectant audience to see the match's outcome. Invariably, while commentators are meant to represent events within the game, different undertones of grammatical meaning and auditory effect are infused into their spontaneous delivery. This is a strategy known as framing.

II. "Nigeria are three-time winners. The Ivorians, twice winners, twice runners-up"

In this segment, we can elicit the following:

- a. Contextualisation: The phrase helps develop the earlier introduced excitement. The commentator highlights both teams' credentials and past achievements, further contextualising the match within African football. It aligns with discourse being historical.
- b. Power Imbalances: Mentioning the number of times both teams have won the competition reinforces the asymmetrical status and positional power of both teams in African football.
- c. Power Relations: Aside from adding depth and importance to the encounter, it also stresses the discursivity of power relations (van Dijk 2003:353; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:271-80), as language is used as a conduit to express the reality of both teams being unequal in the historical advantage of the competition - automatically positioning Nigeria as favourites.
- d. Framing: The commentator already foregrounds the encounter as Cote

d'Ivoire is portrayed as an underdog based on their records, which, although commendable, are less dominant than Nigeria's. Hence, it becomes palpable that even though both realities exist, they are placed side by side for listeners to infer the game's setting.

III. *“There's a chance for the Ivorians!”*

In the game's sixth minute, the Cote d'Ivoire team come closest to the Nigerian goal for the first time. The following can be derived:

- a. Engagement through Excitement: Through the commentator's exclamation, he piques listeners' excitement.
- b. Ideology: The Cote d'Ivoire national team was introduced earlier as an underdog. While representing a moment in the game, the commentator infers the surprise of an early show of dominance using “chance”.
- c. Context: The preceding lines help us to correctly interpret this phrase within the proper linguistic and historical context (van Dijk 2003:353; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997:271–80)

IV. *“Seko Fofana, big fan favourite, Adingra, into the penalty area. Adingra still! [Expectantly] Maybe a little ambitious from that angle.”*

In the 7th minute of the game, the Ivorians attack the Nigerian box again. The following can be derived from the above highlight:

- a. Construction of Identity: The phrase *big fan favourite* suggests an audience-player sentiment the commentator thrives on in exciting listeners. It also increases his relevance in the game, infusing emotional appeal and emphasising the social effect of discourse. Also, calling the players names *Seko Fofana* and *Adingra* emphasises people and elevates attention.
- b. Power Dynamics: Alongside the introduced sentiment, the commentary emphasises players contributing more to the game and the team with the upper hand.
- c. Socio-cultural Construct and Context: The introduced sentiment also situates the game within the African continent. Even so, beyond the game's action, society still

has a way of being relevant in every aspect of life, as evident in the shared relationship between fans and players. Discourse truly is a social action. Also, this segment is influential because of the context of the time, which has socio-cultural implications in discourse. In (III), there is a near attempt at goal. In this segment of the seventh minute, the Ivorians come close. This historical knowledge makes the commentary more context-relevant and socially-culturally impactful.

- d. Discursive Strategies: Short grammatical units, pauses, exclamation, and name-calling aid in the linguistic sequential representation of the game and the introduced suspense. This is evident in *“Adingra, into the penalty area Adingra still!”*. It further emphasises the commentator's commitment to engaging the audience.
- e. Ideology, Judgement, and Critical Analysis: By evaluating the player's unsuccessful attempt at the goal, the commentator reverts to a fair assessment of the game, regardless of the earlier introduced sentiment. This aids a detailed description of the game; however, at this point, it does imply that the commentator often forms a subtle bias based on the favourable aspect of the action.
- f. Stance Taking: The phrase *“Maybe a little ambitious from that angle”* indirectly criticises the player's inaccurate attempt at goal and choice of action instead of squaring to a teammate. Realistically, it shows that the commentator is not neutral even as he tries to moderate his judgment.

V. *“Much higher ball to the back post, it's a strong header-r-r! [Exclaiming] (0:31) That's hit the side netting.”*

This is the 20th minute of the game, and the Ivorians have a close chance to take the lead. The following can be derived from this segment:

- a. Bias and Positionality: Again, the commentator tries to remain as neutrally engaging as possible. While audibly trying to construct spatial awareness, the

exclamatory remark showing expectation and the reaction to a failed attempt at a goal emphasises the nature of commentators trying to be neutral, often doing so by shifting support based on the game's action. Also, the adjective “*strong*” depicts an attempt to succinctly capture the player's skill.

b. Socio-cultural Context: The grammatical units “*higher ball*”, “*back post*”, and “*strong header*” are all registers used in the discourse of sports. Essentially, it situates language use to its context and presupposes the ideology of tacit knowledge possessed by both the speaker and respective listeners.

c. Discursive strategies: The use of visual linguistic units like “*higher*”, engagement strategies in auditory units like exclaiming and prolonged pronunciation, immediate follow-up in short descriptive phrases, expectation management and outcome reporting in “*That's hit the side netting*”; are all means to structure neutrality successfully, or otherwise. At the same time, it allows for an engaging discourse and representation of the action-packed event.

VI. “*Troost Eko-o-ong!* [Expectantly] *Go-o-oal! Goal Nigeria!* (0:53) *Troost Ekong's third in the tournament.* (0:55) *Strong header from a corner, and the Super Eagles are in the lead!*”

In the 37th minute of the game, the Super Eagles break the deadlock. In this segment, the following can be derived:

- a. Bias and Positionality: In (I), Nigeria were introduced as a more dominant team and continental favourite. Hence, the excitement attributed to the show lead becomes palpable. As such, it permits the commentator to not only represent the action of the game but embody this sentiment expressed through, “...and the Super Eagles are in the lead!”.
- b. Ideology: Also, as much as Troost-Ekong scores the opening goal, there is palpable excitement because he is a defender who has netted his “...*third in the tournament*,” which

is impressive since defenders are not often goal scorers. Hence, this highlights the common ideology of selective expectation.

c. Construction of Identity: By highlighting Troost-Ekong's goal as the “*third of the tournament*”, the commentary adds another layer of importance and excellence to the player. This can also be seen in the preceding data.

d. Socio-cultural Context: “*Go-o-o-oal! Goal Nigeria*” has situated the event of the game within the sociocultural context of the game in the tournament and the broader reality of the continent. This is further emphasised by “*Strong header from a corner, and the Super Eagles are in the lead!*”

VII. “*Halftime score here at Alassane Ouattara Stadium.* (1:05) *It's Nigeria who lead the hosts by a goal to nil.*”

At the end of the first half here, we can derive the following:

- a. Power and Hierarchies: “*It's Nigeria who lead the hosts by a goal to nil*” presupposes an implicit imbalance in competitive scoreline hierarchy. Implicatively, this influences the perception of dominance in the game.
- b. Positional Framing: Nigeria leading “the hosts” is a subtle surprise attempt at the Ivorians trailing at this game stage since there is the sentiment of home advantage. Therefore, it stresses the contrast between sporting events and the narratives in the tournament's sociocultural affiliations.
- c. Discursive Strategy: The commentator employs a concise approach in summarising the scoreline and action of the first half. Therefore, it emphasises the custom of commentators in game discourse.

VIII. “*Kossounou, they're all inside the Nigerian half.* (1:21) *Strike from range! Turned around the corner.*”

In the 61st minute of the second half, the Ivorian national team are pressing hard for a goal. The following can be derived in this segment:

- a. Dominance: This segment depicts the shift in dominance despite the previous segment and the present scoreline.
- b. Discursive Strategy: Only nine players out of a possible ten are in the half of the Nigerian team. The exaggerated use of the complete scalar adjective *all* in “...they’re all inside the Nigerian half” is an attempt to highlight the upper hand the hosts have gained. It also highlights the commentator’s commitment to engaging the audience. Similarly, the exclamatory tone anticipating a goal as a reward for their pressing aids the positional shift from neutral to support for the hosts.
- c. Bias and Positional Stance: Clearly, the commentator's language suggests a shift from neutrality to favouritism based on dominant performance in the game's action.

IX. ***Adingra will take the corner, the crowd are on their feet. (1:28) Here it comes, Nwabali, back post, chance, go-o-o-oal!*** [Excitedly] (1:33) ***Frank Kessier!*** (1:36) ***Côte d'Ivoire are back in the game!***

In the 61st minute of the game, the Ivorians equalise through a corner. The following can be derived:

- a. Discursive Strategies: There is a shift from every moment of the action in simple sentences to phrases, to words, and until the goal is scored. This enables attention-grabbing and anticipation, as expressed in the “*crowd are on their feet.*” Furthermore, it allows the reinforcement of a shift in power balances.
- b. Positional Framing: With the Ivorians equalising, the exclamation suggests a change in the game's dynamics. It also emphasises the earlier narrative of sentiments about being hosts. By calling him “*Franck Kessie,*” the commentator portrays him as a hero who significantly contributes to the game.
- c. Socio-cultural context: The goal further enhances the ideology of national pride and affiliation of national teams in the tournament. This is emphasised through

the sentence, “*Cote d’Ivoire are back in the game!*”

X. ***Adingra to attack Aina again (2:00)Adingra, can he cross? It's a great ball, it's a go-o-oal!*** [Exclaiming] (2:05) ***Gets the cross in, Haler got a little foot ahead of Troost Ekong. (2:09) That is a fabulous goal.***

In the 80th minute of the match, the Ivorians take the lead. We can infer the following:

- a. Power Dynamics: At an individual level, the construct “*Adingra to attack Aina again*” portrays the particular advantage in the strength of Adingra in contrast to that of Aina. The battle between Haler and Troost-Ekong also portrays this. In the larger context of the game, the Ivorians have similarly gained an advantage over a continental favourite force - Nigeria.
- b. Positional Framing: The presentation of the Ivorian’s persistence portrays them as more insistent on winning and gaining the upper hand. Hence, the exclamation of “*go-o-oal!*”
- c. Sociocultural Context: Within the confines of football, “*fabulous goal*” represents a valuable effort at a goal and even emphasises its importance to the broader reality of the host on course for the title.

XI. ***There it is, it's all over! (2:14)Côte d'Ivoire are the African champions. (2:16) What a fairytale story here. (2:19)There they are, the champions of Africa!*** (2:23) ***Côte d'Ivoire on home soil.***

This is the end of the match and the tournament. The Ivorians have become winners.

- a. Power Representation: “*Cote d’Ivoire are the African champions...the champions of Africa*” emphasises an unequal power relationship between them and other African teams at the end of the tournament.
- b. Ideology and Framing: “*What a fairytale story here... Cote d’Ivoire on home soil*” reinforces the earlier introduced sentiments associated with hosting the tournament. It suggests that the broader

socio-cultural context cannot be separated from the event.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

This analysis provides a rich exploration of football commentary during the 2023 Total Energies Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON), focusing on matches involving Nigeria. The findings reveal how linguistic strategies, socio-cultural contexts, and power dynamics shape the narrative of football matches. Below is a comprehensive discussion of the findings in prose form:

The commentary on the three AFCON matches involving Nigeria—against Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon, and Angola—demonstrates a blend of factual reporting, emotive language, and cultural framing. These elements combine to create an engaging narrative that captures the excitement and stakes of international football.

From the outset, commentators frame these matches as high-stakes confrontations between nations, emphasizing their historical significance. For instance, in the Nigeria vs. Cameroon match, the introduction highlights both teams' AFCON records: "three-time champions Nigeria" versus "five-time winners Cameroon." This framing not only sets the stage for a competitive encounter but also subtly positions Cameroon as historically dominant due to their greater number of titles. Such framing reflects an asymmetrical power dynamic rooted in past achievements.

Similarly, in the Nigeria vs. Equatorial Guinea match, Equatorial Guinea's early goal is described as a "dream start," reinforcing their status as underdogs against a traditionally dominant Nigerian team. The phrase "surprise start" further underscores the unexpected nature of their performance, challenging pre-existing perceptions of power symmetry.

In contrast, Nigeria's equalizer shortly after is framed as a restoration of balance, with phrases like "Nigeria, however, did not take long to equalize." This suggests an expectation for Nigeria to assert their dominance and aligns with broader socio-cultural perceptions of the Super Eagles as a powerhouse in African football.

The commentary employs various linguistic devices to heighten drama and maintain audience engagement. Emotive language is a recurring feature, with exclamations like "Unbelievable!" and

"Oh my word!" punctuating moments of excitement. Repetition is another key strategy; for example, phrases like "Osimhen! Osimhen! Osimhen!" emphasize the player's prominence and build anticipation during critical moments. Metaphorical language also plays a significant role in creating vivid imagery. In the Nigeria vs. Cameroon match, the commentator describes Nigeria's progression to the quarter-finals as "The Super Eagles have soared... flying into the quarter-finals." This metaphor not only celebrates Nigeria's victory but also evokes national pride by linking the team's nickname to their success.

Additionally, informal and conversational language is used to create a sense of relatability. Phrases like "a nice sneaky piece of play" or "cranky, they get the goal" break away from formal sports commentary conventions and add a touch of personality to the broadcast. The commentary reflects and reinforces socio-cultural narratives surrounding African football. For instance, references to players' club affiliations ("22-year-old La Liga-based goalkeeper," "second choice at Alaves") highlight the global nature of African talent while also contextualizing individual performances within broader football hierarchies.

National identity is another prominent theme. The commentator frequently connects team performances to national pride, as seen in phrases like "Nigerians jumping with joy" after a goal against Cameroon. This creates a shared emotional experience for viewers and ties individual moments on the pitch to collective cultural significance. The use of specialized football discourse also relies on shared knowledge among viewers. Terms like "penalty box," "offside flag," and "delivery" assume familiarity with the game's technical aspects, fostering a sense of community among fans. While commentators strive for neutrality, subtle biases are evident in their language choices. For example, in the Nigeria vs. Equatorial Guinea match, phrases like "Nigeria, however..." suggest an implicit expectation for Nigeria to dominate. Similarly, disproportionate attention is given to star players like Victor Osimhen and Ademola Lookman, elevating their status above other players on the field.

In some cases, bias is more overt. In the introduction to the Nigeria vs. Angola match, both teams are described neutrally as "two nations vying for a place

in the semi-finals." However, as the game progresses, Nigeria's dominance is celebrated more emphatically through phrases like "super dangerous" (referring to Osimhen) and "beautiful work from the wingers." Commentators demonstrate a strong awareness of time and space within matches, using these elements to build tension and provide clarity. Temporal markers like "120 seconds" (referring to Nigeria's quick equalizer against Equatorial Guinea) add urgency and emphasize pivotal moments. Spatial descriptions such as "on the edge of the penalty box" or "out to the left-hand side" help create a mental map of the action for viewers.

This temporal-spatial awareness also enhances narrative coherence. For instance, in describing Angola's near-goal against Nigeria ("Angola's come off the post... how close was that?"), spatial details are combined with exclamatory language to convey both danger and relief. Certain players are consistently highlighted as central figures in their teams' performances. Victor Osimhen is frequently referred to as "super dangerous," while Ademola Lookman is praised for his creativity and goal-scoring ability ("Lookman's done it! He's got that goal!"). These individual narratives not only celebrate talent but also create focal points for audience engagement.

This focus on star players contributes to constructing power dynamics within teams. By emphasizing Osimhen's status as a top scorer or Lookman's decisive contributions, commentators implicitly position these players as more influential than their teammates.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analyzed football commentaries serve as both informative accounts of the matches and carefully constructed narratives that reflect and reinforce cultural values, power dynamics, and emotional engagement. Through a combination of linguistic strategies, socio-cultural references, and subtle biases, the commentators shape the audience's perception of the games and contribute to the broader discourse surrounding African football. The analysis underscores the complex interplay between language, culture, and sport, highlighting how commentary can transform a simple game into a powerful vehicle for national identity and collective experience.

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