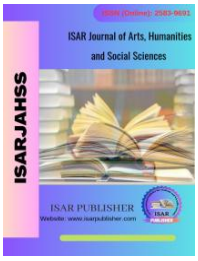
OPEN ACCESS




ISAR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Volume 1, Issue 4, 2023, PP 61-72
*Abbriviate Title- ISAR J Arts Humanit Soc Sci*
ISSN *(Online)*- 2583-9691
https://isarpublisher.com/journal/isarjahss

# ANALYSING FOOTBALL LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF METONYMY AND ZERO COPULA IN TRANSFER NEWS HEADLINES

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**Article History**
Received: 22.08.2023
Revised: 15.09.2023
Accepted: 02.10.2023
Published: 21.10.2023

**Abstract:** This qualitative research is designed to look at the language of football with particular reference to the use of metonymy and zero copulas in football reportage, specifically on the headlines of online portals during the transfer window. In the dynamic landscape of sports journalism, the choice of words and linguistic devices can significantly influence the perception of events and players. Through an in-depth analysis of transfer news headlines, this research seeks to unravel how these linguistic elements contribute to the construction of meaning, impact reader perception, and reflect the distinctive nature of football discourse. The approach is mainly descriptive. Two football online news portals, Sky Sports and All Football, were purposively selected. 100 football transfer news headlines were observed between 27th of May and 23rd of June, 2023, out of which 60 were selected and analysed using conceptual metonymy theory and genre analysis. The findings reveal that football news reports, aside from football register, employ metonymy and zero copulas in their headlines to capture readers' attention. We see names of teams used to represent persons performing activities on behalf of the teams. Again, there are instances of names of stadiums used to represent the teams. Zero copulas are also used for concise and crisp headlines that are apt in conveying meaning and evoking the appropriate feelings or expectation of readers. Ultimately, this investigation exposes the subtle yet influential role of language in football journalism, offering valuable insights into how metonymy and zero copula contribute to the formation of narratives and the public's perception of the ever-evolving football transfer landscape. Understanding these linguistic phenomena not only enhances our grasp of sports discourse but also underscores the broader implications of language in shaping our understanding of complex events and phenomena in the media. The study has professional as well as pedagogical implications.

**Keywords:** Football language, transfer, genre, headlines, register, metonymy, zero copula.

## 1. Introduction

Football is more than just a sport. It permeates all facets of life be it social, economic or political spheres. Ironically, it generates hostilities between opponents and simultaneously serves as a tool for promoting peace. Goldblatt (2007), as cited in Bergh & Ohlander (2017), describes football as "a sport with mass and pop cultural phenomenon of rare proportions." Football, and for that matter, sports, like other disciplines, has its own special language. There are a lot of technical terms associated with football in the arena of commentary, pundit discussions, coaches' vocabulary, newspaper reportage and even spectators' comments. These culminate into the term 'football language'. Some of the expressions may be transcultural whereas others are cultural specific. Whichever the case may be, the untutored is left in the dark when such terms are used.

As the football season grinds to a halt, the transfer window opens and events therein become the focus of journalists and fans. Fans are eager to know which player is staying in a club and which one is moving, and to where. In the era of technology and digitisation, football fans are always glued to the Internet waiting to read about their teams and the players. It is incumbent on journalists, connoisseurs, and analysts to feed these hungry fans with such news. News headlines come in handy in these times, and with a plethora of avenues to read from, most news outlets caption their headlines to attract the most readership. Olagunju (2015:38) reveals, "… readers of sports sections in newspaper tend to be those who have emotional attachment to the game that they read about." Journalists take advantage of this sentimental attachment and present their headlines to carry the readers along. The appropriate use of language in the form of crisp, metaphoric, and metonymic and the typical null copula style of headlining accomplishes a lot here.



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### 1.1 Research Questions

The paper is guided by the following research questions.

- What are the characteristics of online football newspaper headlines?
- What kind of register pervades online headlines during transfer market?
- How do metonymy and zero copulas feature in football transfer news headlines?

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Football is a game that is arguably the sport that has the largest following. European football has caught on so well with the masses so much so that almost every football enthusiast around the world supports one team or the other in Europe's top five leagues. At the end of the football season, players and coaches change clubs, either because their contracts have expired or interests from other clubs are pushing them. This period is when fans are keen on knowing which player is leaving where and going where. Newspaper headlines are daily awash with news about the movement of players and coaches. Sensational, speculative and eye-catching headlines, often cast in figurative language and zero copulas, pervade online portals. The language used within this period is peculiar. Several studies have been done on football headlines and on metonymy, but the focus has not been to isolate and treat metonymy in transfer news. For instance, Tusi Nasrabadi, & Rovshan(2017) studied metaphor in the headlines of sport newspapers in Iran; Alzawaydeh & Alghazo (2018) analysed conceptual metaphors in football news headlines in English and Arabic and Aib, et al (2023) embarked on a critical discourse analysis of football headlines in the area of global politics in relation to FIFA and Russia. Available literature studied so far has not shown any focus on headlines with specific reference to transfer news from online portals. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyse the use of metonymy and zero/null copulas in the captioning of headlines during this transfer window period.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical framework

This work is anchored on two theories, namely, conceptual metonymy theory and genre analysis.

#### 2.1.1 Conceptual Metonymy Theory

The concept of metonymy had not received much attention in earlier studies. Its mention had always been associated with the discussions on metaphors (de Mendoza, 2021). When Lakoff & Johnson (1980) came up with the studies on metaphor, which resulted in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory, their assumption was "that metaphor is an ordinary phenomenon in language and thought" (de Mendoza 2021:204) and that metonymy was no different. Metonymy then had only been mentioned when the need arose to differentiate it from metaphor.

Subsequent to further studies as metonymy was constantly mentioned, interests in its studies came along leading to postulations around this phenomenon. Two landmark studies, Radden and Kovecses (1999) and Panther and Thomburg (1998), are mentioned by de Mendoza (2021) as pioneering the Conceptual Metonymy Theory. Recent works in the field such as Barcelona (2000; 2002; 2011) are worth mentioning.

Panther and Thornburg (2005:91) defines conceptual metonymy as "a contingent, i.e. non-necessary, relation within one conceptual domain between a source meaning and a target meaning, in which the source meaning provides mental access to the target meaning." To them, such metonymic relations are deemed as multipurpose conceptual devices not necessarily restricted to language but used in other semiotic systems and thinking as well.

##### 2.1.1.1 Differences between metonymy and metaphor

Considering the thin line between these two concepts, it will be ideal to attempt to differentiate between them. Lakoff & Johnson (1980) postulates that metonymy, though similar to metaphor, is not just a figure of speech but has a conceptual attribute. This implies that schemas imprinted in our mental faculty are combined as concepts that rely on our physical knowledge and experience of the world around us. Metonymy thus operates by utilising a domain of usage and a plethora of associations and relations, and sends them to a new domain of usage showing a concord between the two entities.

Chaerunnisah (2020) explains metaphor as a way of understanding an abstract concept and ideas through another concept of structure which is more concrete and familiar. Rambaud (2012) views metaphor as involving three elements which are source domain, target domain, and a set of correspondences. The understanding is that source domain is normally concrete and familiar and target domain is abstract and less structured (Chaerunnisah , 2020). Thus, whereas metonymy consists of just one domain, metaphor involves two to three different domains.

Contrary to the dictionary view of metonymy as simply "a figure of speech consisting of the use of the name of one thing for that of another of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated" (Merriam Websters Dictionary), Radden and Kovecses (1999) give a cognitive view of metonymy with different assumptions in three folds: (i) Metonymy is a conceptual phenomenon; (ii) Metonymy is a cognitive process; (iii) Metonymy operates within an idealized cognitive mode.

According Radden and Kovecses (1999), metonymy, unlike metaphor, has always been considered in conceptual terms rather than purely linguistic terms. They contend for metonymy "conceptual notions such as CAUSE FOR EFFECT, CONTAINER FOR CONTENTS, etc" (p1). Kovescses (2002:15) posits. "We use metonymy in one entity, or thing to indicate or to provide mental access to another entity. We try to direct attention to an entity through another entity related to it." The issue of association and relatedness becomes still relevant to the metonymy concept.

#### 2.1.2 General classification of metonymy

Notions of metonymy are general and can be identified in configurations as categorized in Lakoff & Johnson (1980):

| | |
|---|---|
| *Part for Whole*: | We don't hire longhairs. |
| *Producer for Product*: | He bought a Ford. |
| *Object Used for User*: | The buses are on strike. |
| *Institution for People Responsible:* | Exxon has raised its prices again. |
| *Place for Institution*: | Wall Street is in panic. |

Considering the example of the buses, it can be elucidated that the word "bus" doesn't have as one of its lexicalized meanings "bus

drivers", but we are able to do a metonymic mapping because of the context of meaning of a certain situation and our cognitive understanding that buses and their drivers belong to the same functional domain public transport. The concept [bus] as a metonymic source ignites the concept [bus drivers] in the same domain public transport (de Mendoza, 2021).

### 2.2 Genre analysis

There are various text analysis theories that can be used in the analysis of a variety of discourse types. Notable among them are Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Discourse Analysis (DA), Systemic Functional Linguistics, and Genre Analysis (GA). Olagunju (2016) posits that there are three main approaches to genre analysis: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and Genre as Social Interaction.

This study adopts Genre analysis because aside exploring the rhetorical moves within a specific text, it explores "the unique lexico-grammatical resources that dominate each of the moves identified. Genre Analysis therefore has as its main focus to describe and prescribe models for language use for specific purposes" Amoakohene (2021:150).

Our focus here is to look at genre analysis from the perspective of ESP. ESP analysis has gone through different phases before arriving at genre analysis of Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Whichever the approach has been, Dudley-Evans (2000:4) believes "the value of all these approaches to text analysis is that they begin from the idea that the texts used in particular specialist environments, be it academic writing, business or other professional activity or wherever the ESP need lies, have particular characteristics that distinguish them from other texts…" Football language falls into the category of professional language, and in this study, football headlines will be analysed on the same assumptions as other genres have been.

Language used anytime is not in a vacuum. One must be guided by context and convention of language as within certain genres. Genres carry along language for specific use. Thus, for effective communication, Amoakohene (2021:150) states that communicators must factor "the conventions of language use within different genre types."

The work of rhetorical analysis, according to Dudley-Evans (2000), initially introduced the idea that grammatical features of certain fields may not necessarily be as seen in pure grammar classrooms. With this understanding, the language of football may not follow the usual grammatical structures and patterns we see in General English.

Genre analysis, apart from its focus on textual analysis, also considers the writers' purpose. The contention of Benesch (2001) has been that genre analysis should not be merely textual analyses for their grammatical and discourse characteristics. Instead, the fact that genre is "a social activity of a typical recognizable kind in a community, which is realised in language" (Benesch 2001:18) should receive emphasis. This position is challenged by Flowerdew (2011) who believes that since ESP is mainly for L2 learners, the linguistic input is equally relevant. We hold the view that ESP is not just for L2 learners although the linguistic input is relevant.

#### 2.2.1 Zero copulas

The verb is the nucleus of a sentence (Quirk et al, 1985) and therefore we presume that for every utterance to make sense, there must be a verb. However, to brand a structure as grammatically acceptable comes "with questions of meaning, with questions of good or bad style, with questions of lexical acceptability, with questions of acceptability in context, etc." (Quirk, et al, 1985:47). This means field of discourse and its style determine grammaticality. The style associated with headlinese 'violates' the usual requirements of a 'meaningful' sentence especially with the zero copula, also known as copula deletion. Ordinarily, the absence of the verb 'to be' should cause a major infraction in a sentence that requires it because of its significance (Moro, 2018), but zero copula has become fashionable in most structures such that if well managed, can fit into a different and acceptable genre.

Norquist (2018) defines zero copula as the absence of an explicit auxiliary verb (usually a form of the verb *be*) in certain constructions where it is customarily found in standard English. It is also called understood copula. Copula verbs are mostly the verb "to be" (is, are, be, being, been) although verbs like seem, appear and other linking verbs play copula roles.

"Headlinese" is an informal term used for the unique style of newspaper headlines, it is a register characterised by short words, abbreviations, and ellipses (Norquist, 2021) with null copulas. One of the features of headlinese, according to Norquist (2021) is the omission of verbs and articles. The null copula style is adopted by most headlines because of its discourse effect in presenting information.

The absence of copulas is very characteristic of newspaper headlines and football headlines in particular. News headlines as a sub-genre in journalese are typical of avoiding copulas for effect. And this study will analyse some of the headlines along this paradigm.

#### 2.2.2 Football language and English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Football language in English can be considered as ESP because it has its specialised linguistic elements: syntax and semantics, and even phonology are unique from General English in many respects.

Amadi & Harcourt (2022:247) describe football language as "a unique register of sports that expresses, reflects and captures the peculiarities of football events or activities." They add that it is "the linguistic representation of football activities; that is, its technical or professional vocabulary and expressions that can or cannot be easily identified in general usage." It therefore assumes the status of a language variety as it is used in various football circles unconsciously and with spontaneity. Bergh & Ohlander (2017) consider football language even beyond Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) because, unlike disciplines like law and medicine, football language has mass appeal. Its users may transcend just a professional group.

Football language can be typified in vocabulary and terminology. It encompasses a wide range of technical terms and jargon specific to the sport. These include terms related to positions, for instance, keeper, box-to-box player, arrowhead, striker, midfielder, defender; spots on the field such as centre circle, behind the box, touch line, the 18 yard box; techniques such as dribbling, passing, shooting, and other aspects of the game such as: goal, foul, infringement, corner kick, penalty, etc. (cf SoccercoachingPro.com, 2022 for more of these)

Some phrases and expressions are also identified with the sport. These can include tactical instructions like man-to man marking, hold the line, mark your man; tactics and formation: 442 formation, 3-4-1-2 formation, diamond formation; motivational phrases like: give it your all, leave everything on the pitch; and colloquial expressions like: hit a brace, park the bus, hit the woodwork, showboating, against the run of play, and caught ball watching (Can, 2023).

These terms, phrases, and expressions are often understood within the football society and are necessary for effective communication, and augment the culture and identity of football.

Word Connection (2020) observes that reporters don't just use sports language for the sake of being concise; psychologists have said using such specialised language makes them feel superior. Hence, much the same way as other professions use their language to sound distinct, so do football language users.

### 2.3 Football news headlines

Football has its own style and register that differentiate it from other sports and these are aptly utilised by commentators and newspaper reportage. Olagunju (2016), in his study on lexical relationships in football discourse, observes that studying lexical relations transcends learning vocabulary in English. He contends that "football as a sub-genre of sports has its own specific register that needs to be studied and developed" (p 25).

Whether in oral news or written, headlines are the catching point of fanatics, and journalists are not oblivious to this. Headlines, and for that matter, well-garnished headlines, are therefore employed to capture attention. Olugbenga (2020) opines that journalists have specialised methods of using words and phrases in their headlines in their quest to arrest the interest of the readers.

Different stylistic approaches influence headline captioning. Among the grammatical processes adopted are elliptical expressions. Ellipsis and zero copulas are one of the tools adopted in headlines and Agu (2010) observes that headlines of stories and articles in news are written purposefully with either nominal or verbal ellipses. Stainton (2004) treats these structures as non-sentences. Olagunju (2020) mentions that editors employ this "to avoid needless repetition…economise space, create ambiguity and 'quietly say' some things, leaving the readers with an option of inference."

Ifantidou (2009) has a rather interesting view of newspaper headlines. He claims newspaper headlines do not really represent exactly the information that is contained in the articles or stories they head. He posits headlines are more of attention-seeking than information-giving. This is to say that headlines compel you to read what ordinarily you would have ignored. Oloruntobi (2020) rather believes headlines are what direct readers to the thoughts of a writer. They serve as the writer's illumination and banner and "are used to call the attention of readers to an issue in a particular way, making them view an issue from a particular perspective" (p 48).

Football and its related activities have evolved over the years. From the days of black and white television and rediffusion boxes giving commentary the analogue way to the now more complex technological digital age of live text commentary. Live text commentaries are another form of football genre. Jucker (2010:58) defines it as "written accounts of sports events that are produced and published incrementally on the Internet while the event is unfolding." There are a number of online apps including "All Football" that employ this phenomenon in their football commentary. From a multimodal perspective, live text commentaries at least include the news feed, which usually is accompanied by a header with some basic information of the match (teams, current score, etc.) and, optionally, supplementary graphical elements, tables etc. (Meier-Vieracker, 2021)

### 2.4 Metonymy in Football

Sedowa (2022) believes conceptual metaphor and metonymy in various genres of modern English-language sports discourse are worth considering. The position in the study is that it is convenient to divide metaphorical and metonymic concepts into simple and complex ones when analysing linguistic material in the field of sports.

Sports teams are usually referred to by other names that are associated with them. For instance: Kum Apem Boys (Kumasi Asante Kotoko), The Rainbow Boys (Accra Hearts of Oak), The Gunners (Arsenal), The Blues (Chelsea), Red Devils (Manchester United), and The Reds (Liverpool). These names are mostly associated with the colours of the teams or some association with certain attributes.

National teams have names like the Black Stars (Ghana), Super Eagles (Nigeria), Atlas Lions (Morocco), and Three Lions (England). The metonymic use of the countries instead of the teams and vice-versa is very usual in football language. So, one reads "Ghana vow to drown Uruguay today" (Graphic Online, 2022). Certainly, the country Ghana as an inanimate entity did not speak, neither did the whole people speak. It was the players (and more likely one or two) but they are used to represent the whole Ghana.

Editors can sometimes use metonymy to poke fun or ridicule a team or an individual or as pun. Goal.com (2009) reports that in Euro 1992 when England was eliminated by Sweden in the final group game, The Sun (Britain's bestselling newspaper), carried the headline, "Swedes 2 Turnips 1". The Turnips (here in reference to English national team) is a white fleshy taproot vegetable. In some parts of Canada, it is called rutabaga also known as swede (The Guardian, 2010). The metonymic use of Swede (mapping to the country Sweden) which is also a vegetable, is connected to turnip which is mapped to England or the Three Lions.

Ghana soccernet (2023) has the headline, "Hearts of Oak have refused to treat my injured leg - Caleb Amankwah". Here, we can map Hearts of Oak to the management (or to an individual who is supposed to help pay for the treatment of the player's leg).

Myjoyonline (2023) has an interesting headline. "AFCONQ: Black Stars fail to shine against Madagascar in frustrating draw". Here, the Ghana team is given its name (Black Stars) but Barea (the name of the national team of Madagacar) is not used, but the country. Hence, the metonymy is seen in only a part of the headline.

Ghanaweb (2023) reads, "Africa does not win World Cups because players are not passionate - Neymar Jr." Africa does not play as one country in the World Cup. The entire continent has been used to represent the various countries from Africa that participate in the World Cup. This can be further trickled down to the various teams from those countries.

Word Connection (2020) gives a captivating example between football English and normal English.

**Football English**: *The Toffee's left back made a rash challenge in the area which resulted in a red card and a penalty. The Baggies' centre forward stepped up to take the penalty and his audacious Panenka sealed victory.*

**Normal English**: Everton's left-sided defender rashly tripped up an opposition player in the penalty area and was punished for this by being ordered off the field. The referee then awarded West Bromwich Albion a penalty kick at goal. Their most attack-minded player took the penalty kick and audaciously chipped the ball into the centre of the goal, after the goalkeeper had dived, to secure victory.

Some of the metonymic references come in the form of cognomens as in Everton being called The Toffees and West Brom, The Baggies. Here, the metonymic mappings are as follows:

The Toffees→ Everton, The Baggies →West Bromwich Albion, Panenka →audaciously chipping the ball in a penalty shoot. Panenka is the name of a Czech footballer, Antonin Panenka, who first kicked a penalty in such an audacious fashion. This style has since been associated with his name (Word Connection, 2020).

## 3. Methodology

The current study aims at analysing news headlines within the football transfer window as presented by online portals. This design is purely descriptive. The qualitative research design is adopted for this study. Crocker & Heigham (2009) say qualitative research entails collecting basically textual data and examining it using interpretive analysis. Creswell (2003) posits that qualitative research relies on the written or spoken word to analyze relatively few participants. One of the three characteristics Ting-Toomey (1984) postulates on qualitative research is that it examines contexts relevant to the interpretation of discourse.

### 3.1 Data collection

Since the focus was on transfer news headlines, this data was collected from selected online portals from the latter part of May spanning the month of June, 2023. The focus was on the European leagues because most of the news concentrated on them, apparently because those leagues have the most followers and their transfer season is a very active one. The major football leagues have their football calendar ending in May which ushers in the opening of the transfer window.

### 3.2 Sampling

Taherdoost (2016) opines that it is impossible to collect data from all cases. Therefore, there is the need to select a sample. Taking a subset from a chosen sampling frame or entire population is called sampling.

A purposive sampling method was used to select those headlines that employ both metonymy and null copulas. 100 online headlines were observed from mainly two sports online portals between 27 May and 23 June 2023. Sixty were selected and grouped according to their categories and analysed.

## 4. Analysis and discussion

We group the analysis and discussion into metonym, register and null copula use. This will help put the whole analysis and discussion into the proper perspectives.

### 4.1 Use of Metonymy

In line with Jakoff and Johnson (1980)'s categorization of metonym, we group our headlines into the following for analysis.

**4.1.1 Table 1 Name of an institution/team used to represent the people in charge of the team**

| Headline | Source |
|---|---|
| 1. *Newcastle* in talks over £50m deal for Barella | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 14 June 2023 |
| 2. *Chelsea* reject £40m bid from *Man Utd* for Mount. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 14 June 2023 |
| 3. *Arsenal* want Chelsea forward Havertz. | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 14 June 2023 |
| 4. Mount latest: *Man Utd* will assess options if deal not struck. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 5. *Spurs, Chelsea* readying bids for Roma defender Roger Ibanez. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 6. *Man Utd* turn to Ligue 1 pair after Kim frustration. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 7. Guardiola aims cheeky dig at Lukaku in brutally honest *Man City* and *Barca* claim. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 8. *Atletico Madrid* hoping to offload major salary to Saudi Arabian side | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 9. *Barcelona* in contact with rival midfielder over shock move | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 10. *Arsenal* very confident in £170 transfer swoop as Edu advanced talks revealed | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 19 *Arsenal* have simple answer to £70m Havertz dilemma courtesy of Balogun transfer | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 20 Mauricio Pochettino prepares £68m striker deal after *Chelsea* book Nicolas Jackson medical | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 19 June 2023 |
| 21. Havertz: why *Chelsea* are cashing in and why *Arsenal* want him | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 19 June 2023 |
| 22. *Chelsea* confirm £52m Nkuku signing from RB Leipzig<br>23. Transfer Talk Podcast: *Arsenal* in for Rice. Havertz &Timber | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 19 June 2023 |
| 24. *Arsenal* make fresh £50m offer for Havertz<br>25. *Arsenal* in talks with *Ajax* over deal for defender Timber | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 |
| 26. *Arsenal* get Declan Rice clarity after Man City star doubles down on £42m transfer promise | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 |
| 27. *Barcelona* in advance talks to secure second signing of the summer | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 20 June 2023 |
| 28. *Chelsea* hijack £64.2 m Man United deal as Mauricio Pochettino copies Erik ten Hag transfer plan | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 29. Arsenal transfers: *Gunners* to make decision on Partey future | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 21 June 2023 |
| 30. *Chelsea* reject £50m bid from *Man Utd* for Mount | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 31. *Atalanta* demand top price for *Man Utd* target Hojlund | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 32. *Man Utd* to rival *Arsenal* for Rice | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 21 June 2023 |
| 33. *Inter* ask *Barcelona* about the possibility of signing defender Eric garcia | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21June 2023 |
| 34. *Barcelona* and *Tottenham Hotspurs* to thrash out deals in the coming days | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 35. Official: *Roma* extend contract with Smalling until 2025 | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 36. *Barcelona* consider selling Alexia Putellas | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 |
| 37. *Al Hilal* prepared to offer Bernado Silva deal worth £75m per season | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 22 June 2023 |
| 38. *Arsenal* take pole-position in the race to sign Man Utd target Moussa Diaby | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 22 June 2023 |
| 39. *Man United* willing to walk away from Mount transfer if 3rd bid rejected | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 23 June 2023 |
| 40. *Man City* in advanced talks to sign Rice ahead of *Arsenal* | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 23 June 2023 |
| 41. *Premier League* sought written assurance from *Chelsea* that Saudi Arabia were not part of takeover | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 23 June 2023 |
| 42. *AC Milan* in talks with *Chelsea* for midfield trio | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 22 June 2023 |
| 43. *Bayern* in advanced talks with Kyle Walker to seal a move for the Man City star | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 23 June 2023 |

In Table 1 the italicised are institutions/teams which have people performing the various verbs in the headlines listed. Here, the names of the institutions/teams are used to represent the people because of the people's association with the teams and the fact that they are performing whichever activity in the name of the institution/team concerned.

**4.1.2 Table 2 Part for Whole (Individuals associated with a team used for the team)**

| Headline | Source | Referent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Edu sanctions £45.4m summer move as Declan Rice saga takes fresh twist | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 | Edu Gasper is the sporting director of Arsenal and his action here is an action taken by the team Arsenal itself. |
| 2. Chelsea transfer news: Boehly unlocks £40m discount as 2nd Tchouameni bid eyed | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 | Todd Boehly as a co-owner of Chelsea performs an action that is representative of Chelsea as a club. |

**4.1.3 Table 3 Country used to represent team/institution**

| Headline | Source | Referent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Kante, Mendy, Koulibaly, Ziyech- Four Chelsea players off to *Saudi*. | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 19 June 2023 | Here, Saudi is used to represent the various teams that these players are going to play for. |
| 2. Premier League sought written assurance from Chelsea that *Saudi Arabia* were not part of takeover | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 23 June 2023 | Saudi Arabia is used as a metonymy for Saudi Arabia Public Investment Fund (PIF). |
| 3. Jurgen Klopp's agent insists Liverpool boss is NOT eyeing *Germany* job | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 23 June 2023 | The job being referred to is the head coach of German national team but the country is used to represent the team |
| 4. Juventus will challenge *Saudi Arabia* for Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 23 June 2023 | The team(s) in Saudi Arabia interested in Partey are not mentioned but the entire country is used to represent them. |

**4.1.4 Table 4 Place (associated with team) representing institution (the club)**

| Headline | Source | Referent |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Messi leaves *Parc des Princes* | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 7 June 2023 | Messi is leaving Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) but the name of the home grounds of the team has rather been used to represent the club. |
| 2. Chelsea: Pochettino has one big thing to sort out at *Stamford Bridge* | https://Onefootball.com 29 May 2023 | Stamford Bridge is the name of Chelsea Football Club and is here used to represent the club itself as a new coach is appointed. |
| 3. Three Chelsea players who will not be in *Cobham* this season | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 | Cobham is the name of the training grounds for Chelsea FC. It is used to represent the team itself. Thus, those players will not be playing for Chelsea this season. |
| 4. Neymar keen to remain in *Paris* with Luis Enrique poised to take over | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 | PSG is based in Paris (association) and so the city has been used to represent the team. |
| 5. Philips determined to stay at *Eltihad* and fight for Man City spot | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 | Eltihad is the name of the stadium of Manchester City, and so here, it has been used to represent the team itself. Thus, Philips is determined to stay in the team. |
| 6. Arsenal must up the figure if they want to prise the 22-year old away from the *Johan Cruyff Arena* | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 21 June 2023 | Johan Cruyff Arena is the home grounds of the team AFC Ajax. The name of the stadium is here used to represent the Ajax. |

### 4.2 The register of transfer market

Within the period where players and coaches and even backroom staff change clubs, headlines have special vocabulary and expressions that are typical of this season. The register characteristically demonstrates a metaphorical and metonymic use of language to convey meaning to the readers. The concepts of buying and selling, leaving and joining, quoted figures are characteristics of the news headlines at this time.

The following headlines are captured from https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers and https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news and categorised according to the domain they represent.

#### 4.2.1 Trading

1. AC Milan **in talks** with Chelsea for midfield trio
2. Al Hilal prepared **to offer** Bernado Silva **deal** worth £75m per season
3. Man United willing to walk away from Mount transfer if **3rd bid rejected**
4. Chelsea to step up efforts **to sign** Caicedo, but Seagulls want more than £80m
5. Barca DoF Alemany in Munich **to close the signing of** Ikay Gundogan
6. Chelsea to step up efforts **to sign** Caicedo, but Seagulls want more than £80m
7. RB Leipzig are **close to agreeing** a season-long **loan deal** for Liverpool midfielder
8. Why Man Utd want **to sign** Mount from Chelsea
9. Could Tonali **deal** scupper Newcastle's move for Madisson
10. Man utd to battle Arsenal for Declan Rice transfer as **swap deal** offer prepared
11. Thomas Partey Arsenal transfer : Saudi interest, **talks** revealed, Arteta argument
12. Havertz: Why Chelsea are **cashing in** and why Arsenal want him
13. Chelsea **reject** £50m **bid** from Man Utd for Mount
14. Newcastle **in talks** over £50m deal for Barella.
15. Jorge Mendes getting desperate in his attempts **to offload** Ruben Neves.
16. Man Utd edge **closer to** Mount **agreement with** new Chelsea transfer bid
17. Man Utd make improved **bid** for mason Mount
18. Arsenal edge closer to Kai Havertz deal and gear up for third Declan Rice **bid**
19. Barcelona in advance talks to secure **second signing** of the summer
20. Atletico Madrid hoping **to offload** major salary to Saudi Arabian side

#### 4.2.2 Competition

21. Man United **to be rivalled** by PSG for Victor Osimhen as French giants (referring to PSG) prepare £128MILLION **bid**
22. AC Milan seek **to trump** Inter for Lukaku with cash bid to Chelsea
23. Man City **to rival** Arsenal for Rice
24. Juventus **will challenge** Saudi Arabia for Arsenal midfielder Thomas Partey
25. Real Madrid **pursuing** 18-year old Turkish wonderkid with accessible price tag

#### 4.2. 3 Movement or renewal to stay

26. Brozovic close to Saudi Arabia **move** as Barca to make last-ditch Kessie effort
27. Girona eyeing up summer **moves** for Barcelona and Manchester City starlets
28. Aberdeen target Idzes set **to join** Venezia
29. Real Madrid have date set **to announce** Luka Modric renewal
30. Barcelona are certain of **registering** the **renewed contract**
31. Messi **leaves** Parc des Princes
32. Inter Miami admit security will be enhanced for Messi **joining** the MLS team
33. Philips determined **to stay** and fight for Man City spot
34. Bellingham **completes** Real Madrid **move.**
35. Neves finalises £47m **move** from Wolves to Al Hilal
36. Macron: I will try to push for Mbappe to **stay** at Paris.

#### Quoted figures

37. Chelsea have 'secret weapon' in Caisedo chase as Man United eye **£80m** hijack
38. Todd Boehly completes huge **£55m** Chelsea deal as major transfer revealed
39. Manchester United to submit third offer of **£55m** for Mason Mount
40. Chelsea give Man United 'crucial'Mount deadline as **£55m** agreement edges closer
41. Chelsea transfer news: Boehly unlocks **£40m** discount as 2nd Tchouameni bid eyed
42. Edu sanctions **£45,4m** summer move as Declan Rice saga takes fresh twist
43. Neves finalises **£47m** move from Wolves to Al Hilal

### 4.3 Use of zero/null copulas

Zero/null copulas are also characteristics of the headlines. The table shows how it has been used in the captions and their interpretations.

| **Headline** | **Source** | **Full rendition with copula** |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Man Utd transfer: Kim set to sign from Napoli | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 14 June 2023 | Man Utd transfer: Kim **is** set to sign from Napoli |
| 2. Arsenal transfers: Gunners to rival Real for Chelsea's Havertz. | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 14 June 2023 | Arsenal transfers: Gunners **are** to rival real for Chelsea's Havertz |
| 3. Ten Hag angry Man Utd takeover is hurting Rice pursuit. | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 19 June 2023 | Ten Hag is angry Man Utd takeover is hurting the pursuit of Rice. |
| 4. Arsenal very confident in £170 transfer swoop as Edu advanced talks revealed | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 | Arsenal **are** very confident in £170 transfer swoop as Edu advanced talks revealed |
| 5. Spurs, Chelsea readying bids for Roma defender Roger Ibanez. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 | Spurs, Chelsea **are** readying bids for Roma defender Roger Ibanez. |
| 6. Barcelona in contact with rival midfielder over shock move | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 | Barcelona **are** in contact with rival midfielder over shock move |
| 7. Guido Rodriguez gaining ground to be Barca's new midfield signing. | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 | Guido Rodriguez **is** gaining ground to be Barca's new midfield signing. |
| 8. Atletico Madrid hoping to offload major salary to Saudi Arabian side | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 19 June 2023 | Atletico Madrid **are** hoping to offload major salary to Saudi Arabian side |
| 9. Barcelona in advance talks to secure second signing of the summer | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 | Barcelona **are** in advance talks to secure second signing of the summer |
| 10. Arsenal very confident in £170 **transfer swoop** as Edu advanced talks revealed | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 | Arsenal **are** very confident in £170 transfer swoop as Edu advanced talks revealed |
| 11. Philips determined to stay and fight for Man City spot | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 20 June 2023 | Philips **is** determined to stay and fight for Man City spot |
| 12. Argentine international to Liverpool (the reds) | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 20 June 2023 | Argentine international **is going** to Liverpool (the reds) |
| 13. Transfer Talk Podcast: Arsenal in for Rice. Havertz &Timber | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 20 June 2023 | Transfer Talk Podcast: Arsenal **are** in for Rice. Havertz &Timber |
| 14. Arsenal in talks with Ajax over deal for defender Timber | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news 20 June 2023 | Arsenal **are** in talks with Ajax over deal for defender Timber |
| 15. Vieira in contention for Leeds job | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 | Vieira is in contention for Leeds job |
| 16. Barcelona in advance talks to secure second signing of the summer | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers 20 June 2023 | Barcelona **are** in advance talks to secure second signing of the summer. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 17. Getafe lining up replacements as real Madrid circle new shot-stopper | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>21 June 2023 | Getafe **are** lining up replacements as real Madrid circle a new shot-stopper |
| 18. Arsenal transfers: Gunners to make decision on Partey future | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>21 June 2023 | Arsenal transfers: Gunners **are** to make decision on Partey future |
| 19. Arsenal close to Havertz agreement | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>21 June 2023 | Arsenal **are** close to Havertz agreement |
| 20. Barca DoF Alemany in Munich to close the signing of Ikay Gundogan | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>21 June 2023 | Barca DoF Alemany **is** in Munich to close the signing of Ikay Gundogan |
| 21. Man City to rival Arsenal for Rice | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>21 June 2023 | Man Utd **are** to rival Arsenal for Rice |
| 22. Monaco interested in Arsenal's Thomas Partey | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>21 June 2023 | Monaco **are** interested in Arsenal's Thomas Partey |
| 23. Bayern in advanced talks with Kyle Walker to seal a move for the Man City star | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>22 June 2023 | Bayern **are** in advanced talks with Kyle Walker to seal a move for the Man City star |
| 24. Havertz to have Arsenal medical this weekend | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>22 June 2023 | Havertz **is** to have Arsenal medical this weekend |
| 25. AC Milan in talks with Chelsea for midfield trio | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>23 June 2023 | AC Milan **are** in talks with Chelsea for midfield trio |
| 26. Man United willing to walk away from Mount transfer if 3rd bid rejected | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>23 June 2023 | Man United **are** willing to walk away from Mount transfer if 3rd bid **is** rejected |
| 27. Al Hilal prepared to offer Bernado Silva deal worth £75m per season | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>23 June 2023 | Al Hilal **are** prepared to offer Bernado Silva deal worth £75m per season |
| 28. Chelsea expected to approach Brighton over Caciedo | https://www.skysports.com/football/transfer-news<br>23 June 2023 | Chelsea expected **are** to approach Brighton over Caciedo |
| 29. Chelsea to step up efforts to sign Caicedo, but Seagulls want more than £80m | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>23 June 2023 | Chelsea **are** to step up efforts to sign Caicedo, but Seagulls want more than £80m |
| 30. Girona eyeing up summer moves for Barcelona and Manchester City starlets | https://m.allfootballapp.com/news/Transfers<br>23 June 2023 | Girona are eyeing up summer moves for Barcelona and Manchester City starlets |

## 5. Conclusions and implications

The study aimed to identify patterns of metonymic expressions and instances of zero copula usage within the selected corpus of transfer news headlines. We see that metonymy is not only applicable in the domain of literature or literary works. Football language employs metonymy in its headlines and that is aptly able to capture readers' interest. Moreover, it seeks to elucidate how these linguistic choices influence the reader's perception of the transfer events, player identities, and club dynamics. This investigation not only contributes to the fields of sports linguistics and media discourse analysis but also offers a unique lens through which to understand the interplay between language, cognition, and the footballing world.

Pedagogically, teachers can apply these concepts such as metaphor and metonymy in the analysis of other textual materials aside literature.

Again, ESP courses or materials focused on football language can be designed to cater to the needs of players, coaches, referees, and

more especially to sports writers and reporters. These courses may emphasize vocabulary acquisition, listening skills for understanding commentary, reading comprehension of match reports, spoken communication for team discussions and interviews, and match report writing. Authentic materials such as match recordings, interviews, articles, and samples of headlines can be used to enhance the learning experience.

It is imperative journalists and editors in our part of the world be educated on the style of football headline writing. "If football game is very important to human race like this, studying the language of football as a sub-genre of sports will not be out of place in linguistic scholarship" (Olagunju, 2016).

There are other areas of interest that in the course of this study were observed and which can be explored in other studies. These include the use of personification and the absence of apostrophe in genitive cases in online sports headlines.

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