

# An investigation into pragmatic features of Appreciation in English sports commentaries

<sup>1</sup>Luu Quy Khuong, <sup>2</sup>Tran Huu Thuan

<sup>1</sup>Meritorious teacher, <sup>2</sup>Lecturer

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Foreign Language Teacher Education,  
The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam, Vietnam

**Abstract-** In light of Appraisal Theory and Speech Acts, this paper examined the pragmatic features of Appreciation, one of the three subsystems under Appraisal theory, in English sports commentaries. This research was conducted on the basis of a descriptive framework of Appraisal and Speech Acts, using quantitative and qualitative data gathered from English sports commentaries (SCs) on websites, in order to clarify pragmatic features of Appreciation. The results revealed four pragmatic features of Appreciation in English SCs: representative meaning, expressive meaning, conventional implicature meaning, and scalar implicature meaning. The research explained pragmatic features of English SCs based on the results of data analysis and provided readers with a clear understanding of the usage of Appreciation in terms of Speech Acts theory. It also equipped readers with pragmatic knowledge necessary to comprehend pragmatic features of Appreciation in order to use language of Appreciation effectively in their English learning or sports news writing.

**Index Terms**— appreciation, appraisal, speech acts, sport commentaries, pragmatic features.

## INTRODUCTION

Being a fundamental aspect of human being, language enables individuals to communicate and develop their viewpoints. The flourishing of language in both form and content not only significantly adds significantly to the aesthetic of language, but also to the effectiveness of everyday communication. Human experience, including physical and emotional states, thinking, world perception and judgment, character characteristics, morals, behavior of social interactions, and human culture, etc., is accurately and passionately expressed via linguistic forms. Language is also used in recreational activities. In this sense, language may be used to persuade viewers to agree, support, or follow the intention, viewpoint of sportswriters as commentators.

As one of the most common types of entertainment, sports have become an essential part in human life in contemporary society. In line with the development of sports, language, which is used in sports commentaries, is enhanced to provide more efficient communication. Apart from the descriptive purpose of language, sportswriters may use language to communicate their goal, passion, viewpoint, and sentiment in order to attract a viewer in their SCs.

Using Appreciation to describe the sportswriter's attitude toward the numerous evaluative components of sporting events, such as Reaction: Impact to express the feeling of sportswriter about the progress of the match or Valuation to evaluate the talent of the players, is one of the most common methods of expressing assessment in SCs. It provides good or bad opinions of the players, coaches, their performances or influence of items and individuals mentioned in SCs. By using linguistic resources to emphasize the assessing features of the sportswriter's remarks, sportswriter can convey his evaluative messages highlighted in the following sports commentary passages to his readers.

Considering these examples:

(1) It has been a *disappointing* season for Milan in Series A with the club currently in ninth position in the league table. (www.skysports.com)

(2) The Champions League will provide a *welcome* distraction from their troubles. (www.skysports.com)

By the use of evaluative language, such as *disappointing* in (1), the commentators convey to their readers/listeners their negative opinion of Milan's season in Series A. In circumstance (2), the pundit wishes to convey to his/her readers/audience his/her feelings over a Champions League distraction by using '*welcome*' to evaluate.

Due to the variations in language systems regarding the language knowledge of Appreciation and its pragmatic features, it is difficult for students to realize and understand pragmatic features of SCs with these Appreciation expressions. Regarding the genre of sport commentaries, there have been few prior investigations into pragmatic features of Appreciation according to Appraisal theory. This article will analyze the pragmatics features of the language expressions of Appreciation from the perspective of Appraisal theory, with the intention of filling the gap of concerns linked to Appraisal values in past research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Previous Studies

Tim (2015) explores and analyzes minute-by-minute football commentary in terms of time, tense, and aspect, as well as how interaction occurs within it. The article's data were compiled from the BBC Saturday Football newspaper and evaluated using the concordance program AntConc. The research concludes that minute-by-minute commentary may be used to communicate different types of interaction and provides ideas for using learning apps as a learning aid to increase students' motivation and engagement with language learning thanks to the potential advantages of minute-by-minute commentary for motivation and engagement. The

achievement of this research is only focused on certain types of interaction, and it should be highlighted how these forms are portrayed in sport comments so that learners may better comprehend them.

Viewing SCs between everyday life and dramatic interpretation, Phillips (2017) suggests that the sport commentator's implementation may be seen as that of a post-dramatic live artist and theatre-maker. With a rethinking of the position from a post-dramatic theatrical perspective, the mechanism of sport commentary may be seen as theatrical, per his study on the sport commentator. His investigations emphasize the significance of the dramatic content, use, and frequency of tragic language in sport commentary, as opposed to event-based language games. It is fair to expect that this research will provide additional relevant information about the structures employed to create dramatic SCs.

Lulu (2019) investigates the tendentiousness of Chinese e-sports commentators based on speech acts theory and the Language Adaptation Theory. He studies the commentary by selecting a particular e-sports tournament, and then employs continuous watching, transcription, categorization, and numerical and qualitative analysis of the corpus to demonstrate that the Chinese commentators tend to favor their own national team in the game. This study should concentrate on elucidating why commenters are so inclined to provide their opinions.

According to these scholars, sport commentary falls within some pragmatic field. Yet, they should do more studies on how these discourse patterns transmit the authors' intended meaning to their audience. Because of lack research on Appreciation in pragmatic field, this paper seeks to clarify pragmatic features of Appreciation in English SCs and provide readers with a clear understanding of the usage of Appreciation in terms of pragmatics.

### ***Theoretical background***

#### **Appreciation**

According to Martin & White (2005), Appreciation is a component of Attitude that is utilized to evaluate processes and products. It falls under both the aesthetic and non-aesthetic categories and involves assigning value to things based on their significance or potential harm. The distinction between Judgment and Appreciation within the Attitude category is relatively small. Judgment is typically reserved for evaluating human behavior, whereas Appreciation is applied to natural and manufactured objects, texts, and abstract concepts such as processes, products, plans, and policies. Appreciation can also be used to evaluate people as entities, rather than as active participants.

Searle (1975) states a speech act as a statement that alters the universe of discourse when spoken by a speaker and understood by a listener, whether it is communicated verbally or through sign language. Searle classifies illocutionary acts into five basic types:

The first is the **Representative**, which describes a state of affairs, such as stating, asserting, denying, confessing, and predicting.

The second is the **Directive**, which is an utterance that attempts to persuade the listener to take action, such as requesting, ordering, forbidding, and recommending.

The third is the **Commissive**, which commits the speaker to taking some action, such as promising, volunteering, and guaranteeing.

The fourth is the **Expressive**, which expresses the speaker's emotional state, such as apologizing, thanking, and congratulating.

Finally, the **Declaration** is a statement that changes the status of an entity, such as appointing, naming, resigning, and arresting.

According to Yule (1986), **Conventional implicature** indicates that a stronger assertion is being rejected than the one that was actually stated. It is derived from the way sports commentaries are typically used by sportswriters, rather than from the context or the sportswriter's thoughts and intentions.

Yule (1986) also states that **Scalar implicature** goes beyond the literal meaning of a statement and suggests a deeper meaning based on the idea that stating a lower form on a scale implies the negation of all higher forms. Sportswriters may sometimes create multiple Scalar implicatures when they provide sports commentary that is not initially considered to be part of any particular scale.

This paper investigated the pragmatic features of Appreciation with representative meaning, expressive meaning, conventional implicature and scalar implicature.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The research analyzed 580 English clauses that conveyed Appreciation and were selected from 30 English sports commentary texts, taken from hundreds of texts sourced from two websites: [www.skysports.com](http://www.skysports.com) and [www.goal.com](http://www.goal.com). The texts were chosen from the period between 2018 and 2022, with a significant number of texts selected to showcase variations of different genres and to provide enough linguistic properties and resources for exploration.

Based on Speech Acts theory and Appraisal framework, the study was conducted with a descriptive approach to qualitative information to collect Appreciation expressions in English sports commentary texts and investigate pragmatic features of these Appreciation expressions. The study then analyzed and categorized these expressions based on their pragmatic features. Specifically, the study analyzed the expressions from the perspective of Speech Acts with Representative and Expressive meaning, as well as Implicature with Conventional implicature and Scalar implicature.

The 580 English instances collected are expected to provide insight into the pragmatic features of linguistic expressions of Appreciation in English SCs.

### **RESULTS & DISCUSSION**

When providing information to readers, sportswriter frequently expresses their intention or view in argumentative texts. By applying speech acts and implicature with their functions in language expression of Appreciation in SCs, these argumentative discourses can convey successfully sportswriters' belief or feeling with the purpose of appraising their objective to readers. This research clarifies pragmatic features of English sports commentaries in these following meaning:

- (1) Representative meaning, used to represent the state of circumstance that sportswriters believe
- (2) Expressive meaning, used to express the emotional state of sportswriters

(3) Conventional implicature meaning, used to show the meaning that contributes sportswriter-oriented information

(4) Scalar implicature meaning, used to qualify or scale their commentaries not in a stronger, more informative statements

The results of investigation can be shown as the table below:

**Table 1** Distribution of Speech Acts in Expression of Appreciation

No.	Type	Occurrence	Frequency
1	EX	164	35,96
2	RE	292	64,04
	<b>Total</b>	<b>456</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**Table 2** Distribution of Implicature in Expression of Appreciation

No.	Type	Occurrence	Frequency
1	CON	108	50,47
2	SCA	106	49,53
	<b>Total</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>100,00</b>

**Representative Meaning of Appreciation in English Sports commentaries**

According to Searl (1975), Representative speech act represents sportswriter’s opinion, idea, suggestion about something that can be correct or incorrect. It can be used to figure out the fact, description, assertion or conclusion of sportswriter in their commentaries. These sports commentary examples below are considered to clarify the representative meaning of sportswriter:

(1) That was the **famous** verdict of Johnny Rep after the great Netherlands team "passed the ball around and around" before West Germany came from behind to beat them in the 1974 World Cup final in Munich.

(2) He has had a **terrible** few months, losing his father, Jose, in February.

(3) Time and time again the Rojiblancos have turned victory into defeat like **master** magicians, something into nothing.

(4) “Ronaldo plays for Madrid,” ran Marca’s front page hopefully on Thursday, recalling his **good** relationship with Zidane from their playing days at the Santiago Bernabeu.

**Table 3** Representative Meaning of Appreciation

Sentence	Appreciation	Representative meaning of the sentence
(1) That was the famous verdict of Johnny Rep after the great Netherlands team "passed the ball around and around" before West Germany came from behind to beat them in the 1974 World Cup final in Munich.	famous	fact
(2) He has had a terrible few months, losing his father, Jose, in February.	terrible	description
(3) Time and time again the Rojiblancos have turned victory into defeat like master magicians, something into nothing.	master	conclusion
(4) “Ronaldo plays for Madrid,” ran Marca’s front page hopefully on Thursday, recalling his good relationship with Zidane from their playing days at the Santiago Bernabeu.	good	assertion

In (1), Appreciation ‘famous’ is used in this sentence to remind the player who pleaded for his mistake after the final match in World Cup 1974. Sportswriter wants to show his conclusion that the speech of Spanish player is just an undeniable mistake, as same as the Dutch player words. In (2), sportswriter has pity on the player about the dreadful time he has had after the dead of his father through ‘terrible’. In (3), ‘master’ evaluates players as magicians to show the assertion of sportswriter about the awful performance of players that is the reason turned the victory to defeat. In (4), sportswriter believes that the relationship between the player and the coach are in great mood in his description through the use of ‘good’.

**Expressive Meaning of Appreciation in English Sports commentaries**

According to Searl (1975), in sports commentary, Expressive speech act discusses sportswriter’s attitude towards circumstance. It could be a expression of apology, pleasure, feeling or gratitude. Let investigate some sports commentary instances:

(5) By the time that the full-back with the relatively modest reputation executed a **perfect** tackle on Lozano with 12 minutes to go, there were high fives all round.

(6) Gareth Southgate's words from earlier in this World Cup will be worrying the more **pessimistic** among his countrymen right now.

(7) It's the **best** goal I ever saw from a goalkeeper.

(8) They go with an **endless** supply of hope, but not more than an ounce of expectation.

**Table 4** Expressive Meaning of Appreciation

Sentence	Appreciation	Expressive meaning of the sentence
(5) By the time that the full-back with the relatively modest reputation executed a perfect tackle on Lozano with 12 minutes to go, there were high fives all round.	perfect	excitement
(6) Gareth Southgate's words from earlier in this World Cup will be worrying the more pessimistic among his countrymen right now.	pessimistic	concern
(7) It's the best goal I ever saw from a goalkeeper.	best	pleasure
(8) They go with an endless supply of hope, but not more than an ounce of expectation.	endless	emotion

While in (5) sportswriter expresses his amusement with Appreciation 'perfect' when judging the situation that Lozano performed a tackle to save the goal for the team, he also shows his pleasure with 'best' when talking about the goal save from the goalkeeper in (6). In (7), sportswriter reveals the concern with 'pessimistic' about the coach with his players cannot be in the perfect health status before World Cup. And in (8), sportswriter shows his emotion about the team with current players that cannot lead the team to the victory, but he supports them to boost the motivation of the team with 'endless'.

#### **Conventional Implicature Meaning of Appreciation in English Sports commentaries**

According to Yule (1986), Conventional implicature implies the rejection of an assertion stronger than the one mentioned. It comes from the way SCs are used by sportswriter rather than from the context or even the sportswriter's thought and intention. Conventional implicature can be employed with specific words such as conjunctions (but, even, yet...) or certain words (still, already, again, start, know...) To identify Conventional implicature meaning in SCs, let's explore these examples:

(9) Mexico did not manage their first shot on target until the hour mark - and even that was a **tame** effort from Carlos Vela that was comfortably turned over the bar by Alisson.

(10) But they settled for **sterile** domination and paid the price when Gerard Pique's handball gave Artem Dzyuba the chance to equalise from the spot five minutes before half-time.

(11) That the decision did not go Spain's way evoked memories of 2002 and the **controversial** shootout exit to then co-hosts South Korea.

(12) There is plenty of cause for optimism despite the **immediate** disappointment, writes Adam Bate.

**Table 5** Conventional Implicature Meaning of Appreciation

Sentence	Appreciation	Conventional Implicature
(9) Mexico did not manage their first shot on target until the hour mark - and even that was a tame effort from Carlos Vela that was comfortably turned over the bar by Alisson.	tame	even
(10) But they settled for sterile domination and paid the price when Gerard Pique's handball gave Artem Dzyuba the chance to equalise from the spot five minutes before half-time.	sterile	but
(11) That the decision did not go Spain's way evoked memories of 2002 and the controversial shootout exit to then co-hosts South Korea.	controversial	and
(12) There is plenty of cause for optimism despite the immediate disappointment, writes Adam Bate.	immediate	despite

With the use of 'even' in (9), sportswriter wants to indicate that although the player tried his best effort with 'tame', the team did not win the battle with their bad performance. In (10), 'but' is used to imply the contrary of the performance and strategy of the team and the result: even if the team tried to play in the domination, it is just a 'sterile' performance. In (11), the word 'and' is used to show sportswriter's opinion about the exit of Spain in this time, looks like the exit of this team in the past, causes a lot of debates because of incomprehensible decision of the coach during the match with 'controversial'. And in (12), though the performance of player at that moment was unacceptable with 'immediate', sportswriter still believe that the victory will come with the team with the word 'despite'.

#### **Scalar Implicature Meaning of Appreciation in English Sports Commentaries**

According to Yule [8], Scalar implicature provides a deeper meaning to a statement beyond its literal meaning and it is based on the idea that if a form lower on the scale is stated, the negative of all forms higher up on the scale is implied. Sometimes, several Scalar implicatures are formed by sportswriters when they express SCs which may be not initially assume to be part of any scale. To find out Scalar implicature meaning, let discover some SCs examples:

(13) Whether a victory that failed to answer some of the more **pertinent** questions about this Chelsea team will be enough to end the chatter remains to be seen.

(14) There was a lot of **nice** football by this Spain side but not enough of the good football that could and should have separated the sides.

(15) Though Spain were able to conjure no fewer than four **equalising** goals in this World Cup, there is just no coming back from making mistakes in a penalty shootout.

(16) Like Oblak, Ter Stegen too was busy as he brushed aside recent concerns about his form so he can deny Atletico with some **good** saves when necessary.

**Table 6:** Conventional Implicature Meaning of Appreciation

Sentence	Appreciation	Scalar Implicature
(13) Whether a victory that failed to answer some of the more pertinent questions about this Chelsea team will be enough to end the chatter remains to be seen.	pertinent	some of
(14) There was a lot of nice football by this Spain side but not enough of the good football that could and should have separated the sides.	nice	a lot of
(15) Though Spain were able to conjure no fewer than four equalising goals in this World Cup, there is just no coming back from making mistakes in a penalty shootout.	equalising	no fewer than
(16) Like Oblak, Ter Stegen too was busy as he brushed aside recent concerns about his form so he can deny Atletico with some good saves when necessary.	good	some

By choosing ‘some of’ in (13), sportswriter creates an implicature that the team did not need to respond all the pertinent questions about the way of playing of the team in the match with a victory. In (14), ‘a lot of’ implies that there was not most, not all nice football to help Spain team overcome their opponents. Whilst in (15), ‘no fewer than’ signifies that the team can score more than four goals with their ability and they can go further in sportswriter’s expectation, but it is just a reverse result, ‘some’ in (16) refers to the idea that Barca goalkeeper did not need many or most good saves to have a good result for the team against their opponent, Real Madrid.

## CONCLUSION

This paper investigated Appreciation expressions with its pragmatic features in SCs in terms of Speech Acts including representative meaning, expressive meaning, conventional implicature and scalar implicature. This study is expected to contribute significantly to help sports commentary readers by enhancing our understanding and use of Appreciation language with its pragmatic features in sports commentaries. The study’s analysis of pragmatic features is expected to provide learners of English, newspaper writers, and translators with practical knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of how commentators use Appreciation language with its pragmatic features in sports commentaries.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper is carried out as a part of my doctoral thesis at The University of Danang - University of Foreign Language Studies, Vietnam.

## REFERENCES:

1. Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do thing with words (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Halliday, M.A.K., & C.M.I.M. Matthiessen (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar, (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.)* London: Arnold.
3. Lulu, P. (2019). Analysis of the stance of e-sports commentary discourse from the perspective of pragmatics. *International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies*, 1-11.
4. Martin, J.R. & White, P.R.R. (2005). *The language of evaluation: Appraisal in English*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, Ltd.
5. Phillips, P. (2017). *The performance of sports commentary: Post-dramatic theatre as a model to examine the performance of the sports commentator*. Sporting Heritage, Photography and TV Conference, National Science and Media Museum, Bradford, UK.
6. Searle, J.R. (1969). *Speech Acts*, Cambridge University Press.
7. Tim, V. (2015). Minute-by-minute football commentary: A corpus-based discourse analysis of tense and community within online MBM. *CELE Journal*, 50-65.
8. Yule, G. (1997). *Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.