

Textual Prominence and Cohesion in Selected Commentaries on FIFA World Cup Finals: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines the interplay of prominence and cohesion in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries, drawing on discourse-analytic frameworks including Critical Stylistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and the Discourse-Historical Approach. Through a systematic review of 30 empirical studies on football commentary discourse, this research identifies how commentators deploy lexical, grammatical, and prosodic resources to foreground key moments and players while maintaining textual coherence across the unfolding narrative of live match broadcasts. Findings reveal that prominence is achieved through thematic foregrounding, evaluative lexicalisation, prosodic marking, and repetition, while cohesion is sustained via specialized register, lexical chains, grammatical devices, and discourse markers. The analysis demonstrates that prominence and cohesion operate in dynamic tension: commentators must simultaneously highlight critical events (prominence) and weave them into a coherent narrative thread (cohesion) under severe real-time production constraints. This study contributes to discourse studies by theorizing the prominence-cohesion nexus in constrained, multimodal sports discourse and by synthesizing cross-linguistic evidence on how World Cup commentaries construct meaning, identity, and ideology through language. Implications for genre theory, multimodal discourse analysis, and the study of evaluative language in institutional talk are discussed.

Keywords: prominence, cohesion, FIFA World Cup, football commentary, discourse analysis, Critical Stylistics, evaluative language, information structure

1. Introduction

FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries represent a unique discourse genre characterized by real-time production, multimodal integration, high affective intensity, and global audience reach. As commentators narrate the unfolding drama of the world's most-watched sporting event, they face the dual challenge of highlighting critical moments and players (prominence) while maintaining a coherent narrative thread that connects events, builds tension, and constructs meaning (cohesion). This article examines how prominence and cohesion operate in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries, synthesizing empirical evidence from 30 studies on football commentary discourse to theorize the prominence-cohesion nexus in this constrained, high-stakes communicative context.

Prominence refers to the linguistic and paralinguistic strategies that foreground certain elements—players, actions, moments—making them perceptually and cognitively salient to the audience. Cohesion, by contrast, encompasses the lexical, grammatical, and discourse-level resources that bind utterances into a unified text, enabling listeners to track referents, follow narrative threads, and construct coherent mental representations of the match. While prominence and cohesion have been studied extensively in written discourse and planned speech, their interaction in spontaneous, constrained, multimodal genres such as live sports commentary remains undertheorised.

This study addresses three research questions: (1) What linguistic and prosodic strategies do commentators employ to create prominence in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries? (2) How is cohesion achieved and maintained across the dynamic, fragmented discourse of live match narration? (3) How do prominence and cohesion interact, and what does this interaction reveal about the genre-specific constraints and ideological functions of World Cup commentary? By synthesizing findings from Critical Stylistics (Rawian et al., 2023), Discourse-Historical Analysis (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023), Systemic Functional Linguistics (Suom-Kogle et al., 2024), and prosodic annotation frameworks (Mathon et al., 2015), this article offers a comprehensive account of prominence and cohesion in one of the world's most influential discourse genres.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews theoretical foundations, defining prominence and cohesion and situating them within discourse-analytic frameworks. Section 3 surveys methodological approaches used in football commentary research. Sections 4 and 5 present empirical findings on prominence and cohesion, respectively, drawing on the reviewed literature. Section 6 synthesizes these findings to theorize the prominence-cohesion nexus. Section 7 discusses implications for discourse studies, methodology, and practice, and Section 8 concludes.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Prominence in Discourse: Foregrounding and Information Structure

Prominence in discourse refers to the relative salience of linguistic elements, achieved through foregrounding mechanisms that draw attention to specific content. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, prominence is closely tied to information structure, particularly the Theme-Rheme organization, where Theme represents the point of departure for the message and Rheme conveys new or focal information. Foregrounding, a concept rooted in Prague School

linguistics and stylistics, involves deviation from expected patterns—lexical, grammatical, or prosodic—to highlight particular elements.

In live sports commentary, prominence serves multiple functions: it directs audience attention to critical events (goals, fouls, saves), constructs player and team identities, and amplifies affective intensity. Commentators achieve prominence through thematic positioning (placing key actors in subject or topic position), evaluative lexicalisation (using descriptive adjectives, adverbs, and verbs), prosodic emphasis (intonation, volume, tempo), and repetition (reiterating names, phrases, or evaluations). These strategies are not merely descriptive but ideologically charged, shaping how audiences perceive players, teams, and the broader narratives of triumph, struggle, and national identity that World Cup discourse constructs (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023).

2.2 Cohesion in Discourse: Lexical and Grammatical Resources

Cohesion, as theorized by Halliday and Hasan (1976), refers to the linguistic resources that create texture, binding clauses and sentences into a unified text. Halliday and Hasan identify five major cohesive devices: reference (pronouns, demonstratives), substitution, ellipsis, conjunction (logical connectors), and lexical cohesion (repetition, synonymy, collocation, hyponymy). These devices enable listeners or readers to track referents, follow argument structure, and construct coherent mental models of the discourse.

In football commentary, cohesion is particularly challenging due to the fragmented, reactive nature of live narration. Commentators must rapidly shift focus as play moves across the field, yet maintain narrative continuity so that audiences can follow the match's evolving storyline. Lexical cohesion is achieved through repetition of player names, team names, and key terms (e.g., "attack," "defense," "goal"), as well as through specialized football register (technical terms, idioms, metaphors). Grammatical cohesion is realized through pronominal reference ("he," "they"), ellipsis (omitting repeated elements), and conjunctions that signal temporal, causal, or contrastive relationships. Discourse markers (e.g., "now," "but," "and here") further enhance cohesion by signaling shifts in focus, topic, or evaluative stance (Suom-Kogle et al., 2024).

2.3 The Prominence-Cohesion Nexus in Constrained Discourse

The relationship between prominence and cohesion is dialectical: prominence strategies often disrupt cohesion (e.g., sudden shifts to foreground a goal), while cohesion mechanisms can dilute prominence (e.g., embedding critical events within routine narrative flow). In constrained discourse genres such as live sports commentary, this tension is acute. Commentators operate under severe time pressure, must synchronize speech with visual input, and face competing demands to inform, entertain, and emotionally engage audiences.

Mathon et al. (2015) propose an Optimality Theory framework for analyzing constrained discourse, arguing that commentators navigate trade-offs among prosodic, syntactic, and lexical choices to balance multiple communicative goals. In this view, prominence and cohesion are not independent dimensions but interdependent resources that commentators deploy strategically. For example, prosodic emphasis can foreground a player's name while lexical repetition maintains cohesive chains; evaluative adjectives can create prominence while collocational patterns sustain register-based cohesion.

The exploration of the prominence-cohesion nexus in FIFA World Cup commentaries thus requires attention to genre-specific constraints (real-time production, multimodal integration, global audience), discourse functions (informing, evaluating, constructing identity and ideology), and the linguistic resources (lexical, grammatical, prosodic) that commentators mobilize to meet these demands.

3. Methodological Approaches in Football Commentary Research

3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Stylistics

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical Stylistics are prominent frameworks in football commentary research, particularly for studies examining ideology, identity construction, and evaluative language. Rawian et al. (2023) apply Jeffries' Critical Stylistics to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 commentaries, using textual-conceptual functions to reveal ideological traces related to race and religion. This approach treats language as a site of ideological struggle, where lexical choices, grammatical structures, and discourse strategies reflect and reproduce power relations, stereotypes, and social identities.

The Discourse-Historical Approach, a variant of CDA developed by Wodak, is employed in studies of player construction. For instance, analysis of Lionel Messi's discursive construction during the 2022 World Cup reveals how commentators use heroic nouns, descriptive adjectives, and triumphant verbs to position Messi as "the greatest of all time" (GOAT), thereby constructing a legend narrative that transcends the match itself (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023). These critical approaches foreground the ideological and identity-constructing functions of prominence and cohesion, demonstrating that linguistic choices are never neutral but always implicated in broader social and cultural projects.

3.2 Systemic Functional Linguistics and Register Analysis

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing how language realizes meaning in context. SFL's focus on register (field, tenor, mode) and metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, textual) is particularly well-suited to football commentary, a genre defined by its specialized field (football), dynamic tenor (commentator-audience relationship), and multimodal mode (spoken language synchronized with visual broadcast).

Suom-Kogle et al. (2024) employ SFL-informed analysis to examine grammatical cohesion in online minute-by-minute football commentary, identifying patterns of reference, ellipsis, and conjunction that maintain textual coherence despite the fragmented nature of live updates. Register analysis reveals how football-specific lexis (e.g., "offside," "penalty," "corner kick") and collocational patterns (e.g., "brilliant save," "clinical finish") create a cohesive semantic field that signals genre membership and facilitates audience comprehension. SFL's attention to the textual metafunction—how language is organized as message—makes it a powerful tool for analyzing cohesion, while its interpersonal metafunction illuminates how evaluative language constructs prominence and affective engagement.

3.3 Prosodic and Multimodal Annotation

Prosody—intonation, stress, tempo, volume—is a critical but often underanalyzed dimension of prominence in spoken discourse. Mathon et al. (2015) advocate for multi-level annotation schemes that integrate prosodic, syntactic, and lexical analysis, arguing that prosody is the

primary device for signaling momentary prominence in live commentary. Exclamations, rising intonation, increased volume, and accelerated tempo mark critical moments (goals, near-misses, fouls), amplifying affective intensity and directing audience attention.

Multimodal approaches extend this analysis by examining how spoken commentary interacts with visual broadcast elements (camera angles, replays, graphics). Commentators must synchronize their speech with on-screen action, creating a complex interplay between linguistic prominence (what is said), prosodic prominence (how it is said), and visual prominence (what is shown). This multimodal perspective reveals that prominence and cohesion are not purely linguistic phenomena but emerge from the interaction of multiple semiotic resources. Future research integrating prosodic annotation, corpus methods, and multimodal analysis promises to deepen our understanding of how prominence and cohesion operate in real-time, high-stakes discourse.

4. Prominence in FIFA World Cup Finals Commentaries

4.1 Thematic Foregrounding and Player Construction

Thematic foregrounding is a primary strategy for creating prominence in football commentary. Commentators systematically place key players, teams, or actions in thematically prominent positions—typically as grammatical subjects or sentence-initial topics—thereby centering them in the discourse and shaping audience attention. Analysis of FIFA World Cup commentaries reveals deliberate foregrounding of star players, particularly in narratively significant moments such as goals, assists, or decisive saves.

The discursive construction of Lionel Messi during the 2022 World Cup Final exemplifies this strategy. Commentators consistently positioned Messi as the thematic subject, using heroic nouns ("maestro," "genius," "legend") and descriptive adjectives ("brilliant," "unstoppable," "magical") to construct him as the protagonist of Argentina's triumph (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023). This thematic foregrounding serves multiple functions: it directs attention to Messi's actions, constructs his identity as a transcendent figure, and embeds individual performance within broader narratives of national pride and sporting greatness.

Thematic foregrounding also operates at the team level. Commentators foreground the attacking team during offensive plays and the defending team during defensive stands, using grammatical choices (active vs. passive voice, agent vs. patient roles) to highlight or downplay agency. Behnam et al. (2015) demonstrate that after-match reports systematically foreground winning teams and background losing teams through verb choice, noun phrase modification, and nominalisation, revealing how grammatical foregrounding/backgrounding shapes post-match narratives of success and failure. These findings suggest that thematic prominence is not merely a descriptive feature but an ideologically charged strategy that constructs winners, losers, heroes, and villains.

4.2 Evaluative Lexicalisation and Promotional Language

Evaluative lexicalisation—the use of adjectives, adverbs, and verbs that convey judgment, affect, or appreciation—is a central mechanism for creating prominence in football commentary. Commentators deploy evaluative language to amplify the significance of events, construct player identities, and engage audiences emotionally. Saidian's (2023) analysis of promotional meta discursive tokens in Farsi and English commentaries of the 2014 World Cup

match between Argentina and Iran reveals that adjectives and adverbs are the most frequently used evaluative devices, functioning to promote particular interpretations of play and heighten affective intensity.

Evaluative lexicalization operates across multiple dimensions. Descriptive adjectives ("stunning," "incredible," "disastrous") evaluate the quality of play; affective adjectives ("thrilling," "heartbreaking," "joyous") convey emotional responses; and epistemic adverbs ("clearly," "obviously," "undoubtedly") assert the commentator's authoritative stance. These evaluative choices are not neutral descriptions but promotional strategies that guide audience interpretation, constructing certain players, teams, or moments as worthy of attention and admiration.

Putra et al. (2024) extend this analysis to figurative language, examining metaphors, similes, and hyperbole in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final commentary. They find that figurative language serves both evaluative and cohesive functions: metaphors (e.g., "Messi orchestrated the attack") create vivid, memorable images that foreground key moments, while also contributing to lexical cohesion through repeated metaphorical frames (e.g., football as war, football as art). This dual function underscores the interdependence of prominence and cohesion: evaluative lexicalisation creates prominence while simultaneously contributing to the semantic coherence of the commentary.

4.3 Prosodic Emphasis and Affective Marking

Prosody is perhaps the most immediate and powerful resource for creating prominence in live commentary. Prosodic emphasis—achieved through increased volume, rising intonation, accelerated tempo, and exclamatory tone—marks critical moments and amplifies affective intensity. Mathon et al. (2015) argue that prosodic annotation is essential for understanding how commentators signal momentary prominence, as prosodic features often override lexical and grammatical cues in directing audience attention.

Empirical studies document systematic prosodic patterns in football commentary. Goals are typically marked by exclamations, elongated vowels, and rising-then-falling intonation contours that signal climax and release. Near-misses elicit sharp intonation rises and accelerated tempo, conveying tension and suspense. Fouls and controversial decisions are marked by emphatic stress and contrastive intonation, signaling the commentator's evaluative stance. These prosodic patterns are not idiosyncratic but genre-specific conventions that audiences recognize and interpret as signals of significance.

Affective prosodic cues also serve to construct emotional narratives. Commentators modulate their prosody to convey excitement, disappointment, surprise, or relief, thereby guiding audience emotional responses and constructing the match as a dramatic, emotionally charged event. Acerenza's (2015) analysis of emotions in French World Cup commentaries (1998 and 2006) reveals that prosodic marking of affect is culturally variable, with French commentators employing distinct prosodic strategies compared to their English or Spanish counterparts. This cross-linguistic variation suggests that while prosodic prominence is universal, its specific realization is shaped by language-specific phonological systems and culture-specific norms of emotional expression.

4.4 Repetition as a Prominence Device

Repetition is a multifunctional device that creates prominence while also contributing to cohesion. In football commentary, repetition operates at multiple levels: lexical repetition (repeating player names, team names, key terms), syntactic repetition (parallel structures), and prosodic repetition (repeated intonation patterns). Repetition foregrounds elements by increasing their frequency and perceptual salience, making them more memorable and cognitively accessible.

Analysis of World Cup commentaries reveals strategic use of repetition to construct player identities and amplify critical moments. During the 2022 World Cup Final, commentators repeatedly invoked Messi's name, often in exclamatory or evaluative contexts ("Messi! Messi! What a player!"), thereby constructing him as the central protagonist (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023). Repetition of evaluative phrases ("incredible," "unbelievable," "magnificent") creates cumulative affective intensity, transforming individual moments into sustained emotional crescendos.

Repetition also serves cohesive functions, creating lexical chains that link utterances across time and maintain thematic continuity. However, excessive repetition can undermine cohesion by creating redundancy and disrupting narrative flow. Commentators must therefore balance repetition's prominence-enhancing effects with its potential to fragment discourse. This balance is particularly delicate in live commentary, where real-time constraints limit opportunities for lexical variation and where repetition may be driven by cognitive processing demands as much as by strategic communicative goals.

5. Cohesion in FIFA World Cup Finals Commentaries

5.1 Lexical Cohesion: Repetition, Collocation, and Specialized Register

Lexical cohesion is the primary mechanism for maintaining textual unity in football commentary. Repetition of player names, team names, and key football terms creates lexical chains that enable audiences to track referents and follow the match narrative despite rapid shifts in focus. Suom-Kogle et al. (2024) demonstrate that online minute-by-minute football commentary relies heavily on lexical repetition, with player names and action verbs (e.g., "passes," "shoots," "saves") recurring at high frequencies to maintain coherence across fragmented updates.

Collocation—the tendency of certain words to co-occur—is another key cohesive resource. Football commentary is characterized by conventional collocations such as "brilliant save," "clinical finish," "dangerous attack," and "solid defense." These collocational patterns signal genre membership, facilitate rapid comprehension, and create a cohesive semantic field that unifies the discourse. Levin (2008) identifies high-frequency phrases in football reporting, revealing that formulaic language is not a sign of linguistic poverty but a functional adaptation to the genre's real-time production constraints and the need for immediate audience comprehension.

Specialized register further enhances lexical cohesion. Football-specific lexis—technical terms (e.g., "offside," "penalty," "corner kick"), tactical vocabulary (e.g., "pressing," "counter-attack," "formation"), and idiomatic expressions (e.g., "parking the bus," "route one football")—creates a cohesive semantic domain that distinguishes football commentary from

other discourse genres. Cross-linguistic studies reveal that register varies across languages, reflecting different football cultures and communicative priorities. Pak's (2022) comparison of English and Russian football commentary identifies language-specific lexical features, with Russian commentaries employing more emotional and evaluative lexis compared to the more technical and descriptive English register. This variation underscores that lexical cohesion is not universal but shaped by linguistic and cultural context.

5.2 Grammatical Cohesion: Reference, Ellipsis, and Conjunction

Grammatical cohesion devices—reference, ellipsis, substitution, and conjunction—are essential for maintaining coherence in the fragmented discourse of live commentary. Pronominal reference (e.g., "he," "they," "it") enables commentators to track players and teams without constant repetition of full noun phrases, thereby maintaining cohesion while avoiding redundancy. However, reference can be ambiguous in fast-paced commentary, particularly when multiple players are in focus simultaneously. Commentators must therefore balance economy (using pronouns) with clarity (using full names), a trade-off that reflects the genre's real-time constraints.

Ellipsis—the omission of recoverable elements—is another cohesive device adapted to commentary's time pressure. Commentators frequently use elliptical constructions (e.g., "Messi to Di María, back to Messi, shoots!") that omit subjects, verbs, or objects, creating a telegraphic style that conveys information rapidly while maintaining grammatical cohesion through shared syntactic frames. Suom-Kogle et al. (2024) find that ellipsis is particularly common in online minute-by-minute commentary, where brevity is paramount and audiences are assumed to share contextual knowledge that renders omitted elements recoverable.

Conjunction—the use of logical connectors (e.g., "and," "but," "so," "because")—signals relationships between clauses and events, creating coherence at the discourse level. Temporal conjunctions (e.g., "now," "then," "meanwhile") are especially important in commentary, as they help audiences track the sequence of events and understand causal relationships (e.g., "France scores, and now Argentina must respond"). Contrastive conjunctions (e.g., "but," "however," "yet") signal shifts in fortune or unexpected developments, contributing to the narrative tension that makes football commentary compelling. Grammatical cohesion thus operates not merely to link clauses but to construct the match as a coherent, causally structured narrative with dramatic arcs and turning points.

5.3 Discourse Markers and Pragmatic Cohesion

Discourse markers—words and phrases that signal discourse structure, speaker stance, or interactional moves—play a crucial role in maintaining cohesion in live commentary. Markers such as "now," "well," "so," "of course," and "you know" serve multiple functions: they signal topic shifts, mark evaluative stance, manage turn-taking (in co-commentary), and engage the audience by creating a sense of shared understanding.

Temporal discourse markers (e.g., "now," "at this moment," "here we go") are particularly salient in football commentary, as they synchronize spoken discourse with visual action and signal shifts in focus as play moves across the field. These markers create cohesion by framing each new utterance in relation to the unfolding temporal sequence of the match, helping audiences maintain a coherent mental model of events.

Evaluative discourse markers (e.g., "of course," "clearly," "obviously") signal the commentator's stance and invite audience alignment with that stance, creating interpersonal cohesion. Jiménez's (2024) analysis of Spanish football broadcasting identifies pragmatic-textual markers that structure discourse and convey evaluative meaning, revealing that discourse markers are not mere fillers but functional elements that contribute to both textual and interpersonal coherence.

Cross-linguistic research reveals variation in discourse marker use. Saidian's (2023) comparison of Farsi and English World Cup commentaries finds that Farsi commentators employ honorifics and politeness markers more frequently than English commentators, reflecting cultural norms of respect and formality. This variation suggests that pragmatic cohesion is culturally situated, with discourse markers serving not only textual functions but also social and ideological functions that vary across linguistic and cultural contexts.

5.4 Cross-Linguistic Variation in Cohesive Strategies

Cross-linguistic studies of football commentary reveal significant variation in cohesive strategies, reflecting differences in linguistic structure, football culture, and communicative norms. Bakr's (2022) contrastive study of British English and Egyptian Arabic football commentaries identifies divergent patterns in lexical choice, grammatical structure, and discourse organization. English commentaries tend toward more technical, descriptive language with explicit cohesive ties (conjunctions, pronouns), while Arabic commentaries employ more figurative, emotionally charged language with implicit cohesion achieved through shared cultural knowledge and inter-textual references.

Kharabara et al. (2024) compare English and Ukrainian football live text commentary, finding that Ukrainian commentaries use more complex sentence structures and a wider range of stylistic devices (metaphors, idioms, phraseological units) compared to the more straightforward English style. These differences reflect not only linguistic typology (e.g., Ukrainian's richer morphological system allows for more flexible word order and ellipsis) but also cultural preferences for rhetorical elaboration versus informational economy.

Studies of non-European languages further expand our understanding of cohesive variation. Kalenyuk et al.'s (2023) analysis of language diversity in oral football commentary identifies language-specific features that contribute to cohesion, including phonological patterns, morphological devices, and syntactic structures that vary across languages. This body of research demonstrates that while the functional demands of football commentary—maintaining coherence under real-time constraints—are universal, the linguistic resources deployed to meet these demands are language-specific and culturally situated.

6. The Interplay of Prominence and Cohesion: Synthesis and Discussion

6.1 Dynamic Tension Under Production Constraints

The relationship between prominence and cohesion in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries is characterized by dynamic tension. Prominence strategies—thematic foregrounding, evaluative lexicalisation, prosodic emphasis, repetition—draw attention to specific elements, often disrupting the smooth flow of discourse. Cohesion mechanisms—lexical chains, grammatical ties, discourse markers—maintain textual unity, but can dilute the salience of

individual elements. Commentators must navigate this tension in real time, balancing the need to highlight critical moments with the imperative to maintain narrative coherence.

Mathon et al.'s (2015) Optimality Theory framework provides a useful lens for understanding this balance. Commentators face competing constraints: synchronize speech with visual action, convey information rapidly, engage audiences emotionally, maintain grammatical well-formedness, and sustain textual coherence. No single utterance can perfectly satisfy all constraints; commentators must therefore make trade-offs, prioritizing certain goals over others depending on the immediate context. For example, during a goal, prosodic prominence and evaluative lexicalisation may take precedence over grammatical cohesion, resulting in fragmented, exclamatory utterances that sacrifice syntactic completeness for affective impact. Conversely, during periods of routine play, cohesion may be prioritized, with commentators using lexical repetition and grammatical ties to maintain narrative flow even as prominence is distributed more evenly across multiple players and actions.

This dynamic tension is not a flaw but a defining feature of the genre. The interplay of prominence and cohesion creates the distinctive rhythm and texture of football commentary: moments of intense focus and emotional crescendo (prominence) alternating with periods of sustained narrative development (cohesion). This rhythm mirrors the structure of the match itself, with its alternation between critical incidents (goals, fouls, saves) and extended periods of build-up play.

6.2 Ideological Functions of Prominence-Cohesion Patterns

The prominence-cohesion nexus is not merely a technical linguistic matter but a site of ideological work. Choices about what to foreground and how to maintain cohesion reflect and reproduce broader social, cultural, and political meanings. Critical discourse analyses of World Cup commentaries reveal how prominence and cohesion patterns construct national identities, reinforce stereotypes, and legitimize particular interpretations of events.

The discursive construction of Lionel Messi during the 2022 World Cup Final illustrates this ideological dimension. By systematically foregrounding Messi through thematic positioning, evaluative lexicalization, and repetition, commentators constructed him as the central protagonist of Argentina's triumph, thereby reinforcing narratives of individual genius and national redemption (Discursive Construction of Lionel Messi, 2023). Cohesive devices—lexical chains linking Messi to heroic descriptors, grammatical ties connecting his actions to team success—wove this individual prominence into a coherent national narrative. This prominence-cohesion pattern served ideological functions: it individualized collective achievement, naturalized Messi's status as "the greatest," and embedded sporting success within broader discourses of Argentine national identity.

Rawian et al.'s (2023) Critical Stylistics analysis of FIFA 2022 commentaries reveals traces of racial and religious ideologies embedded in prominence and cohesion patterns. Certain players or teams were foregrounded through evaluative language that invoked stereotypes (e.g., African teams as "physical" but not "tactical"), while cohesive devices linked these evaluations to broader ideological frames. These findings demonstrate that prominence and cohesion are not neutral textual features but mechanisms through which power, identity, and ideology are discursively constructed and circulated.

6.3 Genre-Specific Strategies in Live Sports Broadcasting

The prominence-cohesion patterns observed in FIFA World Cup commentaries reflect genre-specific adaptations to the constraints and affordances of live sports broadcasting. Unlike written discourse or planned speech, live commentary is produced in real time, synchronized with unpredictable visual action, and directed at a mass, heterogeneous audience. These constraints shape how prominence and cohesion are realized.

Real-time production favors formulaic language, lexical repetition, and conventional collocations—cohesive resources that reduce cognitive load and enable rapid speech production. Synchronization with visual action requires discourse markers and deictic expressions ("now," "here," "there") that anchor spoken discourse to on-screen events, creating multimodal cohesion. The mass audience necessitates evaluative language and prosodic emphasis that engage viewers emotionally and construct the match as a dramatic, significant event worthy of global attention.

Comparative genre analysis reveals that these strategies are specific to live sports commentary. Thomas's (2015) characterization of televised sports commentary as a specialized discourse genre identifies distinctive features—fragmented syntax, high lexical density, prosodic variability, multimodal integration—that distinguish it from other spoken genres such as news broadcasting, political speeches, or casual conversation. Villa's (2012) analysis of specialized sports radio further demonstrates that prominence and cohesion strategies vary even within sports discourse, depending on medium (television vs. radio), format (live commentary vs. post-match analysis), and sport (football vs. basketball).

These genre-specific strategies have implications for discourse theory. They suggest that prominence and cohesion are not fixed linguistic categories but flexible resources that speakers adapt to meet the demands of particular communicative contexts. Understanding prominence and cohesion in FIFA World Cup commentaries thus contributes to a broader, more nuanced theory of how discourse is organized and how meaning is constructed in diverse genres and contexts.

7. Implications and Future Directions

7.1 Theoretical Implications for Discourse Studies

This study's synthesis of prominence and cohesion in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries has several theoretical implications for discourse studies. First, it demonstrates that prominence and cohesion are not independent dimensions but interdependent resources that speakers deploy in dynamic interaction. Theories of discourse coherence must therefore account for how foregrounding mechanisms (prominence) and binding mechanisms (cohesion) work together to create textual unity and communicative effectiveness.

Second, the study highlights the importance of genre and context in shaping discourse organization. Prominence and cohesion strategies that are effective in one genre (e.g., written academic prose) may be inappropriate or ineffective in another (e.g., live sports commentary). Discourse theory must therefore be genre-sensitive, recognizing that linguistic resources are adapted to meet the specific constraints and affordances of different communicative contexts.

Third, the study underscores the ideological dimensions of discourse organization. Choices about what to foreground and how to maintain cohesion are never neutral but always implicated

in the construction of identity, power, and meaning. Critical discourse analysis must therefore attend not only to explicit content but also to the subtle ways in which prominence and cohesion patterns reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies.

Finally, the study points to the need for multimodal discourse analysis. In genres such as live sports commentary, spoken language interacts with visual images, graphics, and sound effects to create meaning. Prominence and cohesion are thus multimodal phenomena, achieved through the coordinated deployment of linguistic, prosodic, and visual resources. Future discourse theory must integrate insights from multimodal semiotics to fully account for how meaning is constructed in contemporary media environments.

7.2 Methodological Innovations: Multimodal and Computational Approaches

Methodologically, this study points to the value of integrating multiple analytical frameworks—Critical Stylistics, Systemic Functional Linguistics, prosodic annotation, corpus methods—to capture the complexity of prominence and cohesion in live discourse. Future research should pursue several methodological innovations.

First, prosodic annotation should be systematically integrated into discourse analysis. As Mathon et al. (2015) argue, prosody is a primary device for signaling prominence in spoken discourse, yet it is often neglected in favor of lexical and grammatical analysis. Multi-level annotation schemes that integrate prosodic, syntactic, and lexical features will enable more comprehensive accounts of how prominence is achieved and how it interacts with cohesion.

Second, corpus methods offer powerful tools for identifying patterns in large datasets. Levin's (2008) corpus-based analysis of high-frequency phrases in football reporting demonstrates how computational methods can reveal systematic patterns that may not be apparent in small-scale qualitative analysis. Future research should build annotated corpora of World Cup commentaries across multiple languages, enabling cross-linguistic comparison and quantitative analysis of prominence and cohesion patterns.

Third, multimodal analysis should be pursued to understand how spoken commentary interacts with visual broadcast elements. Eye-tracking studies, for example, could reveal how prosodic prominence directs visual attention, while content analysis of camera angles and replays could illuminate how visual foregrounding complements or contradicts linguistic prominence. Such multimodal approaches will deepen our understanding of how prominence and cohesion operate in complex, multimedia discourse environments.

Finally, computational models of automatic commentary generation offer opportunities to test theories of prominence and cohesion. Ming et al.'s (2024) work on applying technology to football commentary demonstrates that computational systems must incorporate cohesion devices (lexical chains, grammatical ties) and prominence strategies (evaluative language, prosodic emphasis) to produce natural, engaging commentary. Developing and evaluating such systems can provide empirical tests of discourse theories and reveal which features are essential for effective communication.

7.3 Pedagogical and Professional Applications

The findings of this study have practical applications for commentator training, language pedagogy, and professional communication. Understanding how prominence and cohesion operate in successful World Cup commentaries can inform training programs for aspiring

commentators, helping them develop the linguistic and prosodic skills needed to engage audiences and construct compelling narratives under real-time constraints.

For language pedagogy, football commentary offers rich material for teaching discourse analysis, register variation, and genre-specific language use. Suom-Kogle et al. (2024) suggest that analyzing cohesion devices in football commentary can help students understand how texts are structured and how meaning is constructed across utterances. Such pedagogical applications are particularly valuable in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, where students need to master specialized registers and genres.

For professional communicators—journalists, broadcasters, public relations specialists—the study offers insights into how to balance prominence and cohesion in high-stakes, real-time communication. The strategies identified in World Cup commentaries—evaluative lexicalization, prosodic emphasis, lexical repetition, discourse markers—are transferable to other contexts where speakers must engage audiences, convey information rapidly, and maintain narrative coherence under pressure.

Finally, the study has implications for media literacy education. By revealing how prominence and cohesion patterns construct meaning and ideology in World Cup commentaries, the research can help audiences become more critical consumers of sports media, recognizing how linguistic choices shape their perceptions of players, teams, and events.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined the interplay of prominence and cohesion in FIFA World Cup Finals commentaries, synthesizing empirical findings from 30 studies to theorize how commentators navigate the dual demands of foregrounding critical moments and maintaining narrative coherence. The analysis reveals that prominence is achieved through thematic foregrounding, evaluative lexicalisation, prosodic emphasis, and repetition, while cohesion is sustained through lexical chains, grammatical ties, discourse markers, and specialized register. These strategies operate in dynamic tension, with commentators making real-time trade-offs to balance competing communicative goals under severe production constraints.

The prominence-cohesion nexus is not merely a technical linguistic matter but a site of ideological work, where choices about what to foreground and how to maintain cohesion construct player identities, national narratives, and broader social meanings. Cross-linguistic evidence demonstrates that while the functional demands of football commentary are universal, the specific linguistic resources deployed vary across languages and cultures, reflecting different football traditions, communicative norms, and ideological contexts.

This study contributes to discourse studies by theorizing the prominence-cohesion nexus in constrained, multimodal genres, by synthesizing cross-linguistic evidence on football commentary discourse, and by demonstrating the ideological dimensions of discourse organization. It points to future research directions—multimodal analysis, prosodic annotation, corpus methods, computational modeling—that promise to deepen our understanding of how prominence and cohesion operate in diverse discourse contexts.

As FIFA World Cup Finals continue to captivate billions of viewers worldwide, the commentaries that narrate these matches will remain a rich site for discourse analysis, offering insights into how language constructs meaning, identity, and ideology in one of the world's

most influential communicative genres. The understanding how prominence and cohesion operate in World Cup commentaries helps us to gain not only linguistic knowledge but also critical awareness of how discourse shapes our perceptions of sport, nation, and the world.

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