

Ballon d'Or Award and Media Framing of Racism in the Case of Vinicius Junior

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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of sport reports in framing racism in association with the Ballon d'Or award, and the exclusion of Real Madrid player Vinicius Junior (Vini Jr.) in 2024. The current study aims to investigate how racism is discursively framed in media reports concerning the Ballon d'Or and Vini. Moreover, it intends to identify the ideological stances used in the selected reports. The sample of the study is limited to four extracts selected from two American journals. As far as the model of analysis is concerned, this study employs an integrated framework including Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1989, 2001), Halliday and Matthiessen's Systemic Functional Linguistics (2014) (SFL), and Fairhurst and Sarr's Framing Theory (1996) (FT). The findings uncovered that American sports reports utilize high-modality language, relational processes, and framing devices to subtly expose racial bias. Finally, the analysis asserts that media texts reflect and contest dominant ideologies, showing the structural entrenchment of racism in football reports.

Keywords: (Ballon d'Or, Critical Discourse Analysis, Football, Racism, Vinicius Junior).

جائزة الكرة الذهبية وتأطير العنصرية إعلامياً في قضية فينيسيوس جونيور

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قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها / كلية الآداب / الجامعة المستنصرية

المخلص

يَتناولُ هذا البحثُ دراسةَ دورِ التقاريرِ الرياضيّةِ في تأطيرِ العنصريّةِ بما يتعلّقُ بجائزةِ الكرةِ الذهبيةِ، واستبعادِ لاعبِ ريالِ مدريد، فينيسيوس جونيور (فيني جونيور)، في سنة ٢٠٢٤. تهدفُ الدراسةُ الحاليّةُ إلى استقصاءِ كَيْفِيّةِ تأطيرِ العنصريّةِ خطّابياً في التقاريرِ الإعلاميّةِ التي تتعلّقُ بجائزةِ الكرةِ الذهبيةِ وَبِغْيَني. وَفَضْلاً عَن ذلك، فإنّها تَهْدُفُ إلى تحديدِ المواقفِ الإيديولوجيّةِ المُعتمَدةِ في التقاريرِ المُختارةِ. نَقْتَصِرُ عِنْدَنا الدِّراسَةَ عَلى أَرْبَعَةِ مُقْتَطَعَاتٍ مُختارةٍ مِنْ مَجَلَّتَيْنِ أَمْرِيكِيَّتَيْنِ. فِيمَا يَتَعَلَّقُ بِنَمُودَجِ التَّحْلِيلِ، نَسْتَخْدِمُ هَذِهِ الدِّراسَةَ إِطاراً تَحْلِيلِيّاً مُتكامِلاً، يَشْمَلُ نَمُودَجَ فيركلوف ذي الأبعادِ الثلاثةِ (١٩٨٩، ٢٠٠١)، وَاللِّسَانِيَّاتِ الوُضُوعِيَّةِ النِّظَامِيَّةِ لِهاليداي وَماتيسن (٢٠١٤)، وَنَظَريّةِ التَّأطِيرِ لِفِيرْمُورْت وَسار (١٩٩٦). قَدْ كَشَفَتِ النِّتائِجُ أَنَّ التَّقاريرَ الرِّياضيّةَ الأَمْرِيكيّةَ تَسْتَخْدِمُ لُغَةً عَالِيَةً التَّوكِيدِ، وَعَمَلِيَّاتٍ عِلَاقِيَّةً، وَأَدَوَاتٍ تَأطِيرِ لِكَشْفِ التَّحيزِ العِرْقِيِّ بِشَكْلِ دَقِيقٍ. وَفِي الخِتامِ، يُوكِّدُ التَّحْلِيلُ أَنَّ النُّصُوصَ الإعلاميّةِ تَعكِّسُ وتُناهضُ الإيديولوجيّاتِ السَّائدةَ، مِمّا يُظْهِرُ التَّجذُّرَ البَنِيويَّ لِلْعُنْصَرِيّةِ في التَّقاريرِ الرِّياضيّةِ في كُرَةِ القَدَمِ. الكَلِمَاتُ المُفْتاحيّةُ: (جائزةُ الكرةِ الذهبيةِ، التَّحْلِيلُ النّقْديّ لِلخُطابِ، كُرَةُ القَدَمِ، العُنْصَرِيّةُ، فينيسيوس جونيور).

1. Introduction

Racism in global football has become a determined issue, along with rising visibility by means of both social media and traditional journalism. Recently, Vini's case has attracted wider attention due to repeated racial abuse in European stadiums and the media's varying treatment of such incidents (Mills, 2023). Language and sport (Richardson, 2007) overlap influentially in the public domain, especially in the way sports are sustained and interpreted via linguistic aspects. Sports journalism basically creates narratives via lexical, syntactic, and discursive language that influence readers' perceptions. As stated by Spurr (2001), the language of sport can be illustrated as "the

linguistic representation of sporting activity, that is bodily effort in the situations of identifiable games with rules and procedures of competitions” (p.82).

Media representation in sports journalism plays an important role in influencing common beliefs, specifically when dealing with race, identity, and merit. Peter (2018) declares that sports journalism is an organized and mainly expanded part of the media, offering illustrations, results, and commentary to the public. According to Boyle and Haynes (2009), media outlets frame players based on cultural, socio-political, and racial stereotypes, emphasizing societal biases. Consequently, linguistic aspects in lexical framing, headings, and metaphors report and interpret incidents. In a pivotal and distinguished event like the Ballon d’Or award 2024, media discourse becomes a stage for enhancing and maintaining narratives around legitimacy, exclusion, and fairness.

The reference to the Brazilian Real Madrid player, Vini, is associated with racism in football, since he has been subjected to racial abuse in stadiums and the media. As Backs and Crabbe (2001) illustrate that racialized discourse in football positions Black players within dehumanizing frames. Vini Jr. has been repeatedly exposed to racism in Spain, where he faced racial slurs from fans, and global events like the Ballon d’Or. These incidents are widely reported and unevenly framed in the media, uncovering how racism persists in elite football culture.

Despite the extraordinary performance of Vini during the 2024 season, marked by significant contributions in the UEFA Champions League, La Liga, and the Spanish Super Cup. His exclusion from the 2024 Ballon d’Or award has sparked widespread debate. The problem lies in the way Vini is exposed to racism. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore and reveal how racism is represented, legitimized, or sustained in American sports reports concerning the 2024 Ballon d’Or and Vini’s exclusion.

CDA, especially Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach (1989, 2001), provides a powerful methodological tool to explore how racism and ideology are linguistically embedded in the Ballon d’Or 2024 coverage. As far as Vini Jr. is concerned, this study reveals the linguistic and discursive strategies used in American news reports concerning the 2024 Ballon d’Or award. Therefore, the Ballon d’Or event becomes a critical case to explore how racial and institutional ideologies are discursively sustained or challenged through media representation. This study intends to answer the following questions:

- 1- How do the selected American news reports frame racism in the Ballon d’Or award, with a focus on the case of Vini’s exclusion?
- 2- What ideological implications are embedded in the reports?

2. The Aims

- 1- To investigate how racism is discursively framed in media reports concerning the Ballon d'Or and Vini Jr.
- 2- To identify the ideological stances used in the selected media texts.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Racism in Sports Media

Racism in sports media is often included in discursive practices that naturalize exclusion and stereotyping. According to Sterkenburg and Knoppers (2004), highlight that media coverage tends to recognize Black players by focusing on their physicality while ignoring strategy or intelligence. Billings (2008) also noted that racial bias is included in commentary via distinguished lexical aspects, which contribute to a discourse that marginalizes and reproduces cultural hierarchies via media narratives. In the context of football, this racial framing is specifically predominant in the media coverage of top players like Vini, whose identity as a Black Brazilian is entangled with racially charged representation and aggressive public treatment.

4.2 Framing Theory and Media Representation

The concept of framing was established by Gregory Bateson (1972), who declared that framing is a mental concept that refers to “a special and temporary bounding of a set of interactive messages” (p.197). According to Fairhurst and Sarr (1996), language is useful in memorizing acts and information to convert how we view circumstances. To use language, individuals should have thoughts that would be reproduced in their interpretative frameworks. Fairhurst and Sarr (1996) propose certain techniques for framing:

- 1- **Metaphor:** To describe an idea or to systematize a new meaning by comparing it with something else.
- 2- **Stories:** To frame a topic with an anecdote clearly and unforgettably (legends and myths).
- 3- **Tradition:** To organize and describe an organization at proper time increments to reproduce and adapt organizational values.
- 4- **Jargons, slogans, and catchphrases:** To frame a topic remarkably and familiarly.
- 5- **Artifacts:** To clarify commercial values using physical traces.
- 6- **Contrast:** To describe a topic by referring to what it lacks or does not involve.
- 7- **Spin:** to state a concept by describing it with a negative or positive connotation.

In sports journalism, these frames serve ideological purposes, either enhancing dominant reports or challenging them. Bruce (2016) found that news reports on racial narratives in sport downplay inequality by focusing on individual incidents. The current paper employs FT to expose how Vini's experiences of racism are depicted as emotional episodes, thereby mitigating broader structural critique and normalizing racial injustice through the 2024 Ballon d'Or.

4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis Representation in Sports Journalism

CDA provides a framework to reveal hidden ideologies within texts by focusing on the relationship between social power and discourse. Fairclough's three-dimensional approach (2001), textual, discursive, and social, has been widely employed in media studies to uncover the ways power and inequality are sustained through language. As stated by Richardson and Wodak (2009), CDA is especially effective in interpreting how media institutions create dominant narratives while marginalizing dissenting voices. In the field of sports journalism, CDA has been utilized to navigate racial bias, national identity, and ideologies (Fleming & Fullagar, 2007). The current study builds on such an approach to investigate how the 2024 Ballon d'Or coverage applies discourse strategies that might obscure or reproduce racism. In regard to a specific focus on Vini's portrayal in both British and American media coverage.

4.4 Linguistic and Ideological Construction of Race in Football Reporting

Language is a key medium through which race is socially created and ideologically mediated in sports reporting. Halliday's SFL (2014) illustrates how the three metafunctions reveal underlying authorial attitudes and social positioning. In football journalism, lexical aspects such as passive construction, agent deletion, and nominalization can hide institutional responsibility in racist incidents. Van Dijk further (2008) declares that elite context often deflects attention from racism by depending on euphemisms or framing the victim as overly sensitive. Vini's case provides a relevant site to explore these strategies, where the language of inclusion exists with implicit racial marginalization within systemic football platforms like the Ballon d'Or.

4.5 Previous Studies

Many studies tackled various aspects of football discourse; still, the relation between racism, bias, and media discourse requires further examination, as far as the football award and Vini's exclusion are concerned. The first study, entitled "Framing Race and Blame in the Media: A Case Study on the Chapel Hill Shooting," by Galadari (2018), examined how racism is denied in news media through various discursive

strategies. This study uses a qualitative research design and CDA's approach to interpret how language frames racism and blame in crime news stories.

The other study, entitled "A Discourse Analysis of Selected Football Texts", by Sada Olagunju (2019), examined the linguistic features of football reporting in Nigerian newspapers. Applying the Generic Structural Potential (GSP) framework by Ansary and Babai (2005), adapted from SFL. The study analyzed thirteen articles from the "Complete Sports" newspapers during the 2010 World Cup. The data explored the structural elements within the context of football reporting, uncovering how these elements contribute to the overall text of social function and meaning.

The second study, entitled "Critical Discourse Analysis on Representation of Racism and Solidarity in Adidas's Tweets", by Desi Indrawati (2021), examined how Adidas uses Twitter to convey messages about racism and solidarity. By applying the CDA approach, the data involved twelve tweets from the official account of Adidas. The study concludes that Adidas influences humanitarian and declarative statement themes to represent direct support for the Black community, employees, and the Black Lives Matter movement.

The third study, entitled "Discourse Structure of The Sports Reports of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Kenyan Newspapers", by Caleb Wekesa and Anashia Nancy Ong'onda (2023), applied a CDA approach based on Van Dijk and Fairclough's models. The researchers analyzed 62 news reports of the World Cup football from Kenyan newspapers on 20th November and 20th December of 2022. They explored the structure of these reports, concentrating on the main events, headlines, and leads to comprehend the way language is utilized to depict football discourse.

3. Methodology

3.1 Sample of the Study

The data is limited to four extracts selected from two American journals, (The New York Times and ESPN). Each journal offers two extracts, providing a comparative and representative sample of how racism in the case of Vini Jr. and the 2024 Ballon d'Or award is framed. The selection criteria involved the prominence of the media reports, their global relationship, and their coverage of football-related racism and the 2024 Ballon d'Or award event. The publication timeframe spans from 29 to 31 October, aligning with the buildup and result of the 2024 Ballon d'Or award ceremony. The first report entitled "Vinicius Junior, Ballon d'Or disappointment and Real Madrid's furious reaction". The second report entitled "Ballon d'Or: Real Madrid, Brazil stars back

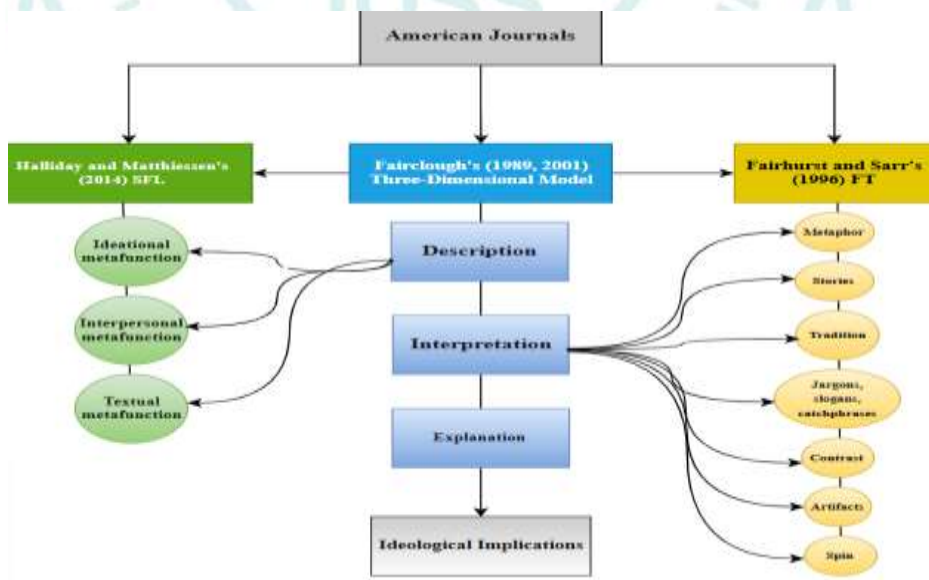
Vinicius after snub”. The third report, “Vinicius Junior, Ballon d’Or disappointment and Real Madrid’s furious reaction”. These reports were selected based on their linguistic richness, journalistic influence, and ideological positioning within American media discourse.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

This paper employs an integrated framework, a combination of three complementary models: Fairclough’s three-dimensional model (1989, 2001), Halliday and Matthiessen’s SFL (2014), and Fairhurst and Sarr’s FT (1996). It adopts a qualitative research design, which follows Fairclough’s three-stage analytical procedures. At the description stage, Halliday’s SFL is employed to analyze how language constructs meaning through the three metafunctions. As far as the interpretation stage is concerned, FT offers valuable devices that shape the interpretation. Moreover, the explanation stage examines both CDA and FT to reveal how these discourses sustain and challenge ideologies of race, institutional inequality, and power. Finally, as far as Vini’s exclusion from the 2024 Ballon d’Or award is concerned, this integrated approach offers a key exploration of how racism is framed in media reports. The following figure provides an analytical framework for analyzing sports reports:

Figure 1

The Eclectic Model



4.1 Analysis and Discussion

4.1.1 ESPN News Sports Reports, Extract (1): “Ballon d’Or: Real Madrid, Brazil stars back Vinicius after snub”

A club source told ESPN the result was "unfair" and "shameful," calling it "a historic robbery." Vinicius posted on social media later on Monday, saying "I'll do it 10x if I have to. They aren't ready. Unfortunately, due to criteria that no one can understand, the award did not come. And don't get me wrong, Rodri is a great player, who deserves to be among the best. But Vini not winning this Ballon d'Or was embarrassing, and the only thing that lost today was football.

This extract presents emotional reactions to Vini's exclusion from the Ballon d'Or 2024 award ceremony. It comprises evaluative commentary and expressions of discontent, allowing for a layered analysis of discourse features concerned with media framing and ideologies of race.

At the description stage, the first clause, “A club source told ESPN the result was ‘unfair’ and ‘shameful’, calling it ‘a historic robbery’”, is in declarative mood. It involves a verbal process, “told” attributed to an unnamed actor, “A club source”. The relational process, “the result was ‘unfair’ and ‘shameful’” at the appraisal system, highlights the result through strong negative value judgments. The graduation is associated with “a historic robbery”, revealing forceful emotional language. The theme is “A club source told ESPN the result was ‘unfair’ and ‘shameful’, calling it ‘a historic robbery’”, while the rheme highlights a constant theme pattern as similar structures. In the interpretation stage,

The next clause, “Vinicius posted on social media later on Monday, saying ‘I’ll do it 10x if I have to. They aren’t ready’”, is declarative. Embeds verbal and material processes, “posted, saying,” showing action and communication. The modal verb “have to” reveals obligation and resistance, while “They aren’t ready” uncovers an interpersonal judgement about the institutions. The system of appraisal is an attitude affective and negative. The theme is “Vinicius posted on social media later on Monday, saying ‘I’ll do it 10x if I have to. They aren’t ready’”, while the rheme involves the ideological and emotional response of Vini to perceived injustice.

The third clause, “Unfortunately, due to criteria that no one can understand, the award did not come”, is in declarative mood. It includes a relational circumstantial clause “due to criteria that no one can understand”. The process is existential modal adverb “Unfortunately,” showing the epistemic stance of the speaker. The clause includes an appraisal system, which is engagement. The theme is the whole clause “Unfortunately,

due to criteria that no one can understand, the award did not come”, and the rheme reveals the critique of the process by which the award was decided.

The other clause, “And don’t get me wrong, Rodri is a great player, who deserves to be among the best”, is declarative. It includes two mental processes, “get” and “deserves”. With engagement intensifying praise for Rodri while reflecting the injustice to Vini.

The fifth clause, “But Vini not winning this Ballon d’Or was embarrassing”, is declarative. It includes a relational process “was”, with the carrier being the normalized clause “Vini not winning this Ballon d’Or was embarrassing”, and the attribute “embarrassing”. Which expresses a strong negative attitude, revealing emotional and ethical condemnation. The theme is “But Vini not winning this Ballon d’Or was embarrassing”, and the rheme suggests the judgment of the result’s inappropriateness.

The final clause, “and the only thing that lost today was football”, is also declarative. It contains a relational process “was”, the carrier “the only thing that lost today”, and the attribute is “football”. This metaphoric construction uncovers a relational attribution, sustaining that the sport has affected not only the player. The appraisal system here is figurative and negative, with graduation strengthening the intensity of “only thing”. The theme is the full clause “and the only thing that lost today was football”, and the rheme highlights a wider cultural and social impact beyond individual loss.

At the interpretation level, the extract uses contrast and metaphor framing in addition to moral evaluation to construct an influential narrative. In the first clause, “the award did not come” reduces agency via passive construction, where “criteria that no one can understand” refers to a spin framing obscuring decision-making in vagueness. The contrastive phrase “don’t get me wrong” frames the speaker as ethically right, proactively blocking criticism. The statement “Rodri is a great player” functions as a balancing frame, recognizing Rodri’s worth to separate the speaker from accusations of prejudice. The framing increases in the clause “Vini not winning this Ballon d’Or was embarrassing,” where the contrast with Rodri is made straight, and the emotional framing succeeds. The lexical word “embarrassing” serves as a slogan, condensing ethical critique into a simple phrase. The final sentence, “the only thing that lost today was football,” is an influential metaphor frame. It changes the problem from individual injustice to a symbolic loss for the sport itself, thus evaluating the risks of the argument and appealing to a wider audience. Generally speaking, the extract is framed not as an individual complaint but as an institutional failure that damages the legality of football awards.

As far as the explanation stage is concerned, the extract shows deeper ideological structures linked to racism in global football. Vini's exclusion, depicted via emotional language as "unfair, shameful, embarrassing," emphasizes the marginalization of Black excellence within elite institutions. The mentioned lexical words function to expose the way racialized players are positioned outside the boundaries of recognized merit alongside outstanding performance. The extract challenges the myth of neutral meritocracy in football awards by referring to opaque "criteria" that conveniently disqualify racialized players. Moreover, via this lens, the discourse reflects how racism is institutionalized. Therefore, the ideological implications affirm that racial injustice persists in elite sports under the appearance of professionalism, as well as that discursive resistance by players and media alike is crucial in exposing and reshaping these narratives.

4.1.2 ESPN News Sports Reports, Extract (2): "Can Vinicius Jr. rise above Ballon d'Or snub? It's up to him."

Vinicius swiftly used social media to proclaim: "I'll do 10 times more if I have to. They're not ready." A post viewed over 128 million times! Now, if he's preparing to inflict a tempest of brilliance on Madrid's rivals to "show" those who have done him "an injustice," it's worth reflecting on how just such circumstances have had a catalytic impact on a few high-achievers in these situations.

At the description level, the first clause, "Vinicius swiftly used social media to proclaim: 'I'll do 10 times more if I have to. They're not ready'", is declarative. It includes a material process "used", where "Vinicius" is the actor, and "social media" is the goal. The rooted verbal process "to proclaim" states Vini as the sayer, and the direct quote remains as verbiage. In the direct quote "I'll do 10 times more if I have to. They're not ready", there is a material process which is "do", alongside the actor "I", and the goal "10 times more". It is modified by commitment modality "if I have to", and future "I'll". The next rooted clause "They're not ready" uses a relational process "are", together with "they" as the carrier, and "not ready" as the attribute, expressing negative judgment. The appraisal system contains a high attitude, firm, interesting, and defiant. The repetition of "I'll do 10 times more if I have to" emphasizes graduation. The theme "Vinicius swiftly used social media to proclaim: 'I'll do 10 times more if I have to. They're not ready'", and the rheme states both the content and the action of resistance.

The next clause, "A post viewed over 128 million times!", is declarative, and it is an exclamative elliptical clause. It covers a material process "viewed", together with "A

post” as the goal, and the actor is implicit (the audience). This structure shows emphasis by bravery and intensity, showing the influence and public response of Vini’s voice. The appraisal system here was uncovered through graduation “over 128 million times,” highlighting amplification of consequence. The theme is “A post viewed over 128 million times”, where the rheme highlights its exceptional reception, reinforcing the social visibility of his defiant voice.

The final clause, “Now, if he’s preparing to inflict a tempest of brilliance on Madrid’s rivals to ‘show’ those who have done him ‘an injustice,’ it’s worth reflecting on how just such circumstances have had a catalytic impact on a few high-achievers in these situations”, is a conditional declarative clause. It includes a relational process “it’s worth reflecting”, together with the phenomenon the subordinate clause, “he’s preparing to inflict a tempest...”. It encompasses a material process “inflict”, where “he” is the actor, and “a tempest of brilliance” is the goal. The verbal process “to ‘show’” presents intention, where “those who have done him ‘an injustice’” is the receiver. As it comprises additional material process “have done”, together with “those” as the actors, and “an injustice” as the goal. The appraisal system here includes attitude (positive towards Vini’s brilliance; negative towards injustice), graduation (metaphor, ‘tempest’), and engagement (inviting the reader into a reflective stance). The theme is the whole clause, where the rheme proposes that these contexts drive greatness.

The extract at the interpretation level frames Vini as both hero and resister, using multiple framing techniques to elevate his moral stance. The first clause, “Vinicius swiftly used social media to proclaim...” frames his declarations “I’ll do 10 times more if I have to. They’re not ready” as a slogan frame. It is particular, emotionally influenced, and notable, maintaining his resilience and challenging authority. The use of contrast framing, Vini’s readiness versus “their” unpreparedness, places him as self-confident and ethically higher. The next clause, “A post viewed over 128 million times!” involves an artifact frame; the post becomes a digital marker of resistance. The huge visibility of his voice frames Vini as a public agent challenging an unfair system. The third clause, “Now, if he’s preparing to inflict a tempest of brilliance...”, uses storytelling and metaphor framing. The phrase “a tempest of brilliance” functions as a heroic metaphor, asserting a retaliatory and overwhelming face. This makes a narrative framing where the performance of Vini becomes rhetorical revenge, a system of sensitive justice.

At the explanation stage, the extract challenges dominant ideological conventions about merit in football through how Vini was exposed to racism. The focus of the journal on social media “128 million times” shifts power from traditional institutions to public

discourse, reflecting how platforms can marginalize voices. As well as the focus on “injustice, brilliance,” positions racism not as a separate behavior but as a pattern that conditions recognition. Moreover, by portraying Vini’s agency as reactionary, yet empowering. Furthermore, ideologically, the extract criticizes whiteness as a gatekeeper of validation in football’s upper tiers, while providing a counter-discourse of Black empowerment and transformation via performance and resilience.

4.1.3 Report (3), Extract (1): “Vinicius Junior, Ballon d’Or disappointment and Real Madrid’s furious reaction”.

“I think there are problems between Real Madrid and UEFA, which affected some things in the results,” former Madrid midfielder Clarence Seedorf told TNT Sports on the red carpet in Paris. “Vinicius Junior is the one who definitely deserves the award. It is a shame.”

Concerning the description stage, the first clause, “I think there are problems between Real Madrid and UEFA”, is in declarative mood. The mental process is “think”, the senser is “I”, and the phenomenon is “there are problems between Real Madrid and UEFA”. The clause includes an existential process “there are”, where “problems between Real Madrid and UEFA” works as the existent. Low epistemic modality is specified via the mental process “think”, uncovering individual opinion or uncertainty. The appraisal system includes engagement (expressing the personal view of Seedorf) and attitude, also illustrating concern or criticism of institutional relations. The theme is “I think there are problems between Real Madrid and UEFA”, where the rheme exposes the debated idea of external institutional conflict.

The next clause, “which affected some things in the results”, is a dependent relative clause in declarative mood, modifying (problems). It contains a material process “affected”, where “which” refers to the problems as the actor, and the goal is “some things in the results”. The appraisal system involves a negative attitude, showing that hidden conflicts distort outcomes. The theme is “which affected some things in the results”, while the rheme highlights the effect of institutional politics on results.

The third clause, “Vinicius Junior is the one who definitely deserves the award”, is declarative. It includes a relational identifying process “is”, where “Vinicius Junior” is the identifier, and “the one who definitely deserves the award” is the identified. Within the rooted clause, there is a mental process “deserves”, highlighting a value judgement. The use of the modal adverb “definitely” expresses high modality (certainty). The

appraisal system contains a strong positive attitude towards Vini, reinforcing merit and legitimacy. The theme is “Vinicius Junior is the one who definitely deserves the award”, where the rheme maintains the claim of rightful recognition.

The final clause, “it is a shame”, is declarative. It encompasses a relational process “is”, where “it” is the carrier, and “shame” is the attribute. It involves a strong negative judgment; the attitude is evaluative and emotional. The theme is “it is a shame”, where the rheme provides the moral evaluations of injustice.

At the interpretation stage, the extract revolves around storytelling and contrast framing. Seedorf is the framing agent who constructs a counter-narrative to the official result. By saying “I think there are problems between Real Madrid and UEFA”, the clause highlights institutional conflict framing, assuming that politics within football rankings, not merit, determined the outcome. The second clause, “which affected some things in the results”, applies spin farming. With a negative connotation that positions bias or interference without unswervingly accusing of corruption. This sustains a tone of professionalism while questioning fairness. Seedorf’s saying “Vinicius Junior is the one who definitely deserves the award” involves slogan framing. A pure, strong, evaluative language that confirms merit and moral value to Vini. The adverb “definitely” shows assertion, affirming the issue of racial discrimination and describing it as shameful. Eventually, the clause “it is a shame” evokes a contrast frame, contrasting what happened (Vini’s loss) with what really did for his team. The phrase becomes an influential result that encompasses emotional disappointment, constructing a moral frame against an unjust outcome. Together with the frames influencing the reader’s comprehension, the narrative is about institutional bias, where a deserving Black player is denied because of politics.

Regarding the explanation stage, the extract emphasizes the ideological structures of sports journalism and institutional football. Seedorf’s comment functions within a wider social discourse that recognizes institutional bias, affirming that UEFA’s relationship with Real Madrid may have ideologically mediated the results. By quoting “Vinicius Junior is the one who definitely deserves the award” Seedorf contests dominant narratives of merit that disadvantage racialized players. Moreover, the extract shows racial politics of recognition, despite Vini’s performance, crucial events like the Ballon d’Or remain disproportionately inaccessible, as the criteria are influenced by both race and institutional politics. Furthermore, Seedorf’s saying “it is a shame” positions the incident as a moral failure of the system, responding with the ideology that racial justice in football remains unfulfilled.

4.1.4 Extract (2)

Winning the Champions League (involved in 11 goals in 10 games, including one in the final), La Liga (involved in 21 goals in 26 games, one every 89 minutes on average) and the Spanish Super Cup (hat-trick in the final against Barcelona) was not enough. So what would be?

Regarding the description stage, the non-finite gerund clause, “Wining the Champions League (involved in 11 goals in 10 games, including one in the final), La Liga (involved in 21 goals in 26 games, one every 89 minutes on average) and the Spanish Super Cup (hat-trick in the final against Barcelona) was not enough”, is a declarative. It functions as a single multifaceted unit listing accomplishments and concluding with their evaluations. The central relational process is “was not”, the carrier is the full nominal group “Wining the Champions League.., La Liga.., and the Spanish Super Cup..”, and the attribute is “enough”. The appraisal system has a negative attitude; outstanding accomplishments are stated as insufficient. The theme is the full clause, while the rheme “was not enough”, carrying the evaluative judgement. The implications are that even significant, measurable achievements do not guarantee recognition.

The other clause, “So what would be?”, is an interrogative clause, a rhetorical question. It contains a relational process “would be”, the carrier is absent, where the attribute is not stated. The use of the modal verb “would” expresses hypothetical modality, assuming doubt. The appraisal system operates here via engagement and attitude, challenging the criteria for merit. The theme is “So what would be”, a complete sentence that functions as a thematic and rhetorical shift, where the rheme critiques the judgment against Vini.

The extract at the interpretation stage is formed with a clear contrast framing. The structure contrasts massive success (quantifiable and widely recognized) with the final clause. This is an instance of contrast framing, where the recognition (the level of success ensures victory) is destroyed by the reported outcome. Which creates a frame of injustice and disbelief. The rhetorical question “*So what would be*” reinforces the storytelling frame (the reader is asked to show the way absurd the denial is, stating that no accomplishments would have been enough in this context). Additionally, the statistics and performance details frame Vini not only as talented but extraordinary and exceptional. A spin framing is also pivotal, through using a negative phrase, “*was not enough*,” which portrays the choice makers as biased or irrational.

As far as the explanation stage is concerned, the extract shows broader ideological tensions in global football. Vini remains unrecognized by the Ballon d'Or voters, which may show institutional marginalization experienced by Black players. The extract criticizes dominant ideologies of neutral performance evaluations. The use of hard statistics juxtaposed with rhetorical questioning functions to undermine the myth of objectivity in award-giving systems, reflecting the ideological gatekeeping included in institutions like FIFA and UEFA. Vini's identity as a young Black player subject to racist abuse is interrelated to this ideological invisibility. Quoting "*was not enough*" becomes symbolic of racial exclusion, success is redefined to sustain exclusion, stating that no level of excellence can guarantee equality in recognition.

4.2 Discussion

This paper set out to show how the American journals frame racism in the case of the Ballon d'Or award and Vini's exclusion in 2024, despite his extraordinary performance. Through the use of CDA, SFL, and FT, it becomes evident that linguistic and discursive devices that applied in media texts to challenge and obscure ideological implications included in football narratives. Moreover, through the analyzed extracts, it was found that the analysis of the four extracts showed important patterns in linguistic choices. As far as the mood system is concerned, specifically declarative clauses occurred 14 times, providing an assertive and authoritative style of reporting. Interrogative clauses were rare and occurred only once, and were mostly rhetorical in tone. Regarding transitivity processes, material processes occurred seven times, emphasizing the actions performed or taken generally toward or via Vini. Relational processes occurred 10 times and functioned as a conformation of qualities or values, such as assigning success or failure. Mental processes were identified four times, which focused on thoughts, opinions, or judgments. Verbal processes occurred four times, especially in the form of reported speech or evaluative commentary. Only two clauses utilized existential processes to present the state of being. In terms of modality, the modals such as "*may, possibility, and perhaps*" occurred six times, showing different degrees of certainty and obligation. These findings assert that the discourse is constructed by linguistic patterns that obscure agency, emphasizing evaluative stance, and negotiate agreement with resistance to dominant ideologies.

Various framing techniques were used to affect the way readers understand Vini's identity, performance, and the controversy surrounding the Ballon d'Or award. Contrast framing, which occurred six times to juxtapose expected merit with denied recognition or

to mark Vini against others. Metaphor framing occurred six times, either to elevate Vini to the level of a mythic figure or to dramatize the injustice he endured. The spin framing was utilized three times, revising facts to state negative or positive connotations. Storytelling frames were identified three times. All of these techniques worked together to create a complex image of Vini, including both resistance and excellence, with exclusion and controversy. The media framing puts Vini as an athlete who defies institutional expectations, is occasionally admired, and is problematized.

5. Conclusion

This paper attempts to recognize the discursive and ideological construction of racism in American sports news reports tackling Vini's exclusion from the Ballon d'Or 2024. Based on an eclectic model including Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (1989, 2001), Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014), Fairhurst and Sarr's FT (1996), and Delgado and Stefancic's CRT (2001), the following conclusions have been arrived at to answer the proposed questions.

- 1- As far as research question (1) is concerned, the analysis reveals that the selected American news reports frame racism in the Ballon d'Or award through influential implicit and explicit discursive strategies. By relying heavily on declarative mood, material, relational, mental, existential, Verbal processes, and framing techniques. Specifically speaking, declarative clauses provide an assertive and authoritative style of reporting. Interrogative clauses were mostly rhetorical in tone. Regarding transitivity processes, material processes emphasize the actions performed or taken generally toward or via Vini. Relational processes functioned as a conformation of qualities or values, such as assigning success or failure. Mental processes are focused on thoughts, opinions, or judgments. Verbal processes occurred in the form of reported speech or evaluative commentary. Using existential processes to present the state of being. In terms of modality, the modals such as "*may, possibility, and perhaps*" show different degrees of certainty and obligation. Various framing techniques were used to influence how readers comprehend Vini's identity, performance, and the debate concerning the Ballon d'Or award. Contrast framing is used to juxtapose expected merit with denied recognition or to mark Vini against others. Metaphor framing occurred either to elevate Vini to the level of a mythic figure or to dramatize the injustice he endured. The spin framing was utilized to revise facts to state negative or positive connotations. Storytelling frames were identified to focusing on Vini's football journey or award statistics.

- 2- In regard to research question (2), the ideological implications embedded in these news reports challenge and expose dominant narratives of meritocracy and fairness in football. The American news reports state that institutional recognition is not purely performance-based by mediated by the wider structure of power, including race, politics, and affiliation. By stating Vini's exclusion despite statistical contributions, the discourse critiques the implicit and explicit racial hierarchies that shape access to symbolic capital in sport. Thus, the American reports function as sites of ideological resistance, questioning who holds the authority to define merit in global football.

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