

The Genre of Sport Anthems: A Critical Analysis of How the Chelsea Anthem Text Conveys Loyalty and Fanaticism

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In this article, Kwawukumey looks at the genre of sports anthems to understand how the Chelsea anthem text conveys loyalty and fanaticism. Kwawukumey also explores how the issues of loyalty and fanaticism are part of how a particular discourse community, Chelsea supporters, illustrates their shared understanding of these concepts. Finally, considering the Chelsea anthem as a spoken genre, Kwawukumey shows how football supporters take information or messages from the anthem and how it influences and reinforces their love and support for the club. Kwawukumey uses P-CHAT terms and the concept of multimodality to do this work.

Introduction

Chelsea is an English professional football (Americans often call it soccer) club based in Fulham, London, and competes in the English Premier League, the top division of English football. An interesting text that might be studied using concepts of P-CHAT and multimodality is the Chelsea club anthem. Because Chelsea has the biggest supporting fans in Ghana, which is where I'm from, I'd like to look deeper at how the anthem is taken up and used by fans in their conversations. The anthem, called "Blue Is the Colour," contains six verses, and I hope readers will give it a listen before continuing with the article since the anthem is, above all, an audible genre—one that exists in people's memories as both sound and word (see Figure 1). It was performed by the squad and released in 1972 to coincide with the club's ultimately unsuccessful appearance in the League Cup final of that year against Stoke City. It has become one of the most well-known English football songs. As of 2021, forty-eight years after the song was first released, it is still very popular among Chelsea's supporters and continues to be their main signature tune. It also plays at every home game and cup finals in which Chelsea competes. In Ghana, where I'm from, the topic of which football club has the best anthem



Figure 1: Link to the YouTube video for the anthem “Blue is the Colour.”

continues to be a heated debate among football supporters, where football is a popular and cherished sport. However, it’s more than a sport. People in Ghana are passionate about football, and Ghanaians are enthusiastic supporters of both their national team (which has qualified three times for the World Cup, an international football tournament that takes place every four years) as well as a vast range of football clubs around the world, including Chelsea. This sportsmanship is illustrated by the huge promises the government of Ghana made to football players in the 2010 World Cup, when Ghana beat the USA in round sixteen, including the Ghanaian star and captain, Michael Essien, who was nicknamed the African Bull in Chelsea. Since players are chosen for National Teams (for the International World Cup competitions) through various connections to the participating country, the 2010 Ghana World Cup team was comprised of players who play professionally on teams worldwide. This intermixing of players and teams across international boundaries is why a football club (like Chelsea) can end up having fans from around the world. This complex system of loyalties, both to the sport in general and to a range of international professional teams, means that conversations about favorite teams (and anthems) can be lively.

Sports Anthems and Chants

Sports fanaticism involves treating sporting events with a high intensity, and fans often believe that their fanaticism can alter games for their favorite teams. Fanaticism can also include people who use sports activities as an ultra-masculine “proving ground” for brawls, as is the case of football hooliganism. Sports fanaticism can be thought of as an **activity system**, which, as David Russell states, “are cooperative interactions aimed at achieving a goal” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). Activity systems have five main features. They are “historically developed, inherently social, dialogic, collective, and constantly changing” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). In football fanaticism, the fans work together in social ways to connect to their team, particularly to their teams’ historic victories. They use a range of resources to find new ways to show their loyalty and ultimately create and use many different types of texts (one of which is anthems) to show their extreme fanaticism for their favorite teams. Most football teams have chants, mainly because that makes spectating intense and lively and adds beauty to the game. In Ghana, football clubs like Kotoko, Hearts, Aduana, Olympics, and others have different varieties of chants based on the same anthem tune, and these chants are unique to each. Chelsea fans also have different versions

of chants that seek to express the ideology of sports fanaticism. These chants are often about the club’s success. In 2012, this was one of the chants that were dominant among Chelsea’s fans (see also Figure 2):

Didier Drogba, tralala,
 Didier Drogba, traaalalala,
 Didier Drogba, tralala,
 Drogba wooddrogba woo
 He comes from the ivory
 And he’s a fat wanker
 Whereas your family gone
 Haaa



Figure 2: Link to the YouTube video “Didier Drogba Song Chelsea.”

This was what Chelsea fans were chanting about in 2012, when Didier Drogba, the Ivory Coast International player, helped Chelsea clinch their first-ever Champions League title. This chant is an excellent example of how sports fans participate in activity systems to find new ways of supporting their teams. Other chants fans use might express fans’ opinions about the club’s success or failure or be related to a decision taken by the board management that they don’t like. When Rafa Benitez was appointed as the interim coach of Chelsea, the Chelsea fans chanted (see also Figures 3 and 4):

The interim one, Rafa Benitez
 Not wanted
 Never wanted
 Rafa out!



Figure 3: Link to the YouTube video of chants by supporters that shows the former Chelsea coach, Rafa Benitez, was not wanted in Chelsea.

Often, these anthems and chants express the obsession of supporters with the club (Figure 5). They are enthusiastic about anything that affects



Figure 4: A picture of Chelsea’s former coach, Rafa Bernitez, in 2013 at Stanford Bridge where the agitated fans chanted that they don’t like him, and they want him out! The chant can be seen as an activity system.



Figure 5: Fans were cheering and chanting for the club.



Figure 6: Video of Chelsea fans singing “Carefree.”

the club’s victory. The chanting of lyrics shows this enthusiasm (Figures 6, 7, and 8). As they create and participate in new chants, fans feel as if they are participating in the overall life of the club.

My Personal Experience with How the Chelsea Anthem Generates a Heated Debate Amongst Fans

The question of which football club has the best anthem continues to be a heated debate among football supporters. Whereas some people choose their favorite anthem based on how these anthems preserve historical names and tradition, others say they are swayed by the anthem’s tune, sound, and lyrical nature. I quite remember how this topic sparked a heated debate even among my colleagues in sports journalism in studio B when I was a student presenter at Atlantic FM in Cape Coast. Atlantic FM is a broadcast media station with wide coverage in the Central Region of Ghana. The heated debate was fascinating and fun because my journalist colleagues support different clubs in Europe. Well, I stated that I developed a love for the anthem because of the success they achieved in 2012 when they won the European title and how the anthem incorporates words of loyalty, such as:



Figure 7: Audio of the anthem “Blue is the Colour.”

Blue is the colour, football is the game
We’re all together, and winning is our aim
So cheer us on through the sun and rain
’Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name



Figure 8: Fans of Manchester United enthusiastically singing their anthem.

Here at the Bridge whether rain or fine
 We can shine, all the time
 Home or away, come and see us play
 You're welcome any day

Blue is the colour, football is the game
 We're all together, and winning is our aim
 So cheer us on through the sun and rain
 'Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name

Come to the Shed and we'll welcome you
 Wear your blue and see us through
 Sing loud and clear until the game is done
 Sing Chelsea everyone

Blue is the colour, football is the game
 We're all together, and winning is our aim
 So cheer us on through the sun and rain
 'Cause Chelsea, Chelsea is our name

Well, this could not convince my sports journalist colleagues because they each had their preferences. And, of course, their loyalty to their own teams' anthems didn't convince me (I still think Chelsea has one of the best anthems and the best fans in Ghana). However, other teams have great anthems like Manchester United (Figure 10), Manchester City (Figure 11), Arsenal (Figure 12), and Liverpool (Figure 13), along with Real Madrid, Barcelona, Juventus, AC Milan, and even the Los Angeles Galaxy anthem in the United States of America.

Sports Anthems as a Genre

Music can inspire, motivate, praise, and create sympathy or empathy. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), an anthem is a song with special significance to a country, organization, or club sung during special occasions. Club and national anthems are **anthemic**. They help people connect to something—and feel happy and enthusiastic about it.

In her article on the symbols and syntax of national anthems and flags, Cerulo (1993) further explains national anthems as official patriotic symbols like the auditory equivalent of a country's currency, crest, or flag. The same is true for football clubs, whose anthems are songs of loyalty and patriotism sung to reflect a club's tradition and philosophy. For example, in



Figure 9: Video of Liverpool fans chanting.



Figure 10: Manchester United anthem.



Figure 11: Manchester City anthem.



Figure 12: Arsenal anthem.



Figure 13: Liverpool anthem.

England, particularly in the English Premier League, the Chelsea anthem is one of the most recognized anthems due to its popularity among football supporters across the globe.

Understanding anthems as a kind of genre requires a shifted understanding of the concept of a genre from what I used to have. Based

Antecedent Knowledge

Based on working with the ISU Writing Program, I've learned to see **antecedent knowledge** as a term used to describe all the things a writer already knows that can come into play when a writer takes up any kind of new information. In this case, it meant changing my beliefs about genre.

on how I was taught in school, I understood “genres” as different types of literature, such as drama, prose, poetry, etc. However, the *Grassroots Writing Research Journal* encourages a further understanding, which challenges my **antecedent knowledge** of genre. To explain, I can use Carolyn Miller’s definition in “Genre as Social Action,” which looked at genre as “typified rhetorical ways of interacting within recurring situations” (1984). This means that a **genre** would be any type of text with defining characteristics or **genre conventions** that mark it as belonging to a specific group of texts. For example, a wedding invitation has certain features that mark it

as recognizable as a wedding invitation, such as the couple’s names in large print, the location of the ceremony and reception, the date and time of wedding activities, and often a list of stores where the couple has registered. These different conventions make it possible for us to know when we receive it in the mail that it is a wedding invitation. Now with respect to the Chelsea anthem, as primarily an aural genre (something you listen to or sing, rather than something you read), it has many of the features belonging to all anthems. It has lyrical elements (although I think Chelsea’s is the best) and words that are chanted or sung. It inspires loyalty either through national or other communities of connection. Finally, it also makes fans happy and enchanted with the team and their game play. In other words, it creates bonds and inspires patriotic—or fanatic—action (Cerulo, 1993, p. 244).



Figure 14: Graphic accompanying a version of the Chelsea Anthem.

Nationalism and Fanaticism

Anthems are important in football, both on the level of club football and a national basis, because individual football club anthems and national team anthems can be essential. So, for instance, Chelsea as a football club has an anthem, but national teams usually use their national anthem to represent the team during games. Unlike the club anthems, national anthems have more different applications and places where they are played. Apart from singing it during a football match or other sporting event, it's echoed at other events, such as concerts, political events, and commemorative moments in public culture. When it comes to club team anthems, they are usually primarily a symbol of support in which fans can participate. Still, while I can support LA Galaxy and my neighbor might support Red Bulls, a national anthem is designed to bring together people throughout a country. Before competitive matches played by national teams, when both teams line up at the centerfield, the national anthem is played from each country. World Cup, CONCACAF (The Confederation of North, Central America, and Caribbean Association Football) cup, International Friendly, Africa Cup, and Asian cup matches include vivid moments where spectators listen to anthems that indicate a kind of national patriotism.

Rhetorical Tools of the Chelsea Anthem

The words of the Chelsea anthem have historically rallied the supporters behind the team. Fans have also identified themselves in the sports stadium with the club's color that defines their conviction about the team. For instance, in Figure 15, the words: "CHELSEA, ONE LIFE, ONE LOVE,



Figure 15: Chelsea fans use aspects of the anthem to show support.

ONE CLUB, PRIDE OF LONDON” are neatly inscribed on the blue flag to communicate their conviction, loyalty, as well as support for the club.

The idea of solidarity and unity is communicated through the anthem’s words. For instance, the anthem entreats supporters to constantly cheer with phrases like: “So cheer us on through the sun and rain.” Through the anthems and club’s symbols, the clubs can rally the rank and file of the team to stand with them through the game of football. Sports, in general, invoke emotions, and the club anthem is one of the critical sources of emotional expressivity in sports. The anthems are sung with enthusiasm and love. The words of the supporters reiterate the messages of the anthem. The use of the adjective, “ONE” in the anthem echoes the consistent use of the first-person plural pronoun and its variants in the anthem. “**We**’re together,” “Winning is **our** aim,” “So cheer **us** on,” and “Chelsea is **our** name” are instances where these pronouns are used to establish collectivity and unity in the team. It is, therefore, a repetition of the solidarity and unity message that the fans in Figure 15 use the sign to depict oneness, unity, and togetherness among all and sundry in the club.

In the moment when Chelsea won its first-ever Champions League, in 2012, Chelsea fans could reminisce how Didier Drogba, one of Chelsea’s greatest footballers, converted a final spot-kick (the last player to shoot in penalty kicks in a competitive match) that led them to clinch the Europa title. It was a great moment for all Chelsea fans, particularly fans in Ghana. What I call the “enchantment” (enthusiastic recitation of the lyrics of a club anthem) of the anthem was done with much enthusiasm after the final penalty kick was taken.

One awesome experience I have had as a Chelsea fan is that irrespective of where the enchantment is situated, the enchantment is done with power,



Figure 16: Fans use body paint and clothing to show support.

enthusiasm, and with a super devotion to a cause. In 2012, I watched a match on television at a drinking bar in Agbozume. Then, a large number of Ghanaian fans went on the street jubilating and chanting the words of the anthem when Chelsea won the Champions League.

In Figure 16 and Figure 17, you can see that club flags, wrist bands, T-shirts, and even body paint are some rhetorical tools used by fans to express their support, and many of these also contain part of



Figure 17: Ghanaian Chelsea fans cheering up for the club in a thanksgiving service in their EPL title triumph.

the anthem. The lyrics on these rhetorical tools are lifted high before and after competitive matches.

I hope you can relate to some of these experiences. Although football is not the most popular sport, rhetorical effects are relational to most people, including nonfans of clubs. In the next section, I'll explore how P-CHAT terms like production, socialization, and activity can be used to see how fans repurpose the words in an anthem in a range of different literate activities.

Why P-CHAT and Football Anthems?

Pedagogical cultural-historical activity theory (P-CHAT) is a kind of analytical framework used by the ISU Writing Program to study how the interrelation of different actors (people, semiotic tools, texts, goals) can form a map that shapes how texts are produced and how they work to interact with the world. This framework helps us break down literate activities using seven concepts: production, representation, reception, distribution, socialization, activity, and ecology.

When we look at the activity systems that football fans engage in, we could consider a massive range of different kinds of activities. And while the Chelsea anthem might be regarded as primarily an oral text, there are all kinds of multimodal activities and texts that are connected. For example, there are not only the different iterations of the anthem and its lyrics (such as various bands who might make versions of the anthem, or fans who might record themselves signing it), there is also a range of different kinds of texts that use aspects of the anthem (mainly words or phrases taken from the lyrics), such as merchandise like flags, cards, or jerseys; or online texts like sharing memes that use the songs or engaging in Twitter exchanges.

Production

According to the ISU Writing Program (n.d.), **production** refers to tools and activities involved with the making of texts. Although the anthem might be understood as an oral text, the enchantment of the lyrics of the Chelsea anthem by Chelsea fans worldwide is an example of production. And since these productions often take place in real time, each one is in many ways unique, even though they are performing the exact same words and music. In addition, we can also look at how the words of the anthem helped produce a text with a specific goal—to help fans come together and show support for their team. For example, the use of the word “blue” in the lyrics allows the fans to create an image of the color that symbolizes the club. Another example of how the anthem’s lyrics are used as a part of production is how fans use lines from the lyrics, such as “Winning is our aim,” to cheer up their club players and inspire them.

Socialization

Another P-CHAT concept I feel strongly fits into my analysis is **socialization**. “Socialization describes the interaction of people and institutions as they produce, distribute, and use texts. When people engage with texts, they are also (consciously and unconsciously) engaged in the practice of representing and transforming different kinds of social and cultural practices” (ISU Writing Program, n.d.). The anthem provides fan-based lyrical content that identifies them as club fans. It also reminds them of who they are. It depicts the performer’s identity. When the anthem is sung in a stadium before matches commence, most club supporters stand on their feet and sing along with the players. The physical movement is usually consummated with shouts and handclaps to establish their solidarity with the players. What happens is that fans who are sitting together after being identified as Chelsea fans through the anthem singing stage are likely to have a mutual interaction that benefits their relationships.

As Emma Hayes (Figure 18), an English football manager who is currently the manager of FA WSL club Chelsea Women, stated, “I want to see our fans come together in their droves, with their songs, flags, and energy and intensity that ultimately helps us towards three points.” This quote is an example of the influence and socialization of anthems.

Activity

Activity is what is happening in the process of reciting and singing this anthem. Activity according to the ISU Writing Program (n.d.) is a term that encompasses the actual practices that people engage in as they create text



Figure 18: Emma Hayes, manager of the Chelsea Women's team, discusses her view on the importance of rhetorical tools and their impact on the game.

(writing, drawing, walking across the hall to ask someone else what they think, getting peer review, etc.). The anthems recitation involves spoken words, intonation, word break, accent, and pitch. There is the use of trumpets, drums, and sound effects by fans to assist in the recitation of the anthems. Many fans clap, jump around, and gesture while proclaiming the Chelsea anthem. Before recitation, we can even think about the activities like body painting, dressing in all blue, and getting into the stands to perform the anthem.

In the enchantment of the anthem, there are emotional expressions such as love, laughter, joy, enthusiasm, and patriotism. These emotions capture the passion that comes with the game. Irrespective of the results, the performance of the Chelsea club anthem becomes a motivating song to cheer up players to victory even amidst defeating times or moments. As a sports journalist, my interactions with Chelsea fans in Ghana show how enthusiastic fans are. I recall when a fan said: "I will continue to love the Chelsea lyrics even if they are relegated to Championship." When I asked them why, they explained that the anthem always made them fall in love with the club. I wondered if they thought the anthem was expressive or emotionally appealing. They explained that "the words alone invoke some sort of patriotism. It brings me and my colleagues to always support this club we have always loved. When reciting the lyrics of the anthem, we never forget what Chelsea did to Bayern Munich in 2012. It's really unforgettable."

P-CHAT has shown how humans can use sports anthems to achieve a distinct communicative function expressing loyalty and fanaticism. Loyalty is the commitment of club members, fans, managers, and well-wishers to the club's vision, dreams, and activities. On the other hand, fanaticism is avowed solidarity with the club, usually expressed in a commitment to paying dues, sponsoring club matches, betting for club matches, and patronizing club matches by buying the tickets to watch games.

Multimodality of the Chelsea Anthem

I also want to explore **multimodality**, all the modes that humans can use to communicate. These modes include alphabetic (stuff we write using the alphabet), visual (pictures), aural (sound), oral (spoken), and symbolic (ISU Writing Program, n.d.), which are used to enhance the enchantment of the Chelsea anthem. When considering the modes of the sports anthem genre, the most prominent are oral and aural. The anthems usually have spoken or sung verses. They also have instrumentals, whether melodic or just percussive, that help support the structure of the executed verses. A gesture component can also accompany the chant depending on the particular anthem.

With sports anthems, these words and melodies get spread in other ways. They can be represented in the alphabetic modality through signs, bumper stickers, and T-shirts. If you look at the images included in this article, you can see how parts of the anthems are displayed in alphabetic form. See—I am even doing it in this article! Sharing these anthems through the alphabetic mode makes it easier to distribute new lyrics and versions of the Chelsea anthem to fans worldwide. Not everyone can sit in the stadium of a match, but anyone with a computer can search for new versions of the anthems to sing from their homes or sports pubs.

As a visual modality, loyalty to the team can be depicted by blue representation. Some of the photos in this article show jerseys and body paint that feature blue as the primary signifier of loyalty and extreme fanaticism. If you look at any images of the Chelsea anthem or Chelsea fans, you will notice intense amounts of blue presented, particularly in merchandise. These multimodal representations of the Chelsea anthem are part of why it is so popular and important to fans all over the world.

Final Thoughts

The issue of loyalty and supporter ideology is expressed in the genre of sports anthems. The Chelsea anthem is an example of this spoken genre communicated through lyrics to the football discourse community. How the Chelsea anthem expresses loyalty and fanaticism is mainly transmitted orally and aurally, which is significant in understanding extreme fanaticism. From the beginning, P-CHAT helps us explore ideas, objects, people, and how they come together to produce any sort of literate activity. Lyrics are not just words but metaphors and symbols that unite the fans and promote loyalty towards the club and sport in general.

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