

METAPHORS WE SHOOT BY: METAPHORS IN LIVE TEXT FOOTBALL COMMENTARY

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Received: 2025-10-17

Accepted: 2025-11-17

Published: 2025-12-10

Abstract

This paper examines metaphors in live text football commentary, a developing genre of computer-mediated sports discourse. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's CMT, live text commentaries of three final football matches were used as the data for the study. The commentaries included that of the 2025 UEFA Champions League, 2025 Conference League and 2025 Europa League. The commentaries were analysed using the Pragglejaz Group's (2007) procedure for identifying metaphorically used words, enabling the study to systematically detect and classify lexical items whose contextual meanings diverged from their basic meanings. The results show that war, journey, construction and power domains were mapped onto various events in the football game. These domains functioned to frame football as a combative struggle (war), a contest for dominance (power), a structured and progressive movement toward a goal (journey), and a creative or strategic process (construction). The following conceptual metaphors were identified: *A Football Match Is War*, *A Football Match Is Competition For Power*, *A Football Match Is A Journey* and *A Football Match Are Construction*. The analysis provides support for the claim that metaphors are not merely stylistic choices but fundamental cognitive tools through which football discourse is structured and communicated.

Keywords: *computer-mediated communication; conceptual mapping; conceptual metaphor theory; football language; live text football commentary; sports discourse.*

1. Introduction

Sports discourse represents a communication genre, including interactions and dialogues, focused on sports-related topics (Caldwell, Walsh, Vine & Jureid, 2017). Language in sports discourse is conveyed through three main forms of communication: written, spoken and computer-mediated (Amoakohene, 2017). To situate the present study more precisely within this broad field, this paper focuses specifically on live text football commentary as a developing computer-mediated genre. Currently, there is a growing focus on computer-mediated communication within academic literature. The increasing impact of technology in modern culture, rooted in its essential role in human life, explains the widespread adoption of computer-mediated communication and the attraction to internet genres. Consequently, the growing integration of technology into everyday life has also

influenced how sports are discussed and consumed, with computer-mediated communication and internet genres now playing a central role in sports discourse across the globe (Bergh & Ohlander, 2012). Sports discourse is widely recognised as a prominent form of communication that takes place on computer-mediated platforms. Nartey (2018) posits that a prominent theme within computer-mediated platforms is the discourse surrounding sports. In the realm of football-related online communication, various internet formats like football tweets, digital commentary and analyses before and after matches are widely observed. In recent years, these genres have attracted academic attention, resulting in several studies within this field (Nartey, 2018; Pérez-Sabater et al., 2008). The various forms of sports discourse include commentary (traditional and online), match previews, after-match panels, sports eulogies and sports news presentations.

There has been a growing number of linguistic studies concentrating on sports discourse. Varied methodological and theoretical perspectives like critical discourse analysis (Liu, 2024), genre analysis (Amoakohene, 2017), appraisal theory (Munday, 2004), intertextual analysis (Waliaula, 2012), morphological analysis (Chanh, 2011; Dzahene-Quarshie, 2012), discourse analysis (Kuo, 2003), rhetoric (Roohani & Esmaeili, 2010), pragmatic (Addi & Kadhim, 2022) and cognitive metaphor (Manu & Afreh, 2024; Sopa, 2023) have been applied in exploring sports discourse. These studies have largely used data from traditional media outlets (television, radio and newspaper). However, despite this rich tradition, research on computer-mediated sports discourse, particularly live text football commentary, remains comparatively limited, creating a clear gap that the present study addresses. In recent times, sports discourse is pervasively enacted on computer-mediated platforms with the prevalence of genres such as online football commentary, football tweets and pre-and-post-match analysis. This has occasioned researchers exploring linguistic features in this new genre of sport discourse. Bergh (2011), for instance, explores war terminologies and metaphors in minute-by-minute football commentary and argues that WAR metaphors are pervasive in this genre, making a strong claim for the master metaphor FOOTBALL IS WAR. Hussein (2019) also explores metaphors in live text commentary and agrees with Bergh (2011) that the source domain of war dominates the genre. In a bid to explore verbal interactions in live text commentary, Chovanec (2006) observes that this genre is interactive, competitive and highly masculine. Nartey (2018) also undertakes a move analysis of match previews and finds that the genre has six moves with a relatively restricted range of grammatical resources.

The present study proposes to expand and add to the existing literature in the relatively new genre of computer-mediated football discourse, specifically live text football commentary. Live text football commentary, mostly referred to as online text commentary (OTC) is an emerging form of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) that has recently developed and established itself as a distinct mode of communication. Limited research has been conducted in this area, and it remains a subject of ongoing investigation (Chovanec 2018; Jucker 2012; Lewandowski, 2012). This is also termed 'event tracker', 'minute-by-minute report', 'live ticker', 'match cast', 'text commentary', 'live match report' or 'live text commentary' (LTC) (Hussein, 2019). Chovanec (2009) described LTC as a distinct genre of online journalism, differentiating it from blogging by its institutional nature, authored by expert reporters, and typically featured on the web pages of established newspapers. Furthermore, both the commentary and the extralinguistic events occur simultaneously, with the distinction between these two processes being the brief duration needed for the

creation of the written message and its subsequent online posting. Despite this recognition, the metaphorical structuring of this genre across multiple high-profile matches has not been fully examined, which highlights the novelty of the present study.

It has been established that metaphors are integral to sports reporting (Bergh, 2011; Sopa, 2023). The present study seeks to explore metaphors in live text football commentary as a way of expanding literature in the relatively new genre of computer-mediated football discourse. Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to identify the conceptual metaphors deployed in live text commentary and examine how these mappings frame football events for online audiences.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Metaphors in Football Commentary

Metaphors are key linguistic resources in football language. Research indicates that metaphors are utilised not only for enhancing descriptive vividness but also for persuasive and evaluative functions (Charteris-Black, 2004; Rina et al., 2022). Commentators often employ metaphors of war or battle to emphasise player confrontations, as well as metaphors of journey and adventure to depict a team's progression through a tournament (Koller, 2004). These metaphorical constructions affect fans' interpretations and emotional engagement with the ongoing match (Caballero, 2012). Luo (2023) shares that metaphors are indispensable in football commentaries as they make the game exciting. For Wilinski (2014), metaphors hold an interpretative function in sports commentary and related news as they attract and sustain the attention of sports enthusiasts. A variety of source domains are used to frame sports with researchers agreeing on the preponderance of war domains (Jinying & Xinping, 2012; Manu & Afreh, 2024; Xiaobo, 2016). Manu and Afreh (2024) agree with Addi and Kadhim (2022) that the common use of words such as shooting, attacking, defending, squad, target, captain and campaign projects the game of football as a combative event. Keranen (2024) shares that war metaphors are particularly frequent in attacking and defending sections of the football game. Wilinski (2014) similarly notes that although written soccer commentaries draw on a variety of source domains, the domains of physical fight and military conflict are particularly prominent. Using online minute-by-minute football commentary, Bergh (2011) contributes to this field of analysis by reporting a high number of war-inspired metaphors in this genre. His study provides a fresh outlook to metaphor studies in football commentary as it examines the linguistic item in online sports commentary, an underexplored genre. Furthermore, Alzawaydeh and Alghazo (2018) quantified war metaphors in football headlines as almost 56%. Even in women's matches, Sopa (2023) identified high war-related source domains in football language. Referencing the obvious prominence of war metaphors in football commentary and related news, Bergh (2011) makes a case for the master metaphor FOOTBALL IS WAR. However, Luo (2023) cautions that the excessive use of metaphors in football commentary causes language violence. Nonetheless, the impression must not be made that war metaphors are distinct from football language as they have been analysed in other genres such as politics (Burgers & Ahrens, 2020; Ngula, 2021) and health communication (Cherpurnaya, 2023; Habwe & Ndung'u, 2022; Seixas, 2021).

Luo (2023) finds that war, animal and object metaphors rhetorically increase the image and comprehension of football matches. While Luo (2023), Yusuf (2016) and Hussein

(2019) attribute the prevalence of war metaphors in football commentary to the fierce, domineering and competitive nature of the sport, Xiaobo (2016) argues that the isomorphism of the structural and cognition features of football and war domains explains this observation. Aside from war metaphors, other domains used to describe football are human behaviour, animal, spatial and journey domains (Luo, 2023; Wilinski, 2014). Lewandowski (2012) argues against war-related metaphors in football language and claims that non-violent metaphors are equally prominent in the genre. He, for instance, identifies the metaphors *A Soccer Match Is A Theater Performance* and *A Soccer Match Is A Test*. Sopa (2023) relatedly identified the metaphor *Football Is A Show*. Keranen (2024) similarly identified art/performance-related metaphors in the attacking side of the game. Performing-related metaphors in describing the attacking side of the game, according to Keranen, rendered a feminine stereotypical frame to the game, although masculinity-related domains overpowered the language of the genre. Aside from war-related metaphors, Manu and Afreh (2024) also identified *A Football Match Is An Examination* and *A Football Match Is Communication* metaphors.

Caballero (2012) makes an interesting observation on the social functions of metaphors in tennis reporting. She asserts that metaphors build interpersonal relationships and add empathy to the highly competitive game of tennis. Luo (2023) agrees with Caballero's assertion on the social function of metaphors as both put forward that commentators use metaphors to celebrate sportsmanship, individual heroism and uphold the dignity of players.

2.2 Cognitive Approach to Metaphor

In order to conceptualize and analyse the metaphors used in live text football commentary, the current study employs the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). This theory enhances our comprehension of metaphor utilisation in sports discourse and provides insights into the conceptual structuring of discourse and thought, highlighting the significance of both abstract and concrete concepts in the development of conventional metaphors in human cognition.

CMT, as established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a), posits that metaphorical use of language extends beyond literary texts to include all aspects of everyday life. Lakoff and Johnson (1980a: 4) note that '[o]ur ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature' and that 'metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to metaphorical concepts in a systematic way' (ibid: 8). As a result, there are now two types of metaphors: linguistic and conceptual. Linguistic metaphors are metaphors that appear in certain language usages as words, phrases, or even visual representations, while conceptual metaphors are thinking processes that underlie linguistic metaphors. Therefore, metaphors are terms that come from or are based on a person's conceptual framework whether they are used in either written or spoken form. An often-used example of a conceptual metaphor in Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) is LOVE IS WAR. This metaphor explains people expressing love are conceptualized to be similar to people fighting in a war. The authors argue that LOVE IS WAR metaphor, like any other metaphor, is reflected in our everyday language. They provide these italicized linguistic expressions below in support of their assumption:

- a) He is known for his many rapid conquests
- b) She fought for him, but his mistress won out

- c) He fled from her advances
- d) She pursued him relentlessly
- e) He is slowly gaining ground with her
- f) He won her hand in marriage
- g) He overpowered her
- h) She is besieged by suitors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980a: 49)

Each of the above expressions about love is uttered in the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS WAR. In these expressions, the abstract notion of LOVE ('target' domain), evidenced by the words advances, mistress, marriage and suitors, is systematically spoken about in the context of a tangible idea of (military) WAR ('source' domain), demonstrated with the words conquests, fought, won out, fled, pursued, overpowered and besieged. Kövecses (2002: 4) expounds that '[t]he conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is the target domain'. Accordingly, Krennmayr (2015: 530) states emphatically that 'metaphor in language reflects conventional thought structures in our minds'.

A conceptual metaphor consists of a structure comprising two domains that correspond to one another: the source domain and the target domain (Kövecses, 2002; Semino, 2008). The source represents the domain that supports the literal interpretation of the utterance, while the target domain, as noted by Croft and Cruse (2004), pertains to the actual subject of the expression. Kövecses (2010) notes that source domains are typically tangible, real, simple, known and well-defined, while target domains are generally abstract, complex, unknown and less clearly defined. To illustrate these mappings, Kövecses (2002: 8) uses the SOCIAL ORGANIZATION ARE PLANTS metaphor.

Source: plant	Target: social organization
(a) the whole plant	⇒ the entire organization
(b) a part of the plant	⇒ a part of the organization
(c) growth of the plant	⇒ development of the organization
(d) removing a part of the plant	⇒ reducing the organization
(e) the root of the plant	⇒ the origin of the organization
(f) the flowering	⇒ the best stage, the most successful stage
(g) the fruits or crops	⇒ the beneficial consequences

The abstract concept of social organization (target domain) is explained within the domain of the more concrete term of plant. The basic components of plants parallel systematically to constituent elements of social organizations, such as companies, and the words that are used about plants are employed systematically in connection with organizations. The mappings are made manifest in the PLANTS metaphor by the words branch, is growing, prune, root, blossom, flower and fruits.

Culture is also principal in Lakoff and Johnson's CMT. The sociocultural setting in which language is used can often determine not just what source domain is used to clarify the target domain, but also how both domains are mapped to create understanding, meaning, and interpretation. By extension, the main idea behind CMT is that metaphors are more than just words we use. They shape how we think and how we organise our ideas, and

we often use real ideas that come from our cultural background to figure out what other, more abstract ideas mean.

3. Research Method

The data were live text football commentaries of final matches from three major European competitions: the 2025 UEFA Champions League (UCL), the 2025 Conference League (ConFL) and the 2025 Europa League (EurL). The UCL commentary consisted of 3,235 tokens, the ConFL 3,125 tokens, and the EurL 3,762 tokens. The UEFA Champions League match was between Paris Saint-Germain and Internazionale Milano at the Allianz Arena in Italy on May 31, 2025, while the 2025 Europa League match was played on May 21 at Estadio de San Mamés in Spain between Tottenham Hotspur and Manchester United. The Conference League was also played on May 28 at Tarczyński Arena Wrocław in Poland between Real Betis and Chelsea F.C. Since the present study was interested in text commentary, I downloaded the live text football commentary of the games from LiveScore, an E-sport company that provides real-time sports news and updates. The text was analysed per Pragglejaz Group's (2007) four-step procedure for metaphor identification. The procedure involved identifying lexical units, determining their basic meanings, comparing these with contextual meanings and marking items as metaphorical when a contrast was observed. Metaphorical expressions were catalogued under general conceptual descriptions and aligned with appropriate primary metaphors identified by Lakoff and Johnson (1980a) and Kövescses (2002). In applying these mappings, the structural correspondences between source and target domains were traced directly from recurring linguistic expressions in the dataset, ensuring that each conceptual metaphor reflected consistent cross-domain patterns evident in the commentary. Two trained research assistants supported the coding process by independently identifying metaphorical items and reconciling discrepancies through discussion until agreement was reached. Further presentation and discussion of the metaphorical expressions were carried out with reference to linguistic examples from the data.

4. Results and Discussion

In line with the study's aim of identifying and analysing the conceptual metaphors used in live text football commentary, the analysis revealed that football is framed around the domains of war/battle, competition for power, journey and construction. The conceptual metaphors identified were *A Football Match Is War*, *A Football Match Is Competition For Power*, *A Football Match Is A Journey* and *A Football Match Is A Construction*. These metaphorical expressions are discussed in the next section using linguistic evidence from the dataset.

4.1 A Football Match Is War

A prominent conceptual metaphorical structuring in the live text football commentary is *A Football Match Is War*. The metaphorical use of militaristic words frames the game of football as war. This metaphorical understanding finds parallels with one significant claim of Lakoff and Johnson (1980b: 202) where they use the concept war to show 'that metaphorical concepts are based on complex experiential gestalts' which are semantically represented within natural occurrences. In their seminal paper titled *The*

Metaphorical Structure of the Human Conceptual System, the authors use the gestalt structure for WAR to explain conversational activity, giving rise to the primary metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. Similarly, we find parallels between the gestalt structure for war and the gestalt structure for football. Lakoff and Johnson (1980b: 202) outline the following gestalt structure for war:

1. Participants: People or groups of people playing the role of ADVERSARIES
 2. Parts:
 - a. The two POSITIONS
 - b. PLANNING STRATEGY
 - c. ATTACK
 - d. DEFENSE
 - e. RETREAT
 - f. MANEUVERING
 - g. COUNTERATTACK
 - h. STALEMATE
 - i. TRUCE
 - j. SURRENDER/VICTORY
 3. Stages:
 - a. INITIAL CONDITIONS: PARTICIPANTS have different positions. ONE or BOTH wants the other to surrender, etc.
 - b. BEGINNING: one ADVERSARY ATTACKS
 - c. MIDDLE: combinations of DEFENSE, MANEUVERING, RETREAT, etc.
 - d. END: TRUCE or STALEMATE or SURRENDER/VICTORY
 - e. FINAL STATE: PEACE, VICTOR HAS DOMINANCE
 4. Linear Sequence:

RETREAT after ATTACK

DEFENSE after ATTACK

COUNTERATTACK after attack, etc.
 5. Causation: ATTACK results in DEFENSE or COUNTERATTACK or RETREAT, etc.
 6. Purpose: VICTORY
- These six dimensions of war equally characterizes the activity of football. The six dimensions of football is given as follows:
1. Participants ⇒ PLAYERS or the two TEAMS who play against each other and MATCH OFFICIALS.
 2. PARTS ⇒ PASSING, DRIBBLING, SHOOTING, DEFENDING, CORNER KICKS, FREE KICKS, THROW-INS, HALF-TIME BREAK, SUBSTITUTIONS, and PENALTY SHOOTOUT.
 3. STAGES ⇒ PRE-MATCH PHASE, FIRST HALF, HALF-TIME BREAK, SECOND HALF, STOPPAGE TIME/ADDED TIME, and PENALTY SHOOTOUT.
 4. Linear Sequence ⇒ ATTACKING and DEFENDING. Play typically begins with BALL POSSESSION, followed by PASSING, DRIBBLING, and ADVANCING toward the opponent's goal. This leads to CROSSING or SHOOTING attempts, which are met by defensive actions such as TACKLING, INTERCEPTIONS, or GOALKEEPING, after which the cycle restarts with a change in possession.

5. Causation ⇒ SHOOTING results in scoring a GOAL, LOSSING possession results in conceding a goal, WINING the ball results in launching a COUNTERATTACK and committing FOUL results in receiving a (red/yellow) card.
6. Purpose ⇒ Winning by scoring more goals

The gestalt for war is structured by means of correspondences with selected elements of a football match, in which the game of football is understood in terms of physical fighting. Various acts of the game such as intense opponent attack, strong defense, blocked attacks and defensive actions in football were represented within the WAR domain. Through CMT, these lexical choices indicate that commentators draw upon entrenched cultural knowledge of combat to structure how readers mentally organize football events. The WAR metaphors highlight and coherently organize the defending and attacking aspects of the football experience. Words/expressions such as pressure, dangerous challenge, shoot, target, win, charge, intercept rough, attack and defend, which are primarily associated with war, are used to describe various aspects and events in the game. Yusuf (2016) and Luo (2023) made similar observations in their studies and concluded that the preponderant use of militaristic words to frame the game of football is attributable to the fierce and competitive nature of the sport.

The commentaries' repeated use of combative phrases maps the physical contest and manoeuvres of war onto football. These present the match as a site of struggle, risk, competition and tactical engagement. The following are illustrative examples:

TEXT 1

- a. Good effort by Cole Palmer as he directs a shot on target, but the keeper saves it [MIN 6 - Confl]
- b. Achraf Hakimi charged Lautaro Martinez from behind and it's a free-kick [MIN 17 - UCL]
- c. Manchester United with a potentially dangerous attack [MIN 87 - EurL]
- d. Natan from Real Betis intercepts a cross aimed towards the box. [MIN 45+2 - Confl]

The source domain of war is metaphorically mapped onto the target domain of football to frame actions like attacking and defending. In (1a), the metaphorical expression directs a shot on target maps the concept of aiming in warfare onto football action. The commentator describes Cole Palmer as an archer or marksman and the goal as the target. This description draws on combative experiences, where an object is carefully aimed towards a goal, to describe the accuracy and intentional dynamics of the football game. Attacking is thus described as an intentional act. Manu and Afreh (2024) make a similar observation in their study where attacking is metaphorically framed as driving (directing). The authors catalogued this metaphor as ATTACKING IN FOOTBALL IS DRIVING with the source domain being war. Achraf Hakimi's defence against Lautaro Martinez is also metaphorically described as a soldier or animal that attacks by rushing at an opponent as exemplified in (1b). The source domain of war is used to structure our understanding of defending in football. This description does not render the game as mere sports but as a moment of physical conflict. A similar description of the attack is observable in (1c), where a Manchester United movement is described as potentially dangerous attack. The expression projects a physical offensive act that causes harm to an opponent. This act is typical of war domain where opponents are threatened and harmed (attacked) on the battlefield. The metaphor is used to conceptualize the movement of Manchester United as parallel to an

army mounting a threatening assault. Defence in football is also metaphorically described as a military interception. In 1(d), Natan of Real Betis is described to have ‘intercepted a cross’, similar to the cutting off of enemy communications, supply lines and movements in warfare to disrupt the enemy’s plans. This act of the player disrupts the attacking team’s pass before it can reach an attacker. These militaristic frames intensify the game, position the teams as opposing armies, the players as combatants, attacking and defending as crucial battle points.

Related to the domain of war is the use of control metaphors to vividly describe the game. The conceptual metaphor A FOOTBALL MATCH IS COMPETITION FOR POWER is observed throughout the dataset. Within CMT, this metaphor reflects a mapping from the concrete domain of SOCIAL/POLITICAL POWER onto the abstract domain of football dynamics. The commentators borrowed experiences from the field of competition to gaudily present a game imbued with power relations. In terms of conceptual mapping, the POWER domain structures how possession, dominance and territorial control in the match are mentally conceptualised by online audience. The source domain reflects a domain where people in authority hold power and are considered to be imperial in every human engagement. Such a prestigious status is equally enviable as it offers dominance and recognition. This life event is used to explain the competition between the two teams on the field of play as akin to individuals fighting for power and hegemony. Consider the following examples:

TEXT 2

- a. Paris Saint-Germain take a throw-in in their own half of the field. Paris Saint-Germain are in control of the ball. [MIN 22 - UCL]
- b. Patrick Dorgu makes the tackle and wins possession for his team. [MIN 62 - EurL]
- c. Marc Bartra wins an air challenge against Trevoh Chalobah. [MIN 45+1 - ConFL]

Paris Saint-Germain is described to have taken control of the ball (2a). They are noted to be dominating play in that particular instance. This metaphorical description draws on the idea of authority and ownership in power where those with power determine the direction of the distribution of resources. Here, the team in power is said to be in control as it dictates the flow and pace of the game. This enviable status is reinforced by the idea of each team struggling for possession. In 2(b), the goal of every tackle is to win possession for one’s team. Metaphorically, winning is not just about taking the ball but seizing power and dominance on the field of play, just like a person usurps power. The metaphor frames possession as a valuable resource in the game of football that can be captured and lost in the ongoing event. When Patrick Dorgu tackles and wins possession, the balance of power is swiftly shifted in favour of his team. The essence of a direct physical contest for power and dominance is also reinforced in 2(c) where Marc Bartra goes into an air challenge to assert the supremacy of his team. This metaphor presents heading duels as contests for dominance, further evidence of the incessant struggle to win in football.

4.2 A Football Match Is a Journey

Another frequently deployed metaphor is *A Football Match Is A Journey*. The source domain is journey and the target domain is a football match, with various movements such as start, progression, and end being structured metaphorically as stages of a journey. The metaphor describes the progression of play as movement through space and time towards a

goal. This metaphor finds parallel with Lakoff (1994) and Winter's (1995) metaphorical conceptualisation of *Life Is A Journey* which maps the conceptual phenomenon of life onto a tangible experience of a journey. In this metaphor, the abstract concept of life is understood in terms of the physical event of a journey with recognizable terms and landmarks such as 'start', 'destinations' and 'obstacles'. This shapes our understanding of life as a movement along a path with significant experiences. Our comprehension of a journey, as a tangible experience, influences our perception of the abstract notion of life. Consequently, life goals are analogous to destinations on a trip, which Winter (1995) indicates that our actions represent progress along the road, while meaningful experiences serve as landmarks. Our everyday expressions exemplify the journey metaphor. Lakoff (1994) for instance mentions that we discourse about life in terms of movement by using linguistic metaphors such as 'We are at a crossroads', 'She has come a long way' and 'He is on the right track'. Goals and ambitions are often phrased as destinations. This is evident in linguistic metaphors such as 'I am reaching for my dreams' and 'He is on a path to success'; while challenges are also described as obstructions – 'I hit a barrier in my plans', 'She overcame a major hurdle'. Decisions, according to Lakoff (1994), are framed as choosing a route. Thus, we talk about 'taking a new path' or 'needing to chart a new course' to describe our evaluation on taking new life paths. The journey description of life is also exemplified in our description of significant moments. Such moments, in Winter's (1995) view, are described as landmarks. It is, therefore, usual to observe expressions such as 'Getting married was a turning point in her life' and 'Graduation was a major milestone' used to describe major life moments.

Similarly, the game of football is framed using journey metaphors akin to the process of life. The event is described as one that has a start, coordinated progression, temporary pauses and an eventual end. Consistent with CMT, the JOURNEY domain provides a concrete schema; movement, direction, obstacles and endpoints, through which the temporal progression of a match is conceptualised. These mappings demonstrate how commentators frame the match as a structured path with coordinated phases, enabling audiences to understand football action as purposeful movement toward a goal. Consider the following texts:

TEXT 3

- a. Paris Saint-Germain start a counter attack. [MIN 61 - UCL]
- b. The match will start in about 5 minutes. [MIN 1 – UCL]
- c. They are off to a flying start. [MIN 46 - Confl]
- d. The team loses their way in the final third. [MIN 29 – Confl]
- e. He's driving through the midfield. [MIN 59 - EurL]

The source domain (journey) frames the football game as a structured event that must be understood as having purposeful movements, stages and attempts towards a goal(destination). In 3(a), Paris Saint-Germain is described as starting a journey towards the opponent's direction. This is parallel to the beginning of a journey or a trip where a purposeful action is taken towards a desired goal/destination. Paris Saint-Germain's counter attack is conceptualized as a rapid advance that changes the direction of the game. Similarly, the expression: the match will start in about 5 minutes (3b), conceptualizes the game as a journey as it signals the commencement of the game, similar to the dawn of a journey where everything and all possibilities are open. The team's 'journey' in the match is also described in 3(c). 'Off to a flying start' metaphorically means that their journey has begun with speed,

energy, and success, akin to travelers who set off swiftly and confidently on a trip. The use of “flying” intensifies the sense of rapid unhindered progress at the start of the journey. Through the match, the team’s attack is metaphorically likened to a journey with a specific destination (the opponent’s goal post). The ‘final third’ refers to the last part of the pitch before scoring. ‘Loses their way’ metaphorically suggests that, like travelers who become disoriented or take a wrong turn before reaching their destination, the team fails to find the right path or method to complete their journey with a goal. The hall marks of a journey are mapped onto the game to reflect how progress toward a target in football is conceptualized as traveling along a path that can be disrupted, diverted, or confused (see 3d). The image of a vehicle moving purposefully towards a destination is also evoked in 3(e). The player’s movement with the ball through the midfield is described as an active forceful travel along a journey’s route. The midfield acts as part of the ‘road’ or ‘path’ that must be traversed to reach the opponent’s goal which is the journey’s endpoint. This linguistic expression frames the match as an act of progressing upfield along a path with controlled movement. Apart from providing vivid language, the journey metaphor invites spectators or fans to see the game as an unfolding story and renders the contest more relatable and meaningful.

4.3 A Football Match Is Construction

The game of football is also framed as a creation event. The conceptual metaphor A FOOTBALL MATCH IS CONSTRUCTION is deployed throughout the online commentary. This metaphor conceptualizes the game as an act of construction or engineering. From a CMT perspective, this metaphor draws on the concrete domain of BUILDING/CONSTRUCTION, blocks, clearing, and creating, to structure understanding of abstract tactical processes in football. Words such as create, clear, building up and blocks reinforce the idea of constructing an object. Kövesces (2002) identifies buildings and construction as a common metaphorical source domain. He contends that both the static entity of a home and its components, together with the process of its construction, provide a common basis for describing the abstract dimensions of life. This perspective emphasizes the impact that architectural imagery can have in shaping our perceptions and interpretations of existence. The following are illustrative examples from the commentaries to support A FOOTBALL MATCH IS CONSTRUCTION metaphor.

TEXT 4

- a. A shot by Ousmane Dembele is blocked. Federico Dimarco successfully blocks the shot. [MIN 34 - UCL]
- b. Marc Cucurella relieves the pressure with a clearance. [MIN 26 - Confl]
- c. Tottenham take a throw-in in their own half of the field. Manchester United are trying to create something here. [MIN 64 - EurL]

The construction metaphor is deployed to describe the teams’ effort in defending their territory/goalpost to prevent conceding a goal. The metaphor highlights the incremental, engineered nature of football play, positioning players as architects who assemble attacking sequences or dismantle threats. In 4(a), Dembele and Dimarco are described as successfully removing a danger that threatened their team. A similar description is observed in 4(b) where the commentary describes Cucurella’s actions as eliminating danger and bringing temporary comfort and respite to the team. Just as

construction workers clear debris and unwanted materials from their site and build barriers to protect certain areas, players also 'clear' and 'block' the ball away from their half of the playing field to prevent the entry of their opponent team and the danger of being scored. Manu and Afreh (2024) also made similar observations on the use of metaphors to describe how players defend and clear their lines. The authors catalogued this metaphor as DEFENDING IN FOOTBALL IS CLEANING. The action of building new pathways and access routes, a typical event in construction, is also exemplified in 4(c). This involves planning, constructing and connecting spaces. Manchester's attempt to create something [an opportunity to score] is described in the commentary. These pathways are advances made by the team after blocking shots. The offensive play is metaphorically seen as constructing a path toward the opponent's goal, building up an attack or creating openings. These concrete aspects of the construction domain are borrowed to enhance the vivid description of the game and enhance easier visualization for readers (spectators).

5. Conclusion

The present study examined the conceptual metaphors that structured live text football commentary across three major 2025 European final matches. Using the principles of CMT, the analysis identified and interpreted four dominant metaphorical domains; war, power, journey and construction, and showed how each domain shaped readers' conceptualisation of match events. These mappings worked collectively to represent football as a combative contest, a struggle for dominance, a purposeful progression through space and time, and a tactical process of building and dismantling opportunities. The findings demonstrate that live text commentary relies on a coherent cognitive system through which abstract sporting actions are made intelligible by grounding them in familiar experiential structures.

A key contribution of this study is the demonstration that CMT remains a rigorous and productive framework for analysing football discourse, including newer computer-mediated genres. While prior work concentrated largely on spoken commentary and single-domain metaphor analyses, this study broadened the empirical scope by examining multiple tournaments and revealing how several metaphor domains operated concurrently within the dataset, thereby exposing the multilayered conceptual organisation of online sport narratives.

Future research may build on these findings by comparing metaphor use across different online platforms (e.g., live commentary, fan tweets, match blogs), examining audience reception of metaphorical framing, and exploring variations across gendered, cultural, or multilingual football contexts. Such studies would deepen understanding of how metaphors shape online sporting discourse and how digital environments influence metaphor choice and interpretation. Conclusively, the study showed that metaphors are not stylistic embellishments but stable cognitive tools through which football commentary is structured, interpreted and communicated across shifting media forms.

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