



A cognitive Semiotic Analysis of Messi-Ronaldo Rivalry in Spanish Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This study undertakes a cognitive semiotic analysis of Messi-Ronaldo rivalry in Spanish newspapers. The study fills an existing gap by addressing the sporting interest of the rivalry, specifically dealing with how the visual communication's involvement in the narrative of rivalry and audiences' cognitive conception of the rivalry. The study incorporates three theoretical models: Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Blending Theory (2002), and Sonesson's Pictorial Semiotics (1989), by a qualitative method. Four chosen images, namely "from rivals to allies," "timeless greatness," "creativity and discipline," and "end of an era," are the foundation of the analysis. Each image is dissected to expose the way metaphor, conceptual integration, and pictorial codes produce meaning and reflect the intricate relationship of the two football legends. The results indicate that the pictures are very powerful cognitive-semiotic artifacts, influencing the people's perception and the cultural mythology related to the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry.

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Received: 18 August 2025

Accepted: 17 October 2025

Published: 01 November 2025

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1290>



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Cite:

Ali, A. K. , & Alhusseini, H. A. M. (n.d.). A cognitive Semiotic Analysis of Messi-Ronaldo Rivalry in Spanish Newspapers. Wasit Journal for Human Sciences, 21(4). <https://doi.org/10.31185/wjfh.Vol21.Iss4.1290>

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Conceptual Blending/Integration, Pictorial Semiotics, Qualitative Method

تحليل سيميائي معرفي للتنافس بين ميسي-رونالدو في الصحف الإسبانية

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المستخلص

تُجري هذه الدراسة تحليلاً سيميائياً معرفياً لمنافسة ميسي-رونالدو في الصحف الإسبانية. تُسد الدراسة فجوة قائمة من خلال تناول الاهتمام الرياضي بالمنافسة، وتحديدًا التعامل مع كيفية انخراط الاتصال المرئي في سردية المنافسة والمفهوم المعرفي للجمهور بالمنافسة. تُدمج الدراسة ثلاثة نماذج نظرية: نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية لأكوف وجونسون (1980)، ونظرية المزج المفاهيمي لفوكونيه وتيرنر (2002)، والسيميائية التصويرية لسونيسون (1989)، وذلك بطريقة نوعية. أربع صور مختارة، وهي "من المنافسين إلى الحلفاء"، و"العظمة الخالدة"، و"الإبداع والانضباط"، و"نهاية حقبة"، هي أساس التحليل. تُشرح كل صورة لكشف الطريقة التي تُنتج بها الاستعارة والتكامل المفاهيمي والرموز التصويرية المعنى وتعكس العلاقة المعقدة بين أسطورتَي كرة القدم. وتشير النتائج إلى أن الصور هي عبارة عن آثار معرفية سيميائية قوية للغاية، تؤثر على تصور الناس والأساطير الثقافية المتعلقة بالتنافس بين ميسي-رونالدو.

الكلمات المفتاحية: نظرية الاستعارة المفاهيمية، المزج/التكامل المفاهيمي، السيميائيات التصويرية، الأسلوب النوعي

1. Introduction

This study performs a cognitive semiotic analysis of Messi-Ronaldo rivalry in Spanish newspapers. Rivalry has traditionally been regarded as highly interesting. The term "sports rivalry" means that from both sides there is some degree of active participation, whether it has the element of conflict or healthy competition. Unfairly, an eternal evil still lingers within this relationship, particularly when it concerns two rival teams, their players, and their ardent followers (Benkwitz & Molnar, 2012).

According to Baimbridge and Dawson (1996), the proximity among the rivals is also a defining characteristic of sporting rivalries. While researchers, fans, media, coaches, and players have always acknowledged the presence of rivalry in sporting contests, the idea of rivalry is fairly straightforward. However, modern rivalry researchers have treated enemies or opposing teams as impostors, presenting a grave threat to the fans themselves from the cognitive semiotic standpoint. This would be considered a new approach to interpreting this much fought concept. Thus would come the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Conceptual Integration/Blending Theory Fauconnier and Turner (2002), and Sonessons Pictorial Semiotics (1989).

Cognitively, the contest tends to be directed toward the assumption of human inborn propensity to dichotomize experiences, which would then simplify the task of describing identities and their careers into two starkly contrasted self-portraits. Messi, metaphorically, would represent gifts, humility, and loyalty ("the boy from Rosario," "born to play"), whereas Ronaldo might metaphorically stand for discipline, ambition, and domination ("the machine," "the self-made king") (Kassing, 2020).

Semiotically, such contradictory imagery is almost certain to become a cultural signifier, creating atmospherics around bigger domains such as Spanish and global football culture: regional pride (Barcelona versus Real Madrid), national identity (Argentina versus Portugal), and ideologies of success (natural talent versus hard work). Hence, the importance of the study stems from its work in cognitive semiotics and attempts to understand how meaning is formed, interpreted, and emotionally felt in discourse concerning the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry in the sport from the perspective of fans, analysts, and legends. The study extends cognitive semiotics and offers insight into this field, as the present research enriches the literature (Whannel, 2002).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Rivalry

Rivalry is considered to be one factor that comes into play with regard to the demand for a sporting event, leaving aside the question of who the rival is and just how much the attendance numbers are affected by the existence of such a rival. The notion of rivalry is something that fans and the media always find thrilling. The term rivalry has been erroneously grafted onto other determinants, such as team performances, the attractiveness of the opponent, and market characteristics, in attempts made by social scientists to estimate consumers demand for spectator sports (Brown, 1995).

Essentially, rivalry is a component of sports demand because fans pay special attention to certain opponents. This resurgence in the field of rivalry literature must be placed alongside the older traditions of scholarly inquiries that examine and attempt to understand and predict consumers demand for spectator sports. This seems to be especially pertinent given the increasing number of instances in which rivalry is imputed and operationalized within demand studies, as well as the rapid development currently underway in the empirical understanding of rivalry within sports (Kress, 2010).

2.2 Rivalry and Cognitive Semiotics

Language is a semiotic interaction broadly varied in the sports field, taking the main points the human semiotic interaction domain of sports. Cognition encompasses those mental operations embedded in sports discourse and interaction. Interaction is about the manner in which the athlete, coach, and commentator relate to one another (Laird, 1983).

Competition is defined as the opponents that exist within the same division in the analysis of sports competitions. A competitor places himself or herself, in practice, under some relation to his concrete outcome. The problem here lies in finding out whether the correlation between self-ratings is due to a partisan judgment of the rater or the true performance of the rated individual (Gilovich & Griffin, 2013).

Football supporters also troll one another over variations in awards and personal attributes. For instance, Ronaldo's supporters would call Messi "the finished man," while Messi's supporters would be somewhat delighted to hear Ronaldo called "the lazy one," a somewhat obscure insult against Ronaldo. Most times, in trolling, an online fan would hardly ever come face to face with his revered foe, which certainly aggravates the problem (Gripsrud, 2006).

2.3 Characteristics of Rivalry and Cognitive Semiotics

In relation to these features there are some distinctions the conceptualization of rivalry and the cognitive semiotics of sports. One function is to provide some of rivalry typical features to analyze how this phenomenon serves in the construction and imputation of meaning with respect to sports rivalries. The interpretations of these relationships are mostly emotional and derive feelings of passion, anger, and exhilaration. These feelings typically arise within spectators during a match and

build up the sheer competitive nature of the aura accompanying such events (Elfenbein & Staw, 2010).

2.3.1 Conflict Narratives in Sports

On the other hand, there still remains a somewhat flawed conception of sports journalists writing articles on games within a war frame. Repetitive categorization has produced much research under the term "media sport." Conflicts in the narratives of mediated sports are always constructed around women and often run concomitantly with their gender or ethnic categories of race and ethnicity in mediated sport, the most prominent of these being that of national identity (Rowe, 2003).

2.3.2 Emotional Resonance

While quite a few explanations for emotional resonance include a description of mutual emotional impact that unites the two individuals in sharing a common mental state, the ones given above can be equally applied to emotional resonance. When one's feelings, expressions, or conduct are in close resonance, they evoke the same kind of response in another. This is especially pertinent to human resource management (Robnett, 2004).

Such an understanding leads to the subversion of actions. Meanwhile, in conflicts emotions are stirred up and expressed in explicit and symbolic ways. This is worth considering in the social understanding of conflict among other helpful things positions on conflict and emotion describe imagery a flat surface regarded as a signaling process with an indexical notion of surface beauty and a second view that is emotional and profound (Singh & Ladsaria, 2017).

2.3.3 Negotiation of Meaning

Negation of meaning is among the integral facets of the cognitive semiotic approach. It can thus be applied to the negation of different elements of rivalry, such as that existing between the images of Messi-Ronaldo. Instances of negation have been searched for in Spanish newspapers outlets as well as in the direct environments of both players. The hypothetical conflict framework proposes that the process of negotiation of meaning involves parties trying to make each other understand one another to a particular degree (Bitchener, 2004).

Therefore, it is useful to mention that actual occasions of communication require negotiation of meaning, which can broadly consist of phases of understanding that, in some cases, include reconstructing within discourse. The formation of negotiation strategies should involve knowledge of each party's needs and objectives, the dynamism of tactics, and an understanding of the current state of the art. Negotiation is important because it is a process by which actors try to come to understand one another (Pellettieri, 2000).

3. Methodology

The current study is qualitative research in the category of qualitative studies. In qualitative studies, one obtains an esoteric description of unique events. Therefore, a description must be provided in any qualitative research rather than a prediction. Qualitative research methods aim to understand the

actions and perceptions of the target group on a topic (Vanderstoep & Johnston, 2009; Al-Lamy & Alhusseini, 2025).

As a result, qualitative methods assist the researchers in investigating the very essence of what people say or how they behave, allowing for comparisons of the differing stances, ideas, and interpretations that social beings bring to any given social occasion in which they partake (Christou, 2022). In some way or another, qualitative research recognizes similarities in its orientation toward culturally constructed meanings that go beyond specific phenomena. Yet, these are carried out indigenously, subjectively, and interpretively that is to say, within the same big tent but different from one another by methodology (Hammersley, 2007).

Several reasons justify the choice of qualitative research. Firstly, the data in the study relate to representativeness; thus, the researchers have to choose the elements most representative of each sample to ensure the best possible results. Secondly, interpretive flexibility is a very indefinite notion and rather difficult to measure and put into practice (Doherty, 2006). It is a qualitative study that uses various cognitive semiotic approaches: in particular, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), Fauconnier and Turner "Conceptual Blending/Integration" (2002), and Sonesson's Pictorial Semiotics (1989), to explain the huge interest in and noisy coverage of the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry in Spanish newspapers.

3.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), assert that Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) has basically been used for the systematic organization of conceptual domains through metaphor, a method that can indeed be very well used in the analysis of literary and non-literary discourse. Given the existence of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and cognitive semiotics, a study can be conducted to illustrate how metaphors are utilized in particular domains and the representations of underlying conceptual metaphors found in other genres and subgenres. These, indeed, are the kinds of structural metaphor, ontological metaphor, and orientational metaphor.

3.1.1 Structural Metaphor

According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p. 5), structural metaphor is thus a way of visualizing different concepts that are difficult to perceive and appreciate by rendering them in more immediately graspable images. Since structural metaphors are at the core of our created world, understanding them is also central to grasping the dynamics of our culture. Structural metaphors are embedded in language and communication, and through language, they are used, with intent, to concretize, simplify, and sometimes adapt fairly difficult and complicated notions.

3.1.2 Ontological Metaphor

A metaphor is a figure of speech by which one conceptual idea is applied to another, with the focused ideas viewed as physical objects or entities in speech composition. It is a mental process whereby abstract ideas are conceived of as things. This approach is essential for understanding reality as we perceive it and many facets of human interaction. Ontological metaphors put forth a physical

and tangible experience and use an inanimate object to make the conceptualization of complex and often vague topics easier (Costa, 2010).

3.1.3 Orientational Metaphor

It is a kind of metaphor that involves a conceptual organization of two concepts based on physical orientation, thus perceiving an intangible concept in relation to a tangible location. This idea is largely exercised in languages to make brief and clear expressions. Orientational metaphors are invaluable in language and communication, as they provide an assisting dimension to aid the audience in grasping and relating to rather complex information (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999).

3.2 Conceptual Blending/Integration

Fauconnier and Turner (2002), describe Conceptual Integration/Blending (CBI) very general cognitive process, of which one kind is conceptual integration. Such cognitive processes include ones such as analogizing, iteration, mental modeling, conceptual categorization, and framing. It performs many functions in cognition, most often building conceptual boxes to be consumed conceptually in interdisciplinary evaluative material, often governed by community rules. They also often use preexisting conceptual products as input to construct new concepts work.

3.2.1 Mental Spaces

The mental spaces illustrate the input spaces into which two persons moving toward each other on the path are blended, resembling one background frame other conceptual integration networks may have several input spaces and blended spaces (Fauconnier, 1994).

3.2.2 Generic Space

Generic space reflects anything that is primarily construed as belonging to either one of the two input spaces during the unfolding of the conceptual projection. From one point in the developmental sequence, this generic space is mapped onto both of the inputs. A given member from the generic space thus maps onto respective pairs of members in the two input spaces (Goldberg, 1994).

3.2.3 Blending

Blending, the mental structures with two input spaces, are projected into the blend space or third space. Generic spaces and blended spaces are related; blends include generic structures contained in the generic space but may contain further specific structures (Coulson, 2001).

3.3 Pictorial Semiotics

The method of design analysis and image analysis was introduced by Sonesson (1989), Pictorial Semiotics (PC) and is probably the second most widely used method in the field. The correspondences undergone during the process of analysis are noted to be basically in relation to the sets of features that characterize each particular case. In one way or another have to be socially embedded and learned. A good understanding of those, as with digital signals, will evolve over a certain period of

time. Codes and conventions, regulatory codes, analogue codes, digital codes, presentational codes, and interpretation of images are the main factors to consider when it comes to good understandability.

3.3.1 Codes and Conventions

Codes and conventions, usually unknown to us since birth, become really curious and an intellectual empowerment once accentuated. Such a code functions as an experiential moment, and through experimentation, we increase our knowledge of the visual world and its effects. Codes and conventions can be understood as social contracts that are a sort of rule that particular groups of people agree among themselves to follow for their convenience or mutual benefit. In semiotics, a code is among users sharing an understanding of the relation (Wales, 2001).

3.3.2 Regulatory Codes

The relationship between regulations especially traffic regulations and semiotic codes (Miller, 2010).

3.3.3 Analogue Codes

An analogue is full of meaning, while the digital domain of signification is, so to speak, almost barren. The great semiotic wealth of the analogue is almost impossible to transpose into any digital form (Wilden, 1980).

3.3.4 Digital Codes

Certain digital codes for the processing and communication of information involve these methods (Cramer, 2001).

3.3.5 Presentational Codes

Presentational codes are associated with imaginary space, along with the discussion of related images and modalities. When talking about modeling within the semiotic universe, it is often difficult, if not impossible (Bernstein, 1966).

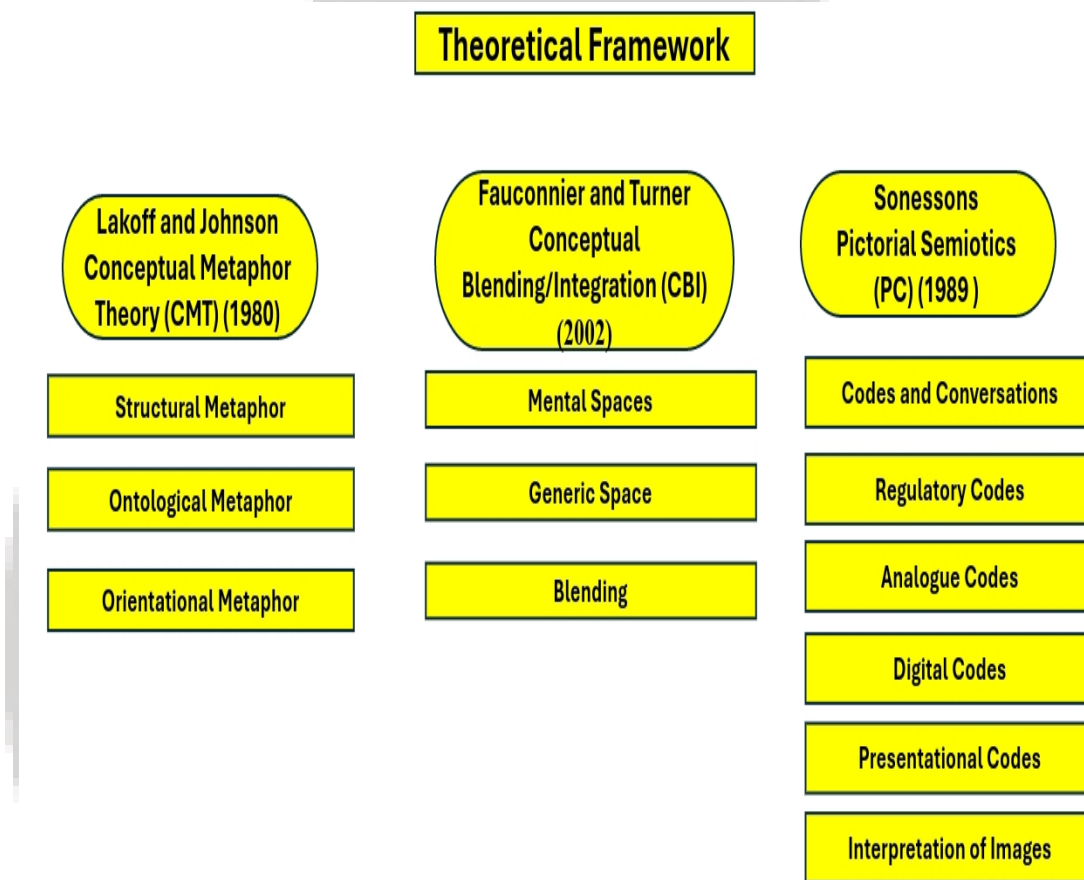
3.3.6 Interpretation of Images

This method is as efficacious as other psychotherapies. Image interpretation, as well as the semiotic complexities of client dialogue, is associated with the process and outcome of image interpretation (Antwi & Hamza, 2015).

Figure 1

Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework adapted from Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Fauconnier & Turner (2002), Sonessons (1989)



4. Data Analysis

In this section, four images have been chosen to be analyzed according to the eclectic models in Figure 1 above. The analysis is based on adopting the following procedures: analyzing Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), Fauconnier and Turner's Conceptual Blending/Integration (2002), and Sonessons Pictorial Semiotics (1989).

4.1 Analysis of Sample (1): "From Rivals to Allies"

Ramos said: Messi is the GOAT. This comes despite the Spaniard spending almost a decade playing alongside Ronaldo at Real Madrid. The pair won pretty much everything there was to win at club level together with Los Blancos, but all it took was two years with Messi in France for Ramos' opinion on who was the best player of all time to be solidified



Note. "From Rivals to Allies," from Spanish Newspapers, by Give me Sport 2024-9-22
<https://share.google/aHioo4ydBEIq6s8Wb>

This statement from the famous Spanish legend Sergio Ramos focuses exclusively on the rivalry between Messi-Ronaldo and builds an iconic narrative around them. All those symbols and icons were used on a certain occasion on September 22, 2024, during which this statement was made indicate digital code. Such icons provide a complete understanding of the statement itself.

In this statement, we have three symbols: The first symbol (greatest of all time), representing structural metaphor Ramos defines Messi as the Goat and places him all alone above the stock of all other players, even Ronaldo, by deciding that he is better than any of them because a player is worth unto himself for such extraordinary skill and talent in the football arena. He admires and respects Messi and considers that the greatness of Messi.

The second symbol (partnership), representing ontological metaphor this symbol represents the partnership between Ramos and Ronaldo at Madrid during a time in football when they combined their services and compatibility with others to become very successful. Although he has spent a long time alongside Ronaldo, Ramos chooses Messi as the Goat since, in his words, he is the best player in the world.

The third symbol (changing perspective), representing orientational metaphor indicates that in just two years in France, Ramos changed his mind and came to believe that Messi is the best footballer. This demonstrates that Messi's ability and talent can surely surpass old loyalties and experiences, marking his name in the annals of history in the eyes of great players like Ramos as the greatest player ever.

In this statement by Sergio Ramos, two cognitive semiotics are created. The first is (all it took was two years), indicates blended mental space and generic space establishes link between short interventions in terms of time or experience and major shifts in perception and judgment, set as an evaluation period in which Messi greatness becomes undeniable for Ramos.

The second cognitive semiotic is the Messi's visual representation serves as a powerful cultural and emotional sign indicates regulatory code, analogue code, and presentational code. His facial expression, gentle smile, and easy-going stance radiate calmness, humility, and confidence all of which are often attributed to him as a public figure. The strong lighting on his face not only brings out a feeling of glory and purity but also brings him closer to the idea of "the chosen one" or "the Goat" (Greatest of All Time) in a symbolic way. Messi's surrounding light blue background not only visually supports the emotional associations of calmness, wisdom, and spiritual elevation but also consolidates the mental image of him as a harmonious and gifted person.

Finally, the Spanish legend uses exaggeration and emotional expressions at the use interpretation of images; Ronaldo's persona evokes the very strong visual impression of a ruler, fighter, and self-assured person. His broad grin, straight stance, and animated facial muscles indicate life and victory. These visual signals combine to tell the story of a victor and the will to win the primary semiotic traits that are frequently linked to Ronaldo's persona. The light shining on his face and the palpable fervor in his expression are the semiotic codes of vigor and success, thus reinforcing his portrayal as an obsessed and tireless fighter.

4.2 Analysis of Sample (2): "Timeless Greatness"

Torres told Marca, 'Messi is the best. I have not seen or will ever see a player like Lionel Messi.'



Note. "Timeless Greatness," from Spanish Newspapers, by Extra.ie 2017-12-20
<https://extra.ie/2017/12/20/sport/soccernews/torres-messi-ronaldo>

This statement from the famous Spanish legend Fernando Torres focuses exclusively on the rivalry between Messi-Ronaldo and builds an iconic narrative around them. All those symbols and icons are used on a certain occasion: on the 20th of December, 2017, during which this statement was made indicate digital code. Such icons here provide a complete understanding of the statement itself.

In this statement, we have three symbols: the first symbol (excellence), representing structural metaphor stands for the feeling of immortality instilled in Messi. It conveys that the artistry of Messi exists beyond generations and that, perhaps, future players will never reach the level he attained in those days; it is a rarity in itself that is impossible to duplicate later on.

The second symbol (hidden competition), representing ontological metaphor by deeming Messi the best, sets a level from which every player, including Torres himself, is measured. This thus creates an implied competition among current and future players striving to surpass the bar set by Torres. Knowing that Messi is on an extraordinary plane should motivate other players; they can actually go achieve it, but getting there is a tremendous amount of work.

The third symbol (inspiration for future generations), representing orientational metaphor thoroughly emphasizes Torres' words, suggesting that every player should strive to emulate Messi in order to reach a level just below his own. This serves as a reminder of Messi's extraordinary skills, which will be etched into memory for everyone to recall. To achieve this, players must work hard to acquire such skills and enjoy them in the future.

In this statement, Spanish legend Fernando Torres creates two cognitive semiotics. The first is (the best), indicates blended mental space and generic space is a personal opinion, but many players and fans share a similar feeling. It thus places a sentiment common to the football community within the personal sphere.

The second cognitive semiotic is, Messi's portrayal through this visual composition sends a symbolic message of remarkable skills, concentration, and equilibrium indicates regulatory code, analogue code, and presentational code. The position of his body slightly forward with eyes on the ball indicates a state of control, consciousness, and technical accuracy. This visual sign represents the semiotic meaning of "the artist of football", depicting Messi as the personification of instinctive talent and deliberate motion. The blue and red hues of the Barcelona jersey are super iconic, acting as cultural symbols that link Messi's character to fidelity, love, and history.

Finally, the Spanish legend uses exaggeration and emotional expressions at the use interpretation of images, such as, the image of Ronaldo represents vibrancy, accuracy, and physical superiority. The way he stands inclined and stretched out with one leg, looking at the ball becomes a visual communicator of motion, mastery, and intention. The signs that come from his body language show, among other things, insistence and rivalry, thus supporting the already strong public view of Ronaldo as a committed and driven sportsman. The white color of the Real Madrid jersey serves as a potent cultural symbol. The white color symbolizes purity, professionalism, and lowliness; when combined with the Real Madrid logo, it expresses greatness and royalty in a very subtle way.

4.3 Analysis of Sample (3): "Creativity and Discipline"

Kaka: "Messi is a genius and Cristiano is an icon of modern football"



Note. "Creativity and Discipline," from Spanish Newspapers, by Marca 2016-3-3
<https://images.app.goo.gl/DJQTizhiYYqhK5Lx6>

This statement from the famous Brazilian legend Ricardo Kaká focuses exclusively on the rivalry between Messi-Ronaldo and builds up an iconic narrative around them. All those symbols and icons are used on a certain occasion: on the third day of March 2016, during which this statement was made indicate digital code. Such icons here provide a complete understanding of the statement itself.

In this statement, we have three symbols: the first symbol (creativity), representing structural metaphor refers to Kaká calling Messi a "genius" to emphasize Messi's supreme-level creativity in the world of football. It highlights Messi's innovation and improvisation, whereas for Ronaldo, it relates to influence and style, which goes beyond just a creative approach to football. Ronaldo is a genius in physical fitness and persistent hard work toward success.

The second symbol (consistency), representing ontological metaphor indicates that Messi has always maintained a unique style and executed it throughout his life at the heights of football. His formula for maintaining his scoring ability at an all-time level over numerous seasons speaks of consistent greatness. However, Ronaldo's desire to stay at the top, his flexibility, and his commitment to fitness and training keep him in a position to score goals that are unmatched in beauty and ingenuity.

The third symbol (football era), representing orientational metaphor denotes the fact that, in Kaka's view, in general terms of creativity, excellence, and the ability to make a difference in a match, clinch championships, and earn individual accolades for his team, both players have helped build modern football and serve as examples for every player in the sport.

In this statement, Brazilian legend Ricardo Kaká creates two cognitive semiotics. The first is (Messi as a genius but Ronaldo as an icon), indicates blended mental space and generic space suggests that the genius that is Messi and the icon that is Ronaldo have made permanent marks on football in very different ways. Messi is considered a creative, artistic genius, whereas Ronaldo is regarded as a sporting icon because of the titles and achievements he has garnered.

The second cognitive semiotic is the image depicts a young Lionel Messi who is now a world superstar standing with two other soccer greats at the FIFA World Player of the Year 2007 ceremony indicates regulatory code, analogue code, and presentational code. This image was taken at a moment that symbolically marked the beginning of a new era in football. Viewed from the perspective of semiotics, the image or it somehow depicts the whole event by the use of signs, such as icon, index, and symbol, which together convey the different meanings.

The basic interpretation of the image shows trophies or three players holding trophies, which very clearly signifies appreciation and success. The way Messi holds his body, his size, and his facial expression are all together icons of the virtues of modesty and youth, which very nicely puts him in contrast to the players who are more confident and are displaying maturity. The very idea of the "rising genius" is also iconically reinforced by his smaller physical presence among the giants in the field. The awards plus the FIFA branding unambiguously lead to the institutional ratification of football's great. Therefore, Messi at this very moment in time is an index of his coming global fame, and one can easily deduce that he was almost there at the point of greatness.

Finally, the Brazilian legend Kaká uses exaggerated language and an emotional tone at the use interpretation of images the image displays Cristiano Ronaldo on the right side, showcasing his FIFA World Player 2007 award and having an air of confidence and control. The image unveils a complex web of meaning via the three fundamental types of signs iconic, indexical, and symbolic leading to the conclusion that Ronaldo is the embodiment of discipline, ambition, and modern sports personality. To begin with, the image presents the iconic features of Ronaldo in a formal black suit and bow tie, and the trophy held tightly in his hand. The whole body of Ronaldo standing straight up, his expression, and the direct look at the camera are iconically denoting confidence, determination, and pride. The three visual elements combined present Ronaldo as an athlete who has already recognized his greatness a self-made image of victory and power.

4.4 Analysis of Sample (4): "End of an Era"

Cristiano Ronaldo: "If you love Cristiano, you don't have to hate Messi. Both of us have changed the history of game & are respected. The rivalry Is over.



Note. „End of an Era," from Spanish Newspapers, by Marca 2023-9-7

<https://www.marca.com/en/football/2023/09/07/64f95294268e3e92358b45d4.html>

This statement from the famous Portuguese legend Ronaldo focuses on the rivalry between him and the footballer Messi, carving out an iconic narrative through references and symbols. He made this statement when he appeared before the media on September 7, 2023, announcing this matter indicate digital code. The icons in this statement convey a complete message to the audience, as the Portuguese legend considers the rivalry between them to be important.

In this statement, we have three symbols: the first symbol (acknowledgment of the rivalry), representing structural metaphor campaigns for competitive distinction, as their rivalry defined an era in football and held the power to elevate the very stature of the game. Ronaldo admits that the rivalry between him and Messi is more beneficial and appreciated by the people because it goes beyond mere antagonism and rests on great achievement.

The second symbol (unity over division), representing ontological metaphor as expressed in Ronaldo's statement, "If you love Cristiano, you don't have to hate Messi," promotes respect. He is actually trying to encourage acceptance rather than hate and discourage unjust and unhappy comparisons regarding the greatness of these two players. By all means, loving one does not mean hating the other. It is indeed sportsmanship and respect, rejoicing in excellence rather than dividing through rivalry.

The third symbol (history and the rivalry is over), representing orientational metaphor is a symbol of recognition granted to the players. "We changed the history of football" ushers in the idea of a revolution in football. Messi-Ronaldo legacy, that is, a legacy of excellence achieved by two icons who have redefined football through their unprecedented achievements and how those achievements have affected football fans, who, in turn, look up to them as an inspiration in their quest for greatness. This sign of the end of rivalry symbolizes the conclusion of a long period marked by fierce contests that have held the sporting world spellbound for the last fifteen years, during which these two artists maintained the artistic level of individual aspiration and competition in a rivalry never before seen so deeply entrenched in sporting ambitions as in the spectators' hearts.

In this statement, the Portuguese legend Ronaldo creates two cognitive semiotics. The first is the creation of (camaraderie), indicates blended mental space and generic space the phrase "we respected each other" carries the meaning of companionship. The rivalry changes from one of hostility and hatred into a respectful relationship. The message of reconciliation and unity arises from emphasizing the positive implications of the now-defunct rivalry and mutual respect, as is so often the practice of Ronaldo.

The second cognitive semiotic is the Messi is the one in the pink Inter Miami jersey, and this is his image a smiling, thumbs-up gesture indicates regulatory code, analogue code, and presentational code. The image sends out signals of peace, satisfaction, and closure, thereby contrasting the competitive and intense imagery that has always been popularly associated with him and Cristiano Ronaldo in the past. The image, therefore, directly illustrates Messi through his new epoch composed, smiling, and super self-assured.

The thumbs-up gesture is an icon that very well embodies friendliness, positivity, and overall approval. His face projecting calm joy is a sign of emotional maturity and inner peace. Messi's jersey

Inter Miami and captain's armband are indicators of his current identity as a leader in a new football environment, therefore, it shows a process of transition from European competition to a more symbolic ground of legacy and influence where the latter aspect can be still sought after among the most elite footballers.

Finally, the Portuguese legend uses exaggeration and emotional expressions in his statement at the use interpretation of images: Ronaldo is shown in action, putting on Al-Nassr's yellow jersey, with a determined face and active body language. The image, conveys meanings of power, endurance, and guidance through the usage of iconic, indexical, and symbolic signs. The image gives off the vibe of Ronaldo playing a game, full of energy and movement. His fists are tightly closed, the forward stride, and the penetrating gaze combine iconically to symbolize being determined, spirited, and vigorous in sports.

The captain's armband worn by him implicitly manifests authority and leadership in his squad. The golden Al-Nassr jersey and captain's armband symbolize his current status as a global player who is not limited to Europe but rather, showcasing his ability to affect different football cultures. The sweat on him and the tension in his muscles are signs of his tough workout, loyalty and his constant chasing after excellence regardless of age or time. Thus, the image can be said to denote commitment and toughness.

5. Conclusion

This study embarked on a cognitive semiotic exploration of Messi-Ronaldo rivalry in Spanish newspapers. With eclectic models and theories as a selection set Lakoff and Johnson, Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), Fauconnier and Turner, Conceptual Blending/Integration Theory (2002), and Sonesson, Pictorial Semiotics, (1989), this study attempted to bypass surface-level newspaper headline and image analyses in order to expose the complex cognitive semiotic machinery that drives the public's perception of this world-famous sporting rivalry.

The analysis of four selected images: "from rivals to allies," "timeless greatness," "creativity and discipline," and "end of an era," indicates that the visual and textual narratives about the two players, Messi-Ronaldo, are anything but straightforward. Rather, they constitute a complex formation of metaphorical blended constructs and pictorial semiotics, which endows the alleged rivalry with a range of meanings beyond that of mere sporting competition. The study concludes that casual readers, as is probably the case with any common audience, cannot grasp the precise meanings of the images and texts without understanding the cognitive models that underlie these meaning.

Our study yielded evidence to suggest that the rivalry is cognitively and semiotically framed across several metaphorical avenues. Structural metaphoric usage was dominant, with language and imagery presenting players as opponents in a battle for supremacy. Ontological metaphors were also crucial in that they objectified the skills and qualities of the players, treating them as concrete objects. Orientational metaphors also patterned the story, with success and failure consistently.

The study further highlighted the indispensable role of conceptual blending/integration: images and headlines created mental spaces for the players and the rivalry. After creating individual spaces, the

two were then blended and endowed with emergent meaning that was more than an aggregate of its counterparts.

This framework was supplemented by Sonesson's pictorial semiotics, which allows one to interpret the visual codes and conventions that newspapers use. Indeed, the study found that the images were not mere representations; rather, they were constructed through different codes. This research confirms that a thorough study of sporting rivalries employing an eclectic model that combines conceptual metaphor, blending theory, and pictorial semiotics offers a powerful tool for dissecting the complex cognitive and semiotic processes that permeate media sports. An analysis of the Spanish sports newspapers accounts of the Messi-Ronaldo rivalry showcases the dimensions of these sports narratives with which the cognitive frameworks are deeply embedded to derive meaning and effect.

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