



A Discourse Analysis of Conceptual Imagery in National Sports Media Texts

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Abstract

Objectives: This paper explores how conceptual metaphors frame modern-day Iraqi sports discourse, using a qualitative corpus-bounded discourse analytical framework underpinned by Conceptual Metaphor Theory. **Methods:** The analysis is based on a purpose-built corpus of thirty-seven Iraqi sports media texts (approximately 11,800 words) drawn from multiple genres, including news reports, analytical articles, interviews, and official statements. Metaphorical expressions were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) and subsequently grouped into higher-level conceptual categories. **Results:** The results show that COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT is the leading organizing conceptual metaphor in our sample, serving as the preeminent cognitive frame for developing a sense of competitive intensity, urgency and evaluative pressure. Other metaphorical conceptualizations, such as SUCCESS IS UPWARD MOVEMENT, FAILURE IS STAGNATION, A LEAGUE IS A VERTICAL SPACE, COMPETITION IS A JOURNEY, and DEVELOPMENT IS A CONSTRUCTION, display evaluative and structural genre-conditioned distribution and functions. While there are examples of heightened militarized discourse in sports, the analysis shows there is not a developed discourse of a WAR scenario, and in fact competition is framed as a bounded struggle. The study demonstrates that metaphor dominance in Iraqi sports media is systematically patterned and closely aligned with genre-specific communicative functions rather than broad cultural generalization. **Conclusions:** By providing a structured, MIP-guided qualitative account of conceptual metaphor use in an underexplored Arabic media context, this research contributes to discourse-based metaphor studies and offers a replicable analytical framework for future investigations of sports discourse.

Paper Info

Keywords

conceptual metaphor theory; sports discourse; iraqi sports media; discourse analysis; metaphor identification procedure (MIP); genre-based analysis

Introduction

Sport is one sector of media language that is conventionalized and dynamic at the same time. There is firm competition, evaluation, and positionality among the institutions and all of that is played out through recurring language models. As van Dijk (1988) pointed out, news is a discourse type, it is not just a reflection of reality, but a social practice that uniquely constructs the different facets of reality.

In this specific area, the use of a particular type of discourse (metaphor) is very important. It helps the writer(s) simplify and organize the complex nature of the different sporting activities, rankings and results so as to help the audience to easily digest the information. It is commonly accepted that the use of metaphorical expressions is one of the central ways and means of conceptualizing reality, especially in highly abstract, hierarchical, and contested domains (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). While it is true that sports discourse has generated much interest in the European and Western media contexts, it is very much the case that Iraqi sports media, when viewed from the discourse-analytical angle, is still uncharted territory. There are a few such approaches that evoke enough interest to engage in the study of news as discourse in its own right (van Dijk, 1988). The majority of works on Arabic media discourse have focused on the political or ideological dimension, while the discourse of sports has been largely studied in a descriptive or informational genre rather than a site of systematic cognitive framing. Talbot (2007) argues that media texts do not simply reflect reality; they actively construct versions of it, thus in representing events, people and issues, media discourse offers particular perspectives rather than neutral descriptions. This absence is analytically problematic, given the centrality of sports reporting in shaping public evaluation, collective anticipation, and institutional credibility within Iraqi media.

The present study aims to investigate the systematic use of sports-based conceptual metaphors in Iraqi sports discourse with regard to organizing competition, success and failure, as well as institutional accreditation. The study focuses on dominant conceptual metaphors that recur across texts and genres, instead of cataloguing isolated metaphorical expressions, thereby functioning as organizing frames for sports narration and evaluation. Methodologically, the analysis uses a methodological frame based on discourse-analytical methods together with systematic text research and is underpinned by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (1980), following the steps of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). A corpus of Iraqi sports texts (partitioned from disparate news sources) is analyzed to extract cross-generic patterns of metaphor across genres, in particular news reports, op-ed pieces, interviews and official statements. This design allows metaphor dominance to be determined systematically rather than heuristically, making our analysis adhere even more closely to best practices in metaphor research at present. The following research questions guide the present study:

RQ1: Which dominant conceptual metaphors organize Iraqi sports discourse across varying text types?

RQ2: How do these metaphors vary in distribution across genres such as news reports, analytical pieces, and institutional statements?

RQ3: What discursive functions do dominant metaphors fulfill in shaping representations of competition, evaluative positioning, and institutional alignment?

In line with these questions, the study seeks to identify and categorize dominant conceptual metaphors in Iraqi sports discourse, examine their genre-specific distribution and discursive functions, and extend discourse-based understandings of metaphor usage in the selected texts under study. In doing so, the paper has two implications for metaphor and discourses studies: On the one hand, it helps to

advance metaphor research. Empirically, it offers a coherent discourse-driven description of how conceptual metaphor is exploited in Iraqi sports media. Analytically, it shows how evaluation and narrative coherence across genres may be structured by a small number of dominant metaphors without the need of large cultural generalizations. The results, therefore, provide an empirical basis for subsequent work on sports discourse and metaphor in Arabic media.

Literature Review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) is used as the primary framework for the current work. Within CMT, the metaphor is not treated as purely ornamentation, but as a structural cognitive process where a particular framework is understood through another more tangible, concrete framework (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 123). The process of comparing and the metaphors involves some systematic cross-domain mapping, and these mappings are what organize the process of interpretation and evaluation within the discourse. As explained by Lakoff (1993), these conceptual metaphors are not simple lexical substitutions but structured mappings between the source and target domains. These mappings have what can be defined as patterned entailments: the moment a source domain is prompted, some conclusions are obvious, and others are insufficient. Furthermore, metaphorical projection is not total, i.e., a target domain only has a selected few aspects of a source domain mapped onto it (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003). This principle is critically important in separating general conflictual expressions from the more complex WAR-schematic expressions. Recent studies have shown that the usage of metaphors is contextual. Instead of viewing conceptual mappings as cognitive templates that are uniformly applied across discourse, Kövecses (2015) states that the meaning of metaphors is shaped by an interplay of situational, sociocultural, and discourse-specific influences. Context collaborates with the metaphors and actively constrains and modulates which aspects of the source domain are foregrounded, extended, or suppressed in various communicative environments. Metaphor processing shows that there is no consistent activation of conceptual mappings. Littlemore (2019) shows that there is a possibility of differences in the understanding of a metaphor within a certain discourse and social culture due to cognitive biases, familiarity, and social surroundings. This variability shows the necessity of investigating the empirical metaphorical configuration within precise discourse environments rather than relying on the assumption of an automatic or uniform projection of source-domain structures. Taking into consideration the above studies, the authors analyze the metaphorical structures of CMT in a selected corpus of Iraqi sports articles. The purpose of this study is to analyze the discourse for its cognitive mappings rather than its general cognitive structure. In this case, the analysis focuses on the possibility of conflict-related expressions in the corpus blending into further extended militarized mappings, or if they stay limited to the sport-internal competitive logic. Conceptual metaphor is thus regarded as one of the structuring mechanisms of discourse that can be empirically observed and must be corroborated with evidence from the texts in the corpus.

Metaphor Identification and Analytical Procedure

Although Conceptual Metaphor Theory explains how cross-domain mappings operate, empirical research needs clear methods for recognizing metaphorically used words. This paper uses the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), created by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), which offers outlining procedures for separating metaphorically charged words and their literal meaning. MIP states that a word is metaphorical when its meaning in that particular context is different (or more complex) than a basic, historically prior, or concrete meaning that can be used in a comparison. As for the rest, Steen et al. (2010) focus and develop procedures using MIPVU which yields better consistency in identifying metaphorical constructs based on word-by-word instructions and dictionary definition guidance. Overall, MIPVU(hence Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit) increases transparency in methodology by distinguishing the identification of metaphorically used words from the mapping of the underlying concepts. This is crucial for qualitative discourse analysis, as it avoids overly conceptual categorization that may obscure the data. Although MIP and MIPVU create orderly formats for recognizing metaphorically drawn lexical items, the analysis of metaphor in discourse starts well beyond identification. Charteris-Black(1993, 33) argues that the analytical task starts from the recognition of metaphorical expressions and then moves to the interpretation of their discursive and evaluative roles. The identification/interpretation distinction is of particular methodological importance in that it avoids collapsing lexical coding into conceptual coding. In this regard, Cameron (2003) points out that in discourse, metaphors often unfold dynamically over stretches of text rather than appear in punctuate in token form. Clustering, repetition, or patterned variation can produce the metaphoric meaning. It is for this reason that the current study goes beyond a study of the lexis of metaphors; rather, it seeks to understand the metaphorical expressions that create a coherent conceptual structure across genre-differentiated Iraqi sports texts. (ibid : 66).

In this study, MIP is utilized as the main method for systematically identifying metaphorical expressions throughout the collection of 37 Iraqi sports texts. The analysis is non-quantitative and does not rely on statistical frequency modelling. The study chooses to analyze the identified metaphors qualitatively by focusing on specific metaphors in the texts and classifying them into general conceptual structures to see if any systematic mappings can be identified across different types of texts. Consistent with the suggestions in applied metaphor research (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), the current study considers the distinction of lexical identification and conceptual patterning as different levels of analysis. The nature of the corpus being limited and differentiated by genre, the rigor in methodology arises more through the consistent setting of analytical units than through any form of statistical reasoning. The aim is to analyze the extent to which the dataset exhibits structural consistency (or structural coherence) in metaphorical framing, and in particular whether conflict-oriented metaphors extend to entailments of a militarized WAR schema, or whether they are rather restricted to a competitive and limited framing associated with sports discourse.

Metaphors in Sports Discourse

As a representative example of the role of metaphor in the structuring of competition, appraisal, and opposition, sports discourse has been the subject of considerable study. Regardless of the language,

empirical studies have shown that the same conceptual mappings are used repeatedly in sports discourse, which shapes the way the audience interprets the situation and the way the audience understand the situation. Raffaelli and Katunar (2016) in their discourse-oriented study of sports reporting in Croatia, show that metaphorical language in sports reports is more likely to show a tendency to cluster metaphorical language than to show random distribution. These findings affirm that sports discourse may metaphorically organize systematically as long as the communicative situation calls for that, and may vary in terms of lexical choice. This study supports the hypothesis that metaphors in journalism are used as a tool for structuring discourse, and not for stylistic ornamentation. Metaphors in headline discourse have also been observed to operate within the boundaries of a particular genre.

Mapunda (2024) captures Tanzania's soccer news coverage and notes the frequent use of metaphorical constructions to embellish match results and heighten rivalry, competition, and conflict. Because headlines are limited in space, metaphorical language is a way to strategically increase competitive tension. In addition to blatant conflict, other types of evaluative mapping in the literature are less apparent. For example, Huang and Tseng (2020) study NBA(hence National Basketball Association) headlines and describe the metaphorical conceptualization of DEFEAT IS CONTROL. In this case, loss is reframed in a way that emphasizes the control and strategy of the losing team. Sports metaphors can achieve evaluative effects of a different order than direct confrontation. This is also seen in the case of other than direct confrontation. The metaphors used in Peng and Li (2024) research on news coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics suggest both the linguistic and social metaphor in sports journalism helps build a narrative that goes beyond the specific event. Hence, the claim that metaphors in sports journalism are used in a purposeful and systematic manner is justified .

The available literature shows that there is a pattern of conflict and competition in sports discourse, but the context, genre, communicative purpose, and sociocultural factors determine how the pattern is formed. Furthermore, using language that is competitive or confrontational does not necessarily mean that a WAR schema has been reached. This distinction serves as a base line for analyzing whether the conflict-related language used in the Iraqi sports journalism is extended beyond the sport-internal competitive rationale or just within competitive rationale.

Metaphors in Arab Sports Media Contexts

In recent years, research on conceptual metaphor in Arabic-language sports media has expanded, particularly in relation to football reporting and headline discourse. These studies indicate that metaphor plays a structuring role in framing competition and evaluation within Arab sports journalism, though the scope and methodological orientation of this research remain limited. Alzawaydeh and Alghazo (2018), in a comparative analysis between English and Arabic football headlines, through the replication of multimodal metaphors, also show that conflict and struggle based metaphors reappear across linguistic borders with different ideological flavors as “their source domains manifest [ed] over two distinct forms. They claim that metaphors in ARA(hence Ahmedabad Racquet Academy) sports headlines works as a means of inflaming the competition, and condensed evaluative meaning imposed

by the genre focus. Focusing specifically on Saudi sports journalism, Al-Otaibi (2025) pinpoints common conceptual metaphors in football headlines from different periods. His corpus-driven investigation demonstrates the existence of patterned metaphorical framing in sports discourse, while also underscoring diachronic change. Results indicate that metaphor usage in Arab sports media is organized, but also sensitive to media change and context changes. Another work by Mobarki and Alzahrani (2024), who focus on the metaphorical framing of sports-related phenomenon in Saudi newspapers, upholds that metaphor is made to work as a cognitive device and an evaluative frame but not merely as decoration. Though not strictly limited to match reporting but more a focus on sports fanaticism, their findings further strengthen the overall claim that metaphor in Arab sport related media is part of structured meaning making.

Although these are valuable, the research into Arab contexts is either corpus-based and/or quantitative or concerns itself in absolute terms with a particular type of genre, e.g. headlines. There is no documented systematic qualitative analysis, comparing metaphor structuring in different journalistic formats in Iraqi sport media. In particular, we do not yet have empirical evidence as to whether the conflictual expressions in Iraqi sports reporting are anchored in a more broadly extended military schema or else confined to sport-internal competitive logic.

Research Gap in Iraqi Sports Discourse Studies

While research on conceptual metaphor has extended across cognitive linguistics and media discourse studies, and while sports journalism has been examined from differing international and Arab perspectives, Iraqi sports media have not previously been systematically analyzed in a discourse-oriented CMT framework. Current research has either limited itself to headline-level analysis, taken a largely quantitative corpus approach or studied contexts outside Iraq. However, no research has previously explored reporting of Iraqi sport drawing on such a qualitative genre-sensitive approach informed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory and operationalizing an explicit identification process like MIP/MIPVU. Furthermore, while conflict-oriented language is frequently associated with sports discourse, the distinction between surface competitive framing and the activation of a more elaborated militarized WAR schema has not been empirically investigated in Iraqi sports journalism. This distinction is analytically significant. The presence of conflict-related expressions does not in itself establish the existence of a structured WAR mapping. Determining whether such expressions generate extended entailments characteristic of a militarized schema requires systematic examination across texts and genres. Without such analysis, assumptions about the nature of sports metaphor remain impressionistic. This study attempts to fill this gap by qualitatively analyzing thirty-seven Iraqi sports texts belonging to different journalistic text-types. Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory and guided by systematic metaphor identification, the study evaluates whether recurrent conflict-oriented expressions in Iraqi sports discourse coalesce into extended militarized mappings or remain bounded within sport-internal competitive logic. In doing so, it contributes a context-specific and methodologically explicit account of metaphor structuring in Iraqi sports media.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative discourse-analytical approach, which has been structured in a systematic way and is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The present study views sports reporting as more than a mere aggregation of lexical items, but rather as an organized discursive act that constructs a competitive reality. As Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) state, “Discourse analysis is not just a method for analysing texts; it is also a theoretical and methodological framework for understanding how social reality is constructed through language”. This viewpoint supports the study’s objective of exploring the systematic role of metaphor in organizing the representation of rivalry across various competitive discursive formations, as opposed to being a mere rhetorical embellishment. Instead of attempting to carry out an extensive quantitative assessment, the study aims to identify and analyze metaphorical patterns and repetitions in the corpus of Iraqi sports media texts, which has been purposefully limited. The dataset provides the basis for a systematic approach to the study of metaphor across genres, while the analysis is intended to be interpretively and theoretically driven. The research design integrates two complementary stages of analysis. First, there are ways of identifying metaphorical expressions that are principled and replicable, thus claiming the methodical rigor needed to differentiate metaphorical and non-metaphorical language. Second, metaphorical expressions are analyzed in their discursive situational contexts to show how recurring conceptual metaphors operate as organizing frameworks related to competition, evaluation, and institutional positioning within the discourse of sports. This design enables an analysis that conceptualizes patterning while moving beyond the discourse analysis of frequency counts. In the context of the systematically sampled texts integrated with qualitative discourse analysis, the study embraces a developed metaphor research methodology that, following the work of Charteris-Black (2004), systematically identifies instances, places them in context, and justifies the analysis in theory, thus overriding statistical generalization. The resultant design is appropriate for identifying the principal conceptual metaphors in a confined media setting, while ensuring a high level of analytical depth, as well as methodological clarity.

Dataset Compilation

This study is based on a purpose-built corpus of thirty-seven Iraqi sports media texts (TEXT 1–TEXT 37). The corpus was constructed to enable systematic qualitative metaphor identification across genre-differentiated sports discourse rather than to achieve statistical representativeness.

Source Selection

The Data set is made up of materials from various Iraqi Sports Media like sport newspapers, online sport sources, and the Iraqi News Agency. This selection works for the variation of the current Iraqi Sports Discourse. Incorporating various sources captures variations in the reporting of matches, previews, interviews, decisions of disciplinaries, and institutional announcements.

Temporal Scope

The texts cover a period from January 2025 to February 2026 and include league competitions, continental tournaments, institutional statements, and disciplinarys within a cycle of active competitions. This time frame captures a coherent but sufficiently diverse contemporary Iraqi Sports Reporting.

Corpus Size and Structure

The processed and cleaned corpus is approximately 11,800 words. This volume is sufficient for engaging in a close, manual application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) while also permitting cross-textual comparability within and across genres. For the purpose of analytical transparency in the extraction log and the interpretation, each document was assigned a number (TEXT 1 - TEXT 37). For each text, the metadata contains the text's source, publication date, and text type. The corpus is constrained to allow systematized qualitative analysis without the corpus having to be frequency-driven.

Data Collection Procedures

The texts were manually collected from the official online archives and the authenticated digital versions of the Iraqi sports media outlets. Only complete sports articles were considered. During the cleaning process, non-sports content, advertisements, duplicates, and irrelevant materials were eliminated. Each text was digitally archived and embedded with metadata that consisted of source, date, headline, and genre type. The corpus was considered complete before identifying metaphors to avoid any post hoc sampling revisions.

Analytical Framework

Metaphor Identification(2007)

Before any of the conceptual grouping was done, MIP was applied to all 37 texts to illustrate the corpus' use of MIP and the metaphorically employed lexical units. Each metaphorical lexical unit was described using a three tiered approach. First, the contextual meaning of the lexical unit was determined. Secondly, the more basic and concrete meaning was established and finally, metaphorical use was identified when the context existed but was described using a more basic and concrete meaning to give the overall context more meaning. This approach also helps to be more consistent in terms of procedure and less arbitrary when identifying pragmatically metaphorical terms. The MIPs identified a distinct analytic stage, a phase prior to the metaphor classification stage, and, therefore, in order to avoid conceptual grouping being influenced by a more thematic, and possibly, less accurate, explanation, the grouping focused largely on metaphorically-linguistically, and systematically, identified conceptual metaphors. This was done while also giving careful consideration to the contextual discourse, ensuring that the textual meaning and situational context was reflected and factored in the grounding of any metaphorical meaning identified.

Metaphor Classification and Categorization

Using the CMT (Lakoff & Johnson; 1980; Kövecses 2005) literature as a guide, the framework-specific metaphorical expressions are refined by the metaphorical expressions in the corpus. Metaphorical expressions are categorized in relation to the higher-level conceptual metaphor constructed through the framework of the corpus. Examples include metaphors framing sport as struggle/conflict, journey, and development or construction.

Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Once the metaphorical expressions are identified, and the conceptual categories are constructed, a qualitative discourse analysis is executed in order to understand the purpose(s) of the recurrent conceptual metaphors in their immediate contexts. This is different from employing a quantitative measure of frequency or corpus-based analysis. It is built from a thorough reading of the corpus. Metaphorical expressions were analyzed in relation to the immediate co-text to uncover their evaluative and framing functions. News discourse is structured in a systematic manner to control the presentation and evaluation of the events, and that is not incidental (van Dijk, 1988). Specific focus was given to how pervasive metaphors shape the representations of competition, hierarchy, progress, and institutional positioning in various fields. Recurrent patterns within the dataset limited interpretation. Conceptual metaphors, as a rule of thumb, were considered valid for analysis only when there were consistent manifestations across the corpus, resulting in restricted conjectural or culturally overreached interpretations. This approach assured that the analytical interpretations were evidence-based and tied to the actual text patterns as opposed to descriptions that relied on the analyst's impressions.

Analytical Rigor and Reliability

The researcher ensured analytical rigor in this study through consistency in the method, cross-genre and cross-media analyses, and bordered interpretive analysis. The identification of metaphors was executed through the same method, Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejaz Group, 2007), systematically, in all 37 documents in the corpus. The analysis was bottom up and the metaphorical status of the lexical unit was ascertained before any grouping was done. This barrier between identification and grouping precludes subjective thematic coding and engenders transparency. The corpus encompasses a variety of Iraqi sports media, comprising several genres: match reports, match previews, interviews, disciplinary rulings, and institutional statements. The distinction of genres provides a basis for cross-textual verification of conceptual developments as opposed to the support of single-text evidence. Metaphor classification was affirmed through sustained and repeated close readings. Discourse contexts of the identified lexical metaphors were examined to check if a set of identified metaphors produced conceptual coherence and mapping across the texts. Conceptual metaphors were analytically considered only if there was evidence of cross-genre recurrence. Specifically, recurrence was operationalized as the appearance of a conceptual metaphor across more than one genre and in multiple independent texts within the corpus.

The study takes a qualitative discourse analysis approach, valuing structural rationality above statistical rationality. Cameron (2003) notes the dynamic movement of metaphors in discourse,

describing their emergence as clusters and patterned interactivity. Charteris-Black (2004) argues that recurrence and pattern analysis in metaphor studies is done through interpretation, while mere counting is done in absentia. This study, with the limitations of a cross-genre corpus, aims to establish reliably recurring inferential structures that are empirically based in cross-genre discourse. Therefore, analytic interpretations are bound to the identifiable cross-genre phenomenon, ensuring that there is an adequate balance between the corpus and analytical argument.

Results and Analysis

Overview of the Data

The corpus encompasses thirty-seven sports media texts that have been systematically numbered (TEXT 1–TEXT 37) for the sake of analytical traceability. After cleaning, the total corpus size is around 11,800 words. The texts were sourced from various Iraqi sports media outlets and demonstrate diversity in the institutional voice, communicative intention, and genre. The corpus is comprehensive, ranging from January 2025 to February 2026, and includes coverage of league competition, continental tournaments, institutional announcements, interviews, disciplinary decisions, and pre-match press talks. The corpus is not constructed for the sake of statistical representativeness in the corpus. Instead, it has been constructed as a defined, purposefully designed dataset for a systematic qualitative identification of metaphors and a cross-genre assessment.

Table 1. Data Composition

Category	Description
Total number of texts	37
Approximate word count	11,800 words
Temporal coverage	January 2025 – February 2026
Text types included	Match reports, pre-match previews, analytical commentaries, interviews, press conferences, official statements, disciplinary news
Media outlets	Iraqi sports newspapers, digital sports platforms, Iraqi News Agency
Analytical orientation	Qualitative, CMT-based, MIP-guided identification

Dominant Conceptual Metaphors

The numerous dominant evaluative conceptual metaphors that have been identified in the corpus are presented in the table below. The identified metaphorical expressions were categorized into higher-order conceptual metaphors as a result of the patterning that was evident in the texts analyzed.

Table 2. Dominant and Structuring Conceptual Metaphors in the Corpus

Conceptual Metaphor	Cross-Text Recurrence	Genre Spread	Functional Role	Analytical Status
COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT (including localized instances of	Widespread cross-genre recurrence	All major genres	Frames rivalry, urgency, competitive stakes	Primary Dominant Frame

militarized lexical intensification)				
SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT	Strong cross-text recurrence	News & standings discourse	Hierarchical evaluation of performance	Co-Dominant Evaluative Frame
FAILURE AS STAGNATION	Recurring cross multiple texts	News reporting	Evaluative counter-frame marking arrested progress	Evaluative Counter-Frame
LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE	Recurring cross multiple texts	News & standings discourse	Spatial structuring of hierarchy and ranking	Spatial Structuring Frame
COMPETITION AS JOURNEY / STAGES	Limited but patterned recurrence	News, interviews, analytical discourse	Temporal structuring of season progression	Processual Structuring Frame
DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION / PROJECT	Limited but patterned recurrence	Analytical & institutional discourse	Institutional reform and long-term planning framing	Secondary Institutional Frame

Within the dataset, COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT emerges as by far the most recurrent across genres metaphor, at the same time playing the most significant role as an organizing principle in news texts. Competitive events are almost always described using vocabulary of confrontation and struggle, and this has been noted in the context of both title contention and relegation struggle. The repetition across competitive fields of the given patterns suggests that the dataset's narrativization of competition relies predominantly on conflict as the central organizing principle, as opposed to being an instance of context-driven stylistic choice. Metaphor SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT, on the other hand, is closely linked to this upward movement framing and provides an evaluative and spatial perspective to understand better positive results, which is achieved by describing the league position as high, above, and to the next level, thus conceptualizing success as upward vertical movement. In this regard, upward movement, rather than being a standalone metaphor, complements conflict framing by providing a vertical evaluative structure.

On the other hand, the framing of poor performance is predominantly done through the metaphor FAILURE AS STAGNATION. Examples of immobilization have been documented in detail in reports describing streaks of unsuccessful outcomes or losing periods in sports. In news articles about sports stagnation works as a negative frame that contrasts a positive upward movement. And in this case articles written about sports news clearly show a binary opposition of movement versus absence of movement. In sports articles The LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE metaphor functions as a spatial reference system that positions teams within a vertically structured hierarchy. The presence of this metaphor does not introduce a separate spatial system; rather, it reinforces the vertical evaluative logic already established. The ability to locate comparative positions vertically in a closed system leads to a

hierarchical evaluation vertically. This reinforces the idea of movement, absence of movement, or a combination of both in sports reporting. Although vertically ordered LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE and FAILURE AS STAGNATION are considered separately, they both operate within the same evaluative vertical system that articulates success and failure.

Long term progression in sports features fewer metaphors, and these are limited to the analytical discourse sections of sports articles. In this area of discourse SUCCESS AS JOURNEY is used to articulate the process that is long term and involves elements beyond single match outcomes. It is vital to stress that expressions relating to relegation should be understood concretely as the extensions of the dominant STRUGGLE/CONFLICT frame instead of relying on a survival metaphor still in the developing phase. Lastly, the metaphors associated with institutional planning and reform appear, if at all, in the analytical pieces only, where the framing of sports development is executive and construction-based. Such metaphors treat leagues and other governing bodies as edifices that can be engineered, modified, or enhanced. Their limited scope reveals a strong divergence between genre and the balance of the text that separates the reporting of immediate results and the systemic analysis that invites consideration of the future.

Qualitative Analysis: Detailed Contextual Examination

Competition as Struggle/Conflict

Within the dataset, the recurrent use of the struggle and conflict metaphors in competitive sport events description constitutes the core of this recurrent phenomenon. News reports describe league contests using the expressions (اشتدّ الصراع، مواجهة صعبة، يصارع من أجل البقاء) and use them in the cases of title contests or cases of pressure for relegation. The expressions construct the league contests the league contests as a struggle, with each side as an opponent, and emphasize the struggle of securing the win. Regarding the relegation expressions (صراع الهبوط) and (دائرة الخطر) are used in describing the bottom part of the league table as a competitive danger zone, and providing proof of the embedded fear in this kind of situational description. It can be noticed, however, that such a description remains exclusive to the sport, and does not venture into more militarized, scenario-level thinking.

Success as Journey / Path

Predominantly appearing in analytical discourse, journey metaphors pop up occasionally in news articles, especially in cases of progression in tournaments. The progression, sequencing, or adjustment over time are described using terms like (تصحيح المسار، على مراحل، الاقتراب خطوة كبيرة). These terms hold in sporting achievement a process unfolding in stages, as opposed to considering achievements as discrete outcomes. Most often, this metaphor is used to talk about long-range development of performance or to talk about an entire season, as opposed to reporting about a single game.

Development as Construction / Project

Construction and development metaphors appear more frequently in analytical articles about the institution and organization of sport. The expression (مشروع تطوير) describes the league as something that is structured and therefore requires planning, modification, and funding. These metaphors are used in describing proposed changes of a structural nature, and this differentiates analytical commentary from coverage of a particular game.

Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors across Text Types

Table 3. Distribution of Dominant and Recurrent Conceptual Metaphors across Text Types

Conceptual Metaphor	News Reports	Analytical Articles	Interviews	Official Statements
COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT	✓	✓		✓
SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT	✓			
FAILURE AS STAGNATION	✓			
LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE	✓			
SUCCESS AS JOURNEY / PATH	✓	✓		
DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION / PROJECT		✓		

The different types of texts in the dataset have different dominant conceptual metaphors which are illustrated in Table 3. Of the different metaphors identified, the COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT metaphor is the only metaphor found in different genres like news reports, analytical articles, and official reports. However, the metaphors SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT, FAILURE AS STAGNATION, and LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE are found only in the news reports. Analytic articles have a broader range of metaphors, which include JOURNEY and CONSTRUCTION, while interviews are more limited and do not display dominant patterns.

Cross-Textual Patterns and Genre-Specific Usage

The analysis shows that there are dominant conceptual metaphors that span across the different genres of texts in the dataset. From Table 2 and Table 3, the COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT metaphor is the only conceptual metaphor which is repeated in multiple texts, including news articles, analytical articles and official reports. This shows that this metaphor is one of the dominant mechanisms for framing competitive sporting discourse. The remaining dominant metaphor types show a high degree of genre specificity. The news genre features dominant use of metaphor types SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT, FAILURE AS STAGNATION, and LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE, because these metaphors conceptualize match results, league positions, and performance reviews. SUCCESS AS JOURNEY/PATH is the most dominant metaphor in the majority of the analytical articles, but some news articles, especially in the reporting of tournaments, also feature this metaphor. DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION/PROJECT is evident only in analytical articles and this suggests an emphasis on a more distant future regarding the processes, planning and changes involved. While official statements are metaphorically limited and mostly conflict-framed, interviews also fail to

display the dominant metaphors identified in the rest of the data set. The analysis of metaphor use in these texts shows that the Iraqi sports discourse is intimately tied to the communicative purposes that are determined by genre. Some of the patterns identified in this analysis will be elaborated in the subsequent section.

Discussion

Dominant Conceptual Metaphors in Iraqi Sports Discourse

The research pinpointed COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT as the most prevalent conceptual metaphor in the 37-text corpus. The dominance of this metaphor underscores the centrality of conflict as a structuring frame. Although the discourse of sports is said to be metaphorically structured as a WAR, Conceptual Metaphor Theory emphasizes that WAR metaphors are based on elaborate linguistic evidence of the mappings, systematically proven, and backed by entailment rather than thematic assumptions (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The difference between repeated references to conflict and a fully developed WAR framework can be explained. In discourse-oriented research on metaphors, metaphors function not only on the level of individual lexical mappings but on the level of constructed “scenarios” that govern the organization of roles, expectations, and inferences throughout an entire discourse. Musolff (2016) refers to metaphor scenarios as conventionalized narrative patterns that go beyond individual lexical cues to include the configuration of roles, active participants, and the development of predicted outcomes. Thus, to identify a WAR metaphor, it is not enough to find “battle,” “attack,” “weapon,” or “blow.” It requires the activation of a cohesive scenario involving enemies, strategies, and dynamics of the battlefield, as well as sustained hostility and far-reaching forecasts of the consequences of warfare.

Using the theories outlined above, the current research determines if the conflict-oriented statements within the given data represent a fully realized WAR scenario, or if they are limited to a competitive logic. Three operational indicators were used to evaluate scenario-level projection: (i) Use of explicit war terminology, (ii) Overt militaristic implications, such as references to battlefields, war tactics, destruction, etc. and (iii) The roles of warfare and narrative coherence are projected at the level of individual texts and across the entire data. In the 37 analyzed texts, conflict-oriented expressions are very common. In extreme cases, the texts employ language of extreme confrontation. However, the analyzed texts do not exhibit a developed sustained narrative that maps the warfare location frameworks to the sporting events. The reviewed texts also do not, in a systematic way, view and construct teams as armies, matches as battlefields or defeats as annihilation. The primary function of extreme confrontation language is rhetorical embellishment to the competitive structures such as movement in rankings, title contention, accumulation of points, elimination in rounds, and qualification to a subsequent stage.

Given the constraints of the available data, competition can be seen as an example of localized militarized lexical intensification located at individual instances rather than at fully developed WAR scripts as per Musolff's scenario. This conclusion is intentionally cautious. By localized militarized lexical intensification, the analysis refers to the presence of explicit war-related lexical items without the

projection of a sustained scenario-level WAR schema. This clarification does not deny that WAR metaphors may be more fully operationalized in other sports contexts. However, it does refrain from attempting to impose a scenario-level mapping where the entailment structure of the current corpus does not sustain it. By separating general conflict framing from structured scenario projection, the analysis more precisely differentiates levels of metaphorical projection within Iraqi sports discourse. While the analysis does not sustain the argument for a fully elaborated WAR scenario structuring the dataset, such localized intensification is still identified. These are found largely in high-stakes contexts such as qualification playoffs, crucial matches, and high emotion press comments. Phrases such as “we will fight”, “we will attack”, “our strongest weapon”, “two blows to the team”, along with “deadly” victories and “group of death” references are examples of overtly war related lexicon. Expressions like these are not just context dependent, they are lexically bound. They do not evoke the full set of extended warfare entailments, including armies, battlefields, enemy construction, annihilation scripts, etc. They do not narratively frame entire texts either. They serve to short-range intensify the evaluative level within the internal competitive logic of sport.

The data, therefore, support the distinction between localized militarized escalation and systemic WAR-script projection. The former occurs sporadically in rhetorically heightened situations, while the latter is not structurally present throughout the entire corpus. This distinction strengthens the claim that competition within the examined Iraqi sports discourse is structured predominantly through a bounded struggle schema as opposed to a fully-fledged militarized conceptual schema.

Table 4. Descriptive Distribution of Dominant and Structuring Conceptual Metaphors across the Corpus

Conceptual Metaphor	Relative Recurrence	Textual Spread	Genre Spread	Analytical Status
COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE /CONFLICT (including localized instances of militarized lexical intensification)	Widespread cross-genre recurrence	Broad cross-text distribution	All genres	Primary Dominant Frame
SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT	Strong cross-text recurrence	Patterned within standings discourse	News & evaluation	Co-Dominant Evaluative Frame
FAILURE AS STAGNATION	Recurring across multiple texts	Recurring in performance decline contexts	News reporting	Evaluative Counter-Frame
LEAGUE AS VERTICAL SPACE	Recurring across multiple texts	Recurring in ranking and positioning discourse	News reporting	Spatial Structuring Frame
COMPETITION AS JOURNEY / STAGES	Limited but patterned recurrence	Recurring in tournament and progression contexts	News, interviews & analytical texts	Processual Structuring Frame
DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION	Limited but patterned recurrence	Institutional and reform-oriented texts	Analytical discourse	Secondary Institutional Frame

Metaphor Dominance as Genre-Conditioned Framing

The metaphor analysis shows that metaphor dominance is more of a connected pattern with the communicative routines of the respective genres of the texts than a metaphoric dominance for the entire corpus. In relation to COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE /CONFLICT, this metaphor frame is the most dominant one, but again, the frame of COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT behaves differently depending on the textual function. In the genre of match reports and pre-match previews, the reports and previews show the most intense use of conflict framing. These genres seek to create a sense of immediacy, rivalry, and a sense of competition. The use of these frameworks seems to create a hostile environment, where the focus is on struggle, conflict, and high pressure. The texts that serve this purpose, which is to dramatize rivalry and structure anticipation, activate conflict language most, and in these texts, conflict language is used as a fast tool to create an urgency and opposition. In contrast to this, reports that focus on the standings and the structure of the league use the frame of SUCCESS AS UPWARD MOVEMENT a lot more than other frames. This frame creates an internally coherent hierarchy, which is understood as a vertical hierarchy of moves, stagnation, and rankings, and in the communicative competition is understood as a hierarchy in the structure of news discourses. The vertical metaphors that refer to advancement, consolidation, or pressure on the leading teams dominate the discourse of evaluative positioning. In these contexts, hierarchy rather than confrontation becomes the organizing principle. The metaphorical structure shifts from dramatized rivalry to spatial ranking and competitive stratification.

Just as Institution statements, strategy games, and analyses of performance over time tend to invoke COMPETITION AS JOURNEY and evocations of DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION. The terms “stages,” “phases,” “roadmap,” “building generations,” and “strategic preparation” situate sports activity as one that is processed in structure within a given time period. In these genres, the metaphor regulates the continuity of the process and the institution over time rather than the rivalry. Even where the militarized lexis is located, however, it is genre conditioned. For example, in some press conferences, there may be used the expressions “fighting spirit” or “we will battle,” and while these expressions are motivational, they are used to encourage rather than tell a narrative. In contrast, disciplinary reports tend to avoid dramatized procedures and maintain the metaphorical framing of the process. The results, then, are consistent with a genre-specific approach to metaphor dominance. Unlike the existing interpretations that link the prevalence of conflict metaphors to more general cultural biases, the results show that the choice of metaphor is influenced by the communicative goal, the purpose of the text, and the institutional context. In this sense, the metaphor dominance is not an enduring cultural feature but a result of a genre-specific configuration of Iraqi sports media discourse.

Secondary Metaphors and Discursive Stratification

While conflict-based metaphors are the most frequent in the corpus, other secondary metaphors like COMPETITION AS JOURNEY and DEVELOPMENT AS CONSTRUCTION, etc. serve different discourse functions. As such, comparatively less extensive distribution than conflict framing can still reflect functional specialization rather than a secondary or peripheral role. Metaphors associated with journeys help to structure temporality as well as progression. For example, the terms “stage,” “phase,” “path,” “qualification route,” as well as “steps” in reference to advancement, organize competitive activity as an unfolding process rather than a singular, decisive confrontation. These mappings are very evident in tournament discourse as well as managerial commentary and future-oriented evaluations, where the focus shifts away from immediate conflict to the rivalry’s cumulative trajectory. Here, metaphor frames competition as a process of navigation that is continuous and ultimately governed by preparation and strategic sequencing.

In individual contexts, development and construction metaphors function on a different discursive level. Phrases like, “building generations,” “strategic roadmaps,” “structural reform,” and “long-term planning” portray sports institutions as structured organizations that are capable of intentional construction and stabilization. The construction metaphor places emphasis on institutional responsibility, governance, and sustainability. The purpose of this is legitimizing, rather than being confrontational. The metaphor patterns present in these discourses showcase a complex and stratified architecture. Event-based reporting emphasises competitive focus and positional changes; tournament-focused discourse organises time spans; and planning and reform are popular in institutional texts. These varying layers suggest that the choice of metaphor is defined by the communicative function being performed in the context of the sport. Instead of using a single, overriding conceptual framework in all situations, the Iraqi sport discourse demonstrates a patterned differentiation, whereby different metaphorical clusters are employed for various textual and institutional purposes.

Methodological Implications for Qualitative Metaphor Research

Even though the corpus comprises 37 texts with an approximate total of 11,800 words, the research is still rooted in a qualitative discourse-analytical approach over a quantitative frequency modelling approach. Establishing an argument for the dominance of a metaphor was done by systematic identification of (Pragglejaz Group, 2007) MIP, cross-textual repetition, and patterned recurrence by genre. This kind of approach shows that without large-scale corpus data, one should be able to demonstrate the claim to a conceptual metaphor, with the restrictions of overriding the interpretive border. By limiting the discourse metaphor to clearly defined systematic linguistic metaphors, and repeated recurrence of discourse metaphors across genres and texts, and disciplines, it helps avoid unfounded speculation. The study shows how a relatively small corpus, with an intricate design, can deliver a considerable amount of quality data, whilst maintaining a metabolic and interpretive limitation.

Concluding Theoretical Position

The findings have provided theoretical support with precision. In the studied Iraqi sports corpus, competition tends to be more a bounded struggle-oriented schema that includes recurring conflict framing and selective militarized intensification rather than a fully developed WAR scenario in the scenario-theoretical sense. While certain metaphors may be genre conditioned, they are still diverse. Reporting that emphasizes events spotlights confrontations and shifts in positions, while tournament discourse organizes the flow of a competition. Furthermore, metaphors that are secondary in nature will have more of a structuring effect instead of being window dressing. These findings are limited to the qualitative boundaries of the corpus, though they still offer a contribution to the framing of conflict, hierarchy, progress, and the legitimacy of institutions as they are manifested in contemporary Iraqi sports discourse. The study, by clarifying the distinction between generalized conflict framing and script-level metaphor projection, provides refinement to the analysis of confrontation in sports media and illustrates the need for a genre-based approach to metaphor analysis.

Conclusion

The analytical focus of this research was to understand the way specific Iraqi sports texts utilize the metaphorical concepts as organizational tools. The study employed a systematic discourse-analytical method based on the Conceptual Metaphor Theory and the Metaphor Identification Process, and shows that the metaphors utilized are systematic, organized, and genre related. The analysis presented here shows that COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT is the most prevalent metaphor of the texts. This particular metaphor exemplifies the evaluative, the intense, the urgent, and the competitive especially in the news coverage and the pre-round coverage. The metaphors of conflict in sports journalism are not mere embellishments of the language of journalism, but they represent a systematic competitive structure that explains the stakes, the shifts in ranking, and the evaluations in sports institutions. The analysis was also done with the understanding that a developed WAR script would be absent. The conflict metaphors in sports are not absent but are not developed into a militaristic narrative. Considering the texts in the data set, competition is framed as bounded struggle without narrative militarization.

In addition to this primary frame, JOURNEY/PATH and DEVELOPMENT/CONSTRUCTION metaphors have also been identified as secondary, yet analytically noteworthy, examples. They illustrate patterns of distribution within analytic versus reform-focused texts, and the functional differentiation between event-centric reporting and reflective institutional commentary. These metaphors, while organizing long-term structural reform and developmental evaluation progression, do not displace the conflict-based framing. The analysis also posits that the texts' metaphor choice aligns with the communicative demands of the specific genres. The prevalence of certain conceptual frames is, in this case, more attributable to the structural traditions of sport journalism than to a form of cultural determinism. This is a somewhat provisional conclusion given the limited dataset, but it indicates the potential for a genre-based analysis in metaphor studies. The analysis of the study shows that there seems to be a reasonable correlation between the qualitative, corpus-bounded analysis corpus, and the theory/pattern hypothesis, if the conceptual categorization follows a methodical MIP (Metaphor

Identification Procedure) cross-recurrence bounding and cross-textual recurrence. The analysis attempts to minimize the risk of overextension, and focuses on the observable, to ensure that the correlation between the data and the inference is accurate to the corpus. Even though the dataset is small and limited, it can serve as a foundation for other researchers who may be interested in analyzing the same corpus over a longer time period, different publications, or different media types, in order to determine whether the metaphorical patterns identified are stable or changing. Overall, and within the limits of the texts, there is a predominant struggle schema, with the majority of the Iraqi sports reporting utilizing a conflict metaphor framework. This study, in its attempt to clarify the difference between conflict framing and militarized scripting, as well as to emphasize the importance of genre on metaphor choice, has provided a limited but valuable contribution to the discourse on the conceptual metaphor of sports media.

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Abstract in Arabic

المستخلص

يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تُوظّر الاستعارات المفهومية خطاب الرياضة العراقي المعاصر، مستخدمًا إطارًا نوعيًا لتحليل الخطاب مبنياً على مجموعة محدودة من النصوص ومستنداً إلى نظرية الاستعارة المفهومية. المنهج: استند التحليل إلى كوربوس مخصص مكوّن من سبعة وثلاثين نصًا إعلاميًا رياضيًا عراقيًا (حوالي 11,800 كلمة) مأخوذة من أنواع متعددة، بما في ذلك تقارير إخبارية ومقالات تحليلية ومقابلات وبيانات رسمية. حُدّدت التعبيرات المجازية باستخدام إجراء تحديد الاستعارة (MIP) وجمعت لاحقًا في فئات مفهومية أعلى. النتائج: تُظهر النتائج أن الاستعارة المفهومية COMPETITION AS STRUGGLE/CONFLICT (المنافسة كصراع/نزاع) هي الإطار المفهومي السائد في العينة، وتعمل كإطار معرفي أساسي لتطوير إحساس بشدة المنافسة، والإلحاح، والضغط التقييمي. استُخدمت استعارات أخرى مثل النجاح حركة إلى الأعلى، والفشل ركود، والدوري فضاء عمودي، والمنافسة رحلة، والتنمية بناء، وتبيّن لها توزيعات ووظائف تقويمية وبنوية مرتبطة بنوع النص. رغم وجود أمثلة لخطاب مسهب بالعسكرة في الرياضة، يُبيّن التحليل عدم وجود خطاب حربي متطور، بل تُوظّر المنافسة كصراع محدود. الخلاصة: من خلال تقديم وصف نوعي منظمّ موجه بـ MIP لاستخدام الاستعارات المفهومية في سياق إعلامي عربي قليل الدراسة، يساهم هذا البحث في دراسات الاستعارة في التحليل الخطابى ويقدم إطارًا تحليليًا قابلاً للتكرار لدراسات مستقبلية في خطاب الرياضة.
