

Investigating Sports News Headlines from the Perspective of Conceptual Metaphors: A Case Study of Headlines during the Qatar World Cup

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Abstract

This paper, based on the theory of conceptual metaphors, uses sports news headlines from the Qatar World Cup as the research object and systematically analyzes the patterns of metaphor application in sports news. The study found that there are three main types of conceptual metaphors in sports news headlines: structural metaphors are the most abundant, including the war metaphor that compares football matches to war (e.g., "迎战" and "备战") and the journey metaphor that views the match process as a journey (e.g., "首发" and "全场"); orientation metaphors express changes in status through up and down concepts, such as using "暴涨" and "晋级" to indicate positive states, and "止步" to express adverse outcomes; entity metaphors are primarily based on container metaphors, using terms like "挺进" and "入围" to conceptualize match stages as spaces that can be entered. These metaphorical expressions utilize familiar concepts to explain abstract sports content, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of news headlines and the efficiency of information dissemination and reflecting the value of metaphors as an important cognitive tool in news communication.

Keywords

Sports news headlines, Conceptual metaphors, Corpus analysis.

1. Introduction

Football carries rich cultural connotations. Football has unique cultural traditions in different countries and regions. The Qatar World Cup has concluded, with numerous unexpected upsets throughout the tournament, greatly thrilling the fans. As a result, football is receiving increasing attention. News is a genre that records society, disseminates information, and reflects the times. As a unique form within discourse, it plays a crucial role in external communication and information transmission. Headlines are often referred to as the 'eyes of news,' as they are one of the most important elements in news reporting and highlight their crucial position. A good headline not only simplifies the layout but also accurately summarizes the main content of the news using concise language, attracting readers' attention. Furthermore, as a linguistic device and writing technique, metaphor is frequently used in news headlines.

This paper compiles sports news headlines from mainstream Korean newspapers during the Qatar World Cup as a corpus. Based on conceptual metaphor theory, these headlines' types of conceptual metaphors are classified and analyzed. The aim is to explore the application of metaphors in news headlines.

2. Conceptual metaphor theory

In the 1980s, American linguist Ronald Langacker developed the central ideas of cognitive grammar in *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, becoming the primary starting point for the emerging field of cognitive linguistics and marking the beginning of theoretical research in linguistics. Subsequently, Lakoff and Johnson conducted revolutionary research on the relationship between language and cognition from the perspective of metaphor in their book *Metaphors We Live By*, significantly advancing the development of cognitive linguistics. They define conceptual metaphor as "the process by which people conceptualize, understand, think about, and express one thing in terms of another." Most people believe that metaphors aren't necessary in daily life. They think metaphors are just rhetorical devices for special literary effects, linked to language expression, not thought. However, Lakoff and Johnson argue that metaphors are a universal mode of thought, a fundamental mechanism for conceptualizing the external world, and are ubiquitous in everyday life. These metaphors actively form the most basic understanding of our experiences and permeate human development. People refer to them as 'the metaphors we live by'. They make our language vivid and engaging and shape our perception and understanding. The fundamental concepts of human thought and behavior are, at their core, metaphorical.

3. Metaphors in News Headlines

Lakoff and Johnson classify conceptual metaphors into structural, ontological, and orientational metaphors based on different source domains. I will fully exemplify these three types of metaphors in sports news headlines and follow up with a detailed analysis supported by examples.

Researchers actively collected the corpus and discovered that a single news headline may contain multiple metaphorical expressions. They first created a frequency list of keywords. Then, they performed keyword extraction for different categories of metaphors based on source domains using the created list. By analyzing the database, they categorized structural metaphors into four subcategories: war metaphors, journey metaphors, business metaphors, and supernatural metaphors. They identified the most commonly used orientational metaphor as the up-down metaphor and the most common ontological metaphor as the container metaphor. As the Qatar World Cup was ongoing during the corpus collection, they expect to continue further data collection to enrich and expand the corpus.

Table1. Types of Metaphors and Representative Keywords

Category	Subcategory	Representative Keywords
Structural Metaphors	War Metaphor	engage in battle, general, enemy, preparation for battle, victory, defeat, abstain from confrontation
	Journey Metaphor	initial appearance, final, semifinal, full match, departure, embark
	Business Metaphor	contract, valuation, affiliation
	Supernatural Metaphor	curse, demon
Orientational Metaphors	Up	ascend, increase, promotion
	Down	cease, halt
Ontological Metaphors	Container Metaphor	enter, join a group, appear online

3.1. structural metaphors

"Structural metaphor refers to understanding or conceptualizing one concept in terms of another, using the language of one concept to discuss another. Although they belong to different cognitive domains, there is a systematic correspondence in the structural components of each. Structural metaphors emphasize using the lexical system of the "source domain" to describe abstract concepts in the "target domain," allowing the "target domain" to be systematically understood according to the structure of the "source domain." Structural metaphors frequently appear in various sports news headlines, with the most typical examples being the "war" metaphor and the "journey" metaphor.

3.1.1. War Metaphor in Sports News Headlines

War is an enduring topic and a common social phenomenon. Although most people born in peaceful times have never experienced war, they can still learn about it from books, films, and news reports. The most prominent characteristics of sports events are their competitiveness and confrontational nature. When people attempt to understand the conceptual framework of football competition headlines, they inevitably compare it to war. War and football matches have many similarities regarding participants, processes, and outcomes. Researchers' analysis of the collected data reveals that many football news headlines contain terms initially used to describe war. People frequently apply these terms to football matches. For example, "preparation," "victory," "defeat," and "outmatched" are often used.

- (1) 太极虎明迎战巴西 取胜概率高于十六强 (《东亚日报》2022年12月5日)
- (2) 韩国国家队备战世界杯淘汰赛 (《韩联社》2022年12月4日)
- (3) 韩国惜败加纳 韩国足球真正的失败在比赛之后到来 (《韩民族日报》2022年11月30日)

The above sports news headlines are typical examples of the "war" metaphor within structural metaphors. In headline (1), the terms "confront" and "victory" are mapped onto the target domain of "achieving success and victory." In headline (2), the term "preparation," initially referring to the logistical and personnel preparations for war, is used here to map the South Korean national team members' efforts in training for the World Cup knockout stage. In headline (3), the term "defeat," originally meaning the failure to achieve a desired goal, also refers to being defeated or losing to the opponent. Here, fans use it to map the post-defeat public sentiment and the personal attacks suffered by the football players.

3.1.2. Journey Metaphor in Sports News Headlines

Few would dislike travel, as it offers the opportunity to experience many wonderful things. Lakoff and Johnson provide examples of metaphorical expressions related to travel, such as "life is a journey" and "love is a journey." Football matches share many similarities with travel, and the characteristics of travel can be mapped onto football matches.

- (1) 卡塔尔世界杯揭幕战两队首发阵容出炉 (《韩民族日报》2022年11月20日)
- (2) 替补登场助绝杀 黄喜灿获全场最佳 (《东亚日报》2022年12月3日)

The terms "starting lineup" and "full game" in headlines (1) and (2) map onto the period of the entire match. A traveler typically has a destination, with a defined distance between the starting and end points. Similarly, a football match has a period from beginning to end.

3.2. ontological metaphors

"Orientational metaphors refer to a series of metaphorical concepts based on familiar spatial relations. Orientational metaphors are metaphors that use spatial cognition domains as their source domains; people often represent many abstract human concepts, such as emotions, physical states, quantity, and social status, through spatial concepts like up-down, front-back, deep-shallow, inside-out, and center-periphery. People map spatial concepts onto other cognitive domains to represent more abstract meanings. All events and states within

conceptual structures are primarily organized based on spatial conceptualization, and nearly all semantic fields have spatially structured organization. Through spatial concepts, individuals can address non-spatial semantic issues. Additionally, sensory perceptions such as smell and taste often employ spatial conceptualization, which helps resolve many other cross-semantic problems. "Up-down" and "high-low" are crucial concepts in the study of orientational metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson also summarize the up and down orientational metaphors in *Metaphors We Live By*. In sports news headlines, "up" and "down" are also the most commonly used orientational metaphors."

(1) “伟大的足球国家的终结”，德国连续两届世界杯止步小组赛（《东亚日报》2022年12月3日）

(2) “曹圭成是孙兴慜的接班人”，欧洲球队对其关注暴涨.....身价还会继续上涨吗？（《韩民族日报》2022年12月1日）

From the above examples, audiences can map the term "stopped" in headline (1) to the "downward" direction of the German team's World Cup match results. They can also map the terms "soaring" and "rising" in the headline (2) to the upward increase of Cao Gui-seong's popularity and market value.

3.3. orientational metaphors

The initial mode of human survival was material, and human experience with physical objects provided the material basis for expressing and understanding abstract concepts as entities, giving rise to ontological metaphors. People use ontological metaphors to understand abstract concepts such as thoughts, emotions, events, actions, and psychological states as concrete, tangible entities. They do this by mapping one concept onto another domain. Through ontological metaphors, abstract concepts such as feelings, thoughts, and psychological activities are understood as concrete entities, forming different cognitions and enriching our understanding of the objective world. According to Lakoff and Johnson, "Each of us is a container with boundaries and an in-out orientation. We project our in-out orientation onto other physical objects bounded by surfaces. Therefore, we also view them as inside and outside containers." People often view the target domain in ontological metaphors as a container representing a mental state or an action. Additionally, people frequently use ontological metaphors in sports news headlines.

(1) 不到最后还不算结束 韩国队能否挺进世界杯进入16强（《韩民族日报》2022年11月29日）

(2) 韩国队今晚若破“第二轮无胜绩”魔咒 或有望入围16强（《中央日报》2022年11月28日）

From the above examples, it is evident that in sports news headlines, the mapping of ontological metaphors helps us vividly understand the impact of containers on the football domain. In headlines (1) and (2), the terms "advance" and "qualify" map the football team or the competition stage as a container. If a team wins a match, it enters the next stage of the competition. Conversely, if the team loses the match, it is kicked out of the competition.

4. Conclusion

This paper combines the three conceptual metaphors to explain their respective concepts and their application in news headlines. Metaphors are rhetorical devices and provide a novel perspective for humans to understand and observe the world. Furthermore, metaphors can create new meanings and express new ideas. Additionally, the frameworks they provide serve as a means for people to construct society. People can use metaphors to convey new ideas and concepts. News reports sometimes involve specialized topics, which often present barriers in

terms of knowledge and understanding. Readers primarily obtain information through headlines, so when they encounter reading difficulties in the headline's content, they often do not continue reading the article, which undoubtedly hampers effective information dissemination. To reduce the difficulty of understanding new information and eliminate barriers between the transmitter and receiver, news headlines require simplified language, using familiar terms to explain unfamiliar concepts. Metaphors are the most commonly used method to reduce the unknown information in headlines. They make the information more concrete, convey new meanings, and express new ideas more effectively. This can provoke more profound reflections on the news content, further stimulating readers to reassess and redefine society and the world.

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