

# ***An Analysis of the Metaphors in Football Commentary: A Case Study of the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final***

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**Abstract:** Football is one of the most popular sports all over the world; however, there are limited seats inside the stadiums, making TV broadcasting an important tool for its popularity. Football commentators, therefore, need to transmit the active information of the game accurately and vividly. To add color to commentary, it is assumed that metaphor is widely used in their speech. As a result, this paper aims at analyzing metaphorical images in the commentary script of the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final. The procedure adopted is to survey the metaphoric images in the speech theoretically and to analyze certain sports texts pragmatically. After that, on the basis of sociolinguistics, analyze the functions of metaphor and their potential drawbacks. The results are as follows: Metaphor is heavily used by football commentators and helps make the game more exciting; it also has rhetorical and social functions. However, the use of metaphors in football commentary may cause language violence.

**Keywords:** Metaphor, Football Commentary, 2022 UCL Final, Sociolinguistics, Language Violence

## **1. Introduction**

Football matches are extremely exciting; however, only a few people have the privilege to feel the hormone in person. For others, they have to feel the excitement with the help of football commentaries. Crystal and Davy define the word 'commentary' as "a spoken account of events that are actually taking place" [1]. One of the lexical aspects of football commentary is metaphor. It is considered a significant register marker used by sport commentators to describe the events of the match so as to help the audience have a better insight [2]. In the rapid development of global linguistics today, linguistics has been widely involved in various fields of daily life, such as computer linguistics, pathological linguistics, anthropology, sociolinguistics, etc. However, as a dynamic oral language, the commentary of sports competitions has the characteristics of immediacy and arbitrariness, which are hard to collect and organize, so few scholars have interpreted the commentary of a specific event. The present study aims to explore metaphor in the 2022 UCL Final. The procedure adopted is to survey the metaphoric images in football commentaries theoretically and to analyze certain sports texts pragmatically. This paper studies the phenomenon of metaphor in football commentary and analyzes the functions and problems of metaphor in football commentary from the perspective of sociolinguistics. The study will deepen people's understanding of football game commentary and metaphor and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the metaphor

phenomenon in discourse communication so as to make more reasonable use of metaphor in daily life. At the same time, the identification of potential hazards of metaphor in football commentary is expected to provide reference and help the news media better use metaphorical language.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. State of the Art in Metaphor Research

In 1980, 'Metaphor We live' co-authored by Lakoff and Johnson appeared, which marked the beginning of the study of conceptual metaphors under the perspective of cognitive linguistics, and pushed the research in this field to a new stage of development. In the book, Lakoff and Johnson pointed out that metaphor is not only a problem of vocabulary in language, but also an important means of human thinking, which directly participates in the cognitive process of human beings and is the basic way of human survival, and they proposed the theory of conceptual metaphor for the first time from the cognitive point of view. In the same year, they published 'Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language', which aimed to discuss the relationship between everyday language and conceptual metaphors [3]. Landau, Mark J. Meier, Brian P., and Keefer, Lucas A. published A metaphor-enriched social cognition in 2010 [4]. This article focuses on the relationship between metaphor use and social cognition.

### 2.2. State of the Art in Sports Metaphor Research

Rosario Caballero's 2012 article "The role of metaphor in tennis reports and forums" further refines the use of metaphor and explores the place of metaphorical expression in tennis reporting, with the article focusing on the function of metaphor in tennis reporting in terms of empathy and evaluation, and the communicative aspects of extension and importance [5]. In a sense, the functions of empathy and evaluation, as well as the role of interpersonal relationships, are part of the social functions of metaphor, which are of some significance for this article.

Dalibor Kesić and Emir Muhić published "sports in metaphor and metaphor in sports" in 2013, which illustrates the intersection between sport and metaphor, focusing on the relationship between expression, idiom and metaphor in US sports news coverage [6]. The article follows a general logical sequence, explaining the relationship between sport and metaphor through a corpus analysis of idioms from major US reports, i.e., "thereby changing the sum of their individual meanings". Metaphors are used to combine isolated sentences and descriptions so that they no longer exist in isolation, thus increasing the connection between the sentences.

In "War Metaphors in Chinese and English Football Reports", Dong Xiaobo analyses Chinese and English football reports using documentary and corpus methods, and concludes that war metaphors have the characteristic of "cultural transcendence" [7]. Dong Xiaobo suggests that "socio-political factors and specific cultural patterns are not the only reasons for the prevalence of war metaphors, but also the isomorphism of the concepts of football and war in terms of structural features, social cognition and cognitive psychology [8]. However, the whole article is still based on a large number of Chinese and English football reports to analyse the data and draw conclusions, has not risen to the theoretical level, and has no practical significance.

In "A corpus-based study of war metaphors in sports news reports", Li Jinying and Jiao Xinping put sports news reports under the theoretical framework of cognitive metaphors, combined with the Chinese lexical analysis system ICTCLAS developed by the Institute of Computing Technology of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and the Word Smith Tools 5.0 corpus retrieval tool developed by Mike Scott of the University of Liverpool, UK, and used qualitative and quantitative analyses to analyse all the contents of issue 2293 of Sports Weekly on January 17, 2011, and found out the theme words of war metaphors through data analysis. They also obtained the distribution frequency of war

metaphors in sports news reports through data analysis [9]. However, the "corpus-based study of war metaphors in sports news reports" is only a simple statistical study of war metaphors in sports news reports, and does not reveal the impact of the use of high-frequency war metaphors, which is high in science but low in practical significance.

Based on the above studies, most scholars only study metaphors from the perspective of static sports news reporting, and there is little literature on metaphors in sports commentary.

### 3. Theoretical Foundation

#### 3.1. Metaphors in Football Commentary

Metaphor is one of the lexical aspects of football commentary, which is considered an important register marker that is used by the sport commentators to describe sporting events to help the audience have a better insight into how the match is done [2]. In football commentaries, metaphorical images like war images are widely used. According to Addi and Kadhim, the concept of "football is war" can surprisingly be applied by using common words like captain, shooting, target, attacking, defending, campaign, squad, friendly, and so on [10]. Beard contributes to this field of analysis [11]. He finds a connection between football and war, describing a football game as an event (a battle) with active participants (captains, squads) and using weapons to defeat each other (through beating) in order to understand the match better.

#### 3.2. Sociolinguistics

Sociolinguistics is a marginal discipline of linguistics. From the point of view of sociolinguistics, language is a unique phenomenon of human society, and it is a process of gradual accumulation of human labor practice. Therefore, sociologists believe that there exists a "co-variation" relationship between language and social structure, that the application of language affects many factors of society, and that both of them interact with each other and promote each other while at the same time constraining each other. Sociolinguistics will explore the following two areas: firstly, from the perspective of society, it will study the impact of changes in social life on many factors of language; and secondly, from the perspective of language, it will study the changes in many factors of language and its application to many factors of society. This paper focuses on the second area of sociolinguistics research, placing society in the first place, examines the impact of the widespread use of metaphors in football match commentary on fans and audiences, and analyzes its potential pitfalls so as to further promote the development of football match commentary.

### 4. Case Study

The objective of this section is to find metaphoric images in football commentary and analyze their impact on the audience. The game chosen is the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final: Real Madrid (RMA) vs. Liverpool (LIV). The commentators are Clive Tyldesley and Rob Green. The author chose this game because it is arguably the most important game of 2022, and the two commentators are famous, which makes it a typical example.

Text 1

Commentator: This repeat of the final is a *revenge* in the year for Liverpool tonight.

Here the commentator talks about "the repeat of the final", which is because these two teams have played against each other in the UCF final in 2020, when Real Madrid humiliated Liverpool with a final score of 3:1. Therefore, Liverpool was determined to win this time. commentator compares this rematch to a revenge in order to trigger audience's excitement.

Text 2

Commentator: They(RMA) *thrive* on the *chaos* of the game.

"Thrive" refers to people or companies growing strong. "Chaos" generally means things going in a disordered way. These two words are seldom used in football commentary. To understand their meaning in this domain, background information is needed. On their way to the final, Real Madrid has survived three knockout rounds in which they were once down by two or more goals. As a result, the metaphorical meaning here is that Real Madrid is able to win the game by a single goal. As a result, the metaphorical meaning here is that Real Madrid is able to bounce back when they are down. The function of this line is to recall Real Madrid fans' memories and encourage them to support their team.

Text 3

Commentator: They(LIV) have height and they have *aerial power*, they have power who can *hit their targets*.

In this case, the commentator compares Liverpool players' heading ability to aerial power, which generally refers to air forces in military. This is because he thinks the height of Liverpool players can help them dominate in the air and use powerful headers to threaten Real Madrid's goal. Hitting their targets, therefore, means achieving a goal.

Text 4

Commentator: Alexander Arnold, winning his first *duel* with Vinicius.

A duel is a contest with pistols arranged between two people to fight for honor. Here, the commentator uses a duel to describe the matchup between Alexander Arnold and Vinicius. Apparently, a matchup in a football game cannot be deadly. As a result, duel is used here to perform a metaphorical function. The image of a duel exaggerates that the matchup between the two players is extremely fierce. The metaphorical image can bring more energy to fans of both sides.

Text 5

Commentator: They will not mind taking their time, allowing Benzema to get back to the middle of the pitch, into that *spearhead* role he talked about.

Here, the commentator pictures another image, a spearhead, after describing the movement of Benzema from the left wing to the middle, which means he is back in his striker position. Spearhead means the end of the spear, the sharpest part of a deadly weapon. The commentator uses this metaphor to show that Benzema is a deadly assassin in the striker position.

Text 6

Commentator: Half of the stadium *erupts* in pandemonium behind the goal.

The word erupt is used to describe the volcano, but in this case it is used to present a metaphorical function. Real Madrid completes a goal, and their fans get crazy, so commentators use erupt to show their sudden and wild happiness.

Text 7

Commentator: Nobody knows quite how Real Madrid even got here, they dodged so many *bullets* in The Knockout rounds pick themselves up off the *canvas* time and time again lucky no you make your own luck. time again lucky no you make your own luck.

Bullets often appear in war, but here "bullets" refers to the attack from the opponent. The word "canvas" is generally used on the boxing stage when a boxer is severely hit. The commentator uses this word to describe Real Madrid's survival against danger. The speech is a post-game review, and the metaphorical function of these two words is to encourage the audience to recognize and respect the team's achievements. In addition, they help Real Madrid fans enjoy more of their victory.

## 5. An Analysis of the Function of Metaphor in Football Match Commentary

On the basis of sociolinguistics, the functions of metaphor in this text can be divided on rhetorical and social level.

## 5.1. Rhetorical Function

### 5.1.1. Rendering

Football match commentary is not mechanical; every detail of the football field is communicated through the language to the audience. In the commentary process, the commentator uses a variety of metaphors to make the language expression have an extraordinary rendering so that the majority of fans can produce strong emotional resonance. If the process of football match commentary is regarded as a high-speed machine, then the emotional expression of the commentator is the lubrication of the machine. The commentator of a football match has to convey such a value to the fans: competitive sports are not only about winning and losing, but there are also a lot of places that can be remembered and recalled outside of winning and losing. For example, in Text 7, the commentator says, "Nobody knows quite how Real Madrid even got here; they dodged so many bullets in the knockout rounds and picked themselves up off the canvas time and time again." This commentary renders Real Madrid's resilience and never-give-up kingly demeanor, and while the title is certainly worth celebrating, the way they got it is even more memorable. After hearing this commentary, many fans were moved to tears. Therefore, the rendering of football match commentary is reflected in the use of metaphor in the statement on the one hand, and on the other hand, it also has an educational and infectious effect on the spirit of the audience of fans, so the rendering of metaphor has the dual effect of both explicit and implicit!

### 5.1.2. Figurative

The emergence of metaphorical rhetoric in football matches is inseparable from the need to express the image of football matches, which is also one of the focuses of this paper. A good football match commentator knows how to catch the audience's eyes and use boring terminology in easy-to-understand language to relay through the artificial creation of a scenario so that the fans and the audience can achieve an immersive experience. The figurative expression of metaphors is mainly reflected in war metaphors, animal metaphors, and object metaphors. The image of war metaphors is that football commentators are able to make abstract elements in football matches metaphors for concrete things, so as to increase the image and comprehension of the matches. The function of animal metaphors and object metaphors is to refine the image of the athletes and increase the concreteness of abstract actions. In text 6, the commentator compares the Real Madrid fans celebrating the goal to an erupting volcano, which vividly expresses their passion.

## 5.2. Social Functions

### 5.2.1. Promotion of Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship is the overall outlook of sports, which reflects the level of sports concepts, beliefs, morals, sports aesthetics, etc., and has an inspiring and guiding effect on athletes and sports practitioners. The content of sportsmanship is not unchanging. The content of sportsmanship is not static, and under the background of different times, sportsmanship has been continuously injected with new connotations, which are reflected in all aspects of daily life. The concept of sportsmanship is abstract, and the elaboration of sportsmanship needs to be combined with specific sports events or sports behaviors, which provides possibilities for football commentators in the process of commenting.

The football commentator's promotion of sportsmanship in the process of commenting on football matches is mainly reflected in the following two aspects:

Individual heroism. Sports team competition by nature emphasizes a spirit of solidarity and cooperation, but the emergence of individual heroism increases the degree of spectacle and uncertainty of the team competition". Due to the composition of many elements, a clear division of labor, and each external ability varying, compared to basketball, badminton, etc., the role of individual heroism is relatively small, but it is the existence of this premise that allows the team's core characters in the completion of a historic performance to play a more inspirational and uplifting role. The different metaphors used by the commentators to dramatize the performance of the key players, highlighting their skill and bravery in times of emergency, are the best illustrations of heroism. For example, in this match, the core player of Real Madrid, Vinicius, the rising star of Real Madrid, is flying at the moment. You can not catch him, scoring goals for fun. Who needs Mbappe? It's all about individual heroism.

Humanitarianism in sport. Humanitarian spirit refers to the interpretation of positive energy that upholds the dignity of human beings, emphasizes their value, proclaims their humanity, signifies the meaning of life, and exists in all aspects of society. The humanitarian spirit of football, which exudes a strong human flavor, is also a manifestation of its charm. At the end of the match, Real Madrid's veteran Modric was substituted, and the commentator fondly called him a warrior, a metaphor that conveys respect and admiration for such a veteran. A football match is not only about winning and losing but also about the athletes who are the real protagonists of the game, and the rendering of the emotions of the characters in the process of the game reflects the humanitarian spirit of "putting people first" at all times.

### 5.2.2. Educational Functions

The educational function of competitive sports is that football commentators condense the message of the game into certain social truths for the fans. The educational aspect of a football match lies in the creative interpretation of the match by the football commentator. Football matches themselves do not carry educational colours, but good commentators will use their knowledge and life experience to use various metaphors to make them educative. When evaluating Real Madrid's victory, the commentator said, "Lucky? No, you make your own luck." This passage gives the fans a philosophy that behind all seeming luck is unremitting effort, and the harder you work, the luckier you are.

## 6. Discussion

Linguistic violence in football match commentary is mainly concentrated in the expression of war metaphors. The use of war metaphors is full of militaristic and hostile ideas, which, while abandoning the spirit of sportsmanship, will have a negative impact on the audience of fans, especially young football fans, and make them follow suit, thus forming an aggressive or a withdrawn personality. Commentators often use words such as duel, bullet, aerial power, and revenge to describe the confrontation on the field, and such metaphors, if used excessively, may cause fans, especially young fans, to receive the suggestion that sports should be all about sparks and death, which will bring about a negative impact. To sum up, football commentators should avoid the use of violent metaphors as much as possible, reduce the presentation of violent tools, or use other metaphors to replace them, so as to avoid the seeds of violence from taking root in the hearts of fans and audiences, especially young people.

## 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study undertook an analysis of metaphorical images within the commentary script of the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final. The methodology encompassed both a theoretical overview of metaphoric expressions and a pragmatic examination of specific sports commentary

excerpts. Drawing from the foundations of sociolinguistics, the functions of such metaphors were dissected, and potential shortcomings were highlighted. The results are as follows: First, metaphor is heavily used by football commentators, especially when physical collisions occur. Second, metaphoric images can describe what is happening on the court in a vivid way, highlight the intensity of the game, and trigger the audience's excitement. Next, metaphor has a rhetorical function, that is, to increase the vividness and rendering of the game so that the game can be better conveyed to the fans. The social function is reflected in the promotion of sportsmanship and educational impact. Finally, excessive use of metaphor in football commentary may cause language violence. The sample was selected from only one representative match, and the results are not necessarily universal. Future research can expand the sample by selecting different matches, different commentary languages, and different commentary styles to build a corpus of commentary languages.

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