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Conceptual Metaphors In Peter Drury's Football Commentaries: A Cognitive-Semantic Analysis

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Abstract

This study looks at metaphors in Peter Drury's football commentaries paying close attention to types of metaphor how source domains are matched to target domains and how these metaphors shape the story of the match. Using a descriptive design and cognitive-semantic analysis this study examines transcribed commentary from three match broadcasts: the first and second legs of AS Roma versus Barcelona in the 2018 UEFA Champions League and the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final between Argentina and France. Metaphorical expressions were found using a four-step process taken from MIPVU: analyzing meaning in context checking the Oxford Dictionary for meaning spotting semantic contrast and classifying with Conceptual Metaphor Theory. The appendix inventory lists 25 expressions. Structural metaphors appear often while ontological and orientational metaphors offer other ways to frame match events. The analysis shows that Drury maps football actions onto domains like driving, warfare, performance, fire, economic value, myth and spatial movement. These mappings convey control, vulnerability, skill, opportunity, historical significance and changes in competitive status. The findings suggest that metaphor is not just decorative in commentary; it organizes fast-moving events into a clear and emotionally engaging story turning athletic competition into a drama of conflict, recovery, destiny and achievement.
Keywords: *metaphor; football commentary; Peter Drury; cognitive semantics; source domain; target domain*

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INTRODUCTION

Football commentary does more than report passes, tackles, goals and changes in possession. It gives language a shape to events that unfold quickly. Helps audiences understand their tactical and emotional meaning. Football discourse is especially rich in expressions because commentators use familiar experiential domains—such as war, art, machinery, travel and physical movement—to describe the games dynamics (Sopa, 2023). Through these expressions a tactical contest can be shown as a battle a player's movement as a performance or a team's shifting control as a journey. Metaphor therefore adds more than description; it shapes how spectators understand and feel a match.

This narrative role is especially clear in Peter Drury's commentary. His style stands out with dramatic language that often goes beyond immediate play-by-play description. Harisma and Ramadhani (2024) note that Drury uses language to create expressive and emotionally charged commentary. Than merely naming an action he often frames it with imagery, historical associations and evocative comparisons. For example the expression "establishes Barca firmly in the driving seat again" shows Barcelona's tactical control through the experience of driving. The team is seen as a driver who sets the direction and pace of the match while the opponent is seen as having control. Such language makes an abstract change in match dominance immediately understandable.

Although metaphor in football commentary has received attention previous studies have usually approached the topic through broad figurative-language classification or a limited match context. Harisma and Ramadhani (2024) for example examined language in Peter Drury's commentary and classified several figures of speech but their analysis did not systematically investigate source–target mappings and discourse functions of the metaphors. Luo (2024) in turn studied metaphor in the commentary of the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final offering an account of one match. These studies provide foundations but they leave room for an analysis that follows one commentator across different high-stakes matches and examines how metaphorical meanings are built across contexts.

The present study fills this gap by examining Peter Drury's commentary in three selected match broadcasts: AS Roma versus Barcelona in the second legs of the 2018 UEFA Champions League and Argentina versus France in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final. Considering the commentator across these different matches lets us examine recurring and varied metaphorical patterns, beyond a single event. Accordingly this study aims to identify types of metaphors explain how source domains are mapped to target domains and describe the semantic functions that build the match narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This study is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT sees metaphor not as decoration in language but as a way to understand one area of experience through another area. A source domain is the concrete or familiar area from which conceptual structure is taken. A target domain is the area that is being understood. In football commentary for example driving can act as the source domain to explain control of a match.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) separate three types that are relevant to this study. A structural metaphor happens when one idea is understood using the structure of another idea; for example control of a match can be seen through the activity of driving. An ontological metaphor treats an experience, event or quality as an object or substance which makes it easier to identify and discuss. An orientational metaphor arranges ideas through relations such as up–down in–out or front–back. In sports talk vertical orientation can link position with success and lower movement with failure.

Metaphor Identification

To spot metaphor-related expressions the analysis uses the Metaphor Identification Procedure VU Amsterdam (MIPVU). This method separates a word's meaning in context from its meaning. A word is treated as metaphor-related when the meanings differ but can be linked through comparison or cross-domain association. In this study the Oxford Dictionary provides the meanings before the expressions are examined through CMT.

Studies

Two studies are especially relevant. Harisma and Ramadhani (2024) studied language in Peter Drury's football commentary and found many types of figures of speech. Hyperbole was the common. Their work shows that Drury's commentary is a source for research on figurative language. The present study builds on this by focusing on metaphors and looking at the mappings and meanings that shape match narratives.

Luo (2024) examined metaphors in the commentary of the 2022 UEFA Champions League Final. The study talked about how metaphor helps dramatise football and its social effects, including the dangers of war imagery. However Luo's data came from one match. By looking at three match broadcasts with teams and competitions the present study widens the analysis across several match situations while keeping the focus on Peter Drury's commentary.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Data

This research uses a descriptive design with cognitive-semantic analysis. It looks at the meanings and conceptual patterns of expressions instead of testing numbers. The main data're transcribed spoken words from Peter Drury in the chosen match broadcasts: the 2018 UEFA Champions League; AS Roma versus Barcelona first leg; AS Roma versus Barcelona, second leg; and Argentina versus France in the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final. These matches were chosen because they have stakes and are historically memorable giving commentary chances to create dramatic and emotionally rich stories.

The researcher watched the chosen broadcasts and transcribed utterances that might contain metaphorical expressions. Literal descriptions and statements that did not show meaning were left out. The selected expressions were then sorted by match context, metaphor type and conceptual domains.

Data Analysis

The analysis used four steps taken from MIPVU. First the meaning in context was set by looking at how each word or phrase worked in the match situation. Second the Oxford Dictionary gave the meaning of the word. Third the contextual and basic meanings were compared to spot a contrast; when the contextual meaning could be linked through similarity or cross-domain association the word was treated as a metaphor-related word (MRW). Fourth each verified word was sorted into CMT categories

– ontological or orientational – and its source–target mapping and role in the match narrative were explained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of Conceptual Metaphors

Structural metaphors make up the biggest group. They use ideas from conflict, driving, storytelling, dance, fire, magic and natural forces. Ontological metaphors treat opportunities, emotions, achievements and players as objects or things. Orientational metaphors use time and height to show limits of opportunity, defeat and high success.

Category	Expressions in appendix	Illustrative source domain
Structural	15	Driving, warfare, narrative, dance, fire, magic, natural force
Ontological	7	Economic assets, living beings, deity, objects, infinity, precious metal
Orientational	3	Temporal path; down/up spatial orientation
Hybrid / overlapping	1 expression (also counted as structural and ontological)	Physical ruins/building + upward movement

Representative Metaphorical Expressions

“Picks up his pieces”: recovery as reconstruction

In the expression “picks up his own pieces,” Drury describes Alisson Becker’s response after blocking Lionel Messi’s shot. In the live match setting, the phrase contextually refers to the goalkeeper’s rapid tactical recovery and restoration of composure during a defensive crisis. However, consulting the dictionary reveals a highly concrete basic meaning for "pieces": fragments produced by breaking a whole object. In the stadium, Alisson is not gathering actual debris. The clear contrast between the physical reassembly of a shattered object (basic meaning) and an athletic recovery (contextual meaning) validates the expression as a metaphor-related word. Under CMT, this operates as a structural metaphor mapped as A MISTAKE IS A FRAGMENTED OBJECT, turning a fleeting defensive vulnerability into a tangible breakdown that can be repaired. It organizes a chaotic sequence into a narrative of resilience and restored order.

“In the driving seat”: control as driving

When Drury states that Barcelona is “firmly in the driving seat again,” he describes the team’s renewed dominance after extending its lead against Roma. Contextually, the phrase denotes gaining absolute tactical authority and control over the match's tempo. Literally, the domain involves the physical operation and steering of a motor vehicle. Because Barcelona is dominating a sporting contest on a pitch rather than operating a mechanical vehicle, a distinct semantic contrast emerges, confirming its metaphorical status. This structural mapping (CONTROL IS DRIVING) frames the dominant team as a skilled driver steering the match's route, while the opponent is relegated to a passive passenger. The modifiers “firmly” and “again” reinforce the complete re-establishment of tactical superiority.

“In no man’s land”: positional vulnerability as a battlefield

The phrase “in no man’s land” is deployed when Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-André ter Stegen misjudges a cross, leaving his goal completely exposed. In this tactical situation, the phrase contextually signifies an isolated, undefended, and highly vulnerable position. Its basic, literal entry defines the ground disputed between the front lines of opposing armies. The goalkeeper is standing on a grass pitch, not a militarized battlefield, creating a sharp semantic contrast that marks the idiom as metaphorical. By projecting the source domain of territorial warfare onto the target domain of football positioning (FOOTBALL IS WAR), Drury elevates a technical error into a life-or-death crisis, instantly maximizing audience suspense.

“Dancing through”: dribbling as performance

Drury’s exclamation, “Dancing through is Lionel Messi!” accompanies the player's fluid movements past several Roma defenders. Contextually, the utterance describes agile, controlled dribbling under pressure. The basic meaning of dancing, however, involves rhythmic bodily movements performed for aesthetic pleasure or entertainment. This structural contrast shifts the focus from a purely functional athletic act to an artistic performance. By mapping dance onto technical football skill, the metaphor frames Messi's spatial navigation not merely as a tactical progression, but as an aesthetic spectacle executed before an audience (DRIBLING IS DANCING)

"Roma have risen from the ruins": comeback as resurrection

Following Roma's historic turnaround against Barcelona, Drury proclaims, "Roma have risen from the ruins!" This expression serves as a vital hybrid mapping in the data. Ontologically, the word "ruins" construes the team's initial aggregate deficit as a collapsed physical structure, materializing an abstract competitive score. Simultaneously, the verb "risen" activates an orientational mapping where upward vertical movement is tied to recovery and success. This combination projects architectural destruction and resurrection onto the target domain of a sporting comeback. By evoking the historical imagery of Rome itself, the metaphor transcends a routine score change, framing the match as an epic historical event.

Synthesis: Metaphor and the Construction of Match Narratives

The predominance of structural metaphors can be related to the action-based and rapidly changing nature of football. A live match involves movement, physical duels, tactical adjustments and sudden changes in momentum. Literal commentary can identify what has happened. Structural metaphor provides an interpretive framework for why an event matters. By drawing on domains Drury makes complex actions accessible while adding narrative depth. Driving explains control; warfare explains confrontation and exposure; dance presents movement as artistry; fire represents an attack that must be contained; and magic frames creative skill as extraordinary. These patterns are consistent with the view that football discourse draws on a variety of source domains than relying exclusively on conflict imagery (Asadi et al., 2022).

Ontological metaphors perform a function. They give fleeting match experiences a more concrete form. In "a live interest " Roma's remaining chance of qualifying is treated as a valuable economic asset. In "argentine gold " a goal is construed as a precious object whose value extends beyond the immediate score. Such expressions allow viewers to grasp the importance of a sporting opportunity or achievement as if it were something valuable and capable of being possessed. Orientational metaphors meanwhile provide evaluations of status and possibility. "Barcelona fall!" uses movement to represent defeat and the loss of competitive standing while "too late in the day" frames the remaining match time as a closing temporal path. These expressions translate evaluations into spatial or temporal relations.

The findings also point to the use of overlapping structures. "Roma have risen from the ruins" combines the representation of a team as a damaged structure with the orientation of recovery. This hybrid pattern shows that a single utterance may activate than one conceptual mapping. In discourse the combination is especially effective because it evokes both the scale of the collapse and the magnitude of the comeback.

Taken together these metaphorical patterns explain how Drury's commentary transforms an athletic competition into an epic human drama. Metaphors frame players as warriors, artists, extraordinary forces or legendary figures; teams become armies or structures that can collapse and rise;. Goals become treasures or historical moments. The commentary therefore does not merely accompany the match. It organizes events into narratives of danger, resilience, pride, destiny and lasting achievement. This interpretation also reflects Ningtyas's (2019) account of metaphor as a means of adding value and engagement to football commentary.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the metaphors in Peter Drury's commentaries across the two legs of the 2018 UEFA Champions League match between AS Roma and Barcelona and the 2022 FIFA World Cup Final between Argentina and France. The analysis identified ontological and orientational metaphors with structural metaphors forming the most prominent category in the thesis appendix. The expressions show that Drury maps football events onto a range of familiar source domains, including driving, warfare, storytelling, dance, fire, magic, economic value, architecture and spatial movement. These mappings help audiences understand control, positional vulnerability, technical skill, opportunity, defeat and historic achievement. Particularly notable is the hybrid expression "Roma have risen from the ruins " in which the team's earlier deficit is construed as destruction while its recovery is represented through upward movement. Overall the metaphors perform evaluative functions while intensifying the emotional and narrative dimensions of live football commentary. They turn a sequence of actions into a story of conflict, collapse, recovery and legacy.

The study is limited to the transcribed commentary in three selected match broadcasts and does not examine visual, vocal or other multimodal features of the broadcasts. In addition the numerical discrepancy between the thesis conclusion, discussion and appendix requires verification against the coding records. Future research could compare commentators narrating the same match to investigate how individual styles produce different conceptual mappings and could extend the analysis to other sports or multimodal features of sports broadcasting.

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