

Conflict-Construing Metaphors in Nigerian Football Discourse

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Abstract

This paper examines conflict-construing metaphors in Nigerian football discourse. Particular emphasis is placed on ascertaining metaphorical expressions, conceptualisations and the implicit experiential-ideology from a Cognitive Analysis approach with insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Discourse Processing Theory. In the selected football discourse, a total of sixty news items were selected randomly from the online version of the Punch Newspaper, Kick Off and Complete Sports, covering a two-year time span: 2011 to 2012. On the basis of the identified metaphorical expressions, our findings reveal that sports journalists draw from our social memory of duel and war to conceptualise FOOTBALL IS A DUEL and FOOTBALL AS WAR. Thus, with the backgrounding of the fun associated with football, spectators and players tend to ensure victory since victory has nothing to do with fun.

Keywords: Conceptual Metaphors, sports/football discourse, Cognition

Introduction

This paper is situated within the theoretical framework of Cognitive Linguistics, specifically, the popular Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989) and Cognitive Discourse Analysis, investigated within the Discourse Processing Theory (van Dijk, 2000) in which metaphor in discourse (text or talk) is not viewed as device of poetic imagination and rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary concept limited to poetry (Lakoff and Johnson, 2003:3) but as a valuable cognitive tool without which neither poets nor ordinary people could live (Kovecses, 2010: xi). And discovered as one of those properties of discourse that are accounted for in terms of cognitive concepts within different types of mental representation including but not limited to knowledge and ideology. Lakoff and Johnson (2003: 5) define *metaphor* as understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another or as a partial mapping or set of correspondences between two conceptual domains, which they term the source and the target domains. Conceptual domain is any coherent organisation of experience. Thus, for instance, we have coherently structured knowledge about *journeys* (source) in understanding *love* (target). The panoply of discourse does not occur in isolation. It is accounted for by mental models, that is, the personal experiences of an individual stored in the episodic memory. They

represent specific acts or event people participate in, witness, hear or read about (van Dijk, 1997: 16). And, of course, if the personal mental models are instantiated in a discourse, it may be shared by others to form social representations such as knowledge and ideologies that become generalised as social cognition.

In sports discourse, which is our preoccupation in this paper, a cursory look at any sports newspaper often times leave the reader amazed by the wealth of metaphoric language found there. Sports journalists, in their bid to construct sports news, activate their mental models, that is, embodied experiences, and strategically conceptualise the meaning of such discourse following the context in which they operate. For instance, their experience about war may be brought to bear on sports as a do or die competition. Thus, we find instances such as:

It was the perfect return for the Nigerian *hit-man* who was delighted to be back in the thick of the action.

(*The Punch*, Dec. 25, 2012)

We are ready as a team to *spill blood* on the pitch.

(*Complete Sports*, Apr. 14, 2011)

In the sports excerpts above, the contextual meaning of the italicised words, *hit-man* and *spill blood* are different from the basic meaning of the words on the basis of dictionary (most concrete, human-oriented as opposed to specific or vague). *Hit-man* in that context conceptualises a skilled football player who comes into the field of play, while *spill blood* in that context conceptualises the attitude of winning a match at all cost. Hence, the two are metaphorical.

In this paper, therefore, an attempt will be made to identify metaphorical conflict-construing expressions in Nigerian football discourse with a view to identifying their conceptualisations and the implicitness in their experiential-ideology.

Sports Journalism, Discourse and Metaphor

Like other fields of journalism, sports/football discourse appeals to many people. Though football enthusiasts probably watch the games on TV or listen to them on radio, they still avail themselves a time-out to read an article recounting the game in a newspaper or magazine that could be published a day, a week or even a month after the actual event. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Sports journalists use their mental models to stress stylistic diversity, vitality and individuality in such discourse. They provide familiar examples of scenarios that generate enthusiasm and emotional investment in the reader as well as offer simple, visual representations of situations that belong to other source domains than just sports (Andersson, 2011: 8). Thus, Digel (1995:84) points out:

In most cases, sports journalists are labeled as “linguistic fecalists”. They are accused of having an emotional linguistic style, of tending toward linguistic exaggeration, of creating idols by means of language, of supporting or promoting unreflected performance orientation, of evaluating in a stereotypical way and of using superlatives, of using clichés and of being careless in their use of words, of preferring dynamic and emotional images and *martial metaphors*, of avoiding problems and of neglecting the playful elements of sport. (emphasis mine)

Going by this martial metaphorical nature of sports journalism, it is important to point out that this scenario does not just occur. It occurs based on the human cognitive nature which is metaphoristic in nature. Sports journalists tend to conceptualise the act of playing football as the experiential act of conflicting, that is, warring or dueling. Metaphor is not only a superficial, rhetorical instrument, but firmly linked to man's way of thinking and understanding the world (Ortony, 1979, cited in Torgny, 1997:6). Thus, metaphors could be seen as cognitive mechanisms where one projects an experiential domain onto a different experiential domain so that the second one is made more comprehensible in terms of the first one (Barcelona, 2000:3). In other words, sports journalists draw from man's social memory (social experience) in order to relate sports/football discourse. The fusion of a particular heuristic expression that belongs to a particular domain (source) and used in comprehending another domain (target) is a metaphor.

Sports/football discourse, perhaps more so than any other section of the newspaper or aspect of journalism, lends itself mainly effectively to negotiating conflicting social memory using metaphors from that domain in sports reporting. Our objective, therefore, is to complement the existing works in sports discourse (Charteris-Black 2004; Serazio, 2010; Andersson 2011) by attempting to examine metaphorical conflict-construing expressions in Nigerian football discourse; then classify their conceptualisations and the implicitness in their experiential-ideology.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is set within the theoretical framework which takes into account the claims of both Cognitive Linguistics and Cognitive Discourse Analysis. In the cognitive linguistic view as developed by Lakoff and Johnson, metaphor belongs to the field of cognitive linguistics, which aims at explaining conceptual systems and language within the general study of the brain and the mind. This field draws on cognitive psychology, cognitive neuroscience, and developmental psychology. It attempts to unify those disciplines to explain as many aspects of language as possible, including syntax, semantics, and discourse. In the cognitive linguistic view, metaphor is conceptual in nature. In the words of Lakoff and Johnson (2003),

Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (pg: 3).

From this claim, metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon that is ubiquitous in thought (our conceptual system) and language. Our conceptual system is naturally metaphorical. Our thought, experience and our perception and conception of reality is very much a matter of metaphor. Thus, Lakoff and Johnson state that, "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another (5). That, which we use in understanding and experiencing another concept is the source domain, which is stored in our episodic or social memory which gives coherence and structure to our experience. Thus, this include when we talk and think about life in terms of journeys, about argument in terms of war, about love in terms of journeys, and many others (Kovecses, 2010: 4). For instance, here, conceptual metaphor means CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A (Source) IS CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B (Target). Lakoff and Johnson observe that people understand abstract, un-known things or concepts in terms of physical or concrete, well-known concepts or ideas. For instance, Lakoff and Johnson, (2003:

4) tried to prove the existence of conceptual metaphor like ARGUMENT IS WAR. using ordinary everyday English expressions like:

Your claims are *indefensible*.
 He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.
 His criticisms were *right on target*.
 I *demolished* his argument.
 I've never *won* an argument with him.
 You disagree? Okay, *shoot!*
 If you use that *strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*.
 He *shot down* all of my arguments.

The above is an illustration of possible linguistic expressions that speakers of English commonly and conventionally employ to talk about ARGUMENT. They draw from the source domain of WAR to conceptualise ARGUMENT. We can state the nature of the relationship between the conceptual metaphors and the metaphorical linguistic expressions this way: the linguistic expressions (i.e., ways of talking) make explicit, or are manifestations of, the conceptual metaphors (i.e., ways of thinking). To put the same thing differently, it is the metaphorical linguistic expressions that reveal the existence of the conceptual metaphors (Kovecses, 2010: 7); which could be mappings that are ubiquitous, unidirectional, systematic, invariable and grounded in physical and socio-cultural experience of human beings. Hence, against these ideas, the Conceptual Metaphor Theory was developed.

The cognitive view of metaphor is psychologically practicable because of its realism. Apart from the fact that it can be seen as a conduit in producing new words and expressions, its cognitive heuristic function, that is, learning or helping to comprehend certain concept from past experience is of importance to this paper. Consciously or unconsciously, sports discourse is spiced with metaphors that perform cognitive heuristic function. Sports journalists draw from their social memory to relate particular concept in terms of another. Consequently, through the metaphors they use, sports journalists more or less consciously reveal their experiential-ideological stance.

On the other hand, Cognitive Discourse Analysis aims at identifying systematic patterns in free language production, constrained by the speakers' conceptualisation of the discourse task situation (van Dijk, 2000; Tenbrink & Gralla, 2009; Tenbrink, 2010). Cognitive Discourse Analysis is not interested in the abstract categories and rules purported to describe 'structures' of discourse, but with the actual mental representations and processes of language users. In that respect, psychology intends to provide a more 'empirically' based understanding of discourse (van Dijk, 2000: 2). However, this cognitive analysis on discourse is not done in the area of experiments; other forms of evidence of what transpires in the mind or the measurement of reading or reaction times as is expected of psychology but will focus on discourse and its structure deriving its terms from psycholinguistic methods.

The fact that discourse processing has to do with our cognitive processes (models) and discourse, with social interaction of which a text is just part (Fairclough, 1989:24), a theoretic account of discourse as social interaction cannot be carried out without considering the cognitive constituents, just as a cognitive account may not be inclusive without a social component that reflects structures of context, its acquisition, change and the use of socially shared social-cognition, such as ideology and other beliefs.

Thus, since metaphor is a discourse strategy that points to specific discourse processing, its analysis should be cognitive and not semantic in approach in order to unveil various mental representations such as ideology that might be veiled through metaphor in discourse. Thus, in as much as this paper takes a cognitive slant in identifying conflict-construing metaphors in sports/football discourse, there is an interlacement between cognition and socials since our social experiences and conceptualisations are packaged in terms of metaphor which helps our perception of certain social issues and how we face those issues.

Methodology

Going by the aim of this paper which is an attempt to examine metaphorical conflict-construing expressions in Nigerian football discourse; then identify their conceptualisations and the implicitness in their experiential-ideology, this paper presents no precise quantitative data for two reasons: firstly, we operate with a fairly small number of texts (60) which prevents us from giving any considerable statistical data; on the other hand, we are more interested in the exemplification of the conceptualisation of FOOTBALL as such through the conflict-construing metaphorical expressions we find in Nigerian football discourse and their contextual usage than in a statistical analysis of calculating, for instance, frequency ratio of some metaphorical expressions and lastly, a qualitative analysis of metaphorical language help gain better understanding of its functions in a larger context (Krennmayr, 2011: 14). Our main focus, therefore, is on the qualitative analysis of conflict suggestive expressions used metaphorically in Nigerian football discourse relating within the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cognitive Discourse Analysis.

Data

This paper examines conflict-construing metaphors in sports/football discourse in a corpus of sixty articles selected randomly from the online version of *The Punch* Newspaper, *Kick Off* and *Complete Sports* which cover a two-year time span, from 2011 to 2012.

The three news papers are significant newspapers in Nigeria, published daily. *The Punch* is published by Punch (Nigeria) Ltd since 1973, with the aim of reporting current issues of the day, while also dedicating a number of pages to sports news. The Punch operates beyond Nigeria with about 26,200 media outlets in 212 countries with worldwide media guide of 27670 media outlets (Punch, 2013: 1). The Punch operates with the web-name www.punchng.com which has been in use for the past seven years and ten months.

Similarly, *Kick Off* has been in existence for over seventeen years with the sister company in South Africa serving the populace with other affiliates such as *Kick Off Nigeria*. *Kick Off* is regarded by fans as Africa's most thriving magazine, known as the leading authority (Kick Off: 2). Apart from the prints, *Kick Off* also runs on the web-name www.kickoff.com with divers users.

Complete Sports is a daily newspaper managed by Complete Communications Limited; first published in 1995. *Complete Sports* is also regarded as Nigeria's number one all-sports daily newspaper with detailed reporting of everything that has to do with sports (Complete Sports, 2013: 1). It comes in the prints and also with the web-name www.completesportsnigeria.com.

Our selected corpus from the online version of these daily newspapers is streamlined to sports discourse that has to do with football alone. The rationale behind this is that majority of the online sports news is based on football.

Analysis and Discussion

In order to get the full understanding of the metaphorical texts being analysed, texts will be quoted across newspapers, bearing in mind metaphorical expressions that are synonymous, or either of the same word or phrase. The metaphorical expressions will appear in italics. Quotations across newspapers will be labelled with the lower case: a, b, c and thus appear under Roman Numerals. The experiential-ideology will follow suit. However, the main metaphoric conceptualisations of FOOTBALL to be dealt with are the following: FOOTBALL IS A DUEL and FOOTBALL IS WAR.

FOOTBALL IS A DUEL

- a. ...Kwadwo Asamoah insists he wants to '*fight* for Ghana' at the Africa Cup of Nations in South Africa in January.
Kick Off: Dec., 28, 2012.
- b. ...she said that her team fears no foe and that they should not be judged by the result of their *clash* last Friday.
Punch: Dec., 31, 2012.
- c. Esosa Igbinoaba *struck the blow* from the penalty spot to deny the Fatai Amoo's side of point.
Complete Sports: Feb., 24, 2011.
- d. The Super Eagles host the Syli Nationale in a key Nations Cup qualifier on October 8 with Group B's sole guaranteed ticket at stake. And the Guineans, who lead the group and need only a draw to sail through, have been talking tough ahead of the big *clash*.
Complete Sports: Jan., 7, 2011

The italicised lexical items/group of words above are evidently metaphor. *Fight* in example a, is construed as bringing honour to one's country in a football competition is a duel. *Clash*, in example b, is construed as football competition is a duel (competition) and *struck the blow* in example c, is construed as scoring a goal in a football competition is striking a blow in a duel (competition). Here, goal is mapped unto blow. The conceptual analysis gives one the occasion to infer the conceptual metaphor FOOTBALL IS A DUEL.

In the texts above, sports journalists draw from our social memory that stands as our social repository of social experiences about duel or physical fist fighting to represent the processes and activities of sports. The context in which we find the metaphorical expression is different from their basic meaning. The heuristic function of those metaphorical expressions aids our interpretation because of our prior knowledge about the practices of duel.

FOOTBALL IS WAR

II

a. Guinea's players, coaches and football federation officials have declared *war* on Nigeria as the win-or-bust Nations Cup qualifier between the two countries in Abuja draws near.

Complete Sports: Sep., 2, 2012.

b. Redknapp was infuriated at the lack of fight shown by the 30-year-old and is considering ditching the player as he says he needs *warriors* to lead his team out of trouble.

Punch: Dec., 27, 2012

c. AmaZulu had a few opportunities after that – Ayanda Dlamini beating a few defenders before a great challenge by Doctor Mampuru, before the striker *fired* over after a great cross from Tsweu Mokoro.

Kick Off: Nov., 21, 2012

d. The strike was also the *weapon of mass destruction's* first goal in the English FA cup. He was not on target representing Newcastle United, his first British club in the 2006/07 season in the competition.

Complete Sports: Feb., 21, 2011.

e. Tuks created their first scoring opportunity on the sixth minute through Bongani Zungu who worked himself into a good *shooting position* just outside the box, but he saw his effort go wide.

Kick Off: Nov., 24, 2012.

f. Our *defence* was really poor in that game. As it stands, we know what to expect of the match and are prepared to make the necessary adjustments.

Punch: Dec., 31, 2012.

All the italicised metaphorical expressions above that belong to WAR metaphor are intended to conceptualise football competition as a state of hostility, conflict and antagonism, characterised by intentional violence. For instance, in example a, the period of the Nations Cup Qualifier football match is conceptualised as a period of armed fighting between Guinean and Nigerian players. Also, *warriors*, in example b, are construed as adept players in a football team are warriors experienced in warfare. Example c, firing a gun/bullet is mapped onto kicking a ball. In this context, readers construe kicking a football by a striker as firing a gun or bullet in a warfare. In example d, an adept player in a football game is mapped onto a potent *Weapon of mass Destruction* in a war. The metaphoric representation of the text is lodged in *weapon of mass destruction*. Such player, skillful at scoring goals to defeat the opponent, is mapped onto a *Weapon of mass Destruction* that guarantees considerable harm to a large number of human beings at war in order to ensure defeat. In example e, a *kicking position* corresponds to a *shooting position*. That is, we are able to understand the kicking position a footballer takes in a football competition in terms of a shooting position that a warrior or soldier takes in war. Lastly, *defence* in example f, is metaphorical. In a football competition, the method a player or some players use in a way to prevent the other team from scoring is understood as the protection made by some soldiers at the hit of war to prevent an attack by the enemy.

The analyses above, no doubt, conceptualise SPORTS/FOOTBALL AS WAR. Sports journalists in their discourse represent football in terms of war. Concepts about war are found in football discourse. Their experiences about war which could be from personal experience or perhaps watched or read somewhere are consciously or unconsciously projected into football discourse. And since war is a social phenomenon, it becomes something we socially store in our social memory. Therefore, readers easily comprehend war expressions in football discourse because we effortlessly draw from our social experience about war to understand football.

Thus, by and large, considering the two mnemonic: SPORTS/FOOTBALL IS A DUEL and SPORTS/FOOTBALL IS WAR, sports journalists, in their discourse, through personal mental models, appeal to our social-cognition about football. The use of conflict metaphors in such sports discourse help to generalise certain experiential-ideology that sports journalists think of football. The occurrence of such metaphors in football discourse has reduced the playful and frolicsome element associated with such sport. The less pleasing aspects of conflict such as physical fight, hitting with the fist, destroying, maiming, killing and every other pain inflicting conflicts are foregrounded.

Consequently, conceptualising football as conflict (war or duel) has since backgrounded the fun associated with football. Since the end product of war is to achieve a goal, which is victory, to achieve such victory is not without excruciating efforts. Thus, with such experience about war seen as a characteristic of football as represented by sports journalists, football is no longer seen as fun but rather as an activity that has an end product, that is, victory, accompanied by all the pains that could help in achieving it.

Conclusion

This paper has considered conflict-construing metaphors in Nigerian football discourse; with theoretical insights from Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Cognitive Discourse Analysis. It has identified two conflict-construing metaphors in Nigerian football discourse: FOOTBALL IS A DUEL and FOOTBALL IS WAR. In this paper, it was discovered that sports journalists draw from our social memory of duel and war to conceptualise FOOTBALL IS A DUEL and FOOTBALL AS WAR. The instantiation of conflict metaphors in football discourse is the cognitive function of the episodic memory of sports journalists. Cognitively, their experience about war has been blended with the activities of football, so, it makes this social representation become a shared social cognition that is comprehended through our social memory. Seeing football as a duel or war becomes generalised. Therefore, with the backgrounding of the fun associated with football, spectators and players tend to ensure victory since victory has nothing to do with fun. Considering this submission, further research could take note of other conceptualisations in sports discourse.

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