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**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN FOOTBALL
REPORTAGE OF SELECTED NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS**

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the use of conceptual metaphor in football reportage in sports section of the Daily Trust and Leadership newspapers. Football journalism in Nigeria often goes beyond literal description, relying heavily on metaphorical language such as war, battle, journey and animal imagery to dramatize matches and intensify audience engagement. Drawing on the framework of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory, the research examines how metaphorical expressions are employed to frame football events, players and teams in a way that shapes readers' understanding of the sport. Football reports were purposively selected from prominent Nigerian Newspapers; Daily Trust and Leadership. The study identified and categorized recurring conceptual metaphors on the report sports discourse. The findings show that conceptual metaphors play a significant role in shaping readers' dynamics and dramatizing matches. The study concludes that metaphorical language is not merely stylistic but also cognitive, reflecting deeper patterns of thought that structure sport discourse in Nigerian media. The research contributes to studies in cognitive linguistics and media discourse analysis by highlighting how conceptual metaphors influence the representation and interpretation of football in Nigerian print journalism.

Keywords: *Conceptual Metaphor, Reportage, Football and Metaphor*

Introduction

Football is widely acknowledged as the world's most popular sport, often referred to as "the world's game" (Murray, 1996). This claim is substantiated by statistics from the *Big Count* conducted by the Federation of International Football Associations (FIFA) in 2006. The survey revealed that football had approximately 265 million active players worldwide, including 239 million males and 26 million females. Additionally, there were about 5 million referees and officials, 1.7 million teams, and approximately 300,000 football clubs participating in the sport (Kunz, 2007). Overall, these figures indicate that nearly 270 million people were actively involved in football globally, highlighting its unparalleled popularity and universal appeal.

Despite football's global prominence, relatively few linguistic studies have examined the language of football discourse. Existing research has largely focused on football commentaries, where conceptual metaphors are particularly prevalent because of the dynamic and spontaneous nature of live sports narration (Bokeno, 2009; Bergh, 2011; Wilinsky, 2014; Spander, 2014; Lewandowski, 2020, 2022). Consequently, the use of conceptual metaphors in written football reportage has received comparatively little scholarly attention. This imbalance represents a significant research gap and underscores the need for studies that investigate how conceptual metaphors are employed in written football news reports.

Most of the existing researches on conceptual metaphors in football, Chapanga, (34), Bokeno, (49); Lewandowski, (9); Bergh, (11); Lewandowski, (72); Spander (63); Wilinsky, (46) were carried out outside Nigeria, (mainly in Europe, with just one done in South Africa), thus a research problem exists concerning researching conceptual metaphors in Nigerian football reportage, considering the clear geographical and sociolinguistic differences between Nigeria and European countries.

METAPHORS

Etymologically speaking, the term 'metaphor is derived from the Latin compound *meta+ phrein* meaning to bear or to transfer, i.e. to transfer the attribute of one entity to another. To distinguish between literary and conceptual metaphors, it needs to be taken into consideration that in contrast to literary metaphor, metaphorical linguistic expressions are lexical units or other linguistic expressions that are derived from the source domain: that is, "the language or terminology of the more concrete conceptual domain" Kovecses (4).

Metaphor is "a word or phrase which is used for special effect, and which does not have a natural meaning." "In a metaphor, something is described by stating another thing with which it can be compared. Metaphor, is a figure of speech in which a word or expression normally used of one kind of object, action, etc. is extended to another object or action. Therefore, the former holds that metaphor is just a figure of speech in which two things are compared by saying that one is another, but not with any word as "like" or "as", while the latter holds that metaphor is both a figure of speech and a mechanism of knowing another thing.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR

Conceptual metaphor is a cognitive process where one abstract idea or domain (the target domain) is understood and explained in terms of another more concrete or familiar domain (the

source domain). It involves mapping the structure and attributes of the source domain onto the target domain to make complex or intangible concepts easier to grasp. For example, in the metaphor "time is money," the abstract concept of time (target) is understood by using the familiar concept of money (source), enabling expressions like "spending time" or "wasting time". In football reportage, conceptual metaphors are widely used to vividly describe matches, players' performances, strategies, and emotions by borrowing language and imagery from domains like war, battle, journeys, or sports equipment.

Some common metaphors in football coverage include:

Football as war or battle: Players are "fighters," matches are "battles," teams seek to "conquer" or "defend territory," and goals are seen as "victories" or "attacks." This metaphor emphasizes competition, aggression, and rivalry.

The game as a journey: Players' careers or a team's progress through a tournament is described as a "journey" with "ups and downs," or "crossing hurdles." This metaphor highlights progress, obstacles, and adventure.

Control and possession as possession of a prize or territory: Football possession is metaphoric "possession" of valuable territory or an object, with teams "holding," "losing," or "regaining" control.

Emotions as physical forces or containers: Excitement or tension in the game are depicted as "boiling," "exploding," or "overflowing," conveying intensity and build-up.

These metaphors serve to shape how readers understand and emotionally engage with the game. They provide familiar mental frameworks to interpret abstract sports events, enabling clear, dramatic, and relatable storytelling beyond just literal descriptions. Conceptual metaphors in football reportage influence not only language but the audience's perception of the sport, reinforcing narratives about heroism, struggle, and triumph. In sum, conceptual metaphor in football reportage is a linguistic and cognitive tool that maps familiar experience domains (like war or journeys) onto football, making the sport's complex dynamics and emotions accessible and compelling to fans and readers.

CATEGORIES OF CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

Ontological metaphor

This deals with physical entities are represented by abstract correspondents using surface as a cynosure leitmotif including the delineation of boundaries where none exist before, and the concretization of abstraction, a typical such use is the application of container metaphor and the congeries of lexicons associated there from archetypal of which is full Ghaddesy.(76).

A further subtype of ontological metaphor is the container metaphor which has an obvious relationship with the ontological as the congeries of lexicons associated there from involves container congruities. An example is the archetypal use of full. In football discourse, the classical example is the personification or animation of the ball Ghaddesy (76). Chapanga (66) opined that: "Abstract experiences such as events, activities, emotions and ideas are revealed in terms of concrete substances and processes by means of ontological metaphor. Intangible entities become entities which makes it possible for them to be categorised, grouped and quantified.

They are also characterized as container metaphors in that something is presented as having an inside and an outside. Activities, actions and emotions which are otherwise nonphysical objects are transformed into physical objects with definite boundaries. Animating objects otherwise known as personification is also an example of "ontological metaphor."

Orientational metaphor

The Orientational metaphors dwell on those metaphors expressing spatial interactions and relationships in essence, those describing the orientation of the abstracted source to that of the referent clearly Lakoff and Johnson 1980b).

Structural Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson argue that figurative language emerges from knowledge structures, which reside in long-term memory. These knowledge structures are termed *Conceptual Metaphors* (Lakoff and Johnson,134). Lakoff and Johnson suggested that there exists a set of primary conceptual metaphors, which are pre-linguistic and universal along with a set of conceptual metaphors which are language-specific (Degnan, 17). Structural metaphors utilize the typecasting of sharply defined concepts using non-concrete examples hence experience is structured from the incorporeal to the perceptible Kaplan and Baldauf. 1997). classically, a structural metaphor is defined as an understanding of the target domain in terms of the structure of the source domain" Lakoff and Johnson (14). This is established by relying on "a set of conceptual mappings or correspondences between elements of the two domains" Kovecses (33).

DEFINITION OF FOOTBALL

Etymologically, the word football is thought to come from foot and ball referring to the action of a foot kicking a ball: while an alternative explanation is that the word comes from the notion of the game of football being played on foot. The word is thought to originate definitely around 1400, with the first mention of the word thought to be in a 1350 Octavian I manuscript. The use of the word soccer instead of football began in 1863, in the US (Etymonline.com,21).

It is difficult to precisely pinpoint the founder of football however, the Chinese competitive game cuju is one of the earliest games having resemblance modern association football (Soccer), and its descriptions have been found in Chinese military manuals dating back to the second and third centuries BC, during the Han and possibly the Qin dynasty, Giossos et al., (110). This form of the game was also found in Japan, where it is called kemari and was developed during the Asuka period. The game was also played within the Japanese imperial court in Kyoto from about 600 AD and involves several people standing in a circle, kicking a ball to each other, trying not to let the ball drop to the ground (much like keepie uppie) Guttman & Thompson, (201).

SPORTS REPORTAGE IN NIGERIA

Sports reportage is a form of writing, reporting or broadcasting of reports on matters pertaining to sporting topics and competitions. There are many different forms of sports reportage, ranging from play-by-play and game recaps to analysis and investigative journalism on important developments in the sport In Nigeria.Despite the abundance of human and material resources, the country is yet to optimize its full potentials in the area of sports. Several factors may be

accountable for this state of affairs, which may not exclude institutional, management and leadership challenges (Dickson,20).

The media at certain instances have also shared part of the spoils for promoting foreign sporting institutions and event rather than giving adequate attention to promoting indigenous sporting event. Sport journalism in Nigeria has often been criticized to have tilted more towards covering European events and athletes than local talent promotion. Nevertheless, the media have a long history of significant contribution to sports development. Long before Super Sports, the Satellite-based Sports TV Channel, Fabio Lanipekun had led a generation of Nigerians that include the late Yinka Craig, Hamed Adio, Waheed Olagunju, Rotimi Bisiriyu, Charles Ojugbana and others to pioneer sports broadcast journalism in Africa (Sho-silva,84).

The newspapers were not left behind The Daily Times, Nigerian Tribune, New Nigerian and others devoted many pages to the coverage of sports and because of this extensive coverage of sporting events, sponsors provided funds needed for sports development. It would be recalled that at a point in Nigeria, volleyball actually rivaled football for sponsors because the head of the Volleyball Federation then, Eddie Aderinokun used the media to make the game so popular that sponsors were running after the federation Abdullahi, (23).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson provides the analytical framework for this study by explaining how metaphor functions as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete and familiar experiences. This theory focuses on how people understand and reason about abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete and familiar experiences. Rather than viewing metaphor as merely a stylistic or rhetorical device, the theory argues that metaphor is a fundamental feature of human thought that shapes perception, reasoning, and language. It explains how systematic correspondences between a concrete **source domain** and an abstract **target domain** enable individuals to conceptualise complex ideas, such as life, politics, love, or sport, through everyday experiences. Consequently, CMT emphasises that metaphor reflects underlying cognitive processes and cultural patterns, making it a valuable framework for analysing how language represents and structures meaning. Within this framework, football reportage is analysed not merely as a collection of stylistic expressions but as a discourse structured by underlying conceptual metaphors that shape how journalists and readers conceptualise football events.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design qualitative research is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings; patterns and contextual uses of conceptual metaphors in football reportage rather than measure numerical variables. Qualitative design enables in – depth textual analysis of metaphorical expressions used in selected Nigerian newspaper. The study is restricted to the *Daily Trust* and *Leadership* publications during the period of June-July, 2025, to collect data used to attempt to identify the metaphors. During the period under review, both newspapers published 52 editions on Saturday. 52 editions on Sunday, 261 strictly 'daily' total of 365 issues in the calendar year.

The researcher decided to limit the scope of the population of the study to The Daily Trust 2025 newspaper and *Leadership newspaper* publications of May-July2025, to make the data

manageable, because of the pervasiveness of the conceptual metaphors. The months May and July were used for selecting the issues of the publications analyzed. This was because the African UEFA Championship Finals (football) and FIFA Women's World Cup were held during that time. Due to that happening, only metaphors related to those events were considered, to further reduce the expanse of the data.

For the *both* newspapers, the following were selected using purposive technique: 4 newspapers from the month of May. The selected newspapers were: *Leadership Newspaper* Wednesday, 28th May; Monday 8th May; Wednesday 28th May. This selection was done purposefully.

Four editions were chosen from the *Leadership newspaper* publication, for the months of June-July, i.e. *Leadership newspaper* of Saturday, Friday July 25th, 1st Tuesday July 7th Monday July 8th Tuesday, 2025.

The Revised Metaphor Identification Procedure proposed by Naicker (92) was used as the research instrument to identify the metaphors in football writings in the sports sections of The Daily Trust newspaper and *Leadership newspaper* publications. This was a revision of the Metaphor identification Procedure of the Praggazel Group (33). These publications were briefly read and wholly scrutinized, and the identified metaphorical expressions are further investigated and subjected to critical analysis according to the methods chosen for data analyses which are described below.

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The analysis begins with the identification of metaphorical linguistic expressions in the selected newspaper reports, such as *battle*, *crushed*, *marched into the final*, *climbed to the top*, and *fired home*, which serve as linguistic manifestations of broader conceptual metaphors. Each expression is then examined by identifying its target domain (football events, players, competitions, or performances) and the source domain (such as war, journey, business, construction, fire, or natural phenomena) to establish the systematic conceptual mappings that underpin meaning.

A Spain's women's team made a statement with a 5 – 0 win over Portugal at Euro 2025, showcasing their skills and dominance on the pitch (Leadership, June – July, 2025).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Mapping
Making a public statement	Demonstrating football superiority	Dominant performance communicates strength
Powerful message	Overwhelming victory	The scoreline conveys authority

The expression "**made a statement**" is grounded in the conceptual metaphor **DOMINANCE IS COMMUNICATION**, where the concrete experience of making a public statement is mapped onto the abstract concept of sporting dominance. In the source domain, a statement is used to express confidence, authority, or intent to an audience. This knowledge structure is projected onto the target domain of football, where Spain's emphatic 5–0 victory functions as a symbolic message rather than merely a numerical result. The team's dominant display is construed as "speaking" through action, informing opponents, supporters, and other competing

teams of their exceptional quality and superiority. Thus, the scoreline becomes a communicative act that signals authority, control, and competitive strength. The metaphor therefore enables readers to understand dominance not simply as winning a match but as conveying an unmistakable message of power and excellence without the use of words.

The FIFA futsal women's world cup 2025 in the philiphines was a thrilling spectacle with Morocco and Argentina Kicking off the tournament.

Source Domain	Target Domain	Conceptual Mapping
Spectacle / performance	Fifa futsal women's world cup 2025 as a sporting event	Spectacle is conceptualised as the tournament; performance is understood as competitive football display; audience excitement represents global attention and emotional engagement; entertainment value reflects the overall sporting experience.
Journey / movement	the progression of teams through the tournament	Kicking off is conceptualised as the beginning of the competition; the starting point represents the opening match; movement along a path reflects advancement through tournament stages; the destination represents tournament success or championship victory.

The expression “**the FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup 2025 was a thrilling spectacle**” activates the conceptual metaphor **SPORTING EVENT IS A SPECTACLE**. The source domain of a *spectacle* involves a public performance designed to attract attention, generate excitement, and create memorable experiences. This cognitive structure is mapped onto the target domain of the futsal tournament, where the matches are understood as performances that display skill, competition, and entertainment. The metaphor therefore frames the tournament not merely as a series of games but as a grand public event capable of producing admiration and emotional involvement among spectators.

Similarly, the expression “**Morocco and Argentina kicking off the tournament**” reflects the conceptual metaphor **COMPETITION IS A JOURNEY**. The source domain of a journey involves movement from a starting point towards an intended destination. In the target domain of football competition, the *kick-off* represents the beginning of the teams' competitive journey, while subsequent matches represent stages along the route towards achieving victory. The mapping creates a cognitive understanding of the tournament as a structured path where teams embark on a challenging process that ultimately leads to success or elimination. Thus, the metaphors construct the FIFA Futsal Women's World Cup as both a **spectacular performance** and a **competitive journey**, highlighting two central cognitive models: **SPORT AS ENTERTAINMENT** and **COMPETITION AS MOVEMENT TOWARDS A GOAL**.

Afghanistan made a momentous return to international women's football, defeating Libya 7 – 0 in a friendly match (Dailytrust June/July, 2025).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
A Journey/Return	Afghanistan's re-entry into international women's football	Return after absence as resumption of participation in global football
A Significant Event/Milestone	The team's comeback achievement	Momentous occasion as a historic sporting achievement
A Battle/Victory	The 7–0 victory over Libya	Defeating an opponent as demonstration of superiority and success
A Rising Force	The renewed strength of Afghan women's football	Re-emergence after difficulty as restoration of confidence and competitiveness

The metaphorical expression **“made a momentous return”** constructs Afghanistan's participation in women's football as a **JOURNEY**, where the team is conceptualised as a traveller that has been away and successfully returned to the international stage. The adjective **“momentous”** further frames this return as a significant historical event rather than merely a sporting appearance. The phrase **“defeating Libya 7–0”** activates the metaphor **SPORT IS WAR**, where football competition is understood through the source domain of conflict, with victory representing dominance, strength, and achievement. The overall cognitive structure presents Afghan women's football as a resilient force overcoming obstacles and reclaiming its position in the global sporting arena.

Afghanistan made a momentous return to international women's football, defeating Libya 7 – 0 in a friendly match (Dailytrust June/July, 2025).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Return journey	Re-entry of Afghanistan into international women's football	Resumption of participation after exclusion
Travelling back to a destination	Reclaiming a place on the international football stage	Restoration of lost sporting identity
Overcoming obstacles on a journey	Challenges faced by Afghan female footballers	Struggle against barriers and restrictions
Arrival at a destination	Successful comeback through international competition	Achievement of renewed recognition
Momentous journey	Historic football revival	Significance of the team's return

The metaphor **“Afghanistan made a momentous return to international women's football”** is structured by the conceptual metaphor **SPORTING COMEBACK IS A JOURNEY**, where the experience of travelling from one location to another is used to

conceptualise the revival of a football team after a period of absence. The source domain of **journey** provides a cognitive frame of movement, struggle, obstacles, and eventual arrival, which is mapped onto the target domain of **Afghanistan’s re-entry into international women’s football**. The expression highlights the team’s return not merely as participation in a match but as a significant movement towards restoration, recognition, and empowerment. The 7–0 victory over Libya functions as the symbolic “arrival point” of this journey, representing achievement, renewed identity, and the overcoming of previous limitations.

India’s women’s football team is making waves, qualifying for the 2026 AFC women’s Asian cup (Dailytrust, 2025 June – July).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Waves	Growth and success of India’s women’s football team	Continuous movement, rising influence, and increasing visibility
Rising tide	India’s qualification achievement	Advancement to a higher level of competition
Powerful waves	Team’s performance and determination	Strength, resilience, and competitive ability
Movement of water	Development of women’s football	Ongoing transformation and expansion
Breaking waves	Historic qualification for the 2026 AFC Women’s Asian Cup	Overcoming barriers and achieving a significant milestone

The metaphor **WOMEN’S FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT IS A WAVE** conceptualises the progress of India’s women’s football team as a natural force that is gradually gaining strength and visibility. The source domain of **waves** provides a cognitive structure for understanding the team’s achievement as a process of movement, growth, and impact. The expression “making waves” highlights the idea that India’s qualification for the 2026 AFC Women’s Asian Cup represents a noticeable breakthrough that attracts attention and signals the rising prominence of women’s football. The mapping reflects how sporting success is understood through the image of a wave that gathers momentum, expands its reach, and creates a lasting impact. India secured qualification after defeating Thailand 2–1 in the qualifiers, marking a significant achievement in the team’s continental football journey.

Aitana Bonmati’s performance in the FIFA women’s world cup earned her the Golden Ball award.

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Journey/Path	Football performance and career progression	Movement towards success
Outstanding performance	Aitana Bonmatí's display at the FIFA Women's World Cup	Excellence and skill demonstration
Destination/Reward	Golden Ball award	Achievement and recognition
Traveller	Aitana Bonmatí	Player pursuing sporting success
Reaching the destination	Winning the Golden Ball	Attaining the highest honour

The metaphor constructs **SPORTING SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY**, where Aitana Bonmatí's performance is conceptualised as a path travelled towards a valued destination. Her skills, creativity, and influential contributions during the FIFA Women's World Cup represent the stages of the journey, while the Golden Ball award represents the final destination achieved through exceptional effort and ability. The metaphorical structure highlights the cognitive association between progress in a competitive environment and movement towards a goal. Bonmatí's three goals and two assists during Spain's World Cup-winning campaign contributed to her recognition as the tournament's best player, making the award a symbolic destination reached through outstanding performance.

FIFA has secured major sponsorships with brands like hublot, itau, and visa, generating significant revenue for the tournament. (Leadership newspaper June/July, 2025).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Business/Enterprise	FIFA tournament organisation and sponsorship activities	Revenue generation
Investment	Sponsorship agreements with brands	Financial support and partnership
Market Expansion	Global visibility of the tournament	Increased commercial reach
Profit-making venture	FIFA's economic benefits from sponsorships	Monetary gains

The metaphor conceptualises **THE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT IS A BUSINESS ENTERPRISE**, where the organisation of the tournament is understood through the structure of commercial activities. The source domain of business provides a cognitive framework for interpreting sponsorship deals with brands such as Hublot, Itaú, and Visa as strategic investments that enhance the financial success and global value of the tournament. The mapping highlights

how sponsorships function as economic resources that transform the tournament into a profitable and commercially sustainable event.

The women's world cup has attracted major broadcasters, with deals with millions of dollars (Dailytrust June/July, 2025).

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Business/marketplace	Women's World Cup	Global sporting event viewed as a revenue-generating enterprise
Broadcasting deals	Media value and visibility of women's football	Television and media partnerships increase the global reach of the tournament
Millions of dollars	Financial growth and investment in women's football	Economic resources reflect the rising commercial importance of the sport
Major broadcasters	Global recognition and audience expansion	Media organisations serve as channels that connect the tournament to worldwide audiences

The metaphor **WOMEN'S FOOTBALL IS A COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE** conceptualises the Women's World Cup as more than a sporting competition; it is framed as an economic venture capable of generating substantial financial value. The attraction of major broadcasters and multi-million-dollar broadcasting agreements highlights the increasing marketability, popularity, and global influence of women's football. Through this metaphor, financial investment is mapped onto sporting development, suggesting that media partnerships function as instruments for expanding audience engagement, increasing sponsorship opportunities, and strengthening the professional status of women's football. The cognitive structure behind the metaphor reflects the conceptualisation **SPORTING SUCCESS IS ECONOMIC GROWTH**, where commercial achievements represent the advancement and recognition of the women's game.

The Tournament has seen a surge in ticket sales, with many matches selling out quickly.

Source Domain	Target Domain	Mapping
Market/Business Industry	Football Tournament	Commercialization of the tournament
Product Demand	Public Interest in Football Matches	Growing popularity and attraction of spectators
Consumer Purchase Behaviour	Fans Buying Match Tickets	Fan engagement and participation
High-Demand Goods	Highly Sought-After Matches	Increased value and excitement surrounding games
Market Success	Tournament Success	Financial growth and global recognition

The metaphor conceptualizes **THE FOOTBALL TOURNAMENT AS A BUSINESS MARKET**, where ticket sales and sold-out matches are understood through the economic activities of supply and demand. The tournament is presented as a valuable commercial product that attracts consumers (fans), generates revenue, and demonstrates success through high public

demand. The cognitive structure behind the metaphor reflects the conceptual mapping **SPORTING EVENTS ARE COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISES**, where spectators' enthusiasm is interpreted as consumer demand and the success of matches is measured through market performance.

Conclusion

The analysis of football reportage through the lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory reveals that sports journalists frequently employ metaphorical expressions to construct football events, players, and achievements as meaningful cognitive experiences. The analysed data demonstrate that football performance is commonly conceptualised through source domains such as **journey, competition, warfare, movement, and achievement**, which enable readers to understand abstract sporting experiences in more familiar terms. Metaphors such as **SPORTING SUCCESS IS A JOURNEY, DOMINANCE IS POWER**, and **VICTORY IS A STATEMENT** show how football reportage extends beyond the mere description of events by framing players' performances, teams' achievements, and tournaments as narratives of struggle, progress, strength, and accomplishment.

The analysis further indicates that metaphor serves an evaluative and ideological function in football discourse. Expressions depicting teams as "rising," "making waves," "returning," or "reaching new heights" construct success as upward movement and progress, while metaphors of battle and power emphasise competitiveness, superiority, and control. In the case of Aitana Bonmati's Golden Ball achievement, her performance is represented as a journey towards excellence, where skill and determination lead to recognition and ultimate success. Similarly, women's football achievements are framed through metaphors of growth, breakthrough, and advancement, reflecting changing perceptions of the sport and highlighting the increasing visibility and significance of women's football globally.

Overall, the findings confirm that conceptual metaphors in football reportage are not merely decorative linguistic devices but cognitive mechanisms that shape how audiences perceive sporting realities. Through metaphorical mappings, journalists transform football actions and achievements into structured experiences of struggle, progress, victory, and identity. Thus, Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides an effective framework for examining how Nigerian newspapers and other sports media construct meanings, evaluate performances, and influence readers' understanding of football narratives.

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