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Metaphorical constructs and semiotic expressions in the BBC Yoruba Internet memes of English Premier League match results

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Abstract: This paper explores the deployment of metaphors in the BBC Yoruba-medium football results of the English Premier League, examining how cultural metaphorical choices shape meaning in online sport discourse. Through a discourse analysis of Yoruba-medium football results, the study reveals how metaphors drawn from Yoruba cultural milieu and everyday life are used to create vivid descriptions of game events, players, and teams. The study relies on Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory, complemented by Kress and van Leeuwen's social semiotic approach to multimodality. Findings reveal that metaphors describe game events, teams, and players, thus, framing the contest in unique and evocative manners, drawing on cultural and shared knowledge to shape the understanding of the game in an adversarial sense. This study, therefore, argues that metaphors are deployed to convey deeper cultural meanings and values, and add creativity to match results. The findings point to the role of language and culture in shaping the experiences of football fandom in sports and media.

Keywords: metaphor; BBC Yoruba; English Premier League; football result; culture; sport discourse

1 Introduction

Football, or soccer, as it is commonly known in some parts of the world, is a global phenomenon that transcends linguistic and cultural boundaries. The beautiful game has a unique ability to unite people from diverse backgrounds, creating a shared

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experience that goes beyond the pitch (Majaro-Majesty 2011). In Nigeria, football is a national obsession, with millions of fans passionately following local and international matches. It is ‘one of the games that is largely followed and cherished across the globe, including Nigeria’ (Osisanwo and Akinade 2024: 52). Football viewing in homes and match centres has attracted millions of fans who ardently support a club in each of the international and popular leagues like the English Premier League, La Liga, and German Bundesliga, among others. However, Nigerian football fandom tenaciously embraces and shares an affinity or support for the English Premier League – the focus of this paper – more than any other league (Adetunji 2013; Owonikoko and Rookwood 2022). This passion is particularly evident in the vibrant culture of Yoruba-medium football commentary.

Yoruba, spoken by approximately 30 million people in southwestern Nigeria, is a language rich in metaphors, proverbs, and idioms that add flavour and depth to everyday communication. Before the 1990s, football fandom in Nigeria was largely limited to local clubs (Omobowale 2009). However, with rising globalisation, there has been a great obsession for European football in Nigeria, aided by the recruitment of African players in European nations, although such a relationship has been tagged “neocolonial exploitation” (Darby et al. 2007: 143). Thus, the growing presence of Nigerian diaspora players through player migration has increased cross-cultural awareness about football. The proliferation of satellite TV and international sports channels has also brought European football leagues directly into Nigerian homes (Onwumechili and Oloruntola 2014).

Football discourse presents a broad communicative environment with verbal and non-verbal interactive moments that have been of interest to scholars. Coaches and referees use a mix of instructions and explanations to guide players and manage the flow; commentators provide real-time updates and analysis; and players themselves get involved in sharing tactical information. Persuasion comes into play through managers appealing to referees and fans, rallying their team or intimidating opponents with chants and songs. Celebrations and chants are all expressive outbursts that reveal the emotional rollercoaster of the sport. Ritualistic elements like pre-game handshakes and anthems also solidify the social aspects of the game, building unity and tradition. Among others, Internet memes – used as graphical illustrations on social media (Osisanwo and Falade 2024) – are prominent tools of online communication that allow sport lovers to express themselves and engage with others through creative and multimodal contents. Metaphorical representations are presented in these memes to facilitate communication, humour, and social interaction among users.

In football commentary, Yoruba language and culture intersect in fascinating ways, creating a unique market of meaning that reflects and reinforces cultural identity, community, and values. Yoruba-medium football commentary, online and offline banter, and affiliation with favourite clubs have all become an integral part of the country’s vibrant football culture, with discourse situations, drawing on a rich

cultural heritage to describe game events, players, and teams. Metaphors, in particular, play a significant role in this cultural exchange, as they enable commentators to describe game events, players, and teams in creative and evocative ways.

The use of football metaphors permeates various aspects of sport and shapes the perceptions and experiences of players, fans and officials. Kellett (2002) explores the pervasive “war” metaphor, revealing a shared cultural understanding through consistent interpretations of photographs using war language. This highlights football as a battleground, the coach as a general, and athletes as soldiers. Derwent and İnan (2015) delve deeper, identifying how social positions influence metaphors. Their study reveals a fascinating disconnect: players conceptualise coaches as protective figures, while club officials view them as decision-making figures. Spandler et al. (2013) and Kaya et al. (2020) explore the emotional power of metaphors. Spandler et al. highlight the use of metaphors in therapeutic settings to facilitate positive change, while Kaya examines how team chants leverage metaphors to evoke powerful emotions. Research also abound on various aspects of language use in sports communication, including phonological features of English-medium soccer commentaries (Osisanwo 1997), teasing by football fans at public viewing centres (Adetunji 2013), description of football actions and ideas (Yusuf 2016), player nicknaming (Adetunji 2010), syntactic analysis of sports commentaries (Okunade 2021), pragma-linguistic practices in sports banter at viewing centres (Ajayi et al. 2023), and the generic structures of football commentaries (Ayodabo et al. 2024).

Metaphors are pervasive in various aspects of Yoruba life, including advertisement (Alugbin 2019), and casual conversations (Alugbin 2022), and sport is no exception. Yoruba football fans commonly use innovative idioms and expressions to discuss and describe match situations, often employing metaphorical language (Àkànmú 2018). Metaphorical language in sports is a crucial tool to create engaging football commentary and discourse across various media formats. For instance, McKerrell (2021) explores how football songs and chants use metaphors related to the body to create a sense of belonging or exclusion. Building on America’s metaphorical equation of sports with life, Segrave (2000) explores the application of sports metaphors in warfare, politics, business, and sexual relations. Raffaelli and Katunar (2016) also focus on the Croatian sports language and how it compares sports in two main domains: war and power. In Zimbabwe, soccer commentators commonly use war metaphors to describe players, actions, and match outcomes of Premier Soccer League broadcasts (Chapanga 2004). While previous studies, such as those by McKerrell (2021) and Segrave (2000), have explored the use of verbal sports metaphors in various cultural contexts, the current analysis addresses how metaphors are culturally situated in Yoruba and how they interact within multimodal texts, such as Internet memes, to enhance football match result narratives.

The present study differs from the studies listed above by concentrating solely on the use of metaphors in reporting football results; specifically examining how

metaphors are employed to describe and discuss match results. Using social media posts as a data source, this study offers insights into how metaphors are deployed in online sport discourse, moving beyond traditional media sources. It examines how Internet memes with Yoruba-delivered football results serve as a unique form of online communication that shapes social interactions and cultural narratives of football discourse in Nigeria. By examining the use of metaphors in Yoruba-delivered football results, this research aims to uncover the cultural significance of linguistic choices in this context, shedding light on how language and culture shape our experiences of the complex relationships between language, culture, and sports. Specifically, the study aims to (i) identify the underlying cultural values embedded within online sport memes in naming players and events (ii) explore how metaphors function to construct narratives and shape perceptions around football victories and defeats, and (iii) examine how visual and verbal elements function as metaphorical resources in the memes to discuss and react to match results.

2 Online sport discourse and the use of memes

Long before the Internet, cultures have always passed on stories and discussions through various means. While the concept of memes existed long before the Internet, the digital age has undoubtedly transformed how they function and spread (Ambrus 2017). The reach, remixability and rapid dissemination have created new possibilities for the use of memes. Shifman (2013) traces the evolution of memes in digital environments in three steps. Firstly, he notes that memes spread from the micro (individuated) to the macro (broader) level, signifying the impact that the diffusion of contents has through digital media. Secondly, through this process, there is the reproduction of meaning either in the original or modified forms, which he refers to as ‘digital meme repackaging’ and lastly, there is the spread and selective competition leading to the sharing of memes (Shifman 2013: 22).

Internet memes contribute substantially to online sport discourse due to the ubiquitous nature of the Internet. They contribute to the stimulation of inter-textual sport discourse that is imbued with metaphorical meanings. Yeku (2018) examines memes based on how they facilitate engagement by simplifying complex political concepts into easily shareable content, thus broadening participation and visibility in political discourse. Ultimately, they are deployed to democratise political participation and give marginalised groups a powerful tool to effect change. The widespread creation and sharing of sport memes on the Internet provide a compelling validation of Jenkins et al.’ (2009) concept of participatory digital culture, which emphasises the active nature of meme culture. Sport fans are passionate about their teams and love to express their feelings. Memes provide a fun and creative way to share their excitement about a win, frustration over a loss, or poke fun at opposing

teams. Meme producers, therefore, manipulate the given football context to create memes as a form of expression, “leveraging on the affordances of the online spaces” to “shape the types of memes that are created and shared within those contexts” (Osisanwo and Falade 2023: 70). As such, Internet sport memes empower people to be active participants in sport conversations. Fans do not just watch games; they’re actively using humour and creativity to shape the online discourse around their favourite teams and athletes.

Since sports are not played in a vacuum, they reflect broader social issues. Memes can, therefore, challenge the authority of traditional sport media and commentators with the intention to expose biases, question narratives, and give voice to fans’ perspectives often overlooked by mainstream media (Milner 2013). Apart from this, digital sport memes have become a powerful force in online sport communication, capable of fostering both light-hearted humour and spreading “trash talk” (Kassing 2020: 1). Memes play a significant role in shaping sport news headlines, with the chosen words potentially revealing underlying ideologies (Peterlicean and Elena-Cristina 2020). Studies have shown they can be used to construct and spread narratives about race and masculinity, often promoting stereotypes of white masculinity and perpetuating racial biases. For instance, Dickerson (2016) explores the intersection of race, masculinity, and online sport discourse through the lens of Internet memes. Examining the portrayal of athletes from different leagues (National Hockey League and the National Basketball Association), the study examines memes specific to sports and how they potentially construct racialised and gendered narratives, especially in presenting African American athletes as selfish and White athletes as heroes. This shows that online sport culture can be a breeding ground for the construction of racialised messages.

Violence is also perpetuated in sport discourse. Sport discourse can sometimes manifest in negative ways, particularly through the identity of hooliganism. Violence and hooliganism involve a subculture of fans who engage in violent and anti-social behaviour, often targeting rival supporters (Newson 2019; Spaaij 2008). With a focus on six European football clubs, Spaaij (2008) notes the existence of a hooligan identity in football where individuals engage in provocative discussions to challenge their rivals. This shows how provocative discussions can also be woven around football discourse.

Beyond negative features, elements of teasing and light-hearted banter are also found in football discourse. Adetunji (2013) notes that teasing can be positive, neutral or negative. Teasing and light-hearted banter build camaraderie among fans and create a sense of shared experience. It can also serve as a way to mark group identity and assert dominance by poking fun at opposing teams. Humour can be a useful tool to release tension during high-pressure matches, but teasing can also be used to exert power, particularly when directed at a losing team or player. Examining these diverse discourse acts offers a deeper understanding of the social dynamics, emotions, and cultural significance embedded within the beautiful game.

Thus, memes hold immense value in deciphering digital culture. They function as a living archive of people's collective experiences. By employing a variety of strategies, memes capture trending topics and social issues in a way that resonates with a broad audience and fosters a sense of relatability (Shifman 2014). Furthermore, memes act as a fertile ground for the cultivation of fresh perspectives and interpretations. They empower users to express complex ideas in a simplified and readily shareable format, making them potent tools for social critique and commentary (Milner 2016).

3 Conceptual metaphor theory, multimodality and cultural meanings

This theory, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, posits that metaphors are not just linguistic devices but also reflect fundamental conceptual structures. Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) can help analyse how Yoruba metaphors in football commentary reveal underlying cultural concepts and values. CMT describes the essence of metaphor as “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 5). Lakoff and Johnson's description suggests that what people do with metaphor signifies or symbolises reality. Kövecses (2015) notes that our ability to use metaphors stems from a combination of what we have experienced firsthand and our general knowledge of the world. In essence, therefore, the more we know about ourselves and the world, the richer the metaphorical toolbox we have at our disposal for communication.

Kress and van Leeuwen's model of multimodality theory is deployed in this study to complement Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory. Kress and van Leeuwen's work is one of the pioneering studies on image analysis. Van Leeuwen (2004) describes multimodality as a combination of different modes of communication – multimodality. It is an interdisciplinary approach designed to cater for the representation of more than one mode of communication (Osisanwo 2018). According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2002), visual structures are similar to linguistic structures because they influence the interpretations they receive. However, visual and linguistic structures do not attract universal interpretations due to cultural diversity, social phenomena, educational attainments, and religious and sporting affiliations (Osisanwo 2018). Hence, three notions are fundamental to multimodality as identified by Jewitt et al. (2016): first, there is usually more than one mode of communication in every communication situation; second, modes of communication are socially influenced; third, people are bound to arrive at their meanings after the modes of communication have been linked to one another. Therefore, the modes come together to produce meanings. Images involve two

participants: *represented participants* and *interactive participants* (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996). The represented participants are the people, for instance, social actors, the places, the football clubs and players whose pictures appear or are depicted as images. The interactive participants are the outside forces involved in the images – the producers and the consumers (meme producers, online readers and football fans). Interaction refers to the view that the producer produces the images for the consumption of the viewer. They are “therefore real people who produce and make sense of images in the context of social institutions to ... regulate what may be ‘said’ with images, and how it should be said, and how images should be interpreted” (Kress and van Leeuwen’s 1999: 377). Image act and the gaze, frame size and social distance, modality, colour and perspective and the subjective image are the subdivisions that require attention when considering visual data for analysis. Analysing Yoruba metaphors in football commentary in conjunction with other semiotic modes can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how meaning is created and negotiated.

Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) and Kress and van Leeuwen’s multimodality approach help to understand how visual and verbal elements create metaphorical meanings and how these meanings contribute to the overall narrative conveyed by the memes. The analysis utilises conceptual metaphor theory to comprehend how concrete language and imagery convey abstract concepts. It identified source and target domains and mapped metaphoric relationships between them. CMT also considers the cultural contexts in which metaphors operate. The analysis also incorporates Kress and van Leeuwen’s multimodal approach by considering the interplay of visual and verbal elements in constructing meaning. An analysis of intersemiotic complementarity helps examine how different modes enhance meaning generation. The analysis explores how images visually complement the metaphorical narration in the memes.

4 Methods

The Internet memes for the study were gathered from Facebook. This analysis relied on 14 purposively selected images gathered from the BBC News Yoruba page on Facebook. The purposive selection of the 14 images was done based on their relevance to football match results and their cultural relevance to the audience of the BBC News Yoruba page. The selected memes also went viral and garnered significant engagement. These memes were shared in reaction to the 2023/2024 football season. Beyond the original posts made by BBC News Yoruba, there was viral sharing of these memes across various social media spaces. Social semiotic approach to multimodality was deployed to analyse the memes while the accompanying commentaries were analysed using conceptual metaphor. The analysis considered the context in which the memes were generated.

5 Analysis

The section starts with an analysis of the naming strategies of the clubs to give a better context for subsequent sections of the analysis, especially, regarding the use of nicknames to represent clubs in football discourse. It then presents the various metaphorical domains used to frame football contests and match results.

5.1 Football fan culture and naming strategies

There is a system of naming the clubs based on the performance and match ratings of the various clubs to indicate affiliation with their performance or disassociation with the quality of their football display. There are created names for events, players, coaches, and levels of performances, which all creatively depict the acceptance or rejection of what is being described. Four clubs were popularly identified with names: Arsenal as *Oriògbadé* (the crown does not fit the head); Chelsea as *Ànàkáyé* (beaten throughout the world); Manchester United as *Ànfàní Àdúgbò* (existing for neighbourhood or community benefit); and Manchester City as *Èkùn* (the Tiger).



Image 1.1



Image 1.2

Text 1

The naming of Arsenal deploys the concepts of “*Ori*” (head) and *Adé* (crown) as metaphors for achievement, power and glory. “*Ori*” in Yoruba translates to “spiritual inner head”, which refers to the sum of all the spiritual and naturalistic choices a person has made in their life that affect their destiny (Ekanola 2006: 46). This suggests that the fall from grace witnessed in Arsenal’s performance is shaped by the club’s choices, leading to their being a misfit for the crown. Chelsea’s reference as

“*Ànàkáyé*” (beaten throughout the world) in Image 1.1 also employs “battle” as a source domain, with “beaten” signifying repeated defeats; “World” emphasises the global nature of these losses, suggesting a decline in competitiveness. This naming suggests a sense of frustration with the team’s inability to secure victories, even on a global stage. Image 1.1 shows Arsenal players in action, with Chelsea players looking dejected in the background. The body language of the players suggests dominance on the part of Arsenal and defeat for Chelsea. *Èkùn* (Tiger), as deployed in Image 1.2, draws on animal metaphor to represent strength, ferocity, and dominance, associating the qualities with Manchester City’s recent success and perceived threat to other teams. The image also features Arsenal players in a jubilant group photo to highlight their collective triumph and victory.

The linguistic choice of naming these clubs was based on the situational context of the matches they played and the overall seasonal performances of the clubs. The semantic association of the names reflects the collective identity attached to the group. These names were mostly used during heightened moments of the season, which sometimes sums up the cumulative club performance. These names align with the Yoruba naming system, where names are assigned based on specific indices, especially the situational context during naming (Odebode 2010; Osisanwo and Akinade 2024). In particular, naming, as argued by Osisanwo and Akinade (2024: 55), is ‘a means of identity,’ among sport lovers online and offline. Hence, just as the clubs have their original assigned names, they also take on “circumstantial names” (Odebode 2021: 816) based on situational factors and identities attached to them. This also aligns with Saeed’s (2003) referential approach to naming, which connects the name given to an object to what the object does in the real world.

5.2 War and battlefield analogies in football memes

The use of war and battle metaphors in Yoruba commentary on football results serves to amplify the sense of intensity and high stakes in the sport. The metaphorical representation here correlates between the source and target domains, that is, the conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions and the conceptual domain that we try to understand. The comparison here is between the represented teams and war. In Yoruba culture, warriors and battles are often associated with honour, bravery, and determination. The commentaries, by describing football matches using metaphors that evoke these themes, create a powerful and engaging narrative. They transform the game from a mere competition into a grand showdown where teams are portrayed as warriors, each vying for victory and supremacy.



Image 2.1



Image 2.2



Image 2.3



Image 2.4

Text 2

Text 2 presents four collective framing of football as war and battle. The four of them are accompanied by both verbals and pictorials. The introductory text in each image presents match results: Crystal Palace 4 – 0 Man Utd (Image 1), Tottenham 2 – 3 Arsenal (Image 2), Copenhagen 4 – 3 Man Utd (Image 3), Arsenal 3 – 1 Burnley (Image 4). The ordering of the results characteristically shows who is playing at home (usually the fronted club) and who is the visitor (usually the second club). The image of a dejected Manchester United player in Image 2.1 conveys a sense of loss and disappointment. The player's body language symbolises defeat and failure. The visual and verbal elements together create a war-like metaphor, portraying the football match as a battle with significant consequences. The dejected player is the fallen warrior, and the text expands this metaphor by showing how the defeat affects others. The text provides a

commentary: “Ogun tó ja Ànàkáyé tẹ̀lẹ̀rì tí jábọ̀ sí orí Ànfàní Àdúgbò FC, ẹ̀sẹ̀ ara wọn ni wọn fi rin lọ pàdẹ̀ àgbákò nílẹ̀.” Crystal Palace (The battle that Ànàkáyé lost earlier fell on Ànfàní Àdúgbò FC; they went to meet disaster at Crystal Palace’s home). The game is metaphorically described as a battle where Manchester United engineered self-defeat. It also references Ànàkáyé (Chelsea) to associate with the defeats of other poor-performing clubs. In Image 2.2, the jubilant Arsenal players symbolise triumph and celebration, visually capturing the joy of victory. The text reinforces the idea that Arsenal’s success is not just a win but a destined triumph, with the imagery of a crown signifying their superiority. The commentary translates to: the head destined to wear the crown will not fail to wear it, *Oríògbadé* FC was angry and gave Tottenham a hot slap on Sunday. The crown is an iconic symbol which is significantly associated with historical, cultural, and political importance across space and time. It signifies headship, kingship, rulership, authority, power, and royalty, transcending time and geography. The crown is also significantly associated with victory and dominance. Although the “hot slap,” suggests human action of violence, it metaphorically presents the match in a narrative of conflict to foreground the battle metaphor and convey the impact of the win.

Copenhagen’s goal celebration in Image 2.3 captures the moment of success, visually representing their victory. The battle metaphor is extended from Image 1, with the implication that Manchester United is continually facing these metaphorical “battles” and losing them. It presents Manchester United’s match against Copenhagen as another in a series of failed attempts to escape defeat. The commentary reads: “A rò pẹ̀ Man Utd tí bọ̀ lówọ̀ ogun ní sùgbọ̀n wọn tún sàgbákò lówọ̀ Copenhagen” which means “We thought that Manchester United had escaped from battle, but they again faced disaster with Copenhagen.” This also presents the match in the sense of battle. “Disaster” as used in the image suggests a catastrophic event often associated with warfare. In this context, it implies a significant setback for Manchester United. Image 2.4 presents an Arsenal player, mid-action, scoring a goal against Burnley. The image of the goal and the metaphor of chaining combine to depict Arsenal’s win as decisive. The commentary reads: “Èsò pẹ̀lẹ̀ ní Arsenal fi ko ẹ̀wọ̀n sí Burnley lówọ̀ tí wọn sì pawọ̀n lẹ̀kún jáyé ní iròlẹ̀ Sátídé” which means “With careful strategy, Arsenal chained Burnley and made them lament on Saturday evening.” Warfare terminologies are deployed to highlight Arsenal’s tactical superiority in the football match. The wording directly evokes the image of restricting an opponent’s movement, a tactic used in warfare to limit the enemy’s ability to fight effectively. Here, “chained” metaphorically refers to Arsenal’s strategy successfully limiting Burnley’s offensive capabilities.

Through the use of Yoruba metaphors, concepts like “battle,” “crown,” “disaster” and “chain” are deployed to convey emotions of victory and defeat and they are contrasted in the images to enrich the narrative of match results. The visual elements serve as the literal representation of the events in the football match, while the verbal elements add a layer of metaphor, transforming these events into battles and strategic conquests. These turn football into a battlefield, where teams are warriors, and every move can lead to victory or defeat. This framing influences how fans view the match and their emotional investment in the outcome.

5.3 Animal imagery in football memes

The use of animal metaphors serves to describe game events and this adds layers of meaning and evokes familiar imagery. These metaphors draw from the Yoruba tradition, where animals are often symbolic of specific traits, such as strength, stubbornness and agility. By borrowing qualities and actions from animals to describe human sports actions, the texts create a rich narrative that resonates with the Yoruba cultural context and engages the audience on multiple levels.



Image 3.1



Image 3.2



Image 3.3



Image 3.4

Text 3

Image 3.1, which captures Arsenal players during a goal-scoring moment, with the Liverpool goalkeeper struggling to save the ball, visually represents Arsenal's

dominance in that moment. The visual of the goal aligns with the metaphor of the elephant used to portray Arsenal as a powerful force that overcomes obstacles. The image presents a commentary: “Ìtākùn tó ní k’érin ma wòḍò ... Arsenal fi Liverpool ṣe ètùtù òlā ní Emirates” which means “A creeping plant that insists the elephant will not enter the river ... Arsenal humbled Liverpool at the Emirates.” The metaphor portrays Arsenal as a powerful and unstoppable force (elephant) that overcomes Liverpool (creeping plant) to achieve its objective (entering the river) which can be interpreted as winning the match or dominating play. Liverpool has recently been a formidable team in the Premier League, which has been uneasy to defeat by other teams. Humbling Liverpool reinforces the idea of Arsenal’s complete triumph. The rich cultural and symbolic value of elephants in Yoruba proverbs reflects their significance and association with strength and determination (Owomoyela 2005). The metaphor, drawing from the cultural depth of Yoruba proverb, portrays Arsenal as a force of nature that cannot be deterred by any obstacle.

The action-packed image in 3.2 focuses on a moment of play near the goal during Aston Villa’s win against Arsenal. The visual of Arsenal under pressure during a match is coupled with the metaphor of a fallen elephant, symbolising a significant and surprising loss. While the victory of Arsenal was captured by using the animal metaphor in correlation with the notable strong nature of the elephant in the first image, defeat is also captured in the second image, using the elephant. Whereas Arsenal’s victory was metaphorically represented by an elephant in the first image, harnessing the animal’s renowned strength and resilience, the second image similarly leverages the elephant’s cultural significance to convey defeat, echoing the Yoruba expression, “Erin wó!” (The elephant has fallen) to capture the team’s contrasting fortunes. The fall of the elephant signifies a significant defeat that indicates a strong or dominant team (Arsenal) that is unexpectedly defeated. The use of the same animal (an elephant) for both victory and defeat creates a layer of irony. It points out the vulnerability strong teams possess and the possibility of unexpected upsets in football.

Image 3.3 depicts an intense moment in a football match between an Arsenal player and a Wolves player. It shows the competitive nature of the match. The text in the commentary reads: “Diè ló kù kí ikòkò Wolves ya aṣò mó Arsenal lára sùgbón Ajá 4 wón gbéra.” This is translated as “Wolves almost tore Arsenal’s clothes but their dog took to running”. Tearing clothes symbolises an aggressive attempt to overpower or humiliate someone. Arsenal is likened to someone whose clothes are almost torn, reinforcing Arsenal’s resilience and eventual survival in the match. In the context of football, it suggests that Wolves were close to dominating Arsenal and winning the match. Clothes represent Arsenal’s pride and reputation while tearing them signifies a loss of dignity. The commentary presents a situation where the last-ditch effort by Arsenal (the dog’s race) prevented a complete breakdown and secured their victory, being a narrow escape.

In Image 3.4, a dejected Chelsea player covers his face, visually representing disappointment and capturing the emotional aftermath of a loss. The visual of a

disappointed player combines with the metaphor of a goat being thrashed to portray Chelsea's defeat as a humiliating and painful experience. The attached comment reads: "Ewùré Chelsea şiléyà, ìgbájú-ìgbámú ni wọn jẹ̀ bọ̀ nílẹ̀ Newcastle." This is translated as "Chelsea's goat went to the wrong house and got terribly thrashed at Newcastle's home." It draws attention to Chelsea's continued struggles and suggests that their challenges are persistent and worsening. Chelsea is represented as a goat, drawing inferences from Yoruba conceptions of animal behaviour. Across cultures, animals are often used as nicknames for sports teams. Thus, Image 4 leverages the Yoruba symbolic qualities associated with the habits and behaviour of the goat. The Yoruba cultural interpretation of the habits of the goat is that they are associated with stubbornness (Olateju 2005) and persistent strong-willed nature, even after receiving several beatings. This understanding of the nature of the goat is transferred to Chelsea. Elephant, wolf and goat are animals used to bridge shared understanding and create a common ground. As such, the well-known characteristics of animals are translated into metaphors, using their actions and habits to describe human actions and tendencies. This creates a bridge between the natural world and human's own as it affords the expression of complex ideas with vivid imagery.

5.4 Food metaphor in football memes

Food metaphor in Yoruba-delivered match results adds a unique dimension to sports commentary by drawing comparisons between teams or players and various food-related conceptions to underline various sports-related attributes, as evidenced in Text 4.



Image 4.1



Image 4.2

Text 4

In Image 4.1, a Newcastle player celebrates a goal while an Arsenal player raises his hands in frustration. The visual of a goal celebration is juxtaposed with that of frustration to show a contrast of emotions between the two teams. The commentary on the image reads: “Ìyà tí Man U jẹ kù, ni Newcastle fi ẹ àlejò fùn Arsenal nìlè wọn,” which means “The leftover of the defeat suffered by Man Utd was used by Newcastle to entertain Arsenal in Arsenal’s home.” To communicate Manchester United’s loss, the image presents the defeat as an unfinished meal served. The portrayal of the unfinished meal suggests the embarrassing situation of the defeat and portrays Newcastle as a new dominating force. Defeat, thus, becomes something tangible like food that is served to one’s opponent. This metaphorical transformation positions the loss as a negative consequence for Manchester United and Arsenal. While victory is conceived as the serving of food, as done by Newcastle, defeat is represented as the inability to finish the served food, as in the case of Manchester United.

Image 4.2 presents Manchester United players looking determined and dominant. The attached text reads: “Man U sọ Chelsea di nńkan ipanu. Wọn gún wọn nínú odó bí iyán Èkiti,” which means “Man U turned Chelsea into a snack; they pounded them in a mortar like Ekiti pounded yam.” Manchester United is represented as the victor; Chelsea is the vanquished, while a snack is presented as a small portion of food. This comparison suggests that Chelsea is insignificant, tiny or lacking in substance, much like a small snack is less filling or satisfying than a full meal. This indicates how small Chelsea is, depicting their abilities, strengths or chances of winning as minimal or inferior compared to Manchester United’s. Pounding in a mortar also shows a forceful and complete defeat. The reference to “Ekiti pounded yam” creates a specific cultural reference, potentially familiar to the intended audience. Ekiti, a state in southwestern Nigeria, has a great reputation for its culinary expertise in the preparation of pounded yam. Pounding yam is a traditional method of preparing the food, and here it signifies the complete dismantling of Chelsea’s defence. Since food in Yoruba culture can be associated with celebration and enjoyment (Allen 2015), winning a match becomes a rewarding and celebratory experience, similar to consuming a satisfying meal. Thus, food is deployed to vividly create an image of dominance and ease of defeat.

5.5 Home metaphor in football memes

The conception of “home” in sports creates an emotional attachment that transcends physical location (Baker 2021). The home metaphor uses imagery related to homes to convey a sense of safety, security and stability. By describing the teams and players in terms of the sense of home, Text 5 emphasises the concepts of defence, belonging,

and territoriality. The comparison between home and football underscores the idea that the victorious teams have a stronghold or base from where they operate.



Image 5.1



Image 5.2

Text 5

Image 5.1 shows two Arsenal players on the ground, while a Nottingham Forest player is attempting to score. The Arsenal players' prone positions visually convey defeat, vulnerability and powerlessness in the face of Nottingham Forest's attack. The commentary reads: "Nottingham Forest ṣe kiní yẹn fún Arsenal. Awóniyi ló fi wọ́n ṣ'ẹ̀sìn léyìnkùnlé wọ́n." This is translated as "Nottingham Forest did the thing for Arsenal. Awóniyi ridiculed them in their (NF's) backyard." Referring to Nottingham Forest's stadium as their "backyard" implies a place of comfort, where they are at an advantage playing in the home stadium they are familiar with. This creates the feeling that home teams are mostly secure and have a home advantage when they play opposing or visiting teams. This creates a sense of territoriality in football, where the visiting team becomes an invader into the hosting team's territory. It suggests the match was not just a win, but a dominant performance on familiar football ground.

Contrary to how the metaphorical notion of home was a safety in Image 5.1, there was disappointment for Chelsea in Image 5.2. Image 5.2 shows dejected Chelsea players walking off while Wolves players celebrate in the background. Chelsea's defeat becomes a betrayal of expectations, where the supposed safety of their home ground was turned into a place of humiliation. The metaphor of home in Image 5.2 portrays Chelsea as a child who is supposed to feel safe at home (Stamford Bridge), but the unexpected beating from Wolves disrupts this notion of home as a place of safety and dominance. This confirms how the deployment of home in proverbial or metaphorical expressions can be varied, relying on contextual beliefs for proper

interpretation (Bamgbose 2023). Accompanying texts in image 2 read: “Chelsea rò pé ilé Bábá ọmọ kí ba ọmọ lérù, ni Wolves bá gbé igbánú fún wọn lábé afára Stamford” which translates to “Chelsea thought that in a father’s house, the child is not afraid, but Wolves gave them a beating under Stamford Bridge.” “Father’s house” is used as a metaphor for home stadium. The metaphor positions Chelsea’s home stadium (“father’s house”) as a place of comfort and dominance, similar to a father providing security for a child. The father, in this case, could be likened to the fans, whose support is tremendous for the home team. The paternal figure is brought in as a symbol of security, which may be culturally specific. In Yoruba culture, the father figure is associated with protection, which should provide Chelsea with an advantage to win the match.

The home metaphor in football, therefore, indicates a sense of security, where the team is most comfortable and confident. Similarly, when a team plays away from home, the home metaphor can highlight the challenge of entering another team’s territory. The texts describe an away game as entering enemy territory, framing the opposing team’s stadium as a hostile environment. This metaphor evokes the idea of an invasion, where the visiting team must overcome both the opponent and the local crowd to achieve victory.

6 Discussion and conclusion

The metaphors in the analysis often draw on cultural knowledge and shared experiences to make the commentary more relatable and resonant with the audience. Shared assumptions are important to understand the values and assumptions communicated in these metaphorical expressions. This involves recognising the cultural assumptions that underlie these metaphors, as well as their emotional resonance with the audience. Through this, the rich cultural significance embedded in these metaphors can be uncovered. When metaphors reflect familiar themes or cultural references, they help bridge the gap between the action on the field and the audience’s understanding by providing a richer experience. Metaphors can significantly influence how people perceive and interpret game events. They help in the presentation of the football game in new ways, which makes the game more engaging for football fans.

Metaphorical representation of events not only enhances the understanding of the game but also affects how football fans view the players and teams as well as how they engage with the game as spectators. Cultural metaphors play a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding the game, as they often draw upon deep cultural values and beliefs. Based on these shared assumptions, the commentaries were able to convey emotions in a way that resonated with a wider audience. For

instance, fans create nicknames for clubs based on their performances (Osisanwo and Akinade 2024). These names reflect the fans' perception of the club's success or failure. By focusing on Yoruba-medium football commentary, this research offers a new perspective on the complex relationships between language, culture, and sports, and contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of metaphors in shaping cultural meaning and identity.

The visual and verbal elements across the memes reveal that both components work synergistically to create layered metaphors that enhance the narrative and emotional impact of the depicted football matches. The visual elements reinforce these metaphors by visually representing moments of defeat, helplessness, humiliation, ridicule, subversion of expectations, and the emotional states of the team. The visuals capture key moments of action and emotion, while the verbal elements provide a metaphorical interpretation that deepens the viewer's understanding of these moments. The metaphors transform the matches into narratives of struggle, surprise, and defeat, resonating with viewers who understand the significance of these moments in the broader context of sports and competition.

The analysis emphasises the emotional connection fans have with their clubs, evident in the naming strategies. Through metaphorical language use, social identity and emotional attachment are created, confirming Baker's (2021) study. Football matches are described using metaphors that evoke themes of honour, bravery, and determination, transforming the game into a grand showdown. Rooted in Yoruba cultural orientation, metaphors are used to convey complex social positions and relationships within the sport. While Dervent and Inan's (2015) identification of social positioning is limited to the conception of football coaches, the present study presents a broader understanding, taking into consideration how metaphors are used in football sport to convey social positioning and relationships based on the overall performances of clubs. Thus, findings show that the deployment of naming strategies and metaphorical representations reflects the societal views and expectations of the fandom. This underscores the importance of linguistic creativity in forming a collective cultural understanding, as seen in the Yoruba naming strategies and commentary that use creative metaphors to depict acceptance or rejection of teams' performances. Adding to the roles of memes as a tool for conveying collective experiences and social critique, as identified by Yeku (2018), this study views Internet memes as tools that carry ideas and beliefs, not just about politics or social issues, but also about everyday life, including experiences in sports. They often use ideas that have established meanings in culture to convey complex ideas, becoming a powerful tool in sports discourse. Beyond Spandler et al.'s (2013) discussion on the psychological impact of football metaphors in therapeutic settings, the present study extends to how specific creative metaphorical language used in Yoruba football commentary serves as cultural symbolism that adds layers of meaning and creates an emotional narrative in football sport discourse.

Metaphors, in particular, are a key feature of Yoruba-medium football commentary, allowing commentators to create vivid and evocative descriptions that resonate with football fans. But metaphors do more than simply add flavour to the commentary; they also convey deeper cultural meanings and values. By examining the use of metaphors in Yoruba-delivered football results, this research uncovers the cultural significance of linguistic choices in football discourse, shedding light on how language and culture shape people's experiences of sports and media.

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