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VISUALISING VICTORY IN TENNIS
Conceptual metaphors shaping Wimbledon 2024 coverage

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of image metaphors in the linguistic representation of Wimbledon 2024 within The Guardian. Drawing on Cognitive Linguistics, we analyse how visual and embodied experiences, such as colour, movement or spatial orientation, are mapped onto abstract domains of fight, purity, movement or prestige, Expressions such as 'small armies of helpers' or 'the favourite to defeat her compatriot', evoke a clear conceptual metaphor (SPORT IS A BATTLE). Our study highlights the interplay between visual language and conceptual structure, showing how metaphor operates as a cognitive tool that transforms sensory impressions into symbolic meaning in the tennis tournament.

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1. Introduction

This research explores how conceptual metaphors shaped the narratives surrounding Wimbledon 2024, focusing on the linguistic and cognitive mechanisms that influence sports discourse. The purpose is to analyse the metaphorical structures embedded in media coverage, revealing how these metaphors frame perceptions of competition, performance and identity in elite tennis.

Previous studies on conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010) have demonstrated its pervasive role in structuring thought and language, particularly in sport contexts (Spurr, 2001; Charteris-Black, 2004; Semino, 2008; Lavric & Weidacher, 2017). However, while athletics and football have received considerable attention, tennis remains underexplored, especially in relation to major tournaments like Wimbledon. This gap provides the foundation for the present study.

The objectives are three-fold; firstly, to identify metaphors according to their source domains and communicative functions; secondly, to measure their frequency; thirdly, to classify the dominant conceptual metaphors in Wimbledon 2024 narratives and interpret their impact on narrative framing. These objectives are measurable through systematic corpus analysis and qualitative interpretation.

The reason for this research lies in its novelty and originality. By examining Wimbledon 2024—a globally significant event—through the lens of conceptual metaphor theory, this study contributes innovative insights into the cognitive underpinnings of sports journalism and storytelling. This work emphasises the interplay between metaphor and narrative construction in a specific, high-profile context. Its originality stems from combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to uncover patterns that not only describe linguistic tendencies but also explain how metaphors shape cultural narratives of struggle, triumph and identity in contemporary tennis.

2. Theoretical background

Traditionally, metaphor has been regarded as a stylistic device restricted to literary discourse. However, the emergence of Cognitive Linguistics transformed this idea completely, positioning metaphor as a fundamental mechanism of human thought and conceptualization (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to another author, metaphor is

> the cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is partially 'mapped', i.e, projected onto a different experiential domain, so that the second domain is partially understood in terms of the first one. The domain that is mapped is called the source or donor domain, and the domain onto which the source is mapped is called the target or recipient domain (Barcelona, 2003, p. 3).

As stated by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphors are not simply linguistic embellishments but reflect systematic mappings between two conceptual domains: a source domain, typically concrete and grounded in bodily experience, and a target domain, often abstract and less tangible. These mappings enable individuals to comprehend and reason about abstract phemonena through more familiar, embodied kinds of experience. Such mappings are pervasive and largely unconscious, restricting how we talk, think and act. Thus, expressions such as "wasting time" or "overcoming a challenge" are not isolated idioms but manifestations of deeper conceptual structures (Kövecses, 2010). Crucially, these structures also extend beyond language into visual and multimodal forms, framing how images are composed and interpreted. For instance, the metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR illustrates how conflict schemas structure our understanding of debate, influencing both language and behaviour. Such a sentence predicts linguistic realisations (attack, defend, win) and behavioural tendencies (adversarial debate), but it also explains visual schemata (opposing sides, weapons) that can be mobilised in imagery, Similarly, TIME IS MONEY motivates the economic framing of time as a budgeted commodity, with visual correlates in clocks-as-currencies or hourglasses as reservoirs of value (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2010).

A foundation of CMT is embodied cognition, that is, conceptual systems are formed through recurrent bodily interactions (Gibbs, 2006). As Talmy (2000) highlights, spatial orientation and force dynamics provide scaffolding for metaphorical reasoning. Mappings such as HAPPY IS UP and DIFFICULTIES ARE BURDENS mirror the physical experiences of verticality, weight and balance, making vertical ascent a natural visual metaphor for improvement or victory (Gibbs, 2006; Kövecses, 2010). Metaphorical reasoning emerges from bodily interaction with the environment, making metaphors deeply experiential rather than arbitrary. Kövecses (2022a: xi) also refers to "their enormous complexity". This

insight is crucial for analysing visual communication, where metaphors often operate beyond language, taking advantage of perceptual and spatial signals or cues to evoke conceptual associations. This kind of embodied cognition or embodied grounding is particularly salient in sport —and by extension in tennis, where movement, force, resistance and balance are literally enacted and visually legible.

2.1. Image metaphors and mental imagery. The case of Wimbledon 2024

While conceptual metaphors involve domain-to-domain mappings, image metaphors — introduced by Lakoff (1987)— entail a mapping between two mental images. In these cases, the vehicle image is perceived as "becoming" or "containing" the tenor image (for instance, in tennis racket morphing into a sword, the court surface blending with battlefield terrain). Image metaphors compress complex conceptual relations into a single striking visual that is processed holistically and rapidly (Lakoff, 1987; Forceville, 2009). These metaphors are particularly salient in visual media because they exploit iconicity and resemblance rather than linguistic convention. Image metaphors often function as cognitive shortcuts, enabling rapid and intuitive interpretation by blending perceptual similarity with conceptual inference. Something important is that according to Ureña Gómez-Moreno & Ruiz de Mendoza Ibáñez (2022, p. 381), "image metaphors arise from sense-perceived resemblance (similarity), which involves comparison in terms of physical features such as shape, colour, and size".

A salient feature is their capacity for conceptual blending —a process described by Fauconnier and Turner (2002), where elements from multiple input spaces are selectively projected into an emergent structure with novel inferences. For example, blending arcadian lawns with competitive arenas can yield an emergent space where nature stands as both stage and adversary, inviting readings of tennis as a cultivated battle within pastoral order. This blending supports metaphorical compression (prestige, tradition, combat, grace) into singular images.

2.2. Multimodal metaphors and semiotic ensembles

Some scholars (Forceville, 2009; Hidalgo Downing & Kraljevic Mujic, 2011) emphasise the multimodal nature of metaphors, arguing that visual metaphors often co-occur with linguistic and auditory cues, forming rich semiotic ensembles. In this sense, visual metaphors are not isolated phenomena but components of integrated communicative strategies. They interact with typography (serif elegance vs. sans-serif modernity), colour (greens and whites of tradition, purples of royalty), motion graphics (slow-motion ascents) and sound design (orchestral crescendos) to construct layered meanings that resonate with cultural narratives and audience expectations. This multimodal perspective is indispensable for analysing contemporary visual culture, where meaning-making often transcends the boundaries of a single modality.

Multimodal metaphor theory argues that different modes can provide parts of a metaphor's source or target, or jointly cue the mapping (Forceville, 2009; Koller, 2009). In Wimbledon's case, the integration of visual heritage markers (laurel-like motifs, crest), spatial compositional cues (central alignment, symmetry), and narrative editing (build-up, climax, resolution) jointly instantiate metaphors of tradition-as-foundation, excellence-as-summit, and competition-as-ritual. Metaphorical mappings manifest in imagery through different aspects, such as spatial arrangement, gesture capture or iconic resemblance. A tennis player depicted on steps or ascending a gradient invokes VICTORY IS ASCENT; split screens of opponents activate the schema of OPPOSITION IS BINARY POLARITY. Visual metaphors, therefore, manifest CMT's mappings via iconicity (resemblance) and indexical cues (context, framing), often without textual support (Forceville, 2009; Koller, 2009).

2.3. Embodiment and perceptual salience in tennis

Embodiment is a fundamental concept in cognitive linguistics, a concept that emphasizes the essential role of the body —its physical structure, sensory systems, motor abilities, and environmental interactions— in shaping how we use and interpret language. In Cognitive Linguistics, embodiment is crucial since it underlines how bodily experiences shape language structure, meaning as well as processing (Varela et al., 1993; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). As Pelkey (2023, p. 1), states, we need to bear in mind "the many layers of bodily meaning that we rely on when thinking and communicating as human beings."

Within the sport industry, we should consider that in general this domain offers visually tractable embodied schemas —force, balance, rhythm, trajectory— that readily support metaphor. Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) notion of "embodied realism" postulates that abstract reasoning is grounded in sensorimotor schemas —movement, container— which are extended metaphorically to domains like competition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Wimbledon 2024 coverage exemplifies that, since Wimbledon's imagery often mobilises WAR (SPORT IS WAR), ASCENT (VICTORY IS ASCENT) and JOURNEY (COMPETITION IS A JOURNEY) metaphors to frame matches as heroic endeavours, players as leading characters and victory as excellence/magnificence. Metaphors such as "battle" or "fortress" draw on embodied schemas of combat, spatial containment and they narrativise matches.

The grass court itself, emblematic of heritage, functions metaphorically as purity or order, contrasting with the agitation of competitive struggle. Visual strategies —stormy skies or elevated camera angles, for instance— indicate interpretations consistent with noble context or moralized ascent, referring to cultural models of merit and resilience (Kövecses, 2010; Koller, 2009). Wimbledon's visual imagery often invokes metaphors that devise athletic performance as heroic or dramatic. The conceptual metaphors mentioned above permeate promotional visuals, shaping audience perception through culturally entrenched schemas. For example, a darkened sky and lightning around a tennis player can activate the metaphor COMPETITION IS BATTLE AGAINST NATURE, merging physical exertion with basic struggle. Such representation does not only decorate, but they construct narratives that elevate sporting events to the realm of spectacle and myth.

Regarding salience, a cornerstone concept in cognitive linguistics, it has to be highlighted that it denotes the extent to which specific linguistic elements capture attention during discourse (Boswijk & Coler, 2020). In cognitive linguistics specifically, salience informs how image schemas and conceptual metaphors are structured: recurring patterns that are prominent in experience become foundational cognitive resources. The salience of schema-based mappings facilitates their entrenchment in grammar and usage. Overall, salience functions as a bridge between perception, cognition and language: salient elements guide attention and interpretation and thus shape linguistic form. It should be highlighted that salience plays a particular dynamic role in news regarding sports in general and live sports, such as Wimbledon 2024.

According to Giora (2003), perceptual salience —the prominence of specific stimuli— guides metaphor selection. Salience operates bottom-up (dramatic events attract attention) and top-down (cultural scripts prime expectations). In the men's final, Carlos Alcaraz's straight-sets victory over Novak Djokovic (6-2, 6-2, 7-6) was framed through metaphors of dominance and siege, anchored in salient episodes like the 14-minute opening game and missed championship points[1]. Similarly, Barbara Krejčíková's oscillating performance in the women's final invited metaphors of resilience and balance[2].

Embodiment explains why these metaphors reverberate. Readers simulate force dynamics (Talmy, 2000), path schemas and verticality when processing phrases such as "opening the court" or "pressure mounted". Some empirical studies demonstrate that sensorimotor strength accelerates metaphor comprehension (Gibbs, 2006). For instance, "pressure" evokes tactile and interoceptive cues and "storming through" activates motion schemas—both perceptually graphic and therefore salient.

Salience also determines metaphor families dominating sport discourse. In sports in general, and at Wimbledon in particular, the media recurrently employs "combat", "journey" and "performance" frames (Charteris-Black, 2004). Wimbledon's grass surface primes a terrain schema, reinforcing battlefield metaphors, while ritual aesthetics (royal box, white attire[3]) cue ceremonial frames. Two cognitive mechanisms sustain metaphor "stickiness": attentional gating, where salient match episodes amplify metaphors aligned with focal points (Giora, 2003), and multimodal entrainment, where visuals of sliding foot work and pace variations enhance embodied simulations (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009). These mechanisms explain why metaphors like fortress Centre Court or changing of the guard recur and resonate.

[1] Guardian Sport, 2024a.

[2] Guardian Sport, 2024b.

[3] Guardian Sport, 2024c.

As we will confirm in the next sections, metaphor in Wimbledon coverage serves social functions: scaffolding collective emotions and national pride (Spain's "golden day" across tennis), while offering cognitively tractable scripts for complex performances[4] .

2.4. Visual-verbal hybridity in Sports discourse

Most human communication involves more than just language—it draws on multiple modes at once. Within Wimbledon mediated ecology —press releases, live broadcast, social feeds, on-site signage and press photography— visual and verbal resources work as a single cognitive system that scaffolds how different kinds of audience perceive and conceptualise the sports event. From a cognitive linguistic point of view, this hybridity is not merely ornamental, but it regulates which conceptual metaphors are activated and how they are stabilised in memory. Verbal framings such as "epic battle", "giant killing" or "fortress Centre Court" cue entrenched mappings (SPORT IS WAR, COMPETITION IS A JOURNEY), while images —grass-stained kit, the purple-and-green palette; tight shots of clenched fists, sweat-slick forearms— materialise these mappings, making abstract schemas perceptually concrete. The result is a multimodal blend in which language shapes inferential structure and visual supply evidential force, co-creating the felt reality of Wimbledon as a theatre of disciplined struggle and ritual tradition (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kress & Van Leuven, 2006).

A central feature of the hybridity mentioned is the metaphor-metonymy interplay (Hidalgo Downing & Kraljevic Mujic, 2011). Photographs often work metonymically while commentaries wrap things in metaphorically framing. When a slow-motion replay isolates a serve that "explodes off the racket", viewers map KINETIC FORCE to PROJECTILE MOTION (the SERVE AS BULLET schema). This image affords trajectory, speed and impact; the commentary supplies the cross-domain mapping that elevates mechanics to meaning. Such co-activation aligns with research showing that visual cues can prime metaphor-compatible inferences, increasing processing fluency and affective intensity (Forceville, 2008; Gibbs, 2017).

At Wimbledon, we have to bear in mind the aesthetics of tradition, the whites-only dress code, ivy-laced facades and the tournament heraldic colours—, which act as a multimodal ground for metaphors of purity, restraint and timelessness. Verbal descriptors such as "hallowed turf" or "sacred Centre Court" immediately activate RELIGION/SPACE metaphors, while visuals of manicured lawns and ceremonial routines metonymically anchor the sacred frame in material culture. The hybrid effect naturalises a narrative of continuity and decorum even when the play is explosive, positioning Wimbledon as the zenith of tennis —an evaluative stance disseminated through broadcast and the news (Wilson, 2015; Billings et al., 2017).

Embodiment underwrites these effects. Viewers simulate force, balance and effort when watching motion, and the news assembles this resonance with verbs of impact ("crush", "sting") and balance metaphors ("on the back foot"). The coupling amplifies experiential realism, conferring plausibility to metaphors because they rely on felt bodily schemas (VERTICALITY, FORCE DYNAMICS. CENTRE-PERIPHERY). Studies in embodied metaphor processing (Gibbs, 2017, Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) suggest that congruent visual-verbal pairings facilitate comprehension and memory, whereas incongruent pairings disrupt coherence —an economy that sports producers exploit through meticulously aligned cuts and effects.

Hybridity further also contributes to persona construction, especially when we deal with well-known tennis players. Photographic angles, colour grading and logo placement collaborate with adjectives ("grass-court maestro", "next-gen disruptor") to build branded cognitive models of players. Metaphors of artistry (ATHLETE AS CRAFTSPERSON) versus warfare (ATHLETE AS WARRIOR) cue completely distinct evaluative inferences —precision, patience and touch versus aggression, courage and domination. Wimbledon's iconographic sobriety tends to privilege artistry and heritage. Journalists as well as fans use these metaphors and at the same time they distribute cognitive models across a participatory network (Forceville, 2008).

Finally, the iterative loop—prime, perceive, reframe—explains why specific metaphors "stick" in Wimbledon's memory archive (e.g. Centre Court as a "cathedral") while others vanish. In this sense, hybridity is the mechanism by which conceptual metaphors become public cognition, a shared

[4] Guardian Sport, 2024d.

repertoire of mappings repeatedly rehearsed until they feel like the natural language of an event (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002; Kress & van Leeuven, 2006).

3. Corpus and method

Throughout history, technology has consistently driven and enabled shifts in news discourse. In 2024 we decided to gather a corpus related to Wimbledon 2024 and as Triantafyllou et al. (2025, p. 92) highlight, "the internet now occupies a remarkable position with characteristics, such as interactivity, virtuality, and openness." This article, thus, presents the methodological process behind the creation and qualitative and quantitative analysis of a 29,865-word corpus of tennis reporting published by The Guardian during the 2024 Wimbledon Championship.

The aim of this corpus-driven study was to explore the density and variety of metaphorical language, particularly conceptual metaphors and image metaphors—that characterise contemporary sports journalism. While sports linguistics has long acknowledged metaphors as a key rhetorical device in the representation of competition performance, and athletic identity (Caldwell, 2020; Shekhovskaya, 2020), few studies (Caballero, 2012, Pirs & Pirs, 2014) have examined metaphor use through a carefully selected, event-specific corpus that balances textual quantity with close manual reading. Corpus-based studies have shown that metaphors can occur on their own or clustered in sets of related metaphorical concepts (Deignan, 2016). Yet, for linguists, pinpointing conventionalised metaphorical lexical items is typically carried out using a lexical approach that relies largely on the researcher's own examination of words. As Philip (2011, p. 156) notes, "Corpus query software is designed to retrieve specific words, but if those words cannot be identified before the data is analysed, how can they be extracted in the first place?"

The method described here was therefore designed to enable a detailed and fine-grained identification of metaphors. The corpus consists of 29,865 words extracted from The Guardian online coverage of Wimbledon 2024. To maintain methodological transparency, only freely accessible articles published between the opening day of the tournament and the day after the men's final were included, because this ensured a homogeneous temporal frame and stylistic consistency, since selected texts share the characteristic journalistic tone adopted by The Guardian during major sports events.

The collection process unfolded in three different stages. First, a list of relevant articles was compiled by filtering The Guardian's sports section for items tagged "Wimbledon 2024". Each article was saved locally to avoid later shifts in online formatting. The resulting dataset comprised 32 articles, which together provided a sufficiently large yet manageable body of text for qualitative and quantitative metaphor analysis. Secondly, all texts were cleaned to remove video descriptions, reader comments and hyperlinks. Only the full body of journalistic prose was kept. Significantly, no headlines or sub-heading were removed, since these often contain striking metaphors and image-based productions. After formatting and conceptual cleansing, the texts were converted into a single plain-text file. Third, the corpus was imported into a simple concordancing environment (txt) to facilitate navigation and keyword searches. Although this was not a corpus large enough to justify full computational linguistic processing, the concordancer (AntConc) proved valuable for the location of patterns around target terms such as struggle, weapon, attack, flow, groove and control—terms that frequently function metaphorically in sports discourse. Nevertheless, as explained below, the identification of metaphors relied primarily on manual scrutiny rather than automatic extraction.

Moreover, it has to be highlighted that metaphor identification in journalistic sports discourse presents a challenge because many metaphors are conventionalised to the point of transparency. Expressions such a "pull the trigger on that forehand", "crush the ball" or "the team collapsed" often passed unnoticed by readers, however, they reflect deeper conceptual structures such as DECISIVE ACTION IS FIRING A WEAPON (or SPORT ACTION IS WAR/COMBAT), HITTING THE BALL IS APPLYING FORCE TO A SOLID OBJECT, A TEAM IS A STRUCTURE/ORGANISATION IS A BUILDING. Traditional computational methods—keyword frequency, part-of-speech tagging—tend to struggle with such established metaphorical forms because they require contextual interpretation more than lexical novelty.

Following standard corpus-linguistic metaphor identification procedures (Steen et al., 2010), an initial seed list of tennis terminology was created to locate potential metaphorical expressions. This list includes:

- Technical terms: serve, return, rally, volley, slice, smash, break, drop shot, net

- Equipment: racket, court, grass, line, ball
- Actions and processes: strike, attack, defend, dominate, dictate, fight, battle
- Attributes and evaluations: explosive, flawless, unbreakable, powerful, fragile
- Competition-related expressions: finalist, champion, opponent, comeback, momentum

These lexical prompts were searched using AntConc 4.0.3, focusing on literal vs. figurative uses.

Image metaphors—metaphors in which one concrete sensory image is mapped onto another—proved particularly salient across the corpus. They typically emerged through descriptions of ball trajectory, bodily movement, or the flow of exchanges between players. Examples included references to balls "exploding off the strings" and players "absorbing pressure" as if they were physical structures. Such descriptions are not literally accurate, but they invoke shared visual and kinetic imagery to intensify the drama of the sport.

To identify image metaphors, our analysis focused on verbs and adjectives that ascribed human, animal, or machine-like behaviours to tennis shots or players' bodies. Particular attention was paid to expressions that involved motion imagery, force dynamics (Talmy, 1988, Kövecses, 2016, 2022a, 2022b) or anthropomorphic qualities. Manual reading allowed the analysis to capture metaphors that were stylistically subtle—such as "clicking into the groove", which draws on mechanical imagery while being casual enough to escape other computational classifiers.

As regards documenting conceptual metaphors, we follow the identification of individual metaphors and recurring conceptual metaphors were extracted by grouping expressions that belonged to broader underlying mappings. For example, some expressions related to aggression ("using her weapons", "on the front foot") were classified under SPORT IS WAR/COMBAT. On the contrary, expressions involving smooth functioning ("finding rhythm", "in the groove") were assigned to PERFORMANCE IS MACHINERY or FLUENCY IS FLOW. Personification metaphors—such as a set "slipping away" or matches having an "air" were catalogued under EVENTS ARE BEINGS.

This conceptual grouping was also conducted manually, because automated tools tend to group lexical similarity rather than cognitive mapping. Hence, the interpretive flexibility of human judgement was crucial to avoid false positives and to recognise subtle metaphorical coherence across stylistically different articles.

In the next section, we will categorise all the metaphors into different groups and we will analyse them in depth.

4. Analysis of metaphors

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First with a Concordance analysis, where each seed term was queried in AntConc's Concordance tool. Keyword-in-context (KWIC) lines were examined to determine whether the term was used literally (tennis domain) or metaphorically (non-tennis domain). Cases exhibiting semantic tension between domain expectations and context were flagged as metaphorical. Secondly, the Clusters/N-Grams and Collocate tools were used to identify recurrent multi-word expressions involving tennis terminology. These patterns reveal whether the corpus systematically extends tennis concepts into broader evaluative or narrative frames (e.g., "fight back", "hold her nerve", "dictate points"). Thirdly, we identified the contextual meaning, determining the more basic, physical-tennis meaning and we evaluated whether the contextual meaning contrasts with the literal one while retaining a form of cross-domain mapping.

Metaphors were categorised into (table 1): conflict metaphors, emotional state metaphors, moral/behavioural metaphors, narrative/heroic metaphors, mechanical or embodied metaphors. The study's reliability was strengthened by revisiting ambiguous cases twice and comparing concordance lines across different players and narrative contexts.

As an initial result we found that the corpus was rich in figurative tennis language, but more importantly, journalists frequently use combat, emotion, national identity, morality, and narrative drama metaphors rooted in tennis terminology. Through the text, we identified five major metaphor families:

1. Conflict and Warfare metaphors
2. Emotional/metaphors of psychological struggle
3. Behaviour and morality metaphors
4. Narrative or heroic journey metaphors
5. Mechanical/embodied performance metaphors

Table 1. Metaphor Categories, Examples and Interpretations

Metaphor category	Examples from Corpus	Interpretation
War / Conflict	roared back; battle; crushing; flattened; spirited comeback	Frames tennis as combat; intensifies drama and stakes
Emotion / Psychological States	fog; fire; rollercoaster; anxiety	Dramatises internal states; humanises players' emotions
Moral /Behavioural Order	genteel; insportsmanlike; bad boy; code violations	Imposes moral norms; constructs Wimbledon as an ethical space
Journey /Heroic Narrative	swansong; run to the final; path to redemption; full-circle	Franes careers as heroic journeys with narrative arcs
Mechanical / Craft	unbreakable; clicked; toolbox; lego	Depicts performance as mechanical or crafted; highlights precision

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

Table 2. Conceptual Metaphor Systems, Appearance and Effects

Conceptual System	Appearance in Corpus	Communicative Effect
Tennis is War	combat verbs: fight, battle, crush, flatten	Frames matches as violent confrontations: enhances stakes.
Sport Is a Heroic Journey	path, run, swansong, full-circle	Creates mythic progression and narrative coherence.
Emotion Is Weather /Heat/ Motion	fog, fire, rollercoaster	Gives vivid imagery to internal states; increases resonance.
Behaviour Is Moral Order	genteel, unsportsmanlike, bad boy	Reinforces Wimbledon's tradition and norms.
Body /Performance is Machine /Craft	unbreakable, click, toolbox	Highlights precision, reliability, engineered performance.

Source: Own elaboration, 2026

These examples (table 2) show that metaphors are basically used within a specific cultural environment and they are not something isolated or individual, since as Caballero (2012, p. 703) highlights, when analysing metaphors, we should examine how they are "enriched, re-elaborated, and, presumably, entrenched within a given community through repeated use."

Table 3. Frequency of Metaphor Categories in the Corpus

Category	Occurrences
War / Conflict	76
Journey / Heroic	44
Emotion/ Psych	37
Moral /Behaviour	19
Mechanical /Craft	6

Souce: Own elaboration, 2026

Quantitatively (table 3), the corpus revealed a strong dominance of WAR/CONFLICT metaphors (n=76), followed by JOURNEY/HEROIC (n=44) and EMOTION/PSYCH metaphors (n=37), with MORAL/BEHAVIOUR (n=19) and MECHANIAL/CRAFT metaphors (n=6) appearing less frequently.

These distributions echo earlier findings that sports events are often conceptualised through conflict schemas (Charteris-Black, 2004; Spurr, 2001). Yet, in tennis —and particularly in Wimbledon— this war frame intertwines with distinctive traditions of ceremony, restraint, and heritage. Expressions such as battle, fight, crushing defeat, and holding off a comeback not only activate embodied schemas of force dynamics and opposition (Talmy, 2000) but also frame tennis players as combatants navigating tactical frontlines.

The JOURNEY/HEROIC metaphors (e.g. path to redemption, run to the final, swansong, full-circle moment) instantiate the athlete-as-protagonist narrative structure typical of broadcast sports storytelling (Semino, 2008). These metaphors draw upon spatial and motion schemas —ascending, progressing, turning back—, which reflect deeper embodied scaffolds for conceptualising achievement and transformation (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gibbs, 2006). Wimbledon journalism thus builds coherent personal trajectories for players such as Krejčíková, Paolini or Raducanu, reinforcing a sense of destiny, progression and catharsis.

EMOTION metaphors (e.g. fog of thoughts, fire back, rollercoaster of emotions) further illustrate how internal states are conceptualised through perceptual experience. These expressions activate simulations of temperature, motion, pressure or opacity — sensorimotor domains that readers can directly imagine, thus enhancing narrative immersion. Literature on embodied metaphor processing supports this: grounded in physical experiences (pressure, ascent, force) exhibit faster processing and deeper affective salience (Gibbs, 2017). Wimbledon's emotionally charged atmosphere —particularly in tight matches or comeback scenarios— provides fertile ground for such mappings.

The presence of MORAL/BEHAVIOUR metaphors underscores Wimbledon's unique sociocultural identity. Terms such as genteel, unsportsmanlike conduct, bad boy, and references to rule-breaking, reinforce the tournament's self-image as a site of decorum, elegance, and tradition. This moral framing is part of a broader cultural narrative that positions Wimbledon not only as a sports event but as a ritualised performance of heritage. Behavioural metaphors thereby serve as evaluative tools, enabling journalists to maintain the boundary between acceptable and transgressive conduct.

4.1. Visual, multimodal and image metaphors: Wimbledon as a semiotic ensemble

While the corpus analysis focused on verbal data, the theoretical discussion highlights that Wimbledon's discourse is fundamentally multimodal. Visual features —uniform whiteness, manicured lawns, architectural symmetry, camera angles, slow-motion replays— act as non-verbal metaphor triggers. Image metaphors (Lakoff, 1987; Forceville, 2009) further enrich the narrative: a racket resembling a weapon, players framed against stormy skies, or Centre Court elevated as a "cathedral" all evoke conceptual domains such as WAR, NATURE, ASCENT, or RELIGION. These visuals ground metaphorical inferences in perceptual resemblance, enabling fast, intuitive conceptual blends (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). Visual metaphors are not isolated artistic choices but manifestations of underlying cognitive structures that rule interpretation.

Wimbledon functions as a semiotic environment where typography, colour (the purple-and-green palette), choreography of ceremonies, and even the acoustic texture of crowds collectively contribute to multimodal metaphors of tradition, purity, elevation, and ritual struggle. This hybridity between visual and verbal cues creates a reinforced cognitive model, rendering metaphors vivid, memorable, and "sticky". It also explains why particular metaphors —cathedral of tennis, hallowed turf, changing of the guard— become entrenched cultural shorthand.

4.2. Embodied realism and perceptual salience in elite tennis narratives

Embodiment provides the cognitive grounding that enables these metaphors to resonate. Wimbledon coverage recurrently activates schemas such as VERTICALITY, FORCE DYNAMICS, BALANCE, and TRAJECTORY — directly experienced in the physical enactment of tennis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). A 14-minute opening game, a player "mounting pressure", or a rally where one player is "on the back foot" exemplify how journalists rely on embodied metaphors to translate kinetic events into conceptual meaning. Salience mechanisms (Giora, 2003) ensure that dramatic match episodes guide metaphor choice, aligning linguistic framing with the most attention-capturing moments.

The interplay of perceptual cues and metaphorical structure reinforces audience perception. Viewers simulate bodily sensations —effort, speed, elevation— while language provides interpretative scaffolding. This produces a coherent experiential narrative in which Wimbledon is collectively conceptualised as a theatre of embodied excellence, ritual tradition, and heroic endeavour.

In examining the visual and discursive system surrounding Wimbledon 2024, the interplay between conceptual metaphors and image metaphors as well as sports narratives emerges as a central mechanism through which meaning is produced, circulated and culturally anchored. This section contextualises the findings within the debate on sport media representation attending to how conceptual and image metaphor shape public interpretations of athletic performance and identity.

Salience captures how particular forms, meanings or linguistic structures attract cognitive attention through a dynamic interplay of factors such as frequency, prominence, expectations and novelty. The reflections carried out address the interpretive implications of the aforementioned metaphors, explore the resonance within contemporary sports communication, and consider their contribution to the evolving visual lexicon of global tennis.

5. Conclusion

It is by means of rhetorical devices such as metaphors that people communicate different kinds of information. Metaphor is not something decorative, but something crucial to conveying meaning, especially in the articles of The Guardian regarding Wimbledon 2024. Wimbledon is definitely associated with a prestigious brandname, which is why our goal when gathering the corpus was to compile a focused, coherent set of texts that reflected how the event was described, framed and narrativised, to particularly highlight the metaphors that sports journalists as well as athletes used during the tournament.

The method we employed—careful corpus construction combined with slow, deliberate manual reading—demonstrates that high-density metaphorical language in sports/tennis journalism can be captured only through an approach that respects contextual nuance (Kövecses, 2022b). The Wimbledon 2024 corpus from The Guardian provided an ideal testing ground for such analysis, revealing an impressive variety of images and conceptual metaphors that shape how readers experience professional tennis. By foregrounding the methodological value of small, carefully gathered and manually analysed corpora, this study contributes to ongoing discussions within visual communication and metaphor studies about the interplay between sporting spectacle, linguistic creativity and cognitive framing.

The central claim of CMT is that everyday reasoning about abstract domains —time, emotion, morality, institutions— is structured by systematic mappings from familiar, embodied source domains to more abstract target domains. The domain of sports provides fertile ground for metaphorical representation, given its inherent dynamism, competitiveness and emotional intensity, which is the reason why the effectiveness of visual metaphors in sports imagery hinges on their ability to tap into shared cultural models and embodied experiences. Wimbledon's imagery often draws on notions of tradition, elegance and resilience, aligning with metaphors that conceptualise tennis as a test of character rather than mere physical skills. In this research we have, for example, checked that at Wimbledon 2024, coverage of Carlos Alcaraz 's straight-sets win over Novak Djokovic and Barbora Krejčíková's three-set triumph over Jasmine Paolini offered rich terrain for image metaphors.

However, while the discussion engages multimodal and embodied perspectives, the analysis itself does not empirically code audio-visual materials or measure audience effects, limiting claims about multimodal reinforcement and cognitive impact. These factors collectively restrict generalisation and causal inference, though they provide a strong foundation for future, more comprehensive multimodal and cross-event studies.

Future research may expand this analysis through comparative corpora (e.g., contrasting Wimbledon with Roland Garros or the US Open), inclusion of broadcast audio-visual data for multimodal annotation, or empirical experiments measuring audience responses to metaphor-rich versus metaphor-neutral descriptions. Ultimately, Wimbledon provides a uniquely fertile terrain for exploring how metaphor shapes not only the language of sport but its cultural imagination, anchoring elite tennis in shared schemas of struggle, ascent, morality, and identity.

In sum, Wimbledon 2024 reporting illustrates how embodied schemas and perceptual salience co-determine metaphor choice and impact: bodily grounded image-schemas provide the grammar of tennis narratives, and salience filters which metaphors become The Guardian's most persuasive storytelling tools.

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