Metaphorical conceptualization in national sports

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Abstract. The article addresses a number of issues in the study of conceptual metaphors related to their nature, typology, and functioning in various discourses. Metaphorical conceptualization on the material of the Yakut language has not so far been systematically explored in the cognitive linguistics literature on metaphor. On the basis of the theoretical framework of conceptual metaphor theory, the paper analyses creative and frozen metaphors and their systematic interconnection during conceptualization in sports discourse. The basic metaphor of sports discourse SPORT IS WAR is frequently elaborated by metaphorical nominations, such as “bootur” (ancient Yakut warriors), “soldaty” (soldiers), etc. In national sports, conceptual metaphors vividly and expressively reflect the specificity of not only the language, but also the history, traditions, and the metaphorical conceptualization of a particular ethnos.

1 Introduction

The problem field of cognitive studies of metaphor includes the mechanism of metaphor generation and its systematic nature. However, studies of the nature and typology of metaphors were largely conducted on the basis of lingua francas. The national and cultural specificity of metaphorical conceptualization has not been dealt with in-depth. The aim of the research was therefore to reveal the specificity of conceptual metaphors used in national sports on the material of the Yakut language.

The materials analyzed were Russian-language articles from traditional regional printed newspaper “Sport Yakutii” (Sport of Yakutia) and Yakut-language reports from the official YouTube channel “NVK Sakha”. The national sports tournament “The Games of Dygyn” occupies a special place in the Yakut culture; it contributes to the formation of the Yakut national identity.

1.1 The discourse of spoken and written sports reportings

In mass media, conceptual metaphors are generally used due to their potential to provide vivid narratives and to highlight various aspects of a sporting event. For Crystal and Davy, spoken broadcasting differs from a written report in its live nature of the produced text; it is created spontaneously and without much premeditation. The guiding principles for commentators are, thus, to achieve fluency and retain audience interest [qtd. in 1, p. 34-35]. This attribute of the genre determines the extensive use of conceptual metaphors.

2 National-cultural specificity of metaphorical conceptualization

Conceptual metaphors are ubiquitous in language and thought because they help to understand abstract concepts through the use of more specific terms. A conceptual metaphor is “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” [2, p. 5]. Frozen metaphors are a part of everyday language, fixed correlations between source and target domains in our conceptual system.

Moreover, metaphorical conceptualization is a dynamic process that is characterized by different factors: sensorimotor, cultural, and linguistic experiences [3]. In everyday life, conceptual metaphors perform at least three cognitive functions: they structure our conceptual system, conceptualize abstract concepts in more understandable terms, and create a new understanding of our experience [4, p. 8]. This conceptual organization determines the generation of creative metaphors that can be extensions, elaborations, or combinations of conventional ones [5, p. 261].

For Kövecses, one of the contexts that influences the use of conceptual metaphors is a conceptual-cognitive context, which includes the metaphorical conceptual system in general, ideology, knowledge about past events, and interests and concerns of a community or an individual [qtd. in 6, p. 199]. Putz describes metaphorical conceptualization as a dynamic process in which the construction of new meanings and the reinterpretation of old ones are more similar among representatives of the same culture. The relationship
between cognition and culture manifests itself in language [7, p. 9] and can help to reveal a typical conceptual system. In other words, a thorough study of the mechanisms of metaphorical conceptualization contributes to a better understanding of the national and cultural specificity of conceptual metaphors.

3 Discussions

3.1. Metaphorical conceptualization in Russian-language national sports

In the context below, we find the use of frozen metaphors which explains the sportsmen’s actions:

(1) “Спортсмены буквально вышли в банк. Стачки были слишком высоки, чтобы останавливаться” IPA:/þ sportʃə/ ‘meni buŋ k’alvə vix’ diliŋ va bank staf’l/ bili $li$šəŋkam viva’ k’/ [8].

(1) Athletes literally went all-in. The stakes were too high to make a mistake.

The frozen metaphors ва-банк IPA:/va bank/ and ставки IPA:/staf’l/ are gambling metaphors (SPORT IS GAMBLING) and they focus readers’ attention on a certain aspect of a sport event. “Ва-банк” has the following meaning in the dictionary: for all the money, risking everything [9]. The conceptual domains of gambling and sports competition share more or less similar frame structures: in both, the outcome of risk is victory or loss. In addition, professional sports and gambling are associated with great responsibility and the risk of failure – injury to the participants.

(2) Думаю, Байнаи спорта дал мне время подумать. Ведь когда человек всё время побеждает, то он теряет истинный вкус победы и начинает расслабляться IPA:/dumajʊ bjr’naj sportə da mne vrem’ pe’ dumaj vedi/ k’ʒa da tənh’ vek f’so vrem’ po’bɪz’ da(ʃ)ʃ tɔ on tə və(ʃ)ʃ jɨt is’vin(ʃ)ʃ jɨ fkus pe’ bɛdi i nətəl n(a)(ʃ)ʃ rəs’le bia’tʃvə’s ʃ[.]

(2) I think Baianai of sports gave me time to think. After all, when a person wins all the time, he loses the true taste of victory and begins to relax.

In this context (2) we see the creative metaphor Байнаи спорта IPA:/bjr’naj sportə/, which reflects the Yakut belief in the spirit of hunting – Baianai. In this case, special attention should be paid to the mechanism of creative metaphor generation: as in the traditional occupation of the Yakuts (hunting), the athlete is metaphorically helped by the spirit. The conceptual metaphor SPORT IS HUNTING is verbalized with Baianai. According to the Yakut mythology, Baianai notes and subsequently awards luck to generous hunters who share their success. In our opinion, the athlete metaphorically shares his “game” (prizes) with other “hunters” (participants) in order to be lucky in the future.

(3) Все мои лучшие годы и вся моя молодость были брошены на альтарь Дыгына IPA:/f’sa mə jə luʃhəjə godi i f’s/ə mə ja molbədə$ bili broʃəni na ul’tar’ digmə/ [10].

(3) All my best years and all my youth were thrown on the altar of Dygyn.

Here (3) we find the frozen metaphor of Russian language “принести на алтарь” IPA:/prɪˈnɛj stːi na ul’tar (to put on the altar) used in a creative form – thrown on the altar of Dygyn. This metaphor refers to the national sports tournament “The Games of Dygyn”. Competitions are held annually on the day of the Ysyakh festival, which has been considered a sacred celebration of the Yakuts since ancient times. In this case, metaphorical conceptualization allows the author to convey the “sacred” meaning that the tournament has acquired for the athlete. Many years of hard training of the athlete are metaphorically compared to making a sacrifice on the altar in the form of constant training without leisure. This metaphorical usage in Russian sports discourse should not be confused with the English phrase “be sacrificed on the altar of something” with the following meaning in the dictionary: “to be destroyed by an activity, system, or belief that is bad but more important or more powerful” [11]. On the contrary, the Russian phrase “принести на алтарь” has no negative connotation and is marked as a poetic phrase [12].

We also see the extensive use of war metaphors, which conceptualize sport as war. For more clarity, let us present the basic metaphor of sports discourse SPORT IS WAR and its elaborations together:

(4) 24 боосур IPA:/botərə/ [8, p. 5].

(4) 24 booturs.

(5) Сегодня мы стали очевидцами захватывающих баталий IPA:/stːɪ vɔd’ɪŋ mi stəli tʃət’vɨʃ ʃn’i zxi vətɪvəjə:ʃx bə təl’ʃj [8, p. 5].

(5) Today we witnessed exciting fights.

(6) Как видишь, один в поле не воин. Нужен хороший тренер IPA:/kak vidɪʃ u’dɪn f pə lə və vnuʃ x’rọj iʃn’i [8, p. 7].

(6) As you can see, one warrior does not make a battle. A good coach is needed.

(7) Намские боосур продолжают побеждать IPA:/namskɨ boʊʃʊ rə prəd’l zəjʊt pəbɪz’ dat’/ [8, p. 11].

(7) Namsky booturs continue to win.

(8) Намские универсальные солдаты продолжают успешно выступать в якутском многоборье IPA:/namskɨ ʊnɪvɜr’slənʃə səldə’tə prəd’lə zəjʊt o’spəŋə vɪstʊ pa’f (j) kutsɨk kənəx bəɾje [8, p. 11].

(8) Namsky “universal soldiers” continue to perform successfully in the Yakut multisport competition.

(9) Победителем же стал намский боотур Артем Варданян IPA:/pəbɪt’ɹi’tɨlm jʊ stə namskɨj boʊtʊr ɪɹ’om vərdən’ɨn/ [8, p. 11].

(9) And the winner was Namsky bootur Artem Vardanyan.

(10) И под конец мы узнаем, готов ли он принять вызов на «Битву века» IPA:/tət kə’niŋtʃ mi uz na(ʃ)ʃ ʊŋ tɔ nɪ pn’iŋt vɪzə̆ na bitvə vəkə/ [10, p. 6].

(10) And at the end, we find out whether he is ready to accept the challenge of the “Battle of the century”.

(11) Плох солдат, который не хочет стать генералом IPA:/plɔʃ tɔl səl də tə kə’tɔriŋ n’t mɪtˑtə(ʃ)ʃ tɔ stat gən’əl rəbər’/ [10, p. 6].

(11) A soldier who does not want to be a general is a bad soldier.
(12) Сейчас победитель Игорь Дыгына не только могучий и сильный боотур, но и всесторонне развитый спортсмен IPA:/siˈrəx ˈʃəbət dɨˈɪlɪ ɪɡɬ dɪɡɨn nɪ tɔlˈkɔ mɬ ɡuɬɛɬ ɪ ɬɪɬɪɬ boɾʊ ɬɪ i fɔˈɪstɹəˈronˈeː rəzˈvɪtɪj spɔrtstˈmɛn [10, p. 7]...

(12) Next the winner of the Games of Dygyn is not only a mighty and strong bootur, but a well-rounded athlete.

(13) After Nikolai Nikolaevich, finally the Vilyui Matannanov.

(13) And the battle of the titans, it will be like a show.

In these contexts, athletes are metaphorically understood as warriors (6), general (11), soldiers (8, 11), and booturs (ancient Yakut warriors) (4, 7, 9, 12). Sports competitions, in turn, are represented as fights (5) and battle (10, 11). As we can see in these Russian-language articles, the metaphor bootur is used extensively, which is determined by cultural and historical contexts. This metaphorical nomination is a more specific subcategory of the war metaphor: the warrior metaphor in sports discourse has a greater degree of conventionality and broader meaning than bootur. Thus, the authors of the regional sports newspaper consider the knowledge of Yakut readers, which contributes to the correct interpretation of figurative expressions and the achievement of a metaphorical effect.

3.2. Metaphorical conceptualization in Yakut-language national sports

In our opinion, creative metaphorical extensions in the Yakut language have unique and original cross-domain mappings between the source and target domains. In the contexts below, we also find the elaborations of the basic conceptual metaphor of sports discourse SPORT IS WAR [13]:

(14) ‘1 Кытычаартарын сортохторурүң дөң дөқаастаабыт улахан өрө буҳатыырдар IPA:/kʊtuˈtxaːtʊɾʊn sɔrˈtɔxtoɾʊɾɨn ɬiɛ dəˈqɑɑstɑːˈbʊɾʊxɑn ɯʊlɑxɑn eɾɛ bʊxɑtʊuurʊrdɑr/…

(14) Great bogatyrs who have proved that they can participate.

(15) ‘Н Николай Николаевич, finally the Vilyui booturs.

(15) ‘I think it is a big responsibility that he follows in his father’s footsteps and takes part again.

In the above contexts (14, 18), Yakut athletes are metaphorically understood as “буҳатыырдар” IPA:/bʊxɑtʊuurʊrdɑr (ancient Yakut warriors, bogatyrs). These conceptual metaphors, in our opinion, refer to the characters of the heroic epos Olonkho who are known for their unusual strength and courage. As we can see in the contexts (15, 17, 19), athletes are also metaphorically presented as booturs – ancient Yakut warriors. The nicknames of the Yakut athletes Khohuunay (16) and Stone Bootur (17) deserve special attention for analysis. Khohuunay comes from the word khoːuuna, which in the northern and Vilyuysky District of Yakutia meant brave and courageous people, especially warriors and hunters [14]. Stone Bootur, in turn, metaphorically compares the sportsman’s athletic build and endurance with him being a stone warrior. The characteristics of stone (for instance, firmness) are extrapolated to the participant of the competition. These conceptual metaphors are vivid figurative nominations that achieve expressiveness when describing sporting events.

(20) ‘5 Артыны төйіштігін хатаран бу қылға өзін күмегі түйір булахан эпіпіэтнэс дүү санымсызды ɨpə ɬaйətтүүн туюян кэді бүлүү эмйө ɬuұxan ɬaйɬaн ʉɬaн аяɬттүү ɬaяɬттaɬны ти ɬaяɬттaɬны баɬстaабыт бuʊtʊɬр dуɬuуɬууɬ ʉɬaяɬттaɬны бaстaабaт бuʊtʊɬр бuɬ аш ʊɬuɬyɬyɬүү ɬи ɬe бaɬуaɬы.

(19) ‘Bootur, who will take first place in the Dygyn Games, will take one million with him.

In sports discourse on the material of the Yakut language, we also find metaphorical nominations related to the war: bogatyr (14, 18), bootur (15, 17, 19), and Khohuunay.

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(19) ’34 Дығын Оңғүүтүүлүр өз аттабыт бuʊtʊɬр биш өшүүкүү үшүү ɬуɪɬaяɬттaɬны ɬaяɬттaɬны бaстaабaт бuʊtʊɬр бuɬ мөлүүүңү ɨɬе барууа.

(19) Bootur, who will take first place in the Dygyn Games, will take one million with him.
source domain the concepts related to parts of the leg: a foot and a hoof by which humans and animals make a “journey”.

When describing cross-cultural variations in metaphorical conceptualization, Kövecses outlined the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION [5, p. 84]. It may be argued that the Yakut phrase metaphorically conceptualizes honoring someone’s memory as cherishing a dear thing, a precious commodity. This interpretation of the metaphorical conceptualization of the previous generation corresponds to the above etymology given by Kulakovskiy. Thus, the phrase metaphorically understands remembering someone’s life and following in their footsteps as taking care of, valuing, and admiring their hooves (LIFE IS A PRECIOUS POSSESSION).

(21) ‘7 Владимир Фёдоров, Нурбя молодой иччата, боо-таха кэффтенээх, тимир иилиизээ, тимир атаахтаах IPA:/vladimir fjodorov nurba molojо uʃ[t]a baʃ[t]a taʃ[t]a кэфтенээх тимир иилиизээ атаахтаах/13].

(21) Vladimir Fedorov, a young man from Nyurba, of strong build, with an iron arm and an iron leg. In this context (21), we see creative metaphors that describe the athlete’s physical characteristics as having an iron arm and an iron leg. These metaphorical usages refer to his body as being made of iron. Iron is a strong, hard metal, much used as a material for construction and manufacturing [18, p. 923]. Thus, the athlete’s arm and leg characteristics are metaphorically regarded as similar to the strength, firmness of iron.

(22) ‘8 Егор Филиппов… Хангалас хотойо… бэйэтин кэпката кэптет айкайлыдаах кэпката IPA:/jegor filippov xanajas xoʃ[t]oʃ[t]o beʃ[t]iʃ[t] keʃ[t]епката keʃ[t]епката/13].

(22) Egor Filippov… The Khangalassky eagle… wearing his cap… the cap with Baianai. As we can see in the context above (22), the creative metaphor the khangalassky eagle is used. The athlete is metaphorically conceptualized as a large bird of prey – an eagle. Moreover, an eagle is known for its powerful flight and keen sight. The athlete Egor Filippov is famous for his performance in jumping (which is metaphorically compared to an eagle’s flight) and archery (the athlete’s precision in which metaphorically compared to having an eagle’s sight).

Moreover, we find the frozen metaphor with Baianai, which has the following meaning in the dictionary: someone with their Baianai who helps in hunting; lucky in hunting [19]. Therefore, this metaphorical usage is highly conventional (present in dictionaries) and realizes the conceptual metaphor SPORT IS HUNTING. The athlete’s cap (head covering) is metaphorically conceptualized as bringing him luck in “hunting” (tournaments).

(23) ‘31 Егор Филиппов этин-сиинин кэдээхээ, дээ кэдээхээ бэйэт харая уота син умааин IPA:/jegor filippov etin siинин кэдээхээ ё кэдээхээ бэйэт харая уота син умааин/13].

(23) If we look at Egor Filippov’s body, in fact, his eyes are on fire this year.

In the context above (23), we see the frozen metaphor харая уота умааин IPA:/xarya uota uota umajан. We find the following meaning of the Yakut word “yor” IPA:/uot/: inner burning, passion, fire (for example, of love) [20, p. 233]. Moreover, this word is used as a component in the Yakut phrase “yor ҥүүлүү күй” IPA:/uot kurduk kii/ (Yakutsk litt.: ‘a man like fire’) with the following meaning: a person who stops at nothing, quick, and clever [Ibid., p. 236]. In the English language, in turn, we find the phrase “on fire” with the meaning: “very strong emotion, especially anger or enthusiasm” [21]. Thus, the conceptual metaphor in both languages expresses a person’s emotional state. In the analyzed context (23), the athlete’s performance is directly linked to the metaphorical fire in his eyes, which describes his psycho-emotional state, passion, and enthusiasm to win the tournament.

4 Conclusions

Conceptual metaphors achieve audience interest, evoke certain emotions and influence evaluations of a sporting event. The basic metaphor of sports discourse SPORT IS WAR is frequently extended by metaphorical nominations (bukhatyr, soldaty, etc.). The specificity of the national sports tournament and its importance in the Yakut culture allows the authors and commentators to extensively conceptualize the Yakut athletes as national heroes – bogatyrs and booturs. In national sports, conceptual metaphors vividly and expressively reflect the specificity of not only the language, but also the history (bootur, Khohuunay), traditions (Agatyn tuyagyn khataran), and the metaphorical conceptualization of a particular ethos (the Sakha). The national and cultural specificity of conceptual metaphors contribute to an easier perception for audience due to a similar conceptual-cognitive context with authors or commentators.

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