

METAPHORICAL PERCEPTIONS OF CURLING ATHLETES TOWARDS THEIR FIELD OF SPORT

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the metaphorical perceptions of curling athletes regarding their sport. The study employs a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design. The research group consists of 60 athletes, including 36 women and 24 men, competing in the 2023-2024 Season Turkey 2nd League promotion matches. Data collected through semi-structured interviews were analyzed using content analysis methods. In the data collection process, each athlete was given a personal information form and asked to complete the sentence: "Curling is like.....; because it....." The data analysis followed the stages of naming, elimination, category development, ensuring validity and reliability, calculating the frequencies of the obtained metaphors, and interpreting them. As a result, the obtained metaphors were dimensioned into four categories. These categories are "Development," "Relaxing Element," "Life," and "Social Environment," with the most frequently produced metaphors identified as life, future, and entertainment.

Keywords: Curling, Metaphor, Perception

Introduction

Sport is a universal activity that provides physical, spiritual, and personal development. Its unique rules include discipline. Thanks to that, sport contributes to the success of the individual in education and improve his/her health, social, and economic life (Memiş Kartal, 2020). The desire of individuals to have and maintain a healthy body, along with the efforts to achieve sports success on an international level, increases the interest in sports within society (Pekel et al., 2023). Moreover, sport is a universal phenomenon in attracting the masses and bringing society together (Sunay and Balçı, 2003). The Olympics are undoubtedly one of the most prominent organizations where sport unites the masses. Olympic sports are divided into summer games and winter games (Türkiye Milli Olimpiyat Komitesi, 2024). Winter sports are categorized into two main branches: those performed on snow and those performed on ice (Yıkılğan, 2016). Curling is one of the sports performed on ice. Curling is a team sport, played on ice, where two teams take it in turns to slide stones made of granite towards a target (World Curling Federation). In addition to imparting skills such as speed, endurance, and flexibility to players, the curling branch contributes to the development of fine motor skills through the importance of sensitivity when releasing the stone. Curling, known as ice chess, is also a strategy game. Therefore, this branch also contributes to the development of tactics, creativity, and mental endurance in athletes. This team sport has been played in our country since 2010. Curling, which first carried out its activities under the roof of the Turkish Ice Skating Federation, has continued its activities under the roof of the Turkish Curling Federation, which was established with its own name since 2015. Many tournaments, championships, courses and camps have been organised in order to introduce and popularise curling in our country. This situation has led to an increase in interest in the branch especially in cities such as Erzurum, Kars, Kocaeli, Ankara, Samsun and Trabzon where curling halls are located. The fact that there is a very wide age scale makes this sport branch more and more popular day by day. In this context, scientists also emphasize the importance of investigating perceptions towards curling.

Metaphors are words or phrases that help to express our thoughts about a phenomenon in the shortest way. Recently, metaphors have been frequently used to determine the sport concept (Yetim and Kalfa, 2019). Metaphors have been defined in various ways. A metaphor represents a set of cognitive concepts underlying the meaning conveyed by language, expressed through lexical and grammatical tools that any language can exhibit (Dobrić, 2010). Therefore, metaphors can express the same meaning even if they are different (Lakoff and Johnson, 2010). The word metaphor originates from Greek. Known as "metapherein" or "metafora," the word "meta" means "to change" and "pherein" means "to carry" (Levine, 2005). Individuals often use metaphors to make sense of their experiences and share these meanings interactively with others (Craig, 2018). Metaphors have been intensively researched in various fields of social sciences, especially since the 1980s (Aydın and Pehlivan, 2010). In Turkey, many studies on metaphors are conducted in various disciplines of social sciences, particularly in educational science. Sports sciences is a field where analogies can be used frequently both in theory and in practice, and are also very favourable to metaphor creation.

Upon examining the literature, different studies reveal metaphorical perceptions of primary school students towards physical education classes, football referees' perceptions of fair play, gifted students' perceptions of physical education classes and teachers, disabled athletes' perceptions of coaches and sports, and university students' perceptions of sports (Arslan, Tekkurşun Demir, İlhan and Mutlu Bozkurt, 2019; Gür and Taşkın, 2022; Pekel, et. al, 2023; Yetim and Kalfa, 2019; Yılmaz, Esentürk, Tekkurşun Demir, and İlhan, 2017). Research on curling athletes includes studies examining their levels of continuous anxiety, problem-

solving skills, and mental endurance (Ağduman, 2023; Süleymanoğulları and Tozoğlu, 2021). Additionally, there are studies on metaphorical perceptions directly related to the sports branches of rugby and korfbal athletes (Erarslan, Halıcı, and Livmercan, 2022; Pekel, et al, 2023). However, no studies have been found to determine the metaphorical perceptions of curling athletes regarding their branch.

The aim of this research is to determine the perceptions of actively competing curling athletes regarding the concept of curling and how they interpret this concept. According to Lakoff and Johnson (2010), metaphors can be a guide for our future actions. It is believed that the research will contribute to the literature by expressing the thoughts of curling athletes about their branch, thereby shaping and, if necessary, altering the approaches of coaches, athletes, and the branch itself.

Material and Method

Ethics Committee Permission

The research was implemented after the ethics committee decision of Gazi University dated 26.12.2023 and numbered E-77082166-604.01-848812 was obtained.

Research Model

This study was designed as a phenomenological study, which is one of the qualitative research designs, aiming to explore the perceptions of individuals interested in the sport of curling. Phenomenological studies aim to reveal individuals' experiences and perceptions related to a specific phenomenon, as well as the meanings they attribute to these perceptions (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2021). The metaphor method, on the other hand, is used to uncover perceptions on a subject or phenomenon. In this context, metaphors were utilized to determine the perceptions of individuals who are licensed and actively involved in the sport of curling.

Research Group

The research group consisted of a total of 60 athletes, 36 women and 24 men, who took part in the matches to qualify for the Turkish 2nd league during the 2023-2024 season. The ages of the athletes ranged from 14 to 31, with an average age of 18.

Data Collection Tool

The data collection tool was designed in two stages, in line with expert advice. Firstly, the demographic characteristics of the study were analysed; secondly, the phrase "Curling is similar to... because..." was used to determine active curlers' perceptions of the sport. The participants completed the given sentence and explained the metaphor they used with the expression "because". The researchers were careful not to use any directive expression when giving instructions to the participants.

Data Analysis

The obtained data were analysed using the content analysis method, starting with an examination of the forms in the analysis process. Subsequently, 3 forms that did not contain metaphors and meaningful explanations, were excluded from the scope of the study. The remaining forms were numbered and listed. Then, the category development stage was initiated, and the relationship between metaphors and explanations was evaluated. They were matched with conceptual categories that the researchers reached a consensus on. As a result of the analysis, similar expressions were categorized, grouped under themes, interpreted, and reported. To ensure the reliability of the data analysis, the data were evaluated by 3 field experts and the results were compared. The formula developed by Miles and Huberman in

1994 was used for the reliability of data analysis. During the research process, a total of 29 metaphors were generated, and disagreement was identified on 2 metaphors (competition and dart). The average reliability among the coders was found to be 93% $[25 / (25 + 2) \times 100 = 93\%]$. According to these results, the research achieves the desired level of reliability.

Findings

In this section, demographic information of curling athletes, the metaphors, categories and explanations about their sports are presented with examples.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variant		F	%
Gender	Female	36	60
	Male	24	40
Age	14-18	37	61.67
	19-23	13	21.66
	24+	10	16.67
Sport Age	1-2	28	46.67
	3-4	18	30
	5+	14	23.33
Perceived Income Level	Low	5	8.33
	Moderate	44	73.34
	High	11	18.33
		60	%100

Table 2. Metaphors developed by curling athletes for the concept of curling

Metaphor sequence	Metaphor name	f	Metaphor sequence	Metaphor name	f
1	Future	7	16	Chess	1
2	Fun	5	17	Milestone	1
3	Life	7	18	Career	1
4	Part of Life	3	19	School	1
5	Everything	3	20	Food	1
6	Family	3	21	Education	1
7	Work	3	22	Competition	1
8	Trust	2	23	Dart	1
9	Home	2	24	Brain Exercise	1
10	Activity	2	25	The Adventure of Life	1
11	Like	2	26	A Branch of Life	1
12	Friend	2	27	Hometown	1
13	Hobby	2	28	Friend	1
14	Goal	2	29	Passion	1
15	Meditation	1			
TOTAL OPINION					60

When Table 2 is analysed, it is seen that curling athletes produced a total of 29 types of metaphors related to the concept of "Curling" and expressed 60 opinions for this concept. Future (7), Life (7), Entertainment (5) metaphors were found to be the most repeated metaphors. Curling athletes generally made analogies to abstract expressions (trust, hobby, entertainment, activity, love, passion, purpose, meditation, etc.) to explain the concept of curling. According to the frequencies of the metaphors, it was determined that the majority of the metaphors were metaphors that curling is life.

When the metaphors developed by curling athletes about curling are evaluated together with their explanations, their classification as four categories is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of metaphors developed by curling athletes according to categories

Categories	Number of metaphors (f)	%
1. Development	10	34.48
2. Relaxing Element	8	27.59
3. Life	6	20.69
4. Social Environment	5	17.24
TOTAL (29)		100.0

According to Table 3, the athletes stated metaphors under four categories for the concept of curling. These are development (10-34,48%), relaxing element (8-27,58%), life (6-20,68%) and social environment (5-17,24%) categories.

Examples of categories and participants' explanatory statements within these categories are given between Table 4 and Table 7.

Table 4. Metaphors and Explanation Statements of "Development" Category.

Category	Number of Metaphors (f=10)
1. Development	Work (3), Career (1), School (1), Purpose (2), Chess (1), Darts (1), Brain Exercise (1), Education (1), Competition (1), Milestone (1)

Extracts from athletes' comments;

Work; Curling is my job and I love my profession (P54).

Chess; Strategically, we try to remove the opponent's piece and leave our own piece inside. (P48)

Darts; because we try to make our throws reach the exact target. (P59)

Purpose; I had no purpose before I started curling. Now it is for my future. (P52)

Milestone; My life became beautiful with this sport. (P49)

Brain Exercise; We have to develop a strategy according to the points where the stones stand. And our strategy may vary in every throw. Curling is a brain exercise for me because we put the strategy we think into practice. (P60)

As seen in Table 4, a total of 10 metaphors were mentioned in the category of "development" related to the concept of curling. As it is understood from the explanatory statements, it is understood that the participants consider curling as their future job and they create a life plan for this branch.

Table 5. Metaphors and explanation statements of "relaxing element" category.

Category	Number of Metaphors (f=8)
2. Relaxing Element	Fun (5), Hobby (2), Meditation (1), Activity (2), Food (1), Trust (2), Like (2), Passion (1)

Extracts from athletes' comments;

Pleasure; I really enjoy curling, the sense of competition is very satisfying (P33).

Activity; A branch of sport that I use in my spare time (P42).

Like; I spend the most important and happiest moments of my time here (P45).

Confidence; I have moved away from my bad environment (P28)

Food; Just as food is a vital necessity, curling is a necessity for my dreams. (P40)

Hobbies; I use my free time (P35)

As seen in Table 5, a total of 8 metaphors were mentioned in the category of "relaxing element" related to the concept of curling. As it is understood from the explanatory statements, it is seen that the participants see curling as an element of entertainment and evaluate it as a hobby and meditation area for the purpose of utilising their free time.

Table 6. Metaphors and explanation statements of "life" category

Category	Number of Metaphors (f=6)
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3.Life	Life (7), future (7), life adventure (1), part of my life (3), a branch of life (1), everything (3)
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Extracts from athletes' comments;

Life; I spend most of my time with curling and my expectations are based on curling... (P33)

Life adventure; I have never had such a great opportunity in my life. I also want to build my future through curling. (P1)

Future; My dream is to be a national athlete. (P19)

Future; I want to be a personal trainer. (P14)

Everything; In order to achieve my goals, it's my everything (P21)

A branch of life; the only sport I love and value (P4)

As seen in Table 6, a total of 6 metaphors were mentioned in the category of "life" related to the concept of curling. It is clearly seen in the explanatory statements that the participants see curling as the most important element in their lives and that they take it to the centre of their lives.

Table 7. Metaphors and explanation statements of "social environment" category

Category	Number of Metaphors (f=5)
4.Social Environment	Friends (2), family (3), hometown (1), home (2), mate (1)

Extracts from athletes' comments;

Friend; When I come to the field, just like when we lean on the shoulder of a friend and forget our problems, I forget all my problems here. (P24)

Family; I get along well with my teammates and my club. It is a team sport. My team is like my family (P31).

Hometown; I love and get attached to it like I love my hometown (P27).

Home; a place where I can express myself. (P30).

Mate; I enjoy as I spend time (P29).

As seen in Table 7, a total of 5 metaphors were mentioned in the category of "social environment" related to the concept of curling. As it is understood from the explanatory statements, it is seen that the participants evaluate curling as a sincere environment and associate it with elements such as friends and family.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this research, the aim was to determine athletes' perceptions of the concept of curling through metaphors. At the end of the study, it was found that athletes expressed a variety of metaphors related to the concept of curling. In this context, they developed a total of 29 different metaphors related to the concept of curling. Upon examining these metaphors, the most frequently mentioned ones in terms of their frequency related to the concept of curling were future, life, fun, family, and everything. These 29 metaphors were mentioned a total of 60 times. These metaphors were categorized into 4 different categories, namely "development, relaxing element, life, and social environment," based on their frequency of occurrence.

In the category of Development, it is observed that participants created 10 different metaphors. These are; "job, career, school, purpose, chess, dart, brain exercise, education, competition, turning point." A total of 34.48% of the metaphors belong to this category. In a study investigating sports managers' metaphorical perceptions of the concept of organization, it is noted that managers mentioned a total of 8 metaphors in the "Purpose" category related to organization. From the descriptive statements given for each metaphor, it is observed that participants emphasized that every organization has a specific purpose, such as education or for a festival, highlighting that every organization is done with a purpose (Kurtipek and Güngör, 2019). In a study conducted by Yetim and Kalfa in 2019, university students taking a

sports activity class responded to the prompt "Write down the first three words that come to your mind when you hear the word 'sports'" with 306 different words describing sports. As a result, metaphors such as physical development, development, self-improvement, purpose, competition, education, and school support our study.

In the Relaxing Element category, it is seen that participants created 8 different metaphors. These are; "fun, hobby, meditation, activity, food, trust, love, passion." A total of 27.58% of the metaphors belong to this category. In a study investigating university students' metaphorical perceptions of sports, it is also observed that the most frequently created metaphors fall under the relaxation category. According to the responses given in the relaxation category, it is seen that students perceive sports as a means of relaxation, having fun, and escaping from mental problems (Yetim and Kalfa, 2019). In a study examining the metaphoric perceptions of sports by 208 university students studying in three different faculties: education, medical, and sports sciences, it is observed that the most produced metaphors were related to the peace-happiness category (Sevinç and Ergenç, 2017). In a research examining the metaphorical perceptions of korfball sport, it is also parallel to our study that the third most frequent metaphor for korfball players regarding korfball is entertainment (Erarslan, Halıcı, and Livmercan; 2022).

In the Life category, it is observed that participants created 6 different metaphors. These are; "life, future, life adventure, part of my life, branch of life, everything." A total of 20.68% of the metaphors belong to this category. It has been determined that abstract concepts such as the future and life are often used as metaphors for the concept of curling. This is particularly evident as athletes, whose average age is 18, primarily perceive curling as life and the future, clearly showing that they shape their lives around this sport and plan their futures accordingly. In a study examining university students' metaphorical perceptions of sports, it was found that life, a part of life, and a lifestyle are among the most frequently perceived metaphors (Yetim and Kalfa, 2019). Similarly, badminton athletes also identify badminton with their lives (Yetim, Bıdıl, and Argan, 2015). In a study examining the metaphorical perceptions of rafting athletes regarding the concept of rafting, it was found that the most identified metaphors are life and love (Şirin et al., 2012). This clearly shows that participants consider rafting as a part of life and an activity related to life itself. In Ayyıldız's 2016 study on university students' metaphorical perceptions of the concept of dance, it was found that the most cited metaphors are life and water. This indicates that students perceive dance as a part of their lives. In a study examining middle school students' metaphorical perceptions of distance and face-to-face physical education and sports classes, it was found that students emphasize "health, life, and fun" the most regarding physical education classes (Yavuz, Yavuz, and İlhan, 2022).

In the social environment category, it is observed that participants created 5 different metaphors. These are "friend, family, homeland, home, companion." A total of 17.24% of the metaphors belong to this category. In a study examining the metaphors of summer sports school athletes regarding their coaches, it was found that athletes produced 132 metaphors. The most produced metaphors regarding the concept of a coach are father (11.8%), friend (10.6%), older brother (9.6%), and older sister (6.9%). It is observed that athletes identify their coaches with a family member inside the home (Güler, 2017).

The perceptions of individuals who are members of sports clubs regarding the concept of sports were attempted to be identified through metaphors. The most produced metaphors by participants are family, tree, home, rainbow, and friendship (Kurtipek, 2019). Similarly, in a study determining the perceptions of sports managers regarding the concept of organization

through metaphors, it was found that the most produced metaphors by sports managers are family, car, human body, and puzzle (Kurtipek and Güngör, 2019).

In conclusion, the metaphors expressed by curling athletes participating in the promotion competitions to the 2nd league are presented in a wide range. A total of 60 athletes expressed 29 different metaphors. The obtained metaphors are categorized into 4 dimensions: "Development," "Relaxing Element," "Life," and "Social Environment," with the most produced metaphors being life, future, and entertainment. It was observed during the interviews that the limited opportunities in the eastern regions and the athletes, whose average age is 18, strive to build their futures through curling and that many of them dream of becoming national athletes. Their placing curling at the center of their lives and expressing metaphors such as life, life adventure, part of life, and branch of life supports this situation. This research is limited with the athletes participating in the second stage of the 2nd League promotion competitions. It can be recommended to conduct similar studies with a more comprehensive sample of athletes engaged in different winter sports branches or curling sports.

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