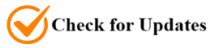


The Metaphorical Perception of Fencing Referees Towards the Concept of Fencing

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Abstract: The aim of the research is to reveal the metaphorical perceptions of the fencing referees towards the concept of fencing. 80 fencing referees who are actively licensed participated in the research. Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. In obtaining the data, a personal information form was applied to each referee, and the referees were asked, "Fencing is like/similar to.....; because....." were asked to complete the sentence. All participants took part in the research voluntarily. The data were analyzed by content analysis technique. In the data analysis, the stages of coding, category development, validity and reliability, creating and interpreting themes were followed. When the referees' perceptions of fencing were examined, it was concluded that they perceived fencing as a strategy, struggle, emotion, and life element. Although it is thought that the research can be a source of ideas for field education and other studies to be conducted in the field, it is considered that research conducted in larger sample groups and different disciplines will contribute to the field.

Keywords: Fencing, referee, sports, perception, metaphor.

1. Introduction

Fencing is a sport discipline that requires physical skills and technique, individuals' working capacity and willingness to work as a determining factor, requires the mind to compete over time to cope with unpredictable challenges (Cheris, 2002), requires skills such as agility, quickness and reaction to adapt to situations with instantaneous variability (Yao, 2022), is performed in three disciplines: epee, foil, and sabre within the framework of specific rules with its unique equipment and has a long history (Tümlü, 2009). Fencing is not only a physical combat sport discipline but also a thinking sport discipline known as the art of defending against an opponent's attack and, therefore, requires strategic intelligence (Barth & Beck, 2006).

In fencing, the number of variables needed to analyze strikes is very high, which makes fencing refereeing difficult and complex. Therefore, the key to success in fencing refereeing is to make the right decision by quickly gathering information from various variables and the positions of the player's limbs. Making the right decision is only possible by paying attention to the necessary environmental cues and the areas containing the essential information. The fencing referee must know they will respect the rules, ensure they are followed, and fulfill their duties with the strictest impartiality and absolute concentration (International Fencing Federation, 2021).

Referees, who play an essential role in conducting competitions fairly and by the rules, are responsible for ensuring justice in the competition with their decisions and attitudes (Karacam & Adiguzel, 2019; Pekel et al., 2023). Therefore, to make decisions appropriate to the level of the competition, they should have mental competencies such as impartiality, determination, communication, stress management, attention and concentration, analytical thinking,

empathy, and self-confidence (Mascarenhas et al., 2005; Firek et al., 2020; Gorczynski & Webb, 2021). Therefore, fencing referees' perceptions and thought processes influencing decision-making are critical (Aghakhanpour et al., 2021).

Metaphors can be used to determine the perceptions of fencing referees that affect their performance and decision-making process. While metaphors help individuals describe their perceptions of the concept in their minds with concrete concepts (Saban, 2004), they contribute to interpreting and clarifying the concept by seeing different aspects of the concept and revealing how concepts are perceived (Randall & Jennifer, 2005). Metaphors can reflect individuals' life experiences and determine their perceptions (Godor, 2019). In this way, connections are established between our minds and concepts without changing the underlying meanings of the concepts (Kövecses, 2002).

It is thought that examining the perceptions of fencing referees towards the concept of fencing with the help of metaphors will allow evaluation of the referees' thought systems, conceptual errors, ideas, and opinions about fencing.

When the literature is examined, there are metaphor studies on the concepts of different sports disciplines, sports, physical education, physical education teacher, coach, and referee (Ayyıldız, 2016; Çalışan & Pekel, 2024; Demiral & Demir, 2018; Karaşahinoğlu & İlhan, 2019; Kozak et al., 2020; Yazıcı, 2020; Ceylan & Kozak, 2021; Güllü, 2021; Karagün, 2021; Petroniene et al., 2021; Pekel et al., 2022; Makaracı et al., 2024). However, there is no research examining the perceptions of fencing referees towards the concept of fencing. Therefore, the primary purpose of this research is to explore the perceptions of fencing referees toward the concept of fencing with the help of metaphors.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Group

In this research, the research group was determined through convenience sampling. A total of 80 referees, 54 males and 36 females, actively working as licensed referees in Turkey, participated in the research.

2.2. Research Design

In this research, phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used to determine the perceptions of active fencing referees about the concept of fencing through metaphors. This research method aims to determine the perceptions and events in the natural environment holistically and realistically (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006).

2.3. Data Collection

As a data collection tool, a personal information form was applied to the active fencing referees participating in the research, and they were asked to complete the sentence "Fencing is like/similar to; because....." to determine the metaphors related to the concept of fencing. The relation between the metaphor and its source was determined using the word "like." The reason and meaning attributed to the metaphor were tried to be revealed with "because." While informing the participants, care was taken to avoid directive statements.

The research group was informed about the basic design and importance of the research. After the information, the relevant data collection tool was sent as a digital Google form to the fencing referees who wanted to participate voluntarily. The data obtained were evaluated, and forms that were unsuitable for the purpose or incorrectly answered were not included in the data set.

2.4. Data Analysis

This research used the content analysis method to analyze and evaluate the data. Content analysis identifies, counts, and interprets recurring issues, problems, and concepts in qualitative data (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Silverman, 2000).

First, the data were numbered from 1 to 80 for data analysis. The numbered metaphors were examined, and coding was performed in line with the explanations. During coding, a code list was created in line with the meanings expressed by the metaphors. The relationship between the codes was examined, and the data were made meaningful by determining the categories that best describe the feature. Metaphors are frequently used in qualitative research due to their features, such as analyzing the multiplicity of the data obtained (ease of categorization), establishing a pattern between the data, and providing convenience in transferring the data to the reader (Sadık & Sarı, 2012). In qualitative research, to ensure

validity and reliability, the data and analyses were checked by the individuals being researched, and the interpretations of the data set and analyses were presented to experts (Ekiz, 2009). In addition, the research was evaluated using Miles and Huberman's (1994) formula ($\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{agreement}}{\text{agreement} + \text{disagreement}}$). In qualitative research, a desired level of reliability is achieved when the agreement between the researcher and expert evaluations is 90% and above (Saban, 2008). This research showed that the metaphors were grouped under the same themes with a 94% agreement rate. As another reliability method, direct quotations were made by including the explanations used by the fencing referees to describe the metaphors.

Microsoft Excel database program was used to analyze the data. Metaphors with similar meanings were grouped into 4 themes (Table 1).

While creating the data set, blank forms that did not specify a metaphor, forms that specified more than one metaphor, or forms that specified a metaphor but did not provide a reason were excluded from the data set. In addition, some referees stated their thoughts about fencing instead of using a metaphorical image. However, they expressed a metaphoric image and did not provide any basis for the metaphor. For these reasons, 5 forms were excluded from the research.

2.5. Ethics Committee Permission

Ethical approval was obtained for his research from the Ethics Committee of Gazi University with decision number E-77082166-604.01.02-197013. Before data collection, participants were thoroughly informed about the study through a detailed presentation and subsequently provided written consent. The research was carried out in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

3. Results

As a result of the analyses, the metaphors were divided into meaningful themes according to their differences and similar characteristics and transformed into tables. A few examples of the metaphors were also included. The metaphors produced by the fencing referees participating in the research for the concept of "fencing" are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the metaphors produced by fencing referees about the concept of fencing according to the characteristics and categories attributed to the source from the subject

Conceptual Themes	Codes
Strategy	Standing chess, brain training, chess, chess of swords, strategy game, war
Struggle	Long road, labyrinth, struggle, passion, inner strength, he fierce clash of two gunslingers, war
Emotion	Love, nicotine addiction, the rose that does not fade when plucked, substance abuse, family, food for the soul
Life	Life, real life, life itself, carbohydrates

It was observed that the same codes were used for some themes (Table 1). The metaphors in these codes are included in different themes because they have different meanings. For example, participant 20 stated the "war" metaphor with the explanation, "Fencing is like a war because even if the opponent is your brother, you attack him to win." The code was included in the theme of "being an element of struggle." Participant 36 defined the metaphor of "war" as "fencing is like war because it is important which action you take at which time. The code was included in the theme of "being an element of strategy" because he used the metaphor of "war" with the explanation "strategy can only be successful if it is applied in place. Statements from participants that were assumed to have high representational value were included in the conceptual themes sections.

3.1. Fencing as a Strategy Element

While strategy is defined as a set of preferred ways and methods for predetermined goals when the metaphors created by the participants for the concept of fencing were examined, the strategy was examined as two subgroups within itself.

Some of the participants who were identified as having a strategy element likened fencing to chess. Participants who liken fencing to chess distinguish/are aware of the concepts of being agile/fast in fencing and making moves in a specific time interval in chess. In this respect, most participants who liken fencing to strategy say this analogy by explaining the concepts of making decisions in seconds, constantly having the brain active, doing it in the fastest way, and doing it fast, versatile, and quick.

Some of the other participants, who were determined to have a strategy element, ignored the concept of speed, unlike the first participants, and used fencing in terms of strategy in terms of “predicting the future” such as “planning the next move, analyzing the opponent, anticipating the opponent's behavior in advance, anticipating a few moves ahead, planning, predicting the next move, using brain power and planning every step.”

Participant 3 said, *“Fencing is like chess played with swords. This is because the strategies employed in fencing are similar to those in chess. There are game styles based on attack superiority or defense.”* When this statement is examined, it becomes clear that fencing is not merely a physical contest requiring agility and speed, but also a mental encounter based on strategy. In this context, it is evident that success depends on making the right moves at the right time and anticipating the opponent's movements, and that fencing is evaluated as a dynamic strategy game played with swords.

Participant 41 said, *“Fencing is like chess played standing up. Because in fencing, you need to predict your opponent's next few moves and create attacks and counterattacks accordingly. You need to determine your strategy well and apply your tactics accordingly.”* When this answer is examined, it is understood that it is not sufficient to simply determine a general strategy for effective performance, but that it is also important to apply tactics appropriate to this strategy in a timely and correct manner.

3.2. Fencing as a Struggle Element

Individuals may sometimes encounter positive or negative situations in their private and professional lives. Compared to weaker people, mentally strong people can control what is happening in life, focus on what they need to do, stay calm in unexpected situations, and think about turning the results of disadvantageous events into advantages (Yıldız, 2017). When the metaphors created by the referees in the fencing category as an element of struggle were examined, they were explained with expressions such as war, inner strength, struggle, and maze.

Participant 19 said, *“Fencing is like war. Because even if the opponent is your brother, you attack him to win.”* is quite remarkable. The concept of attacking can be used both positively and negatively. Here, it is a positive attack on the structure of the fencing discipline. Hurting him may be practiced more to win the race than to harm his brother. A similar situation can be seen in other sports with close contact (such as wrestling). The aim is to perform sporting behavior (sportsmanship) to win the race rather than a damaging or destructive attack.

When Participant 46's response is analyzed, it is stated that *“Fencing is like the power within us. Because when power is used correctly, it takes you to the top. When it is too much, you find yourself at the bottom. Fencing raises you within yourself, and you use that power correctly. There can be no other situation. Because it does not allow this, and it is the one who establishes this balance.”* He states that the fencing discipline, and probably sports in general, can be done with a power that comes from within us and that when it is used in place and on time, it brings us to the top in terms of success or in terms of experiencing emotions, and that all of these can be used in a balanced way. He states that when fencing, we should respect the opponent and the referee by saluting them. When we win a point, in this case, we should focus on the rest of the game without immediately showing joy, saying that “it is he who establishes this balance.”

Participant 76 said, *“Fencing is like a maze. Because it requires dedication to reach the exit among the winding paths.”* When Participant 76's answer is analyzed, it is seen that a maze is a complex structure with corridors that are not any way out. Finding the right path may sometimes be necessary to take a long way and sometimes make mistakes. Passing through these paths repeatedly and continuing without giving up also requires dedication.

3.3. Fencing as an Emotion Element

Emotions, among people's most essential experiences, play a role in coping with events in interpersonal relationships and mental health issues. Emotional expression is a structure that points to some key aspects of interpersonal relationships (Wearden et al., 2000). Emotional expression, which is one of the ways of conveying our needs and

expectations to others (Ölçer et al., 2010), has different interpretations, such as taking a hostile attitude, being overly interested, being critical, or establishing intimacy (Berkun, 1992; Wearden et al., 2000). When the metaphors created by fencing referees as the element of emotion were examined, they were explained with expressions such as love, nicotine addiction, rose that does not fade when plucked, substance addiction, and food for the soul.

Participant 23 said, "Fencing is like nicotine addiction. Because it is there in every emotional intensity and worse, sometimes your hand searches for it even if it is out of control." Nicotine probably refers to cigarettes. The individual desires to leave the negative emotional state and move to a positive one (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988). In this process, they develop a coping response. In this case, they may show various behaviors. Cigarette consumption is a passive coping method and has relaxing, pleasurable, and satisfying aspects (Işıktas et al., 2019). Therefore, the participant may be fencing as a method of stress reduction here while stating that "at some times, even out of control, his hand searches."

Participant 27's statement, "Fencing is like a rose that does not fade when you break it. Because you want to let go many times, but you can't." When the statement is analyzed, the rose metaphor points to the beautiful, the good, and some emotions. A rose is a plant that withers when plucked. In the sense of metaphor, the fact that it does not wither is probably trying to explain the feelings towards fencing. It indicates that even if "fencing" is finished, the inner desire to fencing will continue. This statement is complemented by saying, "You want to quit, but you can't."

3.4. Fencing as a Life Element

Many factors help individuals connect to life, protect their mental health, and reveal their potential (Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Emmons, 1999). The goals that individuals create in life are among the factors mentioned. Goals, which are defined as the internal representations of the results that individuals want in their lives (Austin & Vancouver, 1996), are expressed as a higher concept that includes variables such as individuals' desires and individual struggles, which are different from each other but interrelated (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). When the metaphors of the referees in the category of fencing as an element of life were examined, the concept was explained with expressions such as life, real life, and life itself.

Participant 14 stated that "Fencing is like real life. Because both try to achieve a certain goal over a certain period. There are ups and downs in this time. Still, the gain is born to the one who adapts to these problems the fastest." In this definition, the participant refers to the "perceived locus of control" by stating that real life and fencing are like each other and try to achieve a specific goal. External locus of control refers to controlling one's life by external factors (fate, luck, etc.) (Rotter, 1966). He states that the secret of success in real life and fencing lies in those who can "adapt the fastest" to the problems that arise. The expression of being able to adapt quickly to problems is like the concept of "endurance" in the sports psychology literature. In a review, it was generally stated that the concepts of "exposure to problems" and "positive adaptation" work together in resilience (Sarkar & Fletcher, 2013). Accordingly, the current participant emphasizes that adaptation is essential to achieve fencing and real-life goals.

When the metaphor created by Participant 37 is analyzed, it is stated as follows: "Fencing is like life. Because it contains many emotions in life. We reflect what we learned from our coaches and ourselves to the athlete's character and whole personality." Due to its nature, fencing is a sports discipline that requires maintaining composure, focusing, acting strategically, and managing emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. He states that these behaviors are a training process during fencing training, from the beginning to the end, and that the training gained from this sport can be used throughout life.

4. Discussion

The importance of mental strength for being a good referee in sports competitions is revealed in many studies (Duvinage & Jost, 2019; Terekli & Çobanoğlu, 2019; Uzgur et al., 2021). For referees to manage their mental processes well and minimize mistakes, evaluating their perspectives on fencing is essential. Metaphors used for different purposes in research were used to determine the perceptions of fencing referees towards the concept of fencing.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that different categories are created in metaphor studies on various subjects. In this research, the categories of strategy, struggle, emotion, and life were made due to the evaluation of the metaphors used by the referees.

When the metaphorical approaches of the referees were analyzed in terms of categories, it was seen that the referees produced metaphors mainly in the theme of strategy and struggle. Fencing requires mental characteristics such as strategy, mental endurance, focus, planning, analytical thinking, and physical characteristics such as quickness, coordination, and endurance (Roi & Bianchedi, 2008; Werner, 2010). Fencing, which has a history of four thousand years as both a sport and a martial art, has evolved from primitive equipment used in actual duels to its modern form today. In history, fencing has always been a field where the strategy and struggle factor has always been at the forefront in wars, military training, duels of nobles, and physical education in many countries of Mesopotamia and Europe (Cheris, 2002; Castle, 2003; Angelo, 2017). From this point of view, the fact that most of the metaphors presented by the referees are gathered under the category of strategy and struggle is due to the nature and history of fencing. Considering today's modern fencing, it is necessary to have a good plan to be victorious in the struggle within the framework of the rules.

When the findings obtained are evaluated in terms of refereeing, the referees must reveal the knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes that will support their decisions within the framework of a particular strategy to carry out the fencing competition process in an orderly, fair, and consistent manner and to ensure confidence in the decisions made (Mathers & Brodie, 2011; Proverbio et al., 2012; Yazıcı, 2020; Popovych et al., 2022). Making fast and accurate decisions, remaining impartial, having a cold-blooded approach, and using gestures and mimics specific to fencing refereeing correctly, appropriately, and effectively can be considered primary refereeing strategies. Therefore, strategy is inherent like fencing and an element that referees need in the management process. In addition, strategic moves in fencing are among the factors that both make the game enjoyable and increase the pleasure of watching. For this reason, the fact that referees have a strategy-oriented perspective in metaphorical terms can also be associated with the fact that they enjoy their work more during match management.

Individuals in the competitive sports environment need strategies and emotions to better cope with a series of challenges related to psychological functioning in adverse situations because emotions are essential for directing strategies appropriately and correctly (Coffey et al., 2010; Birrer et al., 2012).

Emotions appear as impulses that shape, mobilize, and direct human behavior (Janelle et al., 2020) and give meaning to an individual's life (Morgan, 2011). When the metaphors produced by the referees participating in the research are examined in terms of the emotion category, it is predicted that the emotional processes of the referees who identify fencing with positive emotions may positively affect their desire to referee in this discipline because it is known that fencing refereeing is generally preferred by people who are fencing athletes.

While contributing positively to individuals' physical, psychological, and sociological aspects, sports can help individuals increase their self-confidence and better understand the meaning of life (Yetim, 2015). Considering that fencing referees mostly have a history of sportsmanship, the fact that they know fencing as an element of life that they identify with positive emotions emphasizes the importance of sports in human life. This internal experience, which comes from the referees' sporting background, increases their emotional attachment to fencing and adds a human dimension to their decision-making processes. This situation may lead them to view fencing not only as a physical activity but also as a school of life that supports human emotional and mental development.

When the researches are examined, the undeniable fact of the importance of sports in human life in physical, spiritual, and social terms within the framework of its unifying, integrating, and socializing features (Bailey, 2006; Coalter, 2005; Russell et al., 2019). reinforces the result of the research on the element of life. Referee competence can be associated with the capacity of referees to perform successfully in their jobs, their experience as a referee, and their level of motivation (Guillen & Feltz, 2011).

5. Conclusion

To improve referee competence and increase their performance, it is thought that it is essential to know the referees first. Metaphor constitutes an essential dimension of qualitative research that allows the researcher to examine the related concept in depth. In this research, in which the perceptions of referees about the concept of fencing were discussed, the fact that fencing referees predominantly approach fencing from a combat and strategic point of view may be related to the nature of the application process of the discipline as well as the characteristics of the discipline itself with the benefits

of sportsmanship life. Indeed, fencing, with its structure that requires not only direct physical contact but also a high level of decision-making skills and foresight, naturally leads referees to develop this type of perception. However, fencing should not be considered solely on a technical and strategic level. From an emotional and life perspective, it is evident that the meanings referees ascribe to fencing are influenced not only by the characteristics of the sport but also by their personal perspectives, value systems, and individual personality traits. In this context, it can be argued that the meaning constructed around fencing is more a reflection of the individual's subjective world than the objective aspects of the sport. In other words, the relationship with fencing is a multi-layered structure shaped by individual experiences. Although the research can be a source of ideas for field education and other research to be conducted in the field, it is evaluated that research with larger groups and in different disciplines will contribute to the field. Thus, it is believed that sport is not merely a physical activity, but rather an integrated experience that encompasses the mental, emotional, and social aspects of the individual.

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