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## **Between sport and war: exploration of military terminology in the Moroccan and French sports press**

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### **Abstract:**

This study analyzes the use of military terms in sports journalism in France and Morocco, examining their impact on sports storytelling. Focusing on articles from 2021 to the present, it aims to decipher the cultural and social implications of these terms in football. The use of words like "battle," "offensive,"... shows how sports are sometimes perceived through the prism of war, thereby questioning the motivations and perceptions of readers.

**Keywords:** sports press, war metaphors, sports discourse, reception, ethos

### **Introduction**

The use of war-related vocabulary in sports journalism is a common practice that generates particular interest due to its impact on the narration of sports events. This recourse,

evoking power, strategy, and combativeness, and frequently used to describe sports performances and competitions, raises questions about the underlying motivations, linguistic and cultural implications, and its reception by readers and sports enthusiasts.

We know that the world of sports is often likened to a battlefield, where athletes compete fiercely for victory. George Orwell, as early as 1945, spoke of sport as "a war without weapons." Indeed, this analogy between sports and the military is so deeply rooted in our language and culture that it frequently appears in sports media, including the written press.

In this analysis, we will examine the war metaphors in sports articles from the Moroccan and French written press, exploring how these metaphors serve to describe and analyze sporting events. Our corpus includes around a hundred sports articles from Moroccan and French newspapers, commenting on various football matches published from 2020 to the present. We will focus on understanding not only the reasons and the ways in which these so-called metaphors infiltrate

sports discourse, but also how they contribute to the self-image that sports journalism seeks to construct. In other words, we will examine how, through these metaphors, sports journalism strives to forge its ethos, according to Maingueneau's terminology. This focus on ethos is all the more relevant in the current context where the media occupy a dominant position, highlighting, as Maingueneau (2002) does, the importance of ethos in discursive analysis in the media age.

#### • SPORT IN MOROCCAN AND FRENCH PRESS

Sports journalism in Morocco and France occupies a prominent place in the media landscape of these two sports-loving nations. In Morocco, sports are deeply rooted in the national culture, with disciplines such as football, basketball, and handball generating keen interest and fervent support from fans. Moroccan sports media reflects this passion and plays an important role in covering local and international sporting events, while conveying values of national pride and identification.

In France, sports also occupy a central place, with sports such as football, rugby, tennis, and cycling captivating the public's attention. French sports media is renowned for its comprehensive coverage of sporting events, in-depth analysis, and sometimes military-tinged language to describe the exploits of athletes and teams.

Of course, sports have their own rich and specific lexicon. This lexicon is not only technical but also extends beyond the sporting domain. Football, as a cultural phenomenon, particularly shapes our language and perception of the world, illustrating its impact well beyond the playing fields; "its specialized press exerts a significant influence on the general press." Politics itself, to make itself better understood, uses it very often. The passion for the game of football seems to invade almost every aspect of society. "(Giovanni Dotoli 2012: 30)"

However, by scrutinizing the incorporation of martial lexicon within sports media coverage in France and Morocco, we immerse ourselves in two distinct media landscapes, characterized by their diversity, passion, and commitment. Lexical selection is paramount there for narrative construction and audience engagement. It is also worth noting that sports and war share a surprisingly similar vocabulary, illustrating the significant importance of the metaphorical mechanism in this lexical phenomenon.

#### • THE IMPORTANCE OF METAPHORS

Metaphors play a crucial role in our communication and perception of the world. They are not just stylistic figures embellishing language, but powerful cognitive tools that influence our way of thinking and acting. The field of study of metaphors extends well beyond linguistics, involving research in numerous disciplines such as philosophy, stylistics, anthropology, psychology, and psychoanalysis. Thus, metaphors represent a highly interdisciplinary field of study, despite the fact that exchanges and theoretical debates between the different disciplines remain quite rare and rather new. In the field of cognitive sciences, known for its interdisciplinary approach, the interest in metaphors is notable, particularly regarding the work of Lakoff and Johnson in their 1980 book, "Metaphors We Live By" (translated into French under the title "Les métaphores dans la vie quotidienne"). This book invites readers to a realization similar to that of the character David Vincent in the series "The Invaders," revealing that metaphors, like extraterrestrials, are scattered throughout our daily lives, far beyond literary texts. Often invisible, these metaphors, which Lakoff and Johnson examine, hide in our most mundane daily expressions, known as conventional metaphors or "dead metaphors."

These metaphors are also frequently found in the data we analyzed, namely a set of French and Moroccan written press articles commenting on football matches.

#### • THE MILITARY LEXICON IN THE PRINT MEDIA

In the landscape of academic and professional disciplines, the emergence of terminologies specific to each field constitutes a widespread phenomenon. Each sector of activity is indeed defined by a lexicon that is exclusive to it.

Particularly, the sports domain, and more specifically the field of football, which focuses our interest, is distinguished by the use of its own terminology. This terminology is adopted not only by the participants, namely the football players, but also by the media dedicated to this field. According to Dubois et al., specialized language can be understood as "a linguistic subsystem that gathers the linguistic specificities of a particular domain." In fact, terminology, which originated this concept, generally suffices to identify the notions and terms considered specific to this field. From this perspective, it is therefore misleading to speak of a specialized language, and specialized vocabulary is more appropriate: 440 »

Like a linguistic subset that concentrates the lexical peculiarities of a specific field. Originally, terminology, which is at the heart of this notion, primarily aimed to catalog the concepts and terms deemed specific to a field. Thus, the use of the expression 'specialized language' may seem excessive, and the term 'specialized vocabulary' appears more appropriate.

The football sector, like any specialized field, has a distinct lexicon that captures the subtleties and unique attributes of this sporting universe. However, our analysis will reveal that this sector also borrows terminological elements from other fields. A notable case is the integration of military lexicon by both football players and specialized media in this field.

We will focus, in the following sections, on exploring the terminological peculiarities specific to football, illustrating how this field integrates and reinterprets terms from other domains, such as the military, to enrich its own terminology.

#### • Moroccan press

The first observation one can make when reading not only the articles that constitute our corpus but also the sports articles, particularly those discussing football in general, is the frequent use of language relevant to the military domain. It is, more precisely, a lexicon that can be described as "bellicose." Indeed, the data we are working with contain numerous occurrences of this phenomenon.

Ex 1 "The Atlas Lions will therefore rely on the solidity of the defensive line (...) while orchestrating quick counter-attacks to try to surprise the opponent." Set pieces will also constitute a formidable weapon, especially thanks to Ashraf Hakimi's floating shots and Boufal's infiltrations into the opponent's area. (Le Matin, 24-3-2022)

By closely examining this passage, extracted from the Moroccan newspaper Le Matin, one realizes that it immediately offers fertile ground for the study of the incorporation of military lexicon in sports media coverage. The reference to the "Atlas Lions" (nickname given to the Moroccan national football team) employs an animal metaphor to evoke the strength and determination of the team, a technique often used to highlight the combative qualities of the players.

The expression "will rely on the strength of the defensive line" illustrates the strategic importance given to defense, suggesting a quasi-castle approach, where defense is perceived as an unshakable bastion. This terminology reinforces the idea of meticulous preparation and fierce

resistance, evoking defense strategies used in armed conflicts.

La stratégie des "contre-attaques rapides pour tenter de "Surprising the opponent" is presented as a calculated offensive tactic, parallel to diversion maneuvers in a military context, where speed and the element of surprise are crucial to unseat the enemy.

As for the designation of "set pieces" as "a formidable weapon," it transforms a game technique into a combat tool, amplifying the intensity and stakes of these moments in the match. The "floating shots of Ashraf Hakimi" and the "infiltrations of Boufal" are described in terms that suggest precision and tactics, where each player becomes a key actor in executing a meticulously designed attack plan.

The analysis of this sequence thus reveals how the use of military lexicon enriches sports narration, conferring an epic and heroic dimension to the competition. It also illustrates how football is perceived and presented not only as a sport but also as a theater of strategic operations, where every action and decision is framed within a context of combat and strategy. The same applies to the following:

Ex. 2: Régragui was thus playing all his offensive cards, hoping to equalize in the last 20 minutes. These reinforcements allowed Morocco to besiege South Africa, but the numerous crosses attempted from both flanks (Le matin. Tue. January 30, 2024)

The above excerpt also uses vocabulary that evokes strategies and actions typically associated with military or combat contexts, even tho it is about football here. Let's analyze the key terms and expressions:

Ex: "Régragui was thus laying down all his offensive cards": The expression "laying down one's cards" comes from card game jargon, suggesting a strategic revelation of one's assets or plans. In a military context, this could evoke the use of all available resources or strategies at a crucial moment. Here, it means that the coach used all his offensive options to try to change the course of the game. Ex: "Hoping to equalize in the last 20 minutes": Although this part of the statement does not directly use military vocabulary, the idea of hoping to equalize within a limited timeframe evokes a last-chance situation or final assault, which can be parallel to a final offensive in a combat context.

Ex: "These reinforcements allowed Morocco to besiege South Africa": The term "besiege" is deeply rooted in military lexicon, describing a tactic where a force encircles and attacks a fortified position to force its surrender. In the football context, this suggests that the Moroccan team intensely

attacked and pressured the opposing team, limiting their movements and attempting to score.

- "but the numerous centers attempted in the two corridors": Here, the language is not explicitly military, but the expression "centers attempted" in the context of the "two corridors" (the sides of the field) can evoke strategic maneuvers to infiltrate the opposing defense, similar to flank maneuvers in military operations.

The use of this vocabulary reinforces the intensity and drama of the described situation, highlighting the strategy, urgency, and inherent conflict of the game, while drawing a parallel between sports tactics and military strategy. It is still the case in the following excerpt:

Ex.5: We are here to change mindsets, confided goalkeeper Yassine Bounou, heroic against Portugal. We had this feeling of inferiority, but in fact, we can beat anyone (Le matin, published on 24.03.2022 at 15:20) The excerpt (5) illustrates a subtle application of the lexicon associated with resilience and combat, emanating from the words of goalkeeper Yacine Bounou as reported by the journalist. Although explicitly military terms are not used, the connotations associated with bravery, strategy, and the psychology of combat are palpable and deserve a thorough analysis.

The phrase "changing mindsets" is interpreted as a strategic objective, evoking a mission of psychological transformation. This notion is akin to psychological strategies in a military context, where mental preparation is crucial. The mission mentioned transcends mere athletic performance to touch on a deeper transformation, reminiscent of the motivation and psychological reinforcement tactics used in the military.

The use of the adjective "heroic" by the journalist serves to evaluate the performance of goalkeeper Bounou while reinforcing this analogy. In everyday language, "heroic" is often reserved to describe acts of bravery typical of wartime contexts. Its application here confers an epic dimension to the sporting action, placing it in a context where courage and self-overcoming are celebrated as supreme values, similar to those promoted in battle narratives.

The "feeling of inferiority" mentioned refers to a psychological struggle, highlighting the parallel between the mental challenges faced by athletes and those that military personnel may encounter. Overcoming such feelings is crucial in the strategy for victory, both on the sports field and on the battlefield.

Finally, the statement "we can beat everyone" reveals a

combative mentality, reflecting a strategy of conviction and confidence typical of military motivational speeches. This assertion reflects a collective confidence, a determination to triumph that is essential to the cohesion and morale of the troops, just as it is for a sports team.

Thus, although the excerpt does not use explicitly military terms, the analysis reveals a deep intertwining of concepts and shared values between the military and sports domains, demonstrating the power of language to shape perceptions, attitudes, and performances in various competitive contexts. In the previous examples, the journalist, when talking about football, uses vocabulary referring to military activities ("a formidable weapon," "a victory," "quick counterattacks"). Thus, the football match becomes a dispute, a competition, a fierce struggle, or even a battle or a war. Thus, we can clearly see thru these examples that language is not only used for communication; as Bourdieu (2001) would say, it is also a means of power since, thru language, one can impose a worldview, legitimize it, naturalize it, and contribute to the perpetuation of certain social structures. This kind of process also exists in the French press, as we will see in the following.

#### • The French press

The French written press covering football events is also full of words belonging to the military lexical field, as is the case here:

Ex.7: With this equalizer, the Ukrainians punish the blues for not having secured their lead. A sterile domination, an opponent digging trenches in front of their goal, (Le Monde, published on 25.03.2021).

The use of military language in this article excerpt highlights how sports, particularly football, can be interpreted or described in terms of conflict or battle. Here, the journalist uses military metaphors to emphasize the intensity and strategic nature of the match. The expression "punish the Blues" suggests a kind of retaliation or severe consequence, as if the Ukrainian team were in a position of authority or strength, inflicting a penalty for the Blues' failure to secure their advantage.

The mention of a "sterile domination" implies that, despite the apparent superiority or control of the game by the Blues, their efforts were not productive or effective, similar to an army controlling a territory without being able to take advantage of it.

The use of the expression "trench-digging opponent" is particularly evocative, directly referring to trench warfare,

characteristic of major conflicts like World War I. This suggests a fierce and well-fortified defense by the Ukrainian team, protecting themselves against the Blues' attacks in a methodical and resilient manner, reminiscent of soldiers in the trenches.

These military metaphors add a layer of drama and intensity to the match narrative, highlighting the struggle, strategies, and stakes as if it were a real battlefield. In the excerpt (8), Ex. 8: the crowd voiced their support, backed the struggling Blues, and rallied troops who were sometimes lacking ideas (Le Figaro, 02.09.2021) The use of military terminology and metaphors serves to enrich the narration of the football match, giving the sporting event a quasi-belligerent dimension. The expression "The crowd raised their voices" illustrates a collective mobilization of supporters, analogous to a troop rallying, where the vocal contribution of the public is perceived as a catalytic, if not essential, element to the dynamics of the game.

The support for the "blues in difficulty" evokes a symbiosis between the team and its supporters, reminiscent of the solidarity found in military contexts where morale and mutual support are crucial. This analogy is reinforced by the use of the verb "haranguer," typically associated with exhortative speeches aimed at galvanizing soldiers before a confrontation, suggesting that the interaction between the public and the players transcends mere observation, actively participating in the psychology of the game.

The reference to "troops sometimes lacking ideas" gives a strategic dimension to the players' performance, likening them to military units facing tactical challenges. This metaphor reinforces the idea that football, within the context of this article, is interpreted not only as a sport but also as a confrontation where strategy, support, and group dynamics play roles comparable to those observed in combat situations.

Thus, the use of martial vocabulary in the description of a football match serves not only to dramatize the event but also to highlight the parallels between collective dynamics in sports and those of military confrontations, underscoring the competitive and strategic nature inherent in both fields. This is illustrated, even more strikingly, in this excerpt from a sports newspaper article taken from the daily "Le Monde." - Ex.9 In the span of twelve minutes, Mbappé torpedoed the Kazakh defense. (Le Monde, November 14, 2021) The use of terminology borrowed from the military lexicon serves to highlight the exceptional performance of football player Kylian Mbappé. The verb "torpiller," derived from naval warfare vocabulary, where it denotes the action of

striking a ship with a torpedo, is here metaphorically transposed to characterize the efficiency with which Mbappé dismantled the opposing team's defense. This warlike metaphor illustrates not only the power and speed of the attack led by the player but also its ruthless and devastating nature. The use of such expressions in sports journalism is not trivial; it aims to confer a more spectacular and intense dimension to the narrative, thereby captivating the reader more by dramatizing the reported facts.

We see, therefore, that French journalists, like their Moroccan counterparts, do not hesitate to use "belligerent" language, meaning terms that directly or indirectly evoke military activities.

Nevertheless, a remark is necessary here: in the analysis of military lexicon within the written press, a particularly notable trend manifests during the coverage of international sporting events. The use of terms borrowed from the lexicon of war and military combat by the journalist (whether French or Moroccan) is not trivial; it is part of a discursive strategy aimed at amplifying the competitive dimension of the event. When a national team faces a foreign opponent, the use of warlike vocabulary can transform the perception of a simple match into a confrontation of high importance, even a symbolic battle between nations. This militarization of sports discourse does not merely reflect the intensity of the competition; it also mobilizes the patriotic sentiments of readers, thereby strengthening their emotional engagement and identification with the national team. The analysis of this linguistic practice offers an intriguing insight into how the media can shape public perceptions and emotions, using sport as a vehicle for a broader nationalist discourse.

In parallel to the intensified use of military lexicon in the coverage of matches involving the national team, an opposite trend emerges when the press covers encounters between two foreign teams. In this context, journalistic discourse tends to take on a more neutral form, abandoning military terms in favor of vocabulary that emphasizes the game and sports performance rather than confrontation or conflict. This lexical neutrality reflects a detachment where the nationalist stakes are absent, thus allowing for a more objective approach focused on the technical and esthetic aspects of the sport. The analysis of this dichotomy offers an enriching perspective on the flexibility of media discourse, which adapts according to the identity of the teams involved, thereby revealing the subtle communication strategies that underpin sports coverage in the written press. Which would prove the media's ability to modulate their language according to the context, highlighting the complexity of discursive strategies in sports journalism.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the study of the use of military terms in Moroccan and French sports press reveals not only the extent of their integration into sports language but also their profound impact on readers' perception of sports events. The comparative analysis of these two distinct media contexts shows that, despite cultural and historical differences, there is a universal tendency to borrow from the vocabulary of war to describe sports competition, thereby highlighting the intensity, strategy, and drama of athletic confrontations.

This warrior metaphor, deeply rooted in sports discourse, not only echoes the ancient tradition that associates sports with a battlefield but also reflects how contemporary societies perceive and value competition, struggle, and victory. By marking sports with the seal of combat, Moroccan and French sports media shape a narrative that transcends the game and touches on issues of identity, pride, and resilience.

This research enriches our understanding of media language and offers new perspectives on the interaction between sport, culture, and society. It underscores the importance of in-depth linguistic analysis to grasp the nuances of our relationship with sports and the media, and invites broader reflection on the implications of using military rhetoric in sports communication. Ultimately, the study of these "linguistic battlefields" opens promising avenues for future research on the power of words and their ability to shape our experience of the sporting world.

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