

# Within-culture variation in English sports metaphors: A window to culture, history, and national identity?

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## Roadmap

1. Introduction
2. Dimensions of variation in metaphor
3. Sports metaphors in English
4. Research questions and methodology
5. Results
6. Outlook

### 1. Introduction: Why sports metaphors?

- sport as an important part of a nation's (popular) culture
- numerous studies have shown the importance of sports (metaphors) in the construction of national identity, e.g. in political and media discourse
  - "a community's figurative language could be considered as a reflection of that community's conventional patterns of thought or world views"; "the high frequency and diversity of a particular metaphor can sometimes be taken as a reflection of a country's history [...] or even its national stereotypes" (Boers 2003: 235)
- sporting events as one kind of "ludic models that engage serious cultural issues in the very rules and structures constituting the field of play" (Shore 1996: 75f.) (handout: 2)
- sports metaphors as an ideal testing ground for the interaction of language, culture, history and national identity, a topic that lends itself to interdisciplinary research

Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell (1993), Shore (1996), Bairner (2001), Charteris-Black (2004)

### 1. Introduction: Why regional variation?

- most work on variation in metaphor has examined cross-cultural differences in metaphorical mappings (with a focus on the conceptualization of emotions)
- typical sociolinguistic parameters of variation (e.g. social class, region, ethnicity, gender, style etc.) that are likely to affect variation in metaphor usage have remained an underresearched topic in cognitive linguistics to date
  - "an obvious place to look for variation in metaphor are the social, cultural, stylistic, individual, and so on, dialects and varieties that have been identified by sociolinguists, linguistic anthropologists, and other researchers of language variation in a social and cultural context" (Kövecses 2005: 88f.)

### 1. Introduction: Why regional variation?

- despite growing interest in issues of (sociolinguistic) variation in cognitive linguistics (cf. the emergence of cognitive sociolinguistics as new (sub)discipline), impact of (geographic) region on within-culture variation in metaphor is sparse and only slowly emerging
- exceptions: work on Dutch and Afrikaans, and corpus-based studies on African Englishes from a cultural-linguistic perspective

Dirven (1994), Wolf & Polzenhagen (2007a, b, 2009), Kristiansen & Dirven (2008)

### 2. Dimensions of variation in metaphor

- primary vs. complex metaphors:
  - primary metaphors map image-schemas onto abstract experience (UP-DOWN, IN-OUT), motivated by correlations in the domain of general physical experience assumed to be universal
  - complex conceptual metaphors that combine (or compound) different primary metaphors (THEORIES ARE BUILDINGS, LIFE IS A JOURNEY); complex experiential domains are more likely to be susceptible to culture-specific influences and thus to cross-cultural variation
- three types of cross-cultural variation in metaphor usage:
  1. differences with regard to the particular source-target mappings that have become conventional in the given cultures
  2. differences with regard to value-judgments associated with the source or target domains of shared mappings
  3. differences with regard to the degree of pervasiveness of metaphor as such, as compared with other (rhetorical) figures

Boers (2003)

## 2. Dimensions of variation in metaphor

- source domains for **POLITICS** is **SPORT** in AmE and Chinese (Yu 1998:44)
  - both English and Chinese have the same generic-level metaphor (**same source-target mapping**)
  - in AmE the specific source domain is typically baseball, American football or boxing
  - common source domains for sports metaphors in Chinese political and everyday discourse are volleyball, soccer and pingpong→ **different degrees of productivity or conventionality**
- a very similar kind of variation is likely to be found in sports metaphors across varieties of the same language, i.e. varieties of English: since baseball is evidently more popular in the US than in Europe, AmE is likely to use more baseball-based figurative expressions

Yu (1998), Boers (2003)

## 3. Sports metaphors in English

- Most previous studies focused on AmE and the **salience, pervasiveness** of sports metaphors in this variety due to the assumed importance of competition in this society ([handout: 3a](#))
- **LIFE IS PLAYING A GAME** or **LIFE IS A SHOW** as a metaphor at the heart of American culture ([handout: 3b](#))
- But: sports metaphors have become increasingly popular in Chinese in the past 15 years when reform has remarkably raised the nation's level of competition in both economy and sports
- "the claim here is not that only Americans have the game and sports metaphors, but that they have them for a **more extensive range of target concepts** than other nations" (Kövecses 2005: 244)

Hardaway (1976), Howe (1988), Ching (1993), Liu & Farha (1996), Yu (1998), Kövecses (2005)

## 3. Sports metaphors in English

- **driving forces** for the increasing popularity and pervasiveness of sports metaphors in AmE in particular:
  - growing intensity of **competition** in almost all aspects of public and private life (competition at the heart of the "American way of life")
  - increasing **commercialization** of sports
  - ever-growing **coverage** and **accessibility** of sports events in the media
- **types of sports** that feature most prominently are baseball, American football and boxing
- **target domains** identified: politics, law, warfare, business, personal relationships, dating

Howe (1988), Ching (1993), Liu & Farha (1996), Kövecses (2000), Tottie (2002)

## 3. Sports metaphors in English

- **Convergence** or even **erosion of variation?**  
"as a result of ongoing economic and cultural globalisation, some cross-cultural differences in metaphor usage will eventually be eroded" (Boers 2003: 236)
- Evidence for AmE influence on British and Australian English ([handout: 4-6](#))

Boers (2003), Dale (2004, 2007), Cameron (2005), Campbell (2009)

## 4. Research questions and methodology

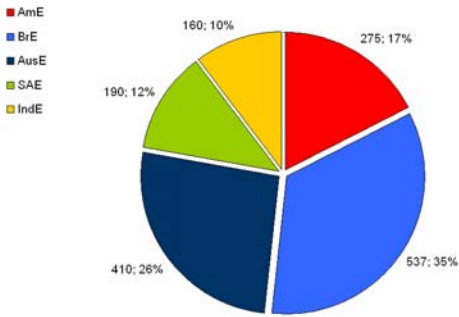
1. Are there any differences as to the salience/prominence of specific source domains across the varieties of English studied? Are these reflected in frequencies of use of metaphorical expressions?
2. Is there evidence for a convergence or even erosion of differences in metaphor usage as a result of ongoing economic and cultural globalisation across varieties of English?
3. Do we find candidates for "stay-at-home" vs. "exported" metaphorical expressions (Liu & Farha, 1996)?
  - horseracing, basketball and boxing are also used in other varieties (Britain, Australia), while baseball and American football are typically American; soccer and cricket typically not found there
  - *out in left field*, *switch hitters*, *slam dunk* have remained predominately American
  - *touch base with someone*, *off base* have been adopted abroad

## 4. Research questions and methodology

- 15 metaphorical expressions from three different types of sport (baseball, cricket, football/soccer), ([handout: 7](#))
- due to lack of comparable corpora: frequency of use in national newspapers (*LexisNexis*, Feb 2007 - Feb 2009), representing 5 main varieties of English
  - **American English:** *New York Times* (daily, Mon-Sun)
  - **British English:** *The Guardian* (daily, Mon-Sat), *The Observer* (weekly, Sun)
  - **Australian English:** *Sydney Morning Herald* (daily, Mon-Sun)
  - **Indian English:** *Hindustan Times* (daily, Mon-Fri, occasionally Sat; New Delhi, India's largest single edition English daily newspaper)
  - **South African English:** *The Star* (daily, Mon-Sat), *The Sunday Times* (weekly, Sun)
- Automatic retrieval of lexical patterns, manual identification and analysis of literal vs. metaphorical uses

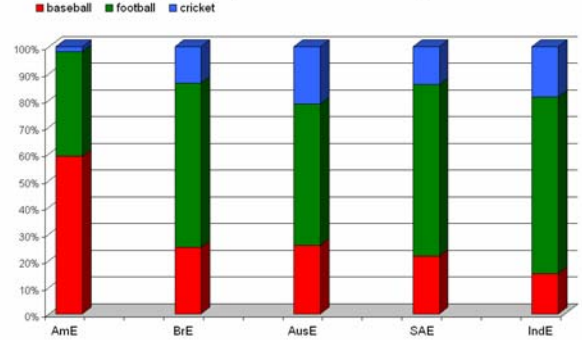
## 5. Results

Use of sports metaphors in 5 varieties of English

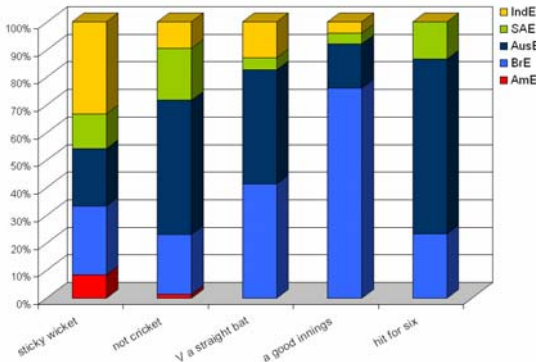


## Overall

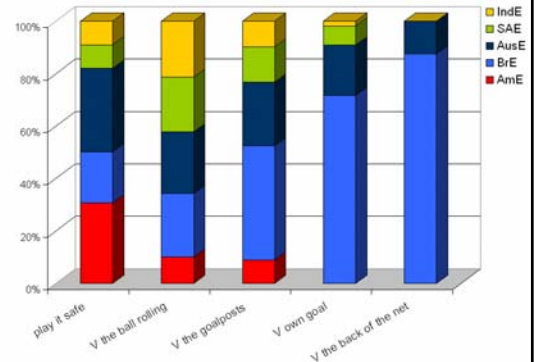
Distribution of metaphorical expressions in 5 varieties of English



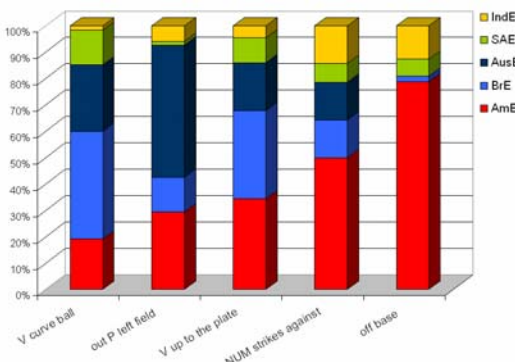
## Cricket



## Football/soccer



## Baseball



## 6. Outlook

- specific sports metaphors (*off base*, *hit for six*, *V the back of the net*) and more general ones (*V the ball rolling*, *V the goalposts*, *curve ball*, *out P left field*) → more general metaphorical motivation
- correlation between salience, prominence, cogn. entrenchment of a specific source domain and phraseological variability? (handout: 8)
- what target domains (politics, business/economics, arts/fashion, dating) are prevalent in a specific variety? → possible preferences in mapping to target domains, e.g. in BrE, *curve ball* used very often in the context of arts (film, music, literature) and fashion (handout: 7, example 1)

## 6. Outlook: Other factors causing variation

### a) personal history

- Kövecses (2005: 183): close correlation between personal history and metaphors used by American politicians in the course of their election campaigns
- Charteris-Black (2005: 138f., 164): both Clinton and Blair show a predilection for sports metaphors in their speeches

### b) gender

"Perhaps what really bothers me about 'straight bats' and 'sprints for the finishing line' is the fear that they might reveal something deeper about work than the fact that gossiping about sport is the best way to show you're a good bloke. Perhaps the reason all this jocular sports chat is so popular is that men have a tendency to see life as a contest; perhaps the reason it tends to irritate their female colleagues so much is that women don't. It sounds like sexist psychobabble, but increasing evidence is emerging that men and women approach competitions, sporting and otherwise, somewhat differently" (Stewart 2007)

## 6. Outlook: Other factors causing variation

c) **national history:** the popularity of cricket in India, Pakistan vs. the US

- Majumdar & Brown (2007): How and why did cricket and baseball become national passions in two of the world's biggest erstwhile colonies?
- In both cases, the common reference point remains the Empire, but **inverse invocation of nationalism**
  - **India:** Empire lasted far longer, appropriation and subsequent indigenization of British sports for purposes of resistance; nationalist movement from the close of the 19th cent. made cricket imperative to be taken up as a non-violent means to compete with the ruling British
  - **US:** independence achieved one and a half centuries earlier, reaction to Empire sport was the opposite: dissociation of American sport from British sport to emphasize an independent American identity, no need to retort to imperial games
- cf. handout: 10