

The Source Domain “Boxing” in Vietnamese Newspaper Discourse: The Case of Online Newspapers

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Abstract—The article explores the appearance of the metaphor ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ in online Vietnamese newspapers. Based on the linkages embedded in the experience and knowledge projected from the source domain to the target domain, the article clarifies the mapping mechanism between the spatial domains ‘boxing’ and ‘politics’ and explains the mechanism of moving and copying attributes between the two spatial domains ‘source’ and ‘target’ in the authors’ linguistic thinking. Based on the partial projection principles of metaphors, this paper presents the hierarchical characteristics of the authors’ conceptual thinking. From the basic metaphor ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’, through the mapping structure, the paper proves that four derived metaphors in online Vietnamese newspapers relate to four prominent characteristics of the source domain: ‘a blow’, ‘boxing tactics’, ‘the rules of boxing’, and ‘illegal blows’. The paper highlights the distinct way of thinking in conceptual structures on political issues based on the logical relationships in the mapping organization of conceptual metaphors. It also helps to clarify how Vietnamese media views politics, a topic that is intrinsic to the social superstructure and vital to the survival and advancement of a nation that is firmly devoted to socialism and is moving toward development.

Index Terms—boxing, conceptual, mapping, online newspaper, politics

I. INTRODUCTION

The conceptualization of one cognitive domain to another, or the systematic mappings from the source domain to the target domain with the goal of developing a cognitive model relating the inner workings of the human mind, is known as conceptual or cognitive metaphors. According to Lakoff and Mark (1980), conceptual metaphors are a cognitive mechanism through which logic of abstract concepts is replaced with/by the logic of more concrete concepts. Additionally, as defined by Kövecses (2002), conceptual metaphors help to further understand a target concept A (often abstract) through the conceptual structures of a source concept B (more concrete). The source domain provides a relatively rich knowledge structure for the target domain and this knowledge is conveyed through schematic mappings between components of domains A and B (Kövecses, 2002). Kövecses (2002) also states that metaphorical mappings play an important role in metaphorical expressions, as they explain why specific characteristics are used to understand target domains.

Lakoff (1993) proved that constructing a mapping schema is a common way to conceptualize things. Mapping is not arbitrarily based on personal experience and accumulated through daily life to be used subconsciously. In conceptual structures, a fixed system of correspondences between constituent elements of source and target domains creates a mapping schema. When these correspondences are activated, attributes from the source domain are projected onto the target domain following partial or unidirectional projection mechanisms, resulting in the movement of very few attributes from the source domain to the target domain. Additionally, metaphors are also associated with the uniqueness of native speakers’ spiritual culture.

Research into conceptual metaphors has become a blossoming trend, undergoing significant development in a number of different industries and nations around the globe. However, in Vietnam, conceptual metaphor research on newspaper discourse, specifically within news relating to political matters via online newspapers, has not been a point of concern among researchers. Within that context, this research hopes to offer a new perspective on how native speakers conceptualize one of the metaphors about politics using the source domain 'boxing'. To achieve that aim, this research serves to answer three questions:

1. In media coverage on politics in online Vietnamese newspapers, which thinking mechanisms underline the use of metaphors with the source domain 'boxing' to discuss the behaviors and actions of politicians?
2. Why do Vietnamese reporters and journalists have a tendency to use metaphors with the source domain 'boxing' to think about problems relating to politics?
3. What are the pragmatic implications of these metaphors?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The source domain 'sports' and other sub-domains relating to sports such as 'football', 'baseball', 'American football', 'cricket', 'horse racing', 'boxing', 'auto racing', and so on seem to have become an integral part of media discourse when researching and analyzing some fields as target domains such as politics, commerce, business, education, and healthcare. In online Vietnamese newspapers, there are several terms reflecting the source domain 'boxing' that are used when expressing aspects of the target domain 'politics'. Moreover, conceptual metaphors in political discourse with the source domain of sports have indeed appeared in some recent studies.

In the first approach, sports have always been exploited as an important source domain in political discourse. Hardaway (1976) provided an interesting outlook on conceptual metaphors of sports used in commercials, business, and when talking about the government. Moreover, research has indicated that the overutilization of sports metaphors has caused readers to wrongly perceive the above-mentioned themes as rules of a game within which participants attempt to deceive and belittle one another. Semino and Michela (1996) placed emphasis on metaphors with the source domains 'football', 'war', and 'Bible' when investigating the political discourse of Italian politician, Silvio Berlusconi. The data revealed that football metaphors were most commonly used, resulting in a relatively new style of political discourse in Italy throughout the 1990s. Through inspecting the speeches of American presidents, Theodore Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton, and others, Segrave (2000) found three typical 'sports' source domains commonly appearing in metaphorical discourse, including 'boxing', 'horse racing', and 'football'. Cudd (2007) looked into some of Karl Marx's works and clearly identified the similarities between democracy and sports regarding the aspects of 'collaboration' and 'competition'. The latter element, including 'objective', 'means of scoring', 'attitude', 'player behavior', 'rules of the game', 'impartiality', 'individual role on the team', and so on, seems to fully project onto the target domain 'politics', expressing parallelism between the behaviors and actions of politicians and athletes. Over a span of five years, Wiliński (2015), who analyzed the politics-related language corpus from two online sources, namely, google.com and yahoo.uk, found 451 metaphorical discourses attached to 29 sports source domains and justified this appearance with a large volume of political metaphors that included boxing, baseball, football, and horse racing source domains.

In the second approach, various works utilizing conceptual metaphors in political discourse employ the source domain 'boxing', a form of martial arts bearing individual combat characteristics, not based on team collaboration. Howe (1988) conducted metaphorical research on the rhetoric of politicians in contemporary American politics between 1980 and 1985 and noted that politics is frequently seen as a struggle against established norms with boxing emerging as a useful domain source to denote head-to-head competition between powerful politicians. Wiliński (2022) examined 145 boxing-related idioms from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and identified their use in political settings. Boxing-related idioms have been found to frequently emerge in political discourse due to the similarities between a boxing match and political contests. Hanh (2022) investigated online Vietnamese newspapers and discovered that metaphors derived from gaming source domains such as 'gambling', 'cards', 'chess', and 'Chinese chess' were frequently used in political discourse. However, her research did not fully exploit the source domain 'sports', including 'boxing match' acting as a source domain to clarify the resemblance in activities within the target domain of politics. This research aims to gain an understanding of the conceptual model 'POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH' and other derived metaphors in the political discourse of online Vietnamese newspapers. As a result, it adds to a better understanding of how Vietnamese media think about politics in general, as well as how politicians respond when making significant national decisions.

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out analyses and research into metaphors with the source domain 'boxing' in online Vietnamese newspaper political discourse, the researchers implemented quantitative, qualitative, and discourse analyses. The corpus was analyzed using two major methods: (1) examining papers to identify metaphors used with themes related to national and international political issues; and (2) finding keywords belonging to the source domain and citing their appearance in different contexts of political discourse. The surveyed corpus consisted of 38 online newspapers in the Vietnamese language, from which a total of 388 articles published between 2013 and 2023 were obtained for analysis. All newspapers are mainstream news sites managed and regulated by the Ministry of Information and Communications or copyrighted

websites licensed by the ministry and run by other ministries or industries. The researchers then proceeded to identify conceptual metaphors used in the articles in accordance with the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) proposed by the Group P. (2007) by following four steps:

1. Study the entire discourse in each article to establish a general semantic understanding;
2. Mark words or phrases with semantic conflict within the context;
3. Look up marked words or phrases in a dictionary to determine whether their meanings could be understood in relation to other words within the context;
4. If not, identify them as metaphors.

Words or phrases creating semantic conflict then become “metaphorically expressed words/ metaphorical linguistic expressions”. Finally, the discourse containing metaphorically expressed words is called “metaphorical statement”.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Boxing is a sport in which two combatants wear specialized gloves and use jabs, punches, footwork, and head and body movements to defeat their opponent. When the source domain ‘boxing’ is projected onto the target domain ‘politics’, the characteristics of the source domain, mainly concerned with terms such as ‘fighter’s ranking’, ‘several strikes’, ‘strike delivering strategies’, ‘gimmicks’, ‘rules’, ‘win’, and ‘loss’, are activated, creating mapping similarities between the two domains. Within this context, politicians are considered fighters, while their respective policies are considered strikes in the boxing ring. In combat, the striking done by the fighters plays a pivotal role in determining the outcome of the match. In the political arena, the policies and decisions made by politicians play the same role in deciding the political outcome of a nation. Thus, the rules of boxing could then be inferred as the rules of the political arena, with all types of strikes against the opponent following the common international set of rules.

The conceptual metaphor ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ is a common concept in different cultures and bears a strong foundation of experience. This metaphor includes two spatial domains, “source” (boxing) and “target” (politics), within which characteristics of the source domain are projected on the target domain through partial projection principles, causing the target domain to hold some knowledge fragments of the source domain. The conceptual structure ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ is expressed through a mapping diagram in Table 1 below:

TABLE 1
MAPPING DIAGRAM OF THE METAPHOR “POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH”

Characteristics of the source domain <i>‘Boxing match’</i>	→	Characteristics of the target domain <i>‘Politics’</i>
1. Strikes in boxing matches	→	Political campaigns and actions
2. Boxing tactics/ techniques	→	Political strategies/ techniques
3. Fouls/ Violations in boxing matches	→	Unethical political behaviour/ unfavourable political state
4. Rules of boxing matches	→	Rules in the political arena

Through the researched corpus, multiple appearances of the metaphoric expression ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ were found with specific metaphorically expressed words attached to each individual characteristic of the source domain ‘boxing’. Metaphorical expressions help readers visualize the political arena as complex, filled with strategic moves and dramatic tension, much like developments in a boxing match, even in terms of risks and dangers. According to the projection schema, the researchers identified the following four derived metaphors.

A. *The Conceptual Metaphor ‘A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN/ ACTION IS A HARD STRIKE’*

Based on characteristics of the source domain, the basic metaphor ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ engenders the derived metaphor ‘A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN/ ACTION IS A HARD STRIKE’, encompassing 107 metaphorically expressed words. The source domain ‘a hard strike’ provides basic metaphorical linguistic expressions, such as ‘strike’, ‘lethal strike’, ‘dangerous strike’, ‘hefty strike’, ‘iron punch’, ‘iron fist’, ‘direct strike’, ‘strike straight to the face’, ‘a powerful slap’, ‘a heavy blow’, ‘dealing a blow’, ‘knockout strike’, ‘a heavy punch’, and ‘lightning punch’. These words refer to knowledge about a boxing match where a fighter deals the finishing blow to his/ her opponent. With some flexibility, the target domain ‘politics’ adopts knowledge from the source domain ‘boxing’ and creates an abundance of metaphorical expressions to describe politicians or other ruling authorities amidst political strife, where they fight with calculated strikes and employ tactics with cautious consideration to safeguard the ideologies and benefits of the organizations or nations that they represent. The frequencies of occurrences of these metaphorically expressed words are reported in Table 2 below:

TABLE 2
FREQUENCIES OF OCCURRENCES OF METAPHORICALLY-EXPRESSED WORDS 'A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN/ ACTION IS A HARD STRIKE'

Source Domain's Attributes (Boxing)	Metaphorically-Expressed Words	Frequency	Source Domain's Attributes (Boxing)	Metaphorically-Expressed Words	Frequency
A heavy blow	Ra đòn hiểm/ cú đòn/ cú đòn hiểm hóc 'hard strike/ strike/ lethal strike'	20	A heavy blow	Cái tát mạnh/ cú giáng mạnh/ giáng đòn 'a powerful slap/ a heavy blow/ dealing a blow'	7
	Ra đòn/ ra đòn nặng ký 'strike/ hefty strike'	7		Cú đánh knock-out 'knockout strike'	6
	Cú đấm thép/ quả đấm thép 'iron punch/ iron punch'	34		Cú đấm/ cú đấm mạnh/ cú đấm sấm sét 'punch/ heavy punch/ lightning punch'	18
	Cú đấm thẳng/ cú đấm thẳng mặt 'direct strike/ strike straight to the face'	11		Nắm đấm/ nắm đấm sắt 'fist/ iron fist'	4
Total	107				

When conceptualizing 'A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN/ ACTION IS A HARD STRIKE', the authors may see political events like the developments of a boxing match in the ring where fighters possess power and use it to deliver blows and gain an advantage. This draws similarities to the challenges and opportunities faced by politicians, organizations, and nations. A match becomes thrilling as boxers utilize their strength and skills to knock out their opponents, and a political struggle becomes intense as politicians engage in a contest of will and intellect to defeat the opposition and achieve a desirable outcome. In online Vietnamese newspaper discourse, a successfully executed strategy or political action is depicted as a heavy blow that is usually metaphorically expressed as the powerful 'iron punch' of a boxer in the political arena. For example:

1. *Đại học đa lĩnh vực: 'Quả đấm thép' của giáo dục đại học Việt Nam.* (dantri.com.vn, 29/08/2018)
[Multi-disciplinary universities: 'The iron punch' of Vietnamese university education.] (dantri.com.vn, August 29, 2018)
2. *Thủ tướng: Không thể thiếu những 'quả đấm thép' của nền kinh tế!* (dantri.com.vn, 17/01/2020)
[Prime minister: there cannot be a lack of 'iron punches' of the economy!] (dantri.com.vn, January 17, 2020)
3. *Đòn lực cho hai 'quả đấm thép' tăng trưởng.* (xaydungchinh sach.chinhphu.vn, 12/04/2023)
[Charging up for two 'iron punches' of growth.] (xaydungchinh sach.chinhphu.vn, April 12, 2023)

In metaphorical expressions 1, 2, and 3 above, 'iron punch' indicates the impact of a government policy deemed to be successful, possessing the capability to alter a certain political scenario that was previously ineffective and poorly operated. In the first expression, the establishment of multi-disciplinary universities has a strong effect; therefore, it is likened to an 'iron punch' for the course taken by the higher education system towards globalization. In expression number 2, the statement made by Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc means state-owned businesses play a role akin to the economy's 'iron punch'. For them to fulfill such a role and attain a central position in the economy, there is a need for business restructuring and reform in accordance with international standards, relying on technological advances. Finally, in example 3, according to Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, boosting domestic consumer demand and expediting the disbursement of public funds are considered two of the three driving forces that the Vietnamese government actively implements, without heavy reliance on external factors. These are seen as two "iron fists" powerfully impacting the economy to generate momentum for growth and development.

In a boxing match, fighters have to pick the right moment to deal a decisive blow to their opponent. This is also the case in politics; the mapping similarities between fighters and politicians include fighting techniques and striking at the right moment. Among the metaphorical expressions found, actions taken or decisions made by politicians to stifle opposition in the political arena are metaphorically expressed as lethal or heavy strikes.

4. *'Đòn đánh phủ đầu' của Nga-Mỹ có khiến đối phương bất ngờ?* (dantri.com.vn, 12/08/2015)
[Did 'The first strike' between Russia-America catch the opponent by surprise?] (dantri.com.vn, August 12, 2015)
5. *Phe Dân chủ ra "đòn hiểm" nhưng Trump có chiến lược phản công lợi hại.* (dantri.com.vn, 30/09/2019)
[The Democrats delivered a 'fatal blow' but Trump had a lethal counterattack] (dantri.com.vn, September 30, 2019)
6. *Tổng thống Trump ra đòn nặng ký: Rút chuỗi cung ứng toàn cầu ra khỏi Trung Quốc.* (dantri.com.vn, 05/05/2020)
[President Trump dealt a heavy blow: Taking the world supply chain away from China] (dantri.com.vn, May 05, 2020)

Dealing 'the first strike', 'a fatal blow', or 'a heavy blow' are all tactics in combat. During their fight, by observing opponents' strengths, weaknesses, and overall ability, fighters may find their window of opportunity and deal the decisive blow. This tactic is similar to the strategy employed by politicians in the arena. Before dealing a heavy blow to opponents, politicians must rely on their judgment of the political scene and analyze their opponents' strengths and weaknesses to take appropriate actions at the right moments. For example:

7. *Tuy nhiên, dù Mỹ hay Trung Quốc hành động, một "cú đấm" mạnh sẽ không chỉ gây thương tích cho đối phương mà còn làm đau cả người ra đòn.* (tuoitre.vn, 28/03/2020)
[However, whether or not the United States or China make a move, one heavy **'blow'** would not only inflict damage on the opponent but also the striker.] (tuoitre.vn, March 28, 2020)
8. *Giáo chủ Iran dọa trả đũa bằng "cái tát mạnh và nắm đấm sắt".* (dantri.com.vn, 11/11/2011)
[Iran's Supreme Leader threatened retaliation with "a powerful slap and iron fist".] (dantri.com.vn, November 11, 2011)
9. *'...' Trung Quốc cố tình gây căng thẳng, khiêu khích trên Biển Đông để "tung một cú đấm thẳng" bằng hình thức chiến tranh phi đối xứng vào thẳng chính sách "đòn can thiệp khu vực" truyền thống của Mỹ.* (baochinhpvu.vn, 23/05/2014)
[China deliberately gauged tension and provoked in the South China Sea in order to **'deal a direct blow'** in the form of asymmetric warfare directly targeting the US's traditional "regional intervention" policy.] (baochinhpvu.vn, May 23, 2014)

Strikes in a boxing match such as 'a heavy blow', 'iron fist', and 'a direct strike' are projected onto politics to refer to punitive measures implemented by political leaders or factions, making it easy for the reader to take in the tense, thrilling, and adventurous atmosphere of a political arena. Of course, when the negotiation process between opposing sides is carried out using physical force, this may lead to the severance of diplomatic ties or even trigger the onset of an armed conflict. However, it is similar to fighters in a boxing ring determined to deal the ending blow because this means that the match has reached its climax and is awaiting an inevitable knockout. At this point, there is bound to be a winner, a loser, or a draw, just as there is in politics.

B. Conceptual Metaphor 'POLITICAL STRATEGIES ARE BOXING STRATEGIES'

Since politics is metaphorically expressed as a boxing match, boxers' tactics play an important role in deciding the outcome of the match. The conceptualization of political strategies as boxing tactics reflects the volatile nature of the political arena, where fierce struggle between evenly matched opponents makes it difficult to predict the outcome. When projecting this characteristic onto the target domain "chính trị", or 'politics', the researchers found metaphoric expressions describing the flexibility, agility, and fierceness that politicians display when proactively using fighting strategies, controlling and monitoring the tempo of the game. The frequencies of occurrences of metaphorically expressed words are reported in Table 3 below:

TABLE 3
FREQUENCIES OF OCCURRENCES OF METAPHORICALLY- EXPRESSED WORDS 'POLITICAL STRATEGIES ARE BOXING STRATEGIES'

Source Domain's Attributes (boxing)	Metaphorically- Expressed Words	Frequency	Source Domain's Attributes (boxing)	Metaphorically- Expressed Words	Frequency
Boxing strategies	Đòn gió 'Feint'	19	Boxing strategies	Tung đòn 'Dealing a blow'	23
	Nhà đòn 'Jab'	3		Phản công 'Counterattack'	4
	Phản đòn 'Counterstrike'	18		Đòn phủ đầu 'First strike'	7
Total	74				

In the boxing ring, 'deliberately missing on purpose' (also known as 'feinting') is a tactic to distract an opponent from the actual attack. In boxing, 'feinting' is a strike that comes before the actual strike, opening up an opportunity for the latter to be more effective. When projected onto the target domain 'political strategies', 'feinting' is metaphorically expressed for strategies deployed by politicians in order to throw off or intimidate the opponent, thereby imposing a level of unpredictability in their political movements. In the examined corpus, the researchers found 74 metaphorical of this type. For example:

10. *'Đòn gió' cho bỏ tức.* (thanhvien.vn, 25/10/2021)
[**'Feinting'** to relieve stress] (thanhvien.vn, October 25, 2021)
11. *Đòn gió để tránh đòn thật.* (kinhtedothi.vn, 17/02/2021)
[**Feinting** to dodge the real attack] (kinhtedothi.vn, February 17, 2021)
12. *Belarus: Dùng đòn gió để không đòn thật.* (kinhtedothi.vn, 03/09/2020)
[Belarus: Using **feints** to avoid actual attacks] (kinhtedothi.vn, September 03, 2020)

In metaphoric expressions 10, 11, and 12, 'feints' appear in the political context to refer to the behavior of politicians and nations in high-tension political situations. The ways 'feints' are delivered refer to political actions aimed at the opposition in order to create political pressure. In 10, 'feinting' is indicative of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's threat to expel ten ambassadors of European nations, which he later backpedaled on. This is only a measure to ascertain the opponent's movement, bearing similarities to 'feints' in boxing. In 11 and 12, these expressions refer to the way Russia threw a feint jab at the EU when making a statement about the possibility of severing diplomatic relations with the organization due to its prolonged sanctions against Russia.

In boxing, ‘jabbing’ is also a tactic commonly used by fighters. ‘Jabbing’ is a quick blow with the purpose of gauging what type of move the opponent is aiming for in order to read their game and deal game-winning blows. ‘Jabbing’ also indicates the precursor move, setting up the opponent before dealing the actual strike. In the political arena, ‘jabbing’ refers to probing moves before implementing strategies. For example:

13. *Trung Quốc nhá đòn “tây chay” với Philippines.* (tuoitre.vn, 20/07/2016)
[China **jabbed** at Philippines by “going cold on them”] (tuoitre.vn, July 20, 2016)
14. *Bản tin nóng công nghệ: Samsung được nhờ giải cứu “khủng hoảng lợn”, OPPO nhá đòn Plus để thực bán F3.* (laodong.vn, 02/05/2017)
[Breaking Tech News: Samsung has been asked to relieve “the pig crisis”, OPPO **jabs** with Plus to actually sell F3]. (laodong.vn, May 02, 2017)

In expression 13, ‘jabbing’ refers to China’s call for consumers to boycott products from the Philippines and the U.S. after the international arbitration court ruled that China illegally prevented Filipino ships from docking at the Scarborough Shoal, which has been under Beijing’s control since 2012. In expression 14, ‘jabbing’ points to the fact that OPPO released the F3 Plus into the Vietnamese market in order to mislead its competitor Samsung, while the then-up-and-coming F3 is, in actuality, the strategic commercial product of OPPO.

Boxing tactics also include counterattacks. When projected onto the target domain ‘politics’, counterattacks may signify business, economic, or diplomatic policies implemented in response to an adversary’s offensive action. For example:

15. *Cuộc chiến công nghệ: Cú phản đòn của Trung Quốc khiến Mỹ bất an.* (vietnamfinance.vn, 23/11/2023)
[Technological battle: **The counter strike** by China has caused anxiety for America.] (vietnamfinance.vn, November 23, 2023)
16. *Cú phản đòn của ‘ông lớn’ taxi: Xe ôm ngán ngẩm, GrabBike bắt đầu lo.* (nguoiduatin.vn, 04/10/2017)
[**The counter strike** of taxi ‘big bosses’: Motorbike taxi drivers are frustrated, GrabBike has started to worry.] (nguoiduatin.vn, October 04, 2017)

In expression 15, Huawei’s launch event for their smartphone line is regarded as a powerful ‘counterstrike’ at their major U.S. and Japanese competitors. In expression 16, two Vietnamese ride-sharing transportation giants’ simultaneous business expansions into motorbikes, buggies, and auto-rickshaws are framed as a powerful ‘counterstrike’ against Mai Linh and Vinasun, two major taxi businesses in Vietnam.

C. Conceptual Metaphor ‘UNETHICAL POLITICAL BEHAVIOR/UNFAVOURABLE POLITICAL STATE IS A VIOLATION OF RULES’

Sports in general and boxing specifically all promote ‘fair play’. Sport participants have to follow rules and avoid violating them as best they can. In actuality, however, some boxers sometimes resort to gimmicks, subtle misconduct, or foul play to win. When the source domain ‘violation of rules’ in boxing is projected onto the target domain ‘unethical political behavior’, the source domain provides metaphorical such as ‘hitting below the belt’ or ‘tripping’, forming metaphors for politicians’ ethically dubious acts to undermine the opposition. The researchers found 25 such metaphorical. The frequencies of occurrences of metaphorically expressed words are reported in Table 4 below:

TABLE 4
FREQUENCIES OF OCCURRENCES OF METAPHORICALLY-EXPRESSED WORDS ‘UNETHICAL POLITICAL BEHAVIOR/ UNFAVOURABLE POLITICAL STATE IS A VIOLATION OF RULES’

Source Domain’s Attributes (boxing)	Metaphorically-Expressed Words	Frequency	Source Domain’s Attributes (boxing)	Metaphorically-Expressed Words	Frequency
Foul play	Đánh dưới thắt lưng ‘Hitting below the belt’	13	Foul play	Ngáng chân ‘Tripping’	12
Total					25

When the source domain ‘violation of rules’ is activated and projected onto the target domain, it is implied that aspects of a politician’s behavior and political states of affairs, including defense, diplomacy, healthcare, or education policies, are analogous to situations in the boxing ring. Since politicians are expected to abide by the laws and behave in accordance with moral standards, code-breaching behavior may be framed as foul play, similar to boxing. In online Vietnamese media discourse, instances of improper conduct by politicians are expressed using the metaphorical lead ‘hitting below the belt’, which is a universally condemned, rule-breaching strike in boxing. For example:

17. *Bóng đá Việt Nam cần một cuộc tranh tài sòng phẳng để lựa chọn được người thực sự xứng đáng, chứ không phải kẻ bước lên ngôi “minh chủ” bằng thủ đoạn “đánh dưới thắt lưng” người khác.* (tienphong.vn, 26/04/2018)
[Vietnamese football needs a fair face-off to determine who is truly worthy, not someone who becomes ‘leader’ by ‘**hitting below the belt**’ of others.] (tienphong.vn, April 26, 2018)
18. *“Đánh dưới thắt lưng” huấn luyện viên Hữu Thắng.* (nld.com.vn, 18/09/2017)
[‘**Hitting below the belt**’ of Coach Huu Thang] (nld.com.vn, September 18, 2017)

Both of the above examples refer to political actions taken by figures of authority in Vietnamese sport amidst the turbulence surrounding candidate choices for Director of the Vietnam Football Federation and the head coach of the

national football team. To be more specific, a smearing campaign, rigged election procedures, anonymous complaints, and other underhanded tactics to remove a potential candidate for a leadership position are viewed in light of boxing rules as instances of unsportsmanlike conduct and conceptualized as ‘hitting below the belt’—a prohibited strike in boxing.

In the case of Vietnamese journalism, dramatization, disinformation, and other methods of manipulating public opinion are sometimes used to discredit high-profile journalists and press agencies. The metaphorical lead ‘hitting below the belt’ manifests itself with flexibility in metaphor expressions indicating the aforementioned unscrupulous methods. For example:

19. *Toàn cảnh vụ 'đánh dưới thắt lưng' nhà báo Thu Uyên.* (nguoiduatin.vn, 30/11/2013)
[Full overview of the ‘hitting below the belt’ of journalist Thu Uyen]. (nguoiduatin.vn, November 30, 2013)
20. *Giới bóng đá những ngày qua lại một phen xì xào về những đòn đánh 'dưới thắt lưng' nhằm vào Phó chủ tịch Cao Văn Chóng. Người ta không lạ bởi giai đoạn vừa qua, bóng đá Việt Nam gặt hái nhiều thành tựu và trong đó, truyền thông đóng góp vai trò không nhỏ.* (tienphong.vn, 25/10/2022)
[The football world is once again undergoing drama due to ‘hits below the belt’ aimed at Vice President Cao Van Chong, which surprises no one as the media plays a not-so-subtle role in recent achievements by Vietnamese football.] (tienphong.vn, October 25, 2022)

Example 19 refers to unscrupulous methods aimed at tarnishing the reputation of a renowned journalist while simultaneously discrediting an influential press agency. Similarly, in expression 20, the Vice President for Communications and Diplomacy of the VFF has taken some ‘hits below the belt’ that were delivered to forestall his re-election.

Additionally, the metaphorical lead manifests itself in news about business conduct, where poaching, or recruiting employees from rival businesses, and buying successful outlets from competitors are depicted as detestable yet common practices among insurance companies. Example 21 below is the title of a news article that reports that CEOs in Vietnam’s insurance industry are committed to following the industrial code of conduct, including relinquishing the practice of buying and selling outlets. However, successful insurance outlets are being offered at very high prices—literally translated to ‘as expensive as fresh shrimp’—and insurance companies are still poaching talents from rivals. This phenomenon is also similar to a ‘hit below the belt’ in boxing, a violation of the rules.

21. *Nhân sự bảo hiểm: Những đòn đánh 'dưới thắt lưng'.* (sme.misa.vn, 30/09/2012)
[Insurance personnel: ‘Hits below the belt’.] (sme.misa.vn, September 30, 2012)

In general, in Vietnamese-language online newspaper discourse, it is fairly common for political misconduct to be metaphorically expressed as foul play in boxing. This conceptualization contributes to uncovering flaws in the system of governance and drawbacks of policies, aids readers in better understanding political affairs, and perhaps puts pressure on politicians to reform or alter policies and practices.

D. Conceptual Metaphor ‘RULES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA ARE RULES OF BOXING MATCHES’

Boxing is a combat sport with its own set of rules established internationally, requiring players to understand and abide by the rules. The political arena is also operated under general laws and principles that are immovable. When receiving the attributes of the source domain, metaphorical expressions reflect how politicians control the political arena in accordance with the rules of boxing. The researchers found 34 metaphorically expressed words, as shown in Table 5 below:

TABLE 5
THE FREQUENCIES OF METAPHORICALLY-EXPRESSED WORDS OF METAPHOR ‘RULES IN THE POLITICAL ARENA ARE RULES OF BOXING MATCHES’

Source Domain’s attributes (Boxing)	Metaphorically-expressed words	Frequency	Source Domain’s attributes (Boxing)	Metaphorically-expressed words	Frequency
Rules of boxing matches	(Cuộc) so găng ‘Boxing (match)’	14	Rules of boxing matches	Găng tay đấm bốc ‘Boxing gloves’	6
	Tháo găng ‘Taking off gloves’	5		Hạ đo ván ‘Knock out’	9
Total					34

Within the rules of the game exist non-negotiable regulations such as deciding on wins and losses, rule violations, types of punches, and codes of ethics and conduct. Projecting the attribute “rules of boxing matches” onto “rules in the political arena” activates the use of metaphorically expressed words such as ‘boxing (match)’, ‘taking off gloves’, and so on. In boxing, “boxing match” is a phrase that expresses the fight between two opponents within the same weight class in the ring. Among political metaphorical expressions in online Vietnamese newspapers, a ‘boxing match’ between opponents of the same caliber is mapped onto the target domain to indicate equal competition between government policies. In example 22 below, ‘boxing match’ refers to the debate over various options for adjustment of wage increases for civil servants paid from the national budget.

22. *Điều chỉnh lương tối thiểu: Cuộc “so găng” giữa các kịch bản.* (congthuong.vn, 21/07/2016)
[Adjusting minimum wage levels: A “**boxing match**” between different scenarios.] (congthuong.vn, July 21, 2016)

The characteristics of the development of a boxing match are also projected onto the development of political negotiations. The lexical item “taking off the gloves”, originally indicating the temporary postponement of a boxing match, is employed to signify the stoppage of political conflicts between politicians in example 23 below; conversely, the inverse movement is ‘taking off negotiation gloves’ in order to step into a fearsome battle as in example 24 below. When “boxing gloves” are put on, as in example 25, it implies that a politician decides to deal new, stronger blows against the opponent.

23. *Mỹ-Trung đã “tháo găng”, bước vào Chiến tranh Lạnh mới vì virus Corona.* (baogiaothong.vn, 06/05/2020)
[The US and China have “**taken off their gloves**”, stepping into a new Cold War due to the Corona virus.] (baogiaothong.vn, May 06, 2020)
24. *Các nhà phân tích nói rằng, giờ là lúc “găng tay đàm phán đã tháo” ám chỉ không còn sự lạc quan còn sót lại từ thỏa thuận thương mại Mỹ-Trung giai đoạn một (được ký vào giữa tháng Giêng vừa qua).* (baogiaothong.vn, 06/05/2020)
[Analysts say that now is the time to ‘**take off negotiation gloves**’, indicating the absence of remaining optimism from phase one US-China trade agreement/ deal (signed in the past mid-January)] (baogiaothong.vn, May 06, 2020)
25. *“Găng tay đấm bốc” rõ ràng đã được tung ra vì sự mâu thuẫn của ba cường quốc lớn nhất thế giới, ở các điểm nóng trên tất cả các châu lục, dù ở Châu Âu, Viễn Đông, Trung Đông, bán đảo Triều Tiên và những nơi khác.* (dantri.com.vn, 04/01/2019)
[Putting on ‘**boxing gloves**’ has clearly been initiated due to the conflict among the world’s three largest superpowers in the world, in hotspots across all continents whether in Europe, the Far East, the Middle East, the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere.] (dantri.com.vn, January 04, 2019)

Another similar attribute between the source domain and target domain lies in how the state of defeat is determined in the ring. In boxing, a fighter is determined to be ‘knocked out’, meaning that they are unable to continue the fight. In the political discourse in online Vietnamese newspapers, this attribute of the source domain is mainly mapped to refer to conflicts over policies and political systems where the victory belongs to the stronger side, though the winning side itself may involve a lack of transparency or negativity. For example:

26. *Quốc nạn có nguy cơ hạ đo ván quốc sách.* (vneconomy.vn, 07/06/2012)
[The national disasters are likely to **knock out** the national policy.] (vneconomy.vn, June 07, 2012)

Example 26 reflects the current situation in which the Vietnamese government has been undermined by corrupt hands. National resources have been diverted into the pockets of individuals and interest groups, reducing the efficiency of national policies. With this situation, it can be concluded that national policy has been ‘knocked out’ by the national disaster.

In the political discourse in online Vietnamese newspapers, there is clearly a widespread appearance of metaphors with the source domain ‘boxing’. Most attributes of the source domain have been chosen, activated, and projected onto the target domain ‘politics’. Perceiving politics as a boxing match, the authors of news articles have conveyed information about the political aspects of different nations through a scenario of a risky and dramatic boxing match, making the readers perceive the challenges inherent in the political arena. The actions and strategies of politicians greatly influence the benefit of a nation and its people. The target domain ‘politics’ is conceptualized through the source domain “boxing”, which has contributed to the clarification of the challenges as well as the political prowess of politicians in their respective historical roles in the political arena, so that their policies are powerful enough and demonstrate the political fortitude of the leaders of organizations, parties, and nations. Moreover, it is easy to see that the entire conceptualization of ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH’ is manifested by the mapping schema inherent in the consciousness of the authors, formed by the correspondences in experience and knowledge about ‘the boxing match’, about the experiences relating to the knowledge of a combat sport within a universal and specific cognitive frame.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the terminology of sports seems to have been flexibly and creatively utilized in aiding the formation of political metaphorical expressions that impact the perception and behavior of readers or serve the purpose of public propaganda and influence. The source domain is exploited for conceptual metaphors in political discourse, while at the same time reflecting the intentions of politicians when using conceptual metaphors. Boxing is a combat martial art sport characterized by individual tactical striking techniques. As a result, this sport has become a useful source domain for metaphorically addressing political issues. Metaphors are an essential part of a political discourse style, with politicians/ governments often using various metaphors in order to change people’s attitudes towards politics. Even on certain occasions, they serve to create a positive public image for politicians and their respective parties or organizations, with a view to attracting support or justifying their political actions.

V. CONCLUSION

Through the clarification of the mapping and stimulation mechanism and pointing out the similarities in characteristics between the two spatial domains ‘source’ and ‘target’ in the conceptual metaphorical structure ‘POLITICS IS A BOXING

MATCH', it can be concluded that the thinking about politics of the authors all stems from background knowledge, established on the basis of human practical experience in general and the unpredictability and harshness of the political environment in general and of boxing matches in particular. From the decoding of the formation and projection mechanism in metaphors with the target domain 'politics', it can be seen that there is a level of consistency in the thinking of authors when rationalizing 'politics' as a boxing match with all the relevant characteristics of participants, rules, strikes and punches, and deciding the outcome in the arena. Sportifying political activities combined with language exaggeration has caused political scenarios to bear shades of a sports competition, requiring the resilience, agility, quickness, endurance, and willpower of politicians. The rules and impartiality in sports are similar to the requirements for politicians to abide by the rules of the political arena. Types of rule violations and negative reactions to political scenarios are often reflected upon with criticism. Strategies used in boxing and other tactics of politicians are viewed in unison. Losing in the ring is akin to the failure of politicians in the political arena or the failure of political organizations. A real-life boxing match ideally ends with a knockout by the fighter causing their opposition to drop to the ground, whereas competition in the political arena ideally ends with the failure of the opposition as they are unable to affect the outcome of the political situation. It is easily observable that the entire conceptual metaphor 'POLITICS IS A BOXING MATCH' is demonstrated through an imagery schema already established in the subconscious of the authors, formed by the correspondences in experience and available knowledge about 'a boxing match', about experiences relating to this combat sport within a universal cognitive frame; however, metaphorical expressions also manifest the distinct features of Vietnamese thinking.

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