

**SPORT IDIOMS BEYOND SPORT: TRADITIONAL AND 21ST-CENTURY
EXPRESSIONS IN POLITICAL, BUSINESS,
AND EVERYDAY ENGLISH DISCOURSE**

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Abstract

The article discusses sport-derived idioms used outside sport and the semantic variety of such expressions in everyday life, business, and politics. The study highlights the role of fundamental sport idioms, including those from cricket, boxing, horse racing, and football, as cultural and historical markers of specific sports, but also as means of communicating values like fairness, competition, success, and failure, which makes them a linguistic link between sport and everyday language. The article also examines the incorporation of sport idioms into other settings, such as the business and political spheres, where many of these expressions have become standard fare in decision-making, competition, and accountability. The role of sport idioms in the context of casual conversation is also considered, demonstrating the enrichment of expressive and figurative language in everyday conversation. To demonstrate that the same expressions can be used in various ways depending on context, a cross-register comparative analysis is employed, showing how different communicative strategies are encoded in both casual and professional settings. The results have shown that sport, as a field of communication, not only supports intercultural communication but also demonstrates the same cognitive and cultural patterns across various communication styles. The study aims to document sport

idioms, thereby demonstrating that those of newly added sports are an important and largely neglected aspect of modern English phraseology.

Keywords and phrases: Sport idioms, figurative language, idiomatic expressions, semantic shift, non-sporting discourse, business discourse, political discourse, casual communication, cultural linguistics, British culture, intercultural communication, metaphor, phraseology, emerging sports, MMA, surfing, parkour, padel, pickleball

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Համառոտագիր

Հոդվածում քննարկվում են սպորտային դարձվածքները և դրանց կիրառությունը ոչ սպորտային համատեքստում՝ սպորտային ծագում ունեցող դարձվածքների իմաստաբանական բազմազանությունը առօրյա խոսքում, բիզնես և քաղաքական դիսկուրսում, ինչպես նաև ոչ պաշտոնական հաղորդակցության մեջ: Այստեղ ընդգծվում է, թե ինչպես են հատկապես կրիկետից, բռնցքամարտից, ձիավազքից և ֆուտբոլից վերցված սպորտային արտահայտությունները դարձել անգլերենում տարածված փոխաբերական արտահայտություններ: Այսպիսի դարձվածքներն արտացոլում են ոչ միայն որոշակի սպորտաձևի հետ մշակութային և պատմական կապերը, այլև արտահայտում են արդարության, մրցակցության, հաջողության

և ձախողման ավելի ընդհանուր արժեքներ, որոնք հանդես են գալիս որպես լեզվական կամուրջ մասնագիտական և առօրյա խոսույթների միջև: Բացի այդ՝ ուսումնասիրությունը վերլուծում է սպորտային արտահայտությունների կիրառությունը բիզնեսի և քաղաքականության ոլորտներում և ցույց է տալիս, որ դրանց մեծ մասը այժմ դարձել է լայնորեն կիրառվող լեզվական միջոց՝ որոշումների կայացման, մրցակցության և պատասխանատվության նշանակություն պարունակող: Ներկայացվում է նաև սպորտային արտահայտությունների դերը առօրյա խոսքում՝ ցույց տալով, թե ինչպես դրանք կարող են ազդել լեզվի արտահայտիչ և պատկերավոր օգտագործման վրա առօրյա հաղորդակցության մեջ: Տարբեր խոսության ռեգիստրների համեմատական վերլուծությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ նույն արտահայտությունները տարբեր կերպ են գործում՝ կախված համատեքստից՝ արտահայտելով հաղորդակցական տարբեր ռազմավարություններ ինչպես առօրյա, այնպես էլ մասնագիտական միջավայրերում: Արդյունքները ցույց են տալիս, որ սպորտային հիմքով դարձվածքների ուսումնասիրությունը ոչ միայն օգտակար է միջմշակութային փոխգործակցության բարելավման համար, այլև արտացոլում է տարբեր ոլորտներում ընդհանուր ճանաչողական և մշակութային օրինաչափությունները: Արվում է եզրակացություն, որ սպորտային արտահայտությունները դինամիկ լեզվաբանական գործիքներ են, որոնք ձևավորում են ժամանակակից անգլերենի խոսույթը և մշակութային ընկալումը: Միաժամանակ ընդգծվում է, որ նոր և զարգացող մարզաձևերից ծագած դարձվածքները ներկայացնում են ժամանակակից անգլերեն դարձվածաբանության կարևոր, սակայն դեռևս անբավարար ուսումնասիրված ոլորտ:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ՝ սպորտային դարձվածքներ, փոխաբերական խոսք, իդիոմատիկ արտահայտություններ, իմաստային տեղաշարժ, ոչ սպորտային խոսույթ, գործարար խոսույթ, քաղաքական խոսույթ, առօրյա հաղորդակցություն, մշակութային լեզվաբանություն, բրիտանական մշակույթ, միջմշակութային հաղորդակցություն, փոխաբերություն, դարձվածաբանություն, զարգացող մարզաձևեր, MMA (խառը մենամարտեր), սերֆինգ, պարկուր, պադել, փիթլբոլ:

СПОРТИВНЫЕ ИДИОМЫ ВНЕ СПОРТА: ТРАДИЦИОННЫЕ И ИДИОМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ВЫРАЖЕНИЯ XXI ВЕКА В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ, ДЕЛОВОМ И ПОВСЕДНЕВНОМ АНГЛОЯЗЫЧНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

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Аннотация

В настоящей статье рассматриваются спортивные идиомы и их применение вне спортивного контекста, а также семантическое разнообразие спортивных идиом в повседневной речи, деловом и политическом дискурсе и неформальной коммуникации. В ней подчеркивается, как идиомы из области спорта, особенно из крикета, бокса, скачек и футбола, превратились в распространенные образные выражения в английском языке. Такие идиомы являются не только признаком культурных и исторических связей с конкретным видом спорта, но и отражением более общих ценностей — справедливости, соревновательности, успеха и неудачи, которые выступают в качестве лингвистического посредника между профессиональным и обычным дискурсом. Кроме того, в работе рассматривается применение спортивных идиом в сфере бизнеса и политики, демонстрируя, что большинство этих выражений к настоящему времени стали общеупотребительными терминами, обозначающими принятие решений, конкурирование и ответственность. Также рассматривается роль спортивных идиом в повседневной речи, показывая, как они обогащают выразительный и образный язык в повседневном общении. Сравнительный межрегистровый анализ показывает, что одни и те же выражения функционируют по-разному в зависимости от контекста, кодируя различные коммуникативные стратегии в повседневном и профессиональном общении. Наконец, результаты указывают на то, что фразеология, основанная на спорте, не только полезна для улучшения межкультурного взаимодействия, но и отражает общие когнитивные и культурные модели в различных сферах. Делается вывод, что спортивные идиомы являются динамичными лингвистическими инструментами, которые

формируют современный английский дискурс и культурное понимание, а идиомы новых видов спорта представляют собой значимое и малоизученное измерение современной английской фразеологии.

Ключевые слова и фразы: спортивные идиомы, образная речь, идиоматические выражения, семантический сдвиг, неспортивный дискурс, деловой дискурс, политический дискурс, повседневное общение, культурная лингвистика, спортивная культура, межкультурная коммуникация, метафора, фразеология, новые виды спорта, ММА, серфинг, паркур, падел, пиклбол.

Introduction

Language and culture are inseparable, and idiomatic expressions are one of the most vivid expressions of the relationship. For a long time, the language of sport has inspired and been particularly rich in metaphor in English: images that originated on the pitch have become part of political discourse, business conversation, news writing, and everyday language. Although this is known to occur in well-established sports like cricket, boxing, and horse racing [1, 6], a new wave of sport-derived idioms is emerging in twenty-first-century sports (MMA, surfing, padel, pickleball, parkour, freerunning). The phraseology of expressions such as tap out, wipe out, stick the landing, dink it, and play the glass appears to be emerging in both informal and professional discourse, yet they have received virtually no attention in the academic literature on English phraseology.

This research investigates the semantic shift of the new sport idioms and their figurative productivity in non-sport contexts. It explores how they entered into the business and professional registers, the political discourse, and everyday talk and discusses what their distribution shows of the interplay between modern sport culture, language variation and social identity. Emerging sport idioms are compared with traditional sport idioms, which can be seen as a comparative point of reference, and are used to illustrate the established path of the sport's origin to the general figurative use.

Theoretical Background

Idiomatic expressions are a fundamental part of every language and are embedded in the historical, cultural, and cognitive life experiences of any speech community. As for the meaning of an idiom, it is usually explained as an expression that cannot be taken apart into the meaning of its constituent parts [5, 10]. Idioms, in the light of phraseological theory, are not only stylistic devices, but also bearers of cultural knowledge, social values and collective experience [9]. Figurative use, such as idioms, requires the same cognitive processes as literal use, and understanding of the figurative is part of language competence rather than an extralinguistic process, as argued by Glucksberg [7].

Sport idioms have a special position in English due to the social and cultural significance of sport in English-speaking societies. Many of the expressions that have come from cricket, boxing, horse racing, football, etc., have undergone semantic shifts and have become part of non-sporting conversation. In recent years, another wave of idioms has emerged from modern sports like MMA, surfing, parkour, freerunning, padel, and pickleball, which have become quite popular in the

21st century. The development of meaning through semantic expansion is thus an example of the process of language's dynamism and of its ability to move meaning from one conceptual domain to another. Therefore, established sport idioms are widely used in political speeches, business communication, journalism, and everyday language, while emerging sport idioms are beginning to follow the same trajectory.

From the perspective of cultural linguistics, sport idioms reflect national traditions, behavioural norms, and collective identity [4]. In British society, cricket is linked to the concepts of fairness, discipline and gentlemanly conduct, and this is why phrases like *it is not cricket* and *a good innings* have much more meaning than just the boundary rope [3, 1]. Both language and history of the speech community are necessary to understand such culturally embedded idioms. The same applies to emerging-sport idioms: tap out has meaning only for those who know the submission rules of mixed martial arts, and dink assumes familiarity with the pickleball non-volley zone. Sport culture is global, and new sports are gaining mass audiences, so the cultural knowledge necessary to translate the culture of idioms is spreading, helping them enter into the mainstream of sport culture [11]. Therefore, the study of emerging-sport idioms contributes to research in intercultural communication by mapping how new cultural practices create new figurative language.

Methodology

The present study is based on a qualitative linguistic and cultural analysis of English sport idioms and their usage beyond the sporting context. The research focuses on sport-related idiomatic expressions from diverse sports such as cricket, boxing, football, horse racing, tennis, and gambling, as well as new sports like MMA, surfing, parkour, freerunning, padel, and pickleball, which are beginning to surface in political, business, and everyday conversations.

The sources of material for the study were phraseological dictionaries, scientific works, the Internet, and real-life examples of English-language use. Special consideration was paid to idioms that illustrate the semantic shift and metaphorical extension of their original sporting uses to broader communicative functions.

The analysis used includes descriptive, semantic and contextual approaches. The idioms were classified and presented using the descriptive method, organised by sphere of application. The semantic approach enabled the study to focus on the change of figurative meaning and metaphorical interpretation, and the contextual analysis assisted in the identification of the communicative and cultural functions of sport idioms in various kinds of discourse.

Additionally, the study incorporates components of the cultural-linguistic approach to examine sport idioms as reflections of national identity, cultural values, and social attitudes in English-speaking communities. In addition, the research explores the idioms of new sports – MMA, Surfing, Parkour, Padel, and Pickleball – as expressions of the new cultural identity, competitiveness, and adaptability in the modern English-speaking communities.

Semantic Development of Sport Idioms

The semantic migration of sport idioms into non-sporting discourse follows a well-established pattern. As Hall and Hall [8] argue, members of different cultural communities bring distinct implicit frameworks to the exchange of information —

frameworks that shape how messages are encoded, interpreted, and stored. Their analysis is national, but it is easy to see how the principle may also be applied to the mutually agreed-upon codes of sport: the figurative vocabulary of the sport is legible primarily to those who share it, and it is their shared legibility that gives sporting expressions the power to be appropriated and moved into wider discourse. Over time, expressions born in specific sporting contexts are generalised in meaning and absorbed into the broader figurative vocabulary of the language [5]. This process is now visibly underway for emerging sports. MMA, surfing, parkour, padel, and pickleball appear to be among its primary contemporary sources, and the idioms they are generating have begun to acquire metaphorical extensions in professional and everyday English.

MMA and combat sports have proved an especially productive source of figurative language because the discipline's terminology is built on universal human experiences — submission, endurance, pressure, and the management of aggression — that translate without difficulty into the language of professional and social life. The semantic transfer is realised through an attributive categorisation, in which the source domain (the fight) provides a rich structural schema that is then transferred to the target domain (the negotiation, the project, the decision) with the same relational schema but without the same physical content. Tap out – literally, the signal of defeat in grappling – goes with it: the act of submission becomes a metaphor for any kind of surrender, of personal or professional limits, and carries with it connotations of honesty and finality. Ground and pound, the MMA strategy of sustained, methodical striking from a dominant position, maps onto any context requiring relentless, systematic pressure. What makes combat-sport idioms particularly durable in their new contexts is their emotional directness: expressions such as in the clinch — a locked standoff in which neither party can land a decisive blow — or change levels — a sudden shift of approach designed to destabilise an opponent — carry an embodied vividness that abstract synonyms (deadlock, pivot) cannot match. Figurative power is strongly related to the imageability of the original action in the idiom, as Moon [10] also points out: The more viscerally legible the original action, the more figurative power the transferred one has.

Surfing generates idioms of a different semantic character, centred not on confrontation but on timing, patience, and the relationship between individual effort and forces beyond individual control. This gives surfing vocabulary a distinctive metaphorical profile in which the speaker is typically positioned against an environment rather than an opponent, and in which judgement and resilience matter more than aggression. Wipe out encodes catastrophic, often public failure after a promising beginning — the wave that looked rideable becomes the wave that destroys — and this semantic structure transfers precisely to contexts of spectacular professional or reputational collapse. Paddle out, by contrast, encodes the unglamorous, effortful phase that precedes any reward, capturing the cultural truth that visible success is preceded by invisible labour. *Caught inside* — the dangerous position of being trapped between the break and the shore as set waves pound in — maps onto any situation of being overwhelmed by accumulating pressures with no clear exit. *Read the sets*, the experienced surfer's discipline of studying wave patterns before committing, encodes strategic patience and the value of observation over impulsive action. The semantic migration of these expressions is facilitated by

the global reach of surf culture through film, social media, and lifestyle branding, which has made surfing's vocabulary familiar well beyond the communities that actually practise the sport [11].

Parkour and freerunning supply a third semantic register, one organised around spatial navigation, efficiency, and the creative reinterpretation of obstacles. The foundational philosophy of parkour — that any environment can be traversed efficiently if the practitioner can identify the optimal line through it — generates a vocabulary that maps onto problem-solving and organisational thinking with unusual precision. *Find the line*, the parkour practitioner's central task, translates directly into management and strategy contexts where multiple routes exist, but only one is genuinely efficient. *Stick the landing*, the requirement that a movement be completed with controlled precision rather than trailing off into recovery, encodes the communicative and professional principle that endings matter as much as beginnings — a claim that resonates in presentation coaching, negotiation, and creative work alike. *Vault over it* reframes an obstacle as a resource, encoding the cognitive shift from problem to opportunity that characterises adaptive thinking. The idiom *flow state* has begun to show up in psychology circles, in the culture of technology, and in the lexicon of work. It is now used more and more to describe something entirely different from ordinary work, namely, a quality of focused productivity. These expressions are not just metaphorical; they also contain a toolkit of concepts associated with the movement of parkour that can be directly applied to organisational life: the idioms of parkour carry entire ways of thinking about obstacles, efficiency, and creative resourcefulness [9].

Padel and pickleball, two of the fastest-growing racket sports of the 21st century, produce idioms of a more strategic and rule-bound nature, as they are sports where the physical boundaries of the court are not a constraint but a tactical asset, and where control and placement always beat power. *Play the glass*, the padel technique of redirecting the ball off the enclosed glass walls, encodes the principle of working creatively within constraints rather than against them. This metaphorical structure transfers naturally into legal, regulatory, and organisational contexts where the boundaries of a situation can be turned to advantage. From pickleball, *dink it* — the soft, well-placed drop shot that drops in the non-volley zone and denies without allowing the opponent an attacking opportunity — encodes the strategic superiority of a measured, de-escalating response over an aggressive one. In the kitchen, pickleball's restricted non-volley zone, where powerful overhead shots are prohibited, describes any constrained position in which the natural aggressive impulse must be suppressed in favour of patience. Stacking, the doubles tactic of deliberately positioning players to ensure the strongest is always in the most advantageous court position, maps onto any deliberate arrangement of personnel or resources to maximise competitive advantage. The semantic productivity of these sports is in line with what Fernando [5] describes as the semantic stability of sports idioms, which are produced by rule-governed competitive activities and follow a fixed structural schema that can be inherited by figurative meaning. The definition of pickleball's *kitchen* is a clear and simple spatial and regulatory concept, and the definition of its transferred meaning is similarly clear. Emerging-sport idioms are not just colourful additions to the lexicon but useful communicative tools because of this precision.

The examples above demonstrate that the meaning of sport-specific idioms

extends beyond the boundaries of the ball field. What unites the emerging-sport idioms examined here — whether from the MMA cage, the surf break, the parkour rooftop, the padel court, or the pickleball kitchen — is their capacity to encode complex interpersonal and professional dynamics in a single vivid image. Unlike many established idioms whose sporting origins have faded from consciousness, these are still alive with the flavour of the sport in which they originated: the physicality of a *tap out*, the patience required to *read the sets*, the precision of sticking the landing. This proximity to lived experience may explain their growing currency in contemporary English. Their popular use in modern English may be due to their nearness to the lived experience. The next section focuses on how the same and other well-known figurative expressions are used in the specific contexts of business and political discourse, where figurative language serves as both a rhetorical device and a means of communication.

Sport Idioms Across Registers: Business, Politics, and Everyday Communication

One of the well-established characteristics in English phraseology is that sports idioms are used as part of the language, both in daily conversation and in professional settings. As Beard [1] observes, the language of sport offers speakers a ready stock of vivid, compressed metaphors for competition, strategy, risk, and resolution — precisely the conceptual terrain of professional, political, and social life alike. In parallel with this traditional lexicon, a new generation of idioms from MMA, surfing, parkour, padel, and pickleball has been gaining currency across registers, as these activities have become an increasingly popular part of everyday life, largely thanks to the visibility afforded by social media and international sporting networks. Sport is a cultural hub in which people and communities make sense of who they are and where they belong, and where collective values are being negotiated, as Dunning [4] claims, thus providing a constant stream of figurative language from the sports field to everyday conversation. The table below presents a representative selection of both traditional and emerging sport idioms as they function across two registers: business negotiation, management communication, and political discourse on the one hand, and informal, everyday communication on the other [12, 13].

Table 1.

Traditional and emerging sport idioms, their meaning and example sentences in casual conversation, business and political discourse

IDIOM / SPORT OF ORIGIN	MEANING AND EXAMPLE IN CASUAL CONVERSATION	MEANING AND EXAMPLE IN BUSINESS / POLITICAL DISCOURSE
Traditional sport idioms		
blind-sided / American football	Meaning: <i>to be caught completely off guard by something</i> Example: I was completely blind-sided when she told me she was moving abroad.	Meaning: <i>To be hit by something entirely unexpected, leaving no time to prepare.</i> Example: The company was blind-sided by the competitor's sudden price cut.
go to bat for someone / baseball	Meaning: <i>to stand up for or support someone</i> Example: Thanks for going to bat for me when they questioned my idea.	Meaning: <i>To defend or advocate strongly for another person in a professional or political context.</i> Example: The minister went to bat for the proposed legislation despite fierce party opposition.

have someone in your corner / boxing	Meaning: <i>to have someone's loyal support</i> Example: It is a tough situation, but at least I know I have my sister in my corner.	Meaning: <i>To have a trusted ally or supporter backing you in a difficult situation.</i> Example: Going into the shareholder meeting, she was relieved to have the CFO in her corner.
the home stretch / horse racing	Meaning: <i>the final stage of something long or difficult</i> Example: We are in the home stretch now — just one more chapter to write.	Meaning: <i>The final stage of a long project, campaign, or process.</i> Example: With the vote two weeks away, the campaign is firmly in the home stretch.
hot shot / big shot / hunting	Meaning: <i>someone who is very good at something or thinks they are</i> Example: He is a bit of a hot shot on the tennis court, to be fair.	Meaning: <i>An important, powerful, or highly successful person in a professional field.</i> Example: All the hot shots from the tech sector were invited to address the parliamentary committee.
<i>infighting</i> / boxing	Meaning: <i>conflict or rivalry within a group</i> Example: There has been terrible <i>infighting</i> in that office ever since the manager left.	Meaning: <i>Hidden conflict or rivalry within an organisation that undermines collective performance.</i> Example: The party's <i>infighting</i> over leadership became a major liability in the election campaign.
keep the ball rolling / ball games	Meaning: <i>to maintain the momentum of something</i> Example: I will rely on you to keep the ball rolling during the Q&A.	Meaning: <i>To sustain the momentum of a project, initiative, or discussion.</i> Example: The coordinator was asked to keep the ball rolling while the director was away.
push it over the goal line / American football	Meaning: <i>to finally finish something that has been going on for a while</i> Example: We have been working on this for months — let's just push it over the goal line.	Meaning: <i>To bring a long-running project or negotiation to a definitive conclusion.</i> Example: After months of stalled talks, both sides agreed to push the deal over the goal line.
saved by the bell / boxing	Meaning: <i>rescued from a difficult situation by a timely interruption</i> Example: I was about to give the wrong answer when the teacher moved on — saved by the bell.	Meaning: <i>Rescued from an awkward or damaging situation by an interruption that halts proceedings.</i> Example: The minister was saved by the bell when a procedural vote cut short the questioning.
take the full count / boxing	Meaning: <i>to accept defeat; to give up</i> Example: After months of trying to get funding, he finally took the full count and shelved the project.	Meaning: <i>To accept total defeat or be knocked out of a competition or process.</i> Example: After exhausting all legal avenues, the firm took the full count and settled out of court.
throw in the towel / boxing	Meaning: <i>to give up; to admit defeat</i> Example: After the third failed attempt, she threw in the towel and tried a different approach entirely.	Meaning: <i>To concede defeat and withdraw from a contest or endeavour.</i> Example: Facing overwhelming opposition, the candidate threw in the towel before the final round.
throw one's hat in the ring / boxing	Meaning: <i>to declare you want to compete or take part</i> Example: She finally threw her hat in the ring and applied for the promotion.	Meaning: <i>To announce one's candidacy or entry into a competition or contest.</i> Example: Three senior figures have already thrown their hats in the ring for the leadership.
under the wire / horse racing	Meaning: <i>at the very last possible moment</i> Example: The assignment was submitted just under the wire — seconds before the midnight deadline.	Meaning: <i>Just within the final deadline; completing something at the very last permissible moment.</i> Example: The bill passed under the wire, approved by one vote in the final minute of the session.

win by a nose / horse racing	Meaning: <i>to succeed by the narrowest possible margin</i> Example: We got the contract, but only won by a nose — the client said the proposals were almost identical.	Meaning: <i>To succeed by the smallest possible margin after a close contest.</i> Example: The incumbent won the constituency by a nose, with a majority of fewer than two hundred votes.
Emerging sport idioms		
tap out / MMA / grappling	Meaning: <i>to admit you have reached your limit and give up</i> Example: I completely tapped out after the third day of the conference — I could not take in any more.	Meaning: <i>To acknowledge defeat or reach one's limit and withdraw from a situation.</i> Example: After years of losses, the board decided to <i>tap out</i> and sell the business.
ground and pound / MMA	Meaning: <i>to keep at something with relentless, sustained effort</i> Example: She just <i>ground and pounded</i> the revision until she finally understood it.	Meaning: <i>To apply relentless, sustained pressure until a result is achieved.</i> Example: The campaign team <i>ground and pounded</i> the marginal constituencies with daily canvassing.
in the clinch / MMA / boxing	Meaning: <i>locked in a standoff where neither side can move forward</i> Example: We have been <i>in the clinch</i> over this flat decision for weeks now.	Meaning: <i>Locked in a tense standoff where neither side can gain a decisive advantage.</i> Example: The merger talks are <i>in the clinch</i> — both companies want a deal but neither will move on valuation.
wipe out / surfing	Meaning: <i>to fail completely, often after things seemed to be going well</i> Example: We totally wiped out trying to get a table — the restaurant was fully booked all weekend.	Meaning: <i>To fail spectacularly, usually after a promising start.</i> Example: The reform programme wiped out in its second year when key allies withdrew their support.
paddle out / surfing	Meaning: <i>to put in sustained, unglamorous effort before seeing any reward</i> Example: Learning a language is all about paddling out — months of hard work before it feels natural.	Meaning: <i>To invest sustained, often unrecognised effort in preparation before any visible return.</i> Example: The start-up spent two years paddling out before the product found its market.
stick the landing / parkour / freerunning	Meaning: <i>to finish something well, with precision and confidence</i> Example: Your speech started brilliantly — just make sure you <i>stick the landing</i> .	Meaning: <i>To complete something with precision and confidence, ensuring a strong finish.</i> Example: The speech was strong, but the minister failed to <i>stick the landing</i> — the closing argument fell flat.
flow state / freerunning	Meaning: <i>a condition of effortless, focused peak performance</i> Example: Don't interrupt him — he is in a complete <i>flow state</i> , and the work is practically writing itself.	Meaning: <i>A condition of peak focused productivity in which work proceeds with unusual ease and clarity.</i> Example: The drafting team entered a <i>flow state</i> in the final week, producing twice their usual output.
find the line / parkour	Meaning: <i>to work out the best or most efficient path through something</i> Example: Once you <i>find the line</i> through this recipe, it is actually really straightforward.	Meaning: <i>To identify the most efficient route or approach through a complex situation.</i> Example: The consultants were brought in specifically to <i>find the line</i> through the regulatory maze.
play the glass / padel	Meaning: <i>to use the constraints of a situation creatively to your advantage</i> Example: Instead of complaining about the small kitchen, she played the glass and made it feel cosy.	Meaning: <i>To use the constraints of a situation creatively to one's own advantage.</i> Example: Rather than challenge the ruling, the legal team played the glass and found a compliant workaround.
dink it / pickleball	Meaning: <i>to respond gently and carefully rather than aggressively</i> Example: Instead of confronting him in public, just <i>dink it</i> — a quiet word later will do far more good.	Meaning: <i>To choose a measured, careful response rather than an aggressive one.</i> Example: Instead of a combative press release, the communications director advised the team to <i>dink it</i> .

<i>in the kitchen / pickleball</i>	Meaning: <i>in a restricted position where you cannot yet make a decisive move</i> Example: With the landlord and the bank both watching, we were stuck <i>in the kitchen</i> all month.	Meaning: <i>In a constrained position where the natural aggressive impulse must be suppressed in favour of patience.</i> Example: With regulators scrutinising every move, the firm found itself permanently <i>in the kitchen</i> .
<i>stacking / pickleball</i>	Meaning: <i>arranging people or things deliberately to put your strongest where it matters most</i> Example: She was <i>stacking</i> the team for the group project — putting the best researchers on the hardest parts.	Meaning: <i>The deliberate arrangement of personnel or resources to maximise competitive advantage.</i> Example: The party was accused of <i>stacking</i> its policy committees with loyalists.

The table above shows the versatility of sport-derived idioms in the English register – from the Boardroom to the breakfast table. What unifies *throw in the towel* and *dink it, win by a nose* and *flow state* is that each of them can capture an intricate relationship between two people, or two people and a thing, in a single vivid image. As Bourdieu [2] argues, sport is a social field that generates its own logic of practice — a logic organised around competition, strategy, and the management of risk — and it is precisely this logic that transfers so productively across registers. However, whether it comes from the boxing ring, the horse-racing track, the MMA cage, or the pickleball court, the figurative uses of an idiom convey a competitive or strategic context in a compact, evocative, and self-explanatory manner common to the speakers of the cultural reference. The traditional idioms in the top part of the table have lost much of their sporting flavour, and are now being used as a kind of figurative coinage; the emerging idioms in the bottom part of the table still have the feel of their source idioms, and have a freshness and an explicitness that a speaker can use to be particularly expressive in contexts that prize directness and retention. As Piirainen [11] notes, the widespread distribution of figurative units rooted in shared human activities suggests that sport, as one of the most universal of those activities, will continue to supply the metaphorical vocabulary of English across all registers for as long as people play, watch, and talk about games.

Conclusion

This study has followed the semantic shift of sport-based idioms from the playing field to the registers of business, politics, and everyday communication, with a specific focus on those derived from MMA, surfing, parkour, freerunning, padel, and pickleball. The analysis shows that these new-sport idioms are not ‘spare’ novelties but actively figurative resources entering the discourse of professional and informal English-speaking communities. Some of the more recent examples, such as *tap out, wipe out, paddle out, stick the landing, find the line, flow state, play the glass, dink it, in the kitchen, and stacking*, indicate the same process of semantic extension and have varying degrees of embedding in the broader English lexicon, which would require systematic corpus research.

The special thing about this new generation of idioms is what they create. Traditional sport idioms often include concepts of fairness, competition and endurance, while emerging sports idioms emphasise strategy, accuracy, adaptability, and mental toughness — attributes that are especially relevant to the modern workplace. The cross-register analysis also demonstrated that the same expressions are used differently in the two modes, in that *dink it* in everyday speech signals a

preference for a quiet, measured response, whereas in business or political speech it signals calculated de-escalation; tap out in everyday speech signals personal exhaustion, whereas in professional speech it signals strategic withdrawal. The sensitivity of this register indicates that emerging-sport idioms are not only being transferred to general use but also being shaped by the communicative needs of various social contexts.

These are terms that have been adopted in popular culture and, as a result of social network usage, have become widely diffused among speech communities. The global online communities that have formed around MMA, surfing, padel, parkour, freerunning and pickleball function as channels through which sporting metaphors travel rapidly into general use, reaching speakers with no direct connection to the sports themselves. Pedagogically, there are obvious implications for the teaching of English: learners who are exposed to such expressions in business meetings, in the media or in political commentaries must have access to the sporting context in which they originated if they are to grasp the meaning of the expression correctly, but instructional materials that exclusively centre on known sport idioms do not capture a growing part of the language used in modern political or media contexts. Future research should pursue corpus evidence on the frequency, register distribution, and semantic stability of these emerging-sport idioms across different varieties of English—and should extend the cross-register comparative framework developed here to additional disciplines, such as e-sports and extreme sports, which are already generating figurative vocabulary of their own.

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