Comparable Political Ideologies in Linguistic Metaphor Usage by Some Nigerian Politicians

By

OKPEH, Ochefu Peter
Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Federal University Lokoja

&

DURO-BELLO, Olaoluwa
Department of English and Literary Studies
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences,
Federal University Lokoja
Abstract

Studies on metaphor usage in political discourse have focused on its rhetoric and conceptual relevance in cognition, leaving out its ideological essence. The foregoing results in underestimating the discourse value and implications of politically motivated metaphors in national politics. This study examines select campaign speeches of two presidential aspirants in Nigeria to determine their choice of metaphors and to comment on their perceived implications for Nigerian politics. Four campaign speeches of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential aspirants were collected from their respective official websites. A collapse of Lakoff and Johnson’s Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Chateris-Black’s Critical Metaphor Theory is appropriated for a critical examination of the derived metaphors. The conceptual metaphors in the text encapsulate two politically motivated ideologies: the supremacist ideology which is expressed as THE NATION IS A PERSON and the sacrificial ideology which indicates that LEADERSHIP IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY. These conceptual metaphors are expressed via sentences in the active voice which are preponderantly used in the text. The study shows that some Nigerian politicians advocate virtually the same ideology - the nation first. Thus, a critical study of metaphors in political speeches provides insight on Nigeria politics.

Keywords: metaphor, supremacist ideology, political discourse, critical discourse analysis

Introduction

Since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) came up with their groundbreaking work, *Metaphors We Live By*, intellectual interest in metaphor radically shifted from its classical conceptualization as being essentially an aesthetic component of language use and a rhetorical device in communication. Lakoff and Johnson established, through their Cognitive Metaphor Theory, that metaphor is an integral aspect of the human conceptual system, and so is first, and more fundamentally, a figure of thought than of speech. This cognitive perception of metaphor has engendered varying studies by scholars on the preponderance, nature and usage of metaphors in various domains of human experience. A few examples of such studies are Taiwo (2008) which evaluates the use of metaphor in Nigerian Political Discourse; Cameroon (2003) which focuses on the developmental function of metaphor in classroom settings, and Weatheral and Walton (1999) which investigates how metaphors are used to express sexual experiences among the university students of New Zealand.

A recurrent gap in these studies and several others that have investigated metaphors is the ideological implication of conceptual metaphors in discourse. The ubiquity of linguistic
metaphors in discourse generally and the cognitive origin of the conceptual metaphors they signal make a critical interpretation of conceptual metaphors necessary for understanding their role in shaping the discourses in which they are used and in also encoding the ideologies associated with such discourses. Arguably, there are few domains where metaphors are more preponderantly used than in political discourse. This is so because political speeches are generally intended to persuade and move the people, and since the metaphor, according to MacCormac (1990) is an emotionally impactful rhetorical device, politicians rely on it as a linguistic resource during especially campaign periods to sway the people to their side.

The linguistic metaphoric expressions used by politicians and the conceptual metaphors resulting from such expressions are usually a reflection of the ideological leanings of the politicians. This connection between conceptual metaphor usage and ideology is captured by Zinken (2003) on a study carried out on conceptual metaphor usage by different newspapers in Poland. The findings of the study reveal varying ideologies among the newspapers, which correspond with the type of conceptual metaphor revealed in their individual reportage. Another study that validates the foregoing is Musolf (2006) which evaluates the political ideologies of British and German public debates about the European Union, based on the metaphors contained in their speeches on the subject matter.

The current enquiry springs from the above background, and sets out to critically investigate the comparability of the ideologies of the two major political parties in Nigeria, based on the conceptual metaphors contained in the campaign speeches of their presidential aspirants. The parties are The People’s Democratic Party and the All People’s Congress. Situated within Critical Discourse Analysis, the study has as its major thrust the argument that even though there are varying conceptual metaphors in the speeches of Nigerian politicians, a critical investigation of these metaphors suggests identical ideologies the knowledge of which is pivotal to understanding the nature of metaphor usage in Nigerian political discourse.

**Theoretical Orientation**

Ideology-focused studies in linguistics are usually situated within the Critical Discourse Analysis theory. This is because of the connection between discourse and ideology, the analysis of which
is well documented in literature. A multi-disciplinary approach to the study of discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an analytical research model that views language as a form of social practice in which all forms of linguistic usage are believed to encode the ideological dispositions of language users (Fairclough 1995). Although its proponents and practitioners may differ in their individual philosophical orientation on CDA, their views converge on its perception as a theoretical framework that sets out to unveil the ideologies embedded in language use, and how these ideologies legitimate dominance, inequality and oppression in the society.

The principles of CDA as a theoretical approach to discourse have been deployed and synthesized along with other language theories for the critical evaluation of text and talk. The result of one such synthesis is Charteris-Blacks’ (2004) Critical Metaphor Theory which is adopted in the current study for the analysis of text. The theory is a collapse of insights from pragmatics, cognitive metaphor theory and Critical Discourse Analysis. The pragmatic dimension of the theory focuses on the role of context in the choice, use and interpretation of metaphors in discourse. The theory, in this connection, seeks to establish the link between the effectiveness of metaphor as a persuasive tool in discourse and the context of its use. Its relevance to the current research is in determining the contextual principles underlying the choice and use of metaphors by Nigerian politicians in their campaign speeches. The cognitive aspect of the theory is drawn largely from Lakoff and Johnson (1980) Cognitive Metaphor Theory the central tenet of which is that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured. Linguistic metaphors are therefore possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system which is structured as source domain (the conceptual domain from which metaphoric expressions are drawn) and target domain (the conceptual domain from which understanding is sought). The metaphor expressions in the text of the study are classified into their conceptual domains using the cognitive aspect of Charteris-Blacks’s Critical Metaphor Theory. The critical component of the theory focuses on the ideological connotation of linguistic metaphors and the conceptual metaphors underlying them. Overall therefore, the Charteris-Blacks’s Critical Metaphor Theory provides a basis in the current study for the critical interpretation of conceptual metaphors as powerful tools of persuasion and ideology formulation in Nigerian political discourse.
Conceptual Metaphor

Also known as cognitive metaphor, conceptual metaphor refers to the understanding of one idea or conceptual domain in terms of another. The notion of conceptual metaphor and a detailed explanation of its processes were first explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal publication, *Metaphors We Live By* in which the authors explained the mapping processes that the source and target domains that underlie conceptual metaphors. The source domain of a conceptual metaphor consists of a set of literal entities, attributes, processes and relationships linked semantically and apparently stored in the mind. The target domain of conceptual metaphor is abstract, and takes its structure from the source domain. In the analysis of conceptual metaphor there is usually a systematic set of correspondences between constituents of the source domain and those of the target domain; the pairing of these correspondences is known as *mapping*. To know a conceptual metaphor therefore is to know the appropriate set of mapping that applies to a given source-target pairing (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual metaphors reside in the mind, but signal their existence in a people’s conceptual system through the people’s use of linguistic metaphors. One of the most famous examples of a conceptual metaphor given by Lakoff and Johnson is ARGUMENT IS WAR, where *argument* is the target domain and *war* is the source domain. The existence of this conceptual metaphor in the English man’s conceptual system is betrayed in the linguistic metaphors italicized in the expressions below:

i. Your claims are *indefensible*.

ii. He *attacked* every weak point in my argument.

iii. His criticisms are right on *target*.


v. If you use that *strategy*, he’ll wipe you out.

Lakoff and Johnson argue that the linguistic metaphors used in arguing will be different in culture where argument is considered as DANCE, for example. Thus, linguistic metaphors reveal conceptual metaphors which serve as the basis on which conclusions are made on the ideological leanings of language users.
**Political Discourse**

What constitutes political discourse is often the subject of debates amongst linguists and political scientists. This is hardly surprising considering the fact that the term *political discourse* is reflexive and thus open to potentially ambiguous interpretations. Therefore, from the outset of any analysis of discourse within the purview of politics, it is pertinent to delenate the object of study. According to Wilson (2008) the term political discourse is suggestive of at least two possibilities: first, a discourse which is itself political; and second, an analysis of political discourse as simply an example of discourse type, without explicit reference to political content or political context. In the former, emphasis is on all forms of communication, written or spoken, that are thematically political, in that they they emerate from a distinct domain of human experience: *politics*. Inclusive in this genre of discourse are campaign speeches, inuagaural speeches,acceptance speeches, or any other speech delivered with a political motive in mind. Political discourse in this sense differs very significantly from other discourses such as religious discourse, for instance, whose thematic focus and philosophical concern are essentially religious. The registers of political discourse in the foregoing sense is also markedly different from that of other discourses. This distinction is particularly evident in usage and context; for example, metaphors in classroom discourse may have an educational function, while metaphors in politics will function to legitimize political power, present policies and depict political opponents in negative light.

The second perspective to political discourse as postulated by Wilson (2008) is on the analysis of the texts that constitute it as a discourse domain. Political discourse in this connection is the result of what discourse analysts do with texts emanating from the political domain. It is an objective linguistic critique of political speeches where the emphasis is on the language used by politicians, and the potentialities of such language to accomplish what is not immediately obvious to the citizenry. The current study bestrides the the two views, but leans more largely towards the latter. This is because the data for the study are campaign speeches which are texts designed for formal political contexts and delivered by political actors. However, the goal of the study is on the linguistic features of these texts, one of which is the metaphor.
The multidimensionality of Nigerian political discourse has attracted a great deal of attention from linguists and political scientists in recent times. Ezejideaku and Ugwu (2007) analyze the rhetoric and propaganda of political campaigns in Nigeria; Ayeomoni (2005) is a linguistic-stylistic investigation of the language of the Nigerian political elite; Daramola (2008) analyses President Obasanjo’s farewell speech to “unearth the linguistic and political underpinnings” therein using Speech Act Theory; Aduradola and Ojukwu (2013) analyzed political messages and slogans in print media and on billboards; Ehinen (2014) critically analyses the ideological uses of modals by Nigerian politicians in their electioneering campaign manifestoes; Alo (2008) examines the ideological preoccupations inherent in the political speeches of African leaders. Closely related to this study is Taiwo (2010) which examines the use of metaphors in selected Nigerian political discourses. While the present study may relate to those mentioned above in terms of political discourse analysis as well as Critical Discourse Analysis, it is uniquely different.

**Methodology**

The study employed a qualitative approach in the analysis of four campaign speeches of the All Progressive Congress (APC) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) Presidential aspirants during Nigeria’s General elections. The speeches were collected from the respective official websites of the APC and PDP. The choice of speeches by the presidential aspirants of these parties was hinged upon the fact that both aspirants were the front runners of their respective political parties in the elections. Moreover, the parties of the aspirants both have a massive national spread, and so are, arguably, representative of Nigeria’s political climate in terms of party politics.

A thorough reading of the speeches resulted in the identification of candidate metaphors which were further subjected to test of metaphoricity using the Group (2007) Metaphor Identification Model. Designed by renowned metaphor scholars, the model remains one of the most effective in marking off metaphorically used words from other lexical items in discourse. Metaphorcity in the model is established if a lexical unit has a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the immediate context of its use, and the contextual meaning contrasts with the basic meaning, but can be understood in comparison to it. Fourteen linguistic metaphors scaled
through the test of metaphoricity, and were further grouped into two, on the basis of the conceptual metaphors they signal.

**Linguistic Description of Text**

The italicized words in the expressions below are linguistic metaphors which have been subjected to test of metaphoricity using the Praglajass Group Metaphor Identification Model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>THE NATION IS A PERSON</th>
<th>LEADERSHIP IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY ALLOWANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>On Saturday the whole world will watch with bathed breath for the greatest nation on earth to take charge of its destiny,</td>
<td>I acknowledge the hand of God on me ...serving this country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nigeria has walked backwards.</td>
<td>I offer myself for the service of this nation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>This is the merger that gave birth to our country.</td>
<td>I want to offer myself for the position of the presiddent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>If Nigria does not kill corruption, corruption will kill her.</td>
<td>I make a solemnn pledge before God that I will donate all I have to serve the people of Nigeria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>We must not let our country down</td>
<td>I conider myself to be on a rescue mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The survival of this country depends on us all.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nigeria is an urgent need of competent leadership. We must not allow Nigeria to die Nigeria has been afflicted with a strange illness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8
A conceptual mapping of the italicized linguistic metaphors in the first column of the table reveals their source domain as Human Person, and target domain as the Nation, resulting in the conceptual metaphor metaphor THE NATION IS A HUMAN PERSON. The validity of this mapping process is evident in the lexical items used to depict the Nigerian nation. A few examples are sentences 2,3,7 in which the words: walked backwards, that gave birth, the lot of, corruption will kill, has been afflicted are used in reference to the Nigerian nation. The basic/literal meaning of the main verbs in these expressions denote activities associated with the human person. The constant mention of Nigeria, the nation, our country used along with these verbs further validate the conceptualization of the Nigerian nation in the text as a human person.

The same conceptual mapping principle applies to the italicized linguistic metaphors on the second column of the table, where the source domain is Religion and the target domain is Leadership. The conceptual metaphor resulting from this mapping process is LEADERSHIP IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY. The basic meaning such italicised words in the column as the hands of God, offer myself, rescue mission, donate myself, etc denote activities associated with the practice of religion. Thus, their usage to depict leadership is a conceptualization of leadership as a religious practice.

**Critical Interpretation of Text**

The conceptual metaphor, THE NATION IS A PERSON, is contextualized alongside the globally acceptable philosophy of the sanctity of the human life and the high importance society places on the human person. This philosophy resides in the consciousness of every normal human being and is thus a given that establishes a ground of mutual understanding between the politician and the citizenry, and also constitutes the basis for the selection and usage of all the linguistic metaphors that betray its existence. It is also on the basis of this contextual knowledge that the citizenry are able to resolve the semantic tension in the metaphor, determine the aspects of the human entity being compared and also unravel the intention of the politician in the choice of the metaphor.
A critical evaluation of this conceptual metaphor reveals the supremacist ideology whereby the Nigerian nation is portrayed by the politician as being superior to any other entity. This ideology gives out the nation as one distinct biological, life-possessing entity that exhibits all human characteristics, including the ability to be given birth to, killed, let down, afflicted, etc. The ideology places the interest, wellbeing, and survival of the nation, as an entity, above that of the individuals and groups that make it up. Consequently, the choice and use of metaphors that encode this ideology constitute a subtle psychological weapon in the hands of the politicians who are depicted in this context as caring more for the interest of the nation than for their political ambitions. If made to believe this, the citizenry are thus easily swayed to the side of the politicians.

The linguistic metaphors that encode this ideology and the mapping process of the conceptual metaphor that unveils it are also deliberately chosen by the politicians to achieve the foregoing intention. For instance, the words kill, take charge of, fate, urgent need, etc are obviously emotion laden words, and their usage in this context is to charge the emotions of the citizenry and make them incapable of logically assessing the credibility of the candidate. Furthermore, the linguistic metaphors above suggest the aspects of the human person (as the source domain) being mapped on to the nation (as the target domain). The words suggest the phenomenon of death, the ability to will, the possibility of being in need, and the reality of fate, all associated with the human person. Humans possess other attributes that could easily be mapped onto the nation; therefore to focus on the above attributes/characteristics is a deliberate attempt by the politicians to foreground these attributes and thus consequently exclude the possibility of looking at other characteristics of the human person that could also be mapped onto the nation. This is motivated by the desire to confine the citizenry to a certain type of interpretation (of the conceptual metaphor) that favours the political motive of the politician.

The second conceptual metaphor, LEADERSHIP IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY, is contextualized in the field of religion. The metaphor is lexicalized in expressions such as offer myself, service to God, the hand of God, etc, all of which unveil the ideology of sacrificial leadership. The effectiveness of this metaphor and the potency of the associated ideology hinges on the pivotal place of religion in the socio-cultural world view of Nigerians. Nigeria is rated as
one of the most religious nations of the world (source). And so issues that are objectively evaluated in other climes are religiously conceptualized and interpreted in Nigeria. It is on the premise of this component of Nigeria’s socio-cultural heritage that the citizenry are made to perceive the sacredness with which LEADERSHIP is being conceptualized in the speeches. Thus, in offering himself for the service of the people, or claiming to have God’s hand upon him, for example the politician equates leadership with the call to religious service, and by so doing places the credibility of his candidature above that of his opponents.

A comparative evaluation of the two ideologies emanating from the text shows that Nigerian politicians are advocates of identical ideologies. The phraseologies and linguistic compositions of these ideologies may differ with politicians, but a critical analysis of the words that encode them suggests that they are actually the same. For example, the supremacist ideology depicted in the metaphor of THE NATION IS A PERSON emphasizes the superiority of the nation’s wellbeing above individual interest. Also, the sacrificial ideology captured in the metaphor of LEADERSHIP IS A SACRED RESPONSIBILITY equates the leadership of the nation with divine responsibility, and thus places the nation, the object of the leadership, above the interest of the leader. Both ideologies thus lead on to one singular ideology - the nation first.

Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of metaphor as tools of ideology formation in political discourse. The analysis revealed that Nigerian politicians are not just deliberate in their choice of linguistic metaphors, but are also mindful of the type of mapping they want the conceptual metaphors to be subjected to. The analysis further revealed that in spite of differences in the linguistic composition of the conceptual metaphors contained in the campaign speeches of Nigerian politicians, the same ideology runs through these speeches. This is a marked departure from what obtains in developed countries of the world, such as the USA, for example, where politicians and political parties differ on ideological grounds. The absence of this in Nigeria politics has serious implication for democracy as it eliminates the element of choice, a key component of democratic governance. Presented with only one ideology, the citizenry are denied the opportunity to make critical comparative ideological analysis of the campaign speeches of
their politicians, on the basis of which they can elect the candidate whose ideology they are convinced about.

References

Primary Sources


