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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## METAPHOR: A LINGUISTIC TOOL FOR IDEOLOGICAL BATTLE IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI'S MEDICAL VACATIONS

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### Abstract

Nigeria, during the period of the failing health of her fifth democratic elected president, Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) witnessed a fundamental division across political line. The health status of the president became a subject of debate among opposing political gladiators and actors, who compared the president's medical situation with other phenomena-using metaphorical discursive strategy. This study therefore examines the metaphorical choices employed by politicians in their discourse on PMB's medical vacations abroad. This study adopts the approach of Charteris-Black's (2004) Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA). This approach is considered appropriate because of its simple procedures which include identification, analysis and explanation of conceptual metaphor in the selected data. The scope of this study is made up of news reports, particularly from the print media that reported diverse opposing comments of politicians on the medical situation of PMB. The sources of these data are The Guardian and Nigerian Tribune. The study reveals that the health status of the president provides a significant ground for the use of conceptual and symbolic metaphors to either project positive self or negative-other's representation.

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### Introduction:-

Among several forms of communication, language, either its spoken or written form, is typical to man for use in communicative situations. The effective use of language connotes that the intention of a speaker/hearer is achieved through discourse. Hence, the propositions of man in communicative situation are shaped by the context that produces them and also reflect his power and interest. This necessitated the differences between informal discourse, such as a dialogue between a mother and her son which bothers on family affairs and political discourse which bothers on national issues. In the later situation, language is carefully used to wield dominance through the use of discursive strategy like metaphor.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) opine that metaphors take an idea and compare it to another for better understanding. For example, "Folake is a rose" is a metaphorical proposition that compares a concept in terms of another. Metaphor is a topic of similarity. Though the comparison is made between two words of unlike nature (Folake-Human being and Rose-A kind of flower), there is some respect in which they are similar (beautiful and attractive).

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Metaphor was initially considered to be a fancy language that should be confined only to the figurative and literary world. Classical theories saw metaphor as a matter of language not thought. In these theories metaphor was a novellinguistic expression in which a group of words were used outside their normal meaning to define another similar concept Reza and Shahrzad (2011). However, efforts by Lakoff and Johnson show that metaphor is also a central part of human cognition and language and as such, impacts the thinking and perception of man about the realities around him. This is why political gladiators employ metaphor in making political rhetoric, especially when such comment could determine their acceptance by the electorates or would-be electorates. In other words, politicians, in their attempts to uncover the ineptitudes of the oppositions and make the general public align with them on a particular national issue, tend to employ metaphor for ideological battle.

Literarily, a metaphor compares two elements from “separate walks of life” without the use of “as” or “like”. This is done either to achieve ornamental purpose (Decorative Approach) or to help the speaker/writer reinforce the fulcrum of a message and the listener/reader identify the essence of a speech from its redundant parts (Conceptual Approach). The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines metaphor as “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them.”

The opinion of (Burkholder & Henry 2009: 98) cited in (Hanne 2014) gives a succinct description and function of conceptual metaphor. They opined that such comparison gives new understanding to an existing word/phrase. He also identified the essential term of a proposition as the focus and the term used to suggest an analogy as the frame.

*The terms focus and frame are indications for the two concepts that are being compared metaphorically by a writer or speaker. The focus is the most essential term and relates to the topic that is being discussed. The frame refers to the other term that is of a different kind of experience from this focus. By bringing together this focus and frame, the metaphor as a rhetorical figure in fact urges the hearer or reader to understand one concept “in terms of” the other concept (Burkholder & Henry 2009: 98)*

Metaphors, in political discourse, are highly pervasive. On the basic contribution of Lackoff and Johnson, every part of human communication is dominated by metaphors. If metaphors are contained in human communication, it is much more elusive in political rhetoric, and conveyed complex meanings in the discourse of PMB’s medical situation reported in print media.

### **Media and Political Discourse**

The importance of the media to the political development of any nation cannot be overemphasized. It is the window through which information is processed for the public. Adebisi (2012) opines that the media has been described as the Fourth Estate of the Realm. He posits further that a society without the press is compared with one in perpetual darkness Adebisi (2012 p.69). Also, Saraisky (2015) reviews the importance of the media in the political development of a nation. In her own words, the media is highly ‘recognized in the policy studies... as playing an important, perhaps key role in the policy process, as both purveyors of information and as ciphers for competing ideas’ (Saraisky, 2015 p.25). The explicit power of advocacy bestowed on the media and the privileges to serve as social commentators and assess information for the public are the most significant roles assigned to it. In cases where these privileges of indirect social influence are judiciously exploited, the media serve as the channel for propagating news not just limited to politics alone, but human social, economic, religious and recreational life, among others. However, limiting it to the political function, the media researches have explored the ‘key role that media play in political nations’ affairs.

Beck (1994, p.vii) posits that the media effects changes in human relations, and has a long-lasting effect on ‘policy-making decisions most influential upon our lives today’. The platform for decision making and propaganda is the seat of political power. Here, we have a group of people taking the decisions that affect the life of the citizens. The media stands as the conscience of the political profiteers and ‘shape and help redefine the character of the orthodox political order. In fact, it is difficult to by-pass or boycotts the media in terms of public opinion and reportage of political decisions, conflicts and other relations or affairs. Language is at the centre of the media and political propaganda. It is the instrument that the media use in reporting political issues.

### Theoretical Perspective, Purpose and Scope

Critical Metaphor Analysis(CMA) is a simple approach to the analysis of conceptual metaphor. It involves the use of the linguistic, cognitive and pragmatic criteria, that is, the internal and external linguistic properties of a speech/text for the identification, interpretation and explanation of metaphors in such speech/text. Charteris-Black, the proponent of this approach opines that it aims at revealing the implied intentions and ideologies of language users and the conceptual nature of metaphor (see Isaiah et al, 2018).

Also, Wei Li (2016) cited in Isaiah, et al (2018) considers CMA as an attempt to “also bring metaphor back into the traditional view of metaphor, a branch of philosophy, where metaphor was treated as a way of argumentation as well as a way of composition and style”. One of the problems of politicians during ideological battle is how to say what to be said. Since metaphor is endowed with shades of meaning, it becomes an inevitable tool to persuade their audience and maintain solidarity.

This study therefore examines the metaphorical use in political discourse as a form of persuasive language in framing PMB’s medical vacations abroad. The corpus of this study is limited to news reports, particularly from the print media. The sources of these data are: *The Guardian* Thur. June 29, 2017, Mon. June 19 2017 and *Nigerian Tribune*, July 13 2017, Mon. July 24 2017. These two newspapers were so selected because of their national coverage.

### Text Analysis

*Buhari on life support, says Gov. Fayose... The governor, who said Buhari would need a miracle from God to survive his current predicament... (The Guardian Thur. June 29, 2017)*

The concept of ‘life’ itself is alluded to in the above extract, the president’s health condition is relative to life. In the view of the speaker agent, the president’s sick condition is metaphorised as a life threatening condition. The metaphor is from the medical repertoire, which is used to describe a kind of *life* sustaining machine to resuscitate one who is in a critically ill condition. This implies that the president’s condition is terrible. It is not only the president’s health that is metaphorised here, *life* itself is metaphorised to imply that a form of *support*, that is, intervention, can be applied to sustain it, and without this form of intervention, a critical patient may not survive.

The same source, ‘intervention’ is transposed to the religious sense in the same report. The speaker invokes the metaphor, *miracle*, to signify the process that the president would have to experience to *survive* the illness, which has kept him from his office for about 90days, at the time of report. He defines and links *miracle* to be in God’s jurisdiction, implying that only *God* can revive the president. In the latter part of the utterance, the president’s condition is metaphorised as a *predicament*. The target of this metaphor is to define the fact that the president’s plight is pitiable to the nation. The source to this metaphor is the inference that the president’s health condition is not improving, against the reports of the in-group, who said that he is recuperating.

*...as I have said he is in very high spirit, he is recuperating very well and we had very long conversation... (Nigerian Tribune, July 13 2017)*

The position of the in-group is in a sharp contrast with that of the out-group, even at the level of metaphors used to describe PMB’s medical condition. For instance, against the *predicament*, the precarious state metaphorised in the precedent extract, the speaker uses the metaphor, *high spirit*, to define the prospect of the president in responding to medical treatment. The source or basis for the metaphoric description is the consciousness that human wellness is hinged on will, which is often described as his *spirit*. It alludes also to the religious description of a man as an embodiment of body, *spirit* and soul, where the spirit controls his physical body or reactions. This is reflective in the following utterance; since the president is in *high spirit*, since his will to survive the illness is strong, he is *recuperating very well*, as described by the pro-Buhari supporters or in-group.

*He noted there were Absalom and Adonija, who thought they could capitalize on the state of health of King David to become king but at the end of the day, they became history... (The Guardian, Mon. June 19 2017)*

The metaphors invoked in the excerpt above are construing of the identity of the speaker, who is a religious in-group advocate in the PMB medical condition discourse. He used these metaphoric expressions to admonish his congregation and garner more supporters. In the process, he makes a fundamental leadership juxtaposition, which he

establishes by metaphoric allusions to the bible. The character metaphors which constitute the source for his expression are characters linked to the throne of Israel in the bible times. The latter two, *Absalom* and *Adonijah*, conspired to usurp power from *King David* and *King Solomon* respectively. The speaker compares the out-group, particularly from the rival party, PDP, to these *Absalom* and *Adonijah*, implying that they are trying to seize the opportunity of PMB's medical condition to take over power unconstitutionally.

On the other hand, PMB is metaphorised as *King David*. The striking bases for comparison, which the speaker alludes to are: first, these two had the mandate to rule, David had God's mandate, while Buhari had the people's mandate, second, he hinges on the inference that it is God that has brought Buhari to power, which then perfects the implicature of the metaphor. Third, he places an index that as David had, at one point in his rule, a health condition, so also Buhari has a health condition, which is at the center of controversy. Lastly, he uses this to describe the attempt of the sycophants to usurp power. This happened to David, and it is resurfacing itself in the time of Buhari. He foregrounds the fact that these pundits would not succeed, which he metaphorises also with the geographical metaphor, *history*. The simple implicature is that their plans to usurp or topple the government would fail.

*Buhari will be back as soon as the doctors gave him the green light... 'By our visit to London today, the merchant of lies have been put out of business and Nigerians will not buy the garbage they have been selling...(Nigerian Tribune, Mon. July 24 2017)*

The pervasiveness of metaphor can be construed by the fact that it does evolve from all works of life and human interaction, including media reports, in any discipline, discourse or environment it is used. It co-opts elements and registers - lexemes from various sources. For instance, in the report above, the speaker has co-opted - borrowed from the 'traffic', economic and nutrition (food) registers or fields. It therefore implies that the expression uses three sources of metaphors, viz: 'light' metaphor, 'buying and selling' metaphor, and food metaphor to describe certain positions. Traffic light has three characteristic light symbols, 'red', which signifies stop and in the metaphoric sense, a precarious condition, 'yellow', which prepares the commuters for movement, and 'green', which passes the signal to move. This characteristic, moving or going, is the direct target of the metaphor, that is, to indicate the readiness of the president to return home.

The political activists, those who the in-group labelled as pundits are metaphorised as *merchants*. The attribute of the merchant sold out to the metaphor is that of rumor mongering and circulating other perspectives of news about the president's health. The activity of circulating fake news by haters of PMB is what the speaker describes as *lies*. Thus, the title *merchant of lies* is coined to metaphorise all those who are not congruent with the position that PMB is really recuperating. In the latter part of the report, another economic metaphor is evoked, which is *business*. It is reflective of the activities of the people spreading the news about the president. The debate about the wellness and severity of PMB's condition is what is metaphorised as *business*, which the two sides are involved in passionately.

The speaker, saying that the out-group *have been put out of business*, implies that they, that is, the in-group, have sufficiently provided proofs that could invalidate or displace the claims made by the former. These claims are subsequently metaphorised using the food metaphor, *garbage*, which means waste. In the discourse of PMB's medical condition, each side, the in-group or out-group try to invalidate or disparage the claim of the other and present it as valueless or baseless claim as defined by the use of *garbage*. A piece of garbage is thrown away in the dung because it has become useless and inconsumable. This is the in-group's position about the opinion of the out-group.

*... the hyenas and 'the jackals' hoping that they would soon be sent out of 'his kingdom'... the lawmaker had posted: 'prayer for the absent lion king has waned. Until he is back, they will fall over one another to be on the front row of the palace temple... it is the wish of the hyenas and the jackals that the lion king never wakes up or come back so that they can be kings. It is the prayers of the weak animals that the lion king comes back to save the kingdom from the hyenas, the wolves and other predators... (The Guardian, Tues. July 11, 2017)*

A rich source of metaphor in political and the PMB medical condition discourses is from wildlife. The wildlife, particularly the jungle, provides a vivid description of the inter-play or power tussle between and among the 'strong' animals, the predators and the *weak* animals which are the prey. In the expression, the interplay of power between the two dominant and rival political parties in Nigeria, the PDP and APC, is at the center of the description and metaphor. The speaker uses the metaphor, *hyenas* to refer to the opposition, seeing them as opportunists who are

waiting to snatch the opportunity of the President's failing health to topple the government in the same way that *hyenas* in the jungle snatch a kill in a hunt they did not partake in.

Also, they use the *jackals* to metaphorise the out-group, the mockers of the president's condition. The nature or attribute of the *jackal* is co-opted as a source and target in this metaphoric description. The noisy chatters of the jackal, which is symbolic of the several dissuading and grievous comments of the out-group, is the most affective to the in-group and inner-cycle in the PMB medial situation discourse.

On metaphoric description of the *lion*, king of the jungle of all the predators and animals is attributed to the president, PMB. Although the *lion* is also a predator, it controls its territory, especially from the intrusion of weaker predators like *hyenas* and *jackals*, among others. This metaphor contains a fundamental existential blackmail on the president. As the *lion*, king and leader of the nation, he is supposed to be hale and hearty to protect the *kingdom*, but this is not the case as the president is in a decrepit sick condition in a faraway country receiving medical treatment, and leaving the *hyenas*, political profligates at the forefront of affairs.

The speakers are however conscious not to use the right metaphoric field, *jungle*, which is the jurisdiction where predators thrive. At the jungle, it is survival of the fittest. However, the speakers allude to anthropological realism and monarchical system of government using the metaphor, *kingdom*. In the kingdom, there is only one ultimate ruler, in this case, PMB, despite his ill health, all others are subjects. Besides, in the kingdom, it is the politics of the haves and have-nots, rather than the survival of the fittest. The speakers use this metaphor to send the message that Buhari is still the president and the ultimate ruler of the kingdom, irrespective of his condition.

The gap between the strong and the weak, haves and have-nots, leader and follower is also established in the metaphoric expression. Here, the citizens, the electorates are labelled or metaphorised as *weak animals*. Their only bane is their inability to challenge the *predators*, another metaphor for the power blocs. They are the grasses that are trampled, the victims that are hunted by all forms of political tendencies, they are at the receiving end of inconsistent policies and the heavy weight of democratic discrepancies, yet they cannot complain. They are consistently fed by soothing compliments and deception such as the metaphor contained in the utterance, *the lion kings comes back to save the kingdom*. Every political administration presents itself as the people's messiah, as evident in in-group's position here.

### Findings

The PMB's medical condition discourse provides a significant ground for the use of conceptual and symbolic metaphors. Health is metaphorised as 'life' which one should fight for. Health is also as a form of *support*, implying that humans' survival is hinged on a support system, that is, intervention. Health is metaphorised as an *intervention* and as a *predicament*. Metaphors are coopted also from the scriptures. Such metaphors include political office as kingship, using the story of *David*, *Absalom*, *Solomon* and *Adonijah*, in the bible. This is used to signify the power tussle between the leadership party and the opposition.

We also see nutrition – food metaphors to describe the positions of leadership. Metaphors are also coopted from buying and selling. Political activists metaphorised as *merchants*. We also have war metaphors, where the position of leadership is portrayed as a ground for contention and battle. The war metaphors also mirror wildlife metaphors, using predators to indicate the fierce fight between the two dominant parties to define, maintain or topple positions. The nation itself is metaphorised as 'jungle', the battleground for the *strong* and *weak* animals. The president is metaphorised as *lion* and monarch, signifying his unflinching grip of his office and political power, while the opposition party is metaphorised as the *jackal* or other smaller predators. The nation is metaphorised also as a kingdom.

### Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the study presents it clearly that, in the cause of airing their plight, the political actors use metaphoric choices to persuade their audience and to project their positive self or negative-other's-self representation. Thus, the overwhelming importance of this study is the insight it provides on how the language used by the media to report the medical condition of PMB presented the shades of political identities and knowledge, which also strengthened the argument that the nation was divided.

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