

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF NIGERIA'S ECONOMIC RECESSION

Isyaku Ahmad

Abstract

This study explores the use of conceptual metaphors in Nigerian media to frame the 2016 economic recession; it focuses on *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust* and Sahara Reporters. Grounded in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the research employs qualitative content analysis; purposive sampling was used to select news articles containing economy-related metaphors. Key findings reveal six broad types of metaphors: disaster metaphors, journey metaphors, human metaphors, container metaphors, structural metaphors and shrinking metaphors; these metaphors reflect Nigeria's cultural, cognitive, and contextual realities. The metaphors simplify complex economic phenomena; they shape public understanding of the recession and highlight the interplay between language, culture, and cognition. This research seeks to contribute immensely to the discourse on metaphor universality and specificity as it provides practical insights for scholars, policymakers, and media practitioners. By unveiling how Nigerian media linguistically captures economic realities, this study offers a culturally relevant tool to enhance communication strategies and foster public engagement during crises.

Keywords: Conceptual metaphors, Economic recession, Nigerian media, Metaphoric linguistic expressions, Source domains and target domains.

Introduction

Hidden beneath the surface of everyday language, conceptual metaphors wield unparalleled power to shape our perceptions, spark

new ideas and even transform the way we think; language, as a tool of human communication, is a human cognitive ability that enables human to have complex thought, ideas, and emotions (Denham & Lobeck, 2010, p. 1). Metaphors are part of this complex human communication system; they play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of the world. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are not merely poetic devices, but fundamental to human cognition. This perspective is supported by Hermann (2013); who emphasises the significance of metaphors in scientific writing and thinking.

The cognitive linguistic theory of conceptual metaphors was introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980); the theorists hold that metaphors structure our ordinary conceptual system. They posit that our conceptual system defines our everyday realities (Ahrens, 2002). The theory suggests that language is metaphorical in nature; metaphors are pervasive in everyday life. They influence both language and thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). This approach represents a departure from traditional views; metaphors are not mere decorative devices but fundamental to cognition (Evans, Bergen, & Zinken, 2007).

The essence of metaphor is understanding one thing in terms of another (Sani & Ruma, 2014, p. 4); it is axiomatic that conceptual metaphors express abstract domains through simpler or familiar ones. For example, the ARGUMENT (target domain) is described in terms of WAR (source domain); this is evident in expressions such as "They ATTACKED every WEAK POINT in my argument" or "I DEMOLISHED his argument" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 124).

In the context of economic discourse, conceptual metaphors play a vital role in shaping public understanding of complex economic concepts. The National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) defines the term "economic recession" as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy." The 2016 economic recession in

Nigeria is characterised by a significant decline in economic activity. In connection to this issue, this evokes a compelling case study for examining the use of conceptual metaphors in economic discourse. Despite the widespread coverage of the recession by the Nigerian media and to the best of my knowledge, there is hardly any study on metaphors of economic crisis in Nigeria: a notable lack of language studies on the linguistic representation of Nigeria's economic recession discourse.

To this point, this study aims to address this knowledge gap by examining the use of conceptual metaphors in news articles on Nigeria's economic recession. The study focuses on three main online editions of Nigerian newspapers based on their popularity and wide readership *The Vanguard*, *Daily Trust* and *Sahara Reporters* and explores the metaphoric linguistic expressions used to describe the economic recession. The aim of the study is to explore the conceptual metaphors used in Nigerian media to describe the 2016 economic recession; it seeks to uncover how these metaphors reflect cultural, cognitive and contextual influences in shaping public understanding of economic crises.

The study holds significant practical and theoretical value; it bridges a critical gap how conceptual metaphors can shape economic discourse in non-Western contexts. By analysing conceptual metaphors in Nigerian media, this research seeks to provide insights into how cultural and contextual factors influence the framing of economic crisis. The study's findings are significant for policymakers, media practitioners and researchers, especially those who seek tools used to communicate complex economic issues effectively. Similarly, the emphasis on the conceptual economic crisis signifies their role in facilitating understanding of abstract concepts in terms of concretised or tangible concepts; this can enhance public comprehension and engagement, especially during times of economic hardship. The study contributes to the broader field of cognitive linguistics by widening our

horizon on the universality and cultural specificity of metaphors; it offers a deeper appreciation of their role in shaping economic realities and equips stakeholders with culturally relevant tools.

Review of Related Literature

This literature review examines the concept of conceptual metaphors, their cognitive function and cultural significance as grounded in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) framework. The review shows that metaphors are integral to our daily linguistic experiences and shape our understanding of complex phenomena; it identifies a significant research gap in the study of conceptual metaphors in African context of economic discourse, particularly Nigeria. The existing studies have predominantly focused on English and Asian languages and other non-economic topics in Africa, thereby overlooking the unique cultural and linguistic metaphoric features of African economic discourses.

Conceptual Metaphors

According to Hermann (2013), metaphors are vital tools of communication in terms of scientific writing and thinking (p. 18). Louise (2016) also asserted that metaphor is a cognitive mechanism as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that it involves "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p.5). Louise maintained that Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) is a landmark in the study of conceptual metaphors. He contended that their argument was conceivable account of how metaphors underlie our thinking processes that makes the topic interesting and popular in cognitive linguistics.

Lacoff and Johnson (1980) maintained that "metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action" (P. 4); they proclaimed that our thought processes are fundamentally metaphorical in nature, and that our

conceptual system plays a vital role in shaping our everyday realities or perception. In addition, this argument with the following examples demonstrate that metaphors are reflected in our everyday language usage and act:

Argument is war.

Your *claims* are indefensible.

He attacked every weak *point* in my argument.

His criticisms were right *on target*.

I demolished his argument.

I've never won an argument with him. You disagree?

Okay, shoot!

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

He *shot down* all my arguments.

Considering the examples above, we can see that argument is highlighted in terms of war or battle to be won. It is also described as something to be defended or attacked as though in a war, etc.

Conceptual Mappings

Conceptual metaphors naturally use a more abstract concept as target and a more concrete concept as their source; thus, metaphors can be seen as designed mappings across conceptual domains. Conceptual mapping evokes a set of systematic correspondences or mappings between source domain and target. According to Evans and Green (2006) , one of the significant features of metaphor is meaning extension; that is to say metaphors give new meanings (p.38). In Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), conceptual structure is organised according to the cross-domain mappings or correspondences between conceptual domains, namely the source domain and the target domain, and "some of these mappings are due to preconceptual embodied experiences in order to form complex conceptual structures. Consider the following examples:

Time is money.

You're *wasting* my time.

This gadget will *save you hours*.

How do you *spend* your *time* these days?

That flat tire *cost* me an hour.

You don't use your time *profitably*.

Life is a journey.

He's without *direction* in life.

I'm at a *crossroads* in my life.

She's *gone* through a lot in life.

He's *gone* (=died).

The examples above, show the significance of time (target domain), which is an abstract concept we want to describe in terms of worldly valuable commodity; the concept of *money* (concrete object) is mapped onto the concept of *time* to aid comprehension of it, like money which we spend, save, waste, or borrow and even make profit from using it. Linguistic items in the above expressions such as *wasting*, *save*, *spend*, *cost* and use of *profitably* suggest the construction TIME IS MONEY. Similarly, the concept of *life* (target domain) is understood in terms of the journey (source domain), which is a tangible concept to grasp than the complex concept of life. Here conceptual mapping is made between these distinct conceptual domains and the construction LIFE IS A JOURNEY is realised by using the linguistic items such as *direction*, *crossroads*, *gone through* and *gone* which cognitively evoke journey schema.

Metaphor and Culture

Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that a culture's core values align with its underlying metaphorical concepts; these values are deeply rooted in our cultural framework. Kovecses (2005) further describes the

relationship between metaphor and culture; he discusses how we conceptualise the phenomenon of culture from a cognitive linguistic point of view. His close examination of the relationship between metaphor and culture offers us an enhanced view of culture, as well as context, where culture can be seen as a way of making meaning based on context. Briefly, what could account for the cross-linguistic differences in metaphor are that different cultures or contexts may have different attitudes to metaphor vehicles or that source domain entities and events are more important in one culture than another.

Furthermore, Kovecses (2005) raises the question of whether there are universal metaphors, pointing out that native speakers of all languages make use of many metaphors in their discourse; he holds that such metaphorical linguistic expressions they use may vary across different languages. The different images some languages and cultures adopt can be extremely diverse; however, universal metaphors exist. By universal we mean those conceptual metaphors or metaphorical linguistic expressions in each language. Many conceptual metaphors are noticed to appear in a wide range of languages and cultures, such as TIME IS SPACE, which can be found in English, Mandarin, Chinese, Hindi and Sesotho (Alverson, 1994).

Studies on Conceptual Metaphors

Studying conceptual metaphors in economic discourses has been an important area of research, although with a strong focus on international contexts, especially on English and Asian languages. Scholars such as Zamarina (2013), Jue (2009), Chifane (2013), Luporini (2013), Cardini (2014), Langer (2015) and Gao (2016) have examined how conceptual metaphors shape the understanding of economic phenomena; these consist of works on financial crises, recessions and inflation. Generally, these studies demonstrate the pervasiveness and role of conceptual metaphors in capturing and depicting economic

realities. As observed, they often employed frameworks such as the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and Systemic Functional Linguistics.

While these works provided key insights into global economic discourse, they seem to largely overlook non-Western and non-Asian contexts. Notably the African context, like Nigeria, is unexplored; this gap indicates the need for research that examines how economic crises are metaphorically conceptualised in different linguistic and cultural settings.

Moreover, a common theme in the existing literature is the use of conceptual metaphors to simplify and explain complex economic phenomena. For instance, online papers. Jue (2009) examined conceptual metaphors such as ECONOMY IS A HUMAN and ECONOMY IS A BUILDING in *The Financial Zamarina* (2013) identified the metaphor ECONOMY IS A GARDEN as a dominant conceptualisation in English and Lithuanian *Times* and *CNNMoney*. Similarly, Chifane (2013) explored metaphors such as ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE DISASTER and CRISIS IS MADNESS in *The Economist*; it reflects the American recession and Euro-zone crisis. These studies have collectively demonstrated that metaphors serve as cognitive tools which make it possible for individuals to grasp abstract economic concepts through familiar domains such as nature, human behaviour, and physical structures; however, the reliance on international newspapers and magazines constrains the scope of the findings: they do not account for cultural and contextual variations in metaphorical expressions.

Furthermore, comparative studies such as Luporini's (2013) research of British and Italian financial papers and Gao's (2016) examination of English and Chinese news headlines, emphasised the influence of culture and history on metaphorical language. For example, Gao's analysis revealed that Chinese headlines frequently

employ agricultural metaphors; they reflect China's agrarian heritage. While English headlines favour journey and game metaphors, as opposed to Chinese. These findings align with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) assertion that metaphors are culturally embedded as they shape and reflect the conceptual systems of a society.

Studies have examined metaphors in various domains in the Nigerian context. The existing literature consists of works on COVID-19, death, corruption, politics, and religion; it offers a unique perspective on how metaphors reflect cultural and environmental influences.

For instance, in a relatively recent study, Agwuocha's (2024) study critically examined conceptual metaphors in COVID-19 discourses within Nigerian print media; the study used Pragglejaz metaphor identification procedure alongside Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory. It focuses on notable newspapers such as *The Nation* and *The Sun*. The analysis reveals how metaphors like "COVID-19 is war" significantly influence public understanding and emotional responses to the pandemic; this highlights the strategic role of metaphorical language in framing health crises and shaping societal reactions. In addition, the study highlights how metaphors in media discourse reflect cultural attitudes and societal responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria.

Akintayo and Olatokunbo (2024) explored the use of metaphors in Nigerian political discourse; the research emphasised themes of war and journey. Examples of metaphoric linguistic expressions such as "beating the drums of war" and electoral contests as "battlegrounds" illustrated how politicians framed politics as a combative struggle. The study emphasised cultural relevance in mirroring and affecting Nigeria's socio-political identity and narratives; however, further study on the engagement with the public's reception and interpretation of the metaphors will enrich the analysis in order to

uncover how they shape not only political narratives but also public sentiment and action.

Additionally, Kamalu and Anasiudu (2024) explored the pervasive use of conflict and warfare metaphors in the Nigerian media's discourse on corruption to capture their metaphorical representations; the study illustrated how metaphors portrayed corruption as a "battlefield" where anti-corruption forces engage in a "combat". The study resonated with a cultural conception of corruption as a powerful adversary threatening national stability. While this research effectively demonstrated the cognitive and social implications of such metaphors in shaping public perception, it would benefit from further research of alternative metaphors that will also provide insights into the complexities of corruption beyond the binary of war.

Moreover, Asiru and Batagarawa (2019) have analysed Yoruba and Hausa metaphors for death; they identified common themes such as DEATH IS A JOURNEY and DEATH IS A GATE. The conceptual metaphors reflect cultural beliefs about transition from life to the afterlife. The study evokes the need for further cross-linguistic research with English or French metaphors. Similarly, Isyaku et al. (2016) examined corruption metaphors in Nigerian media; they revealed the use of animal schemata such as lions and hyenas to depict corrupt officials. These metaphors reflect Nigeria's natural environment and contrast with the technological and war-related metaphors used in Iraq and Malaysia, countries which are more industrialised nations.

In the political domain, Lawan (2016) analysed metaphors in Nigerian and U.S. presidential speeches and highlighted their role in persuasion and deception; however, the study's omission of Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a framework limits its theoretical grounding. Sani (2014) explored metaphors in Nigerian political cartoons. The study gave insights into how cartoonists use creative and satirical metaphors to convey powerful messages. While the study employed semiotic and

cognitive approaches, it seems to be oblivious of the impact of these cartoons on public opinion, which leaves a room for further research on their communicative and persuasive functions.

To this point, despite the richness of the studies on conceptual metaphors of economic discourse above, their focus on English and Asian languages leaves a significant gap in the literature to fill in. In African contexts, more specifically, in Nigeria, the study of conceptual metaphors of economy or economic crisis remains largely unexplored. The study closes this research gap; it examines how Nigerians metaphorically conceptualised the 2016 economic recession. The recession was a relatively new phenomenon in Nigeria; therefore, the study analyses news reports from Nigerian online dailies to uncover unique metaphorical expressions. The metaphoric expressions describe Nigeria's economic crises; specifically, they reveal how Nigeria frames such challenges. The study compares its findings with international research, seeks to determine whether the conceptual metaphors align with or diverge from global patterns. The research makes an important contribution as it enhances our understanding of how culture, context and history shape economic discourse.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Cognitive Theory of Conceptual Metaphors, as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980); the theory holds that metaphors are an integral part of our daily linguistic experiences. They allow us to conceptualise experiences and express ideas. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) claims that metaphor is a cognitive tool that allows us to comprehend one conceptual domain in terms of another. The theory further challenges the traditional assumptions about metaphor as a mere literary or rhetorical device; it argues that thought itself is metaphorical.

To better understand the conceptualisation of economic recession within Nigerian context; the CMT is employed in the analysis

of Nigerian context the economic downturn. This study aims to uncover the underlying conceptual metaphors that shape public discourse on this issue. This framework will enable a deeper understanding of how metaphors influence our perceptions of economic recession and how they reflect Nigeria's cultural, social and economic contexts. Essentially, the study seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of metaphor in shaping public discourse on economic issues and to shed light on metaphors which shape our understanding of complex economic phenomena.

Methodology

This research design is qualitative; it employs the qualitative content analysis of Layoff and Johnson (1980) to identify and interpret conceptual metaphors. The data is collected from the online editions of *Vanguard*, *Daily Trust*, and *Sahara Reporters* on news headlines and their contents from July to December 2016. The newspapers were selected based on their popularity, wide readership, and online accessibility.

In addition, the study uses *purposive sampling* which ensures relevance by selecting articles with headlines and their news contents containing "economic recession" or "recession." Moreover, the data analysis applies Lakoff and Johnson's textual analysis; this method identifies, describes, and interprets conceptual metaphors as informed by the CMT.

Briefly, the research design is largely qualitative with a few elements of quantitative data; purposive sampling effectively isolates relevant metaphors. The Data was collected directly from the online editions of the selected dailies. The study identifies 7 conceptual metaphors (e.g., Economy is a Disaster, Moving Object, Human Being) and 35 metaphoric linguistic expressions from *The Vanguard*, *Daily Trust* and *Sahara Reporters*; these simplify complex economic phenomena and reflect Nigeria's cultural, cognitive and contextual realities.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data analysis and presentation from THE VANGUARD, DAILY TRUST and SAHARA REPORTERS uncovers a rich use of conceptual metaphors to describe Nigeria's economic recession; the metaphors simplify complex economic phenomena by mapping them onto more familiar experiences:

ECONOMY IS A DISASTER

Source Domain: Disaster/Affliction (e.g., natural disasters, suffering, ills, accidents etc).

Target Domain: Economic recession (e.g., decline, crisis, hardship).

Key Metaphoric Linguistic Expressions

THE VANGUARD (December 7, 2016, "Nigeria and Economic Recession: Way Out (1)":

1. "...before we would realize the *dangers of an economy.*"
2. "The huge cost of running and maintaining our political structure was always a *recipe for disaster.*"
3. "For many who before then had *struggled to cope* with a *downturn* in their *conditions of living.*"
4. "Lots of *ills for the Nigerian economy.*"
5. "*Health and education services suffered.*"

SAHARA REPORTERS (September 1, 2016, "PDP Calls on Buhari to Resign Amid Economic Recession"):

1. "The *disastrous economic decline* he has brought on Nigerians."
2. "*Crash in oil prices as well as oil production.*"

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A DISASTER is a **structural metaphor** because it maps the structure of disasters onto economic recession and conveys severity and devastation through metaphoric linguistic expressions such as "recipe for disaster" and "disastrous

economic decline"; it enables understanding of complex economic issues through familiar concepts of catastrophe and suffering.

The disaster metaphors frame the economic recession as an uncontrollable catastrophe ("dangers", "disaster", "ills" "suffered", "living conditions", "disastrous decline"); it evokes imagery of destruction and suffering and emphasises the severity of the crisis, as well as the need for urgent intervention. In Nigerian natural setting, disasters such as floods, wildfire and droughts often occur, the disaster metaphor connects deeply; it aligns with the cultural and contextual experience of enduring and recovering from sudden and devastating events. This metaphor borrows from our common experiences and concept of disaster to comprehend the complex issues of economic recession in Nigeria.

Economy is a Moving Object

Source Domain: Physical movement of objects/liquids (e.g., falling, rising, sliding).

Target Domain: Economic recession (e.g., decline, instability, recovery).

Key Metaphoric Linguistic Expressions

THE VANGUARD (November 22, 2016, "Economy Sinks Deeper into Recession"):

1. "The present *slump in oil prices* was predictable."
2. "The *economy sinks deeper into recession*."

THE VANGUARD (October 19, 2016, "IMF Report: Nigeria's Economy Bounces Back, Overtakes South Africa, Egypt"):

3. "Nigeria's *economy bounces back*."

THE VANGUARD (August 31, 2016, "Nigeria in Recession as Economy Shrinks by 2.06%"):

4. "The Nigerian economy, Wednesday, *plunged into recession.*"

DAILY TRUST* (September 1, 2016, "Economy in Recession"):

1. "Oil *price* has *tumbled* from more than \$100 a barrel in 2014 to under \$50 now."
2. "The *naira* has been *sliding against* the *dollar.*"
3. "The *skyrocketing inflation rate.*"
5. DAILY TRUST (November 19, 2016, "Economic Recession Spurs Massive Job Cuts in Nigeria"):
4. "The *bank's net profit fell* from N86 billion in 2014 to N15 billion in 2015."
5. "*Nigerian economy has sunk into recession.*"
6. DAILY TRUST (December 26, 2016, "2016: Nigeria's Economy Struggles as Recession Persists"):
7. "*Inflation peaked* at 18.48 percent."

SAHARA REPORTERS (October 5, 2016, "Worst Economic Crisis in 25 Years: What Nigeria Can Do to Get Out of Recession"):

1. "A 60% *drop in oil revenue.*"
2. "*Spiral inflation* in the system causing more misery to an already battered citizenry."

SAHARA REPORTERS (August 31, 2016, "Nigerian Economy Officially Enters Recession as Pressure Mounts Buhari Government"):

3. "*Prices soar*, value of the *naira* depreciates compared to the US dollar."
4. "The *fall in oil prices* is not the cause of Nigeria's recession."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A MOVING OBJECT functions as an **orientational metaphor**; it uses spatial concepts like "sinks", "bounces back" and "plunged" to describe economic trends in

terms of upward or downward motion. This motion or spatial metaphor conceptualises the economy as a dynamic entity in motion; linguistic items such as "sinks", "tumbled", "profit fell", "inflation peaked", "skyrocketing", "prices soared" and "spiral inflation" highlight instability and decline. This help readers visualise economic trends through familiar experiences of physical movement ("up and down" movements in negative senses). In Nigeria, where transportation and movement are central to daily life, whether through bustling markets, crowded roads or the flow of goods, this metaphor aligns with the cultural understanding of motion and its consequences.

3. ECONOMY IS A HUMAN BEING (PERSONIFICATION)

Source Domain: Human characteristics/conditions (e.g., health, emotions, actions).

Target Domain: Economic recession (e.g., vulnerability, struggle, recovery).

Key Metaphoric Linguistic Expressions

THE VANGUARD (September 26, 2016, "How to Get Nigeria Out of Economic Recession"):

1. "The local currency, which currently *carries too much pressure*."
2. "*Nigeria's economic situation* is in its *worst possible time*."

THE VANGUARD (October 24, 2016, "Nigerian Economic Recession and Entrepreneurial Revolution"):

3. "*Oil price* has *crashed* to less than \$50 per barrel."
4. "*The economy suffered* contraction in the second quarter."

THE VANGUARD (September 1, 2016, "Economic Recession Worse than Expected National Bureau of Statistics"):

5. "The non-oil sector declined due to a *weaker currency*, while *lower prices dragged* the oil sector down."

DAILY TRUST (September 1, 2016, "Economy in Recession"):

1. "Nigeria's *economy struggles* as recession persists."
2. "The year 2016 is indeed *a difficult one for the economy*."
3. "*Businesses were excited hoping* that would be the end to forex scarcity."
4. "*Economic recession spurs massive job cuts* in Nigeria."
5. "*Inflation has devalued people's income and lives*."

DAILY TRUST (August 22, 2016, "Economic Recession: Buhari Was Handed Nigerian Economy on a Stretcher"):

6. "Nigerian Economy on a *stretcher*"

DAILY TRUST (September 8, 2016, "Nigerian Economy: Recession, Depression and Recovery"):

7. "Academic and public discourse on how to *bring our economy out of the dilemma*."
8. "Voodoo economists that will *prescribe pills* that will add *more pains to our ailing economy*."

DAILY TRUST (August 22, 2016, "Economic Recession: Buhari Was Handed Nigerian Economy on a Stretcher"):

9. "By 2015, the country's *economy was on life support* and was literally handed over to the APC government on a stretcher."

SAHARA REPORTERS (November 21, 2016, "How the CBN's Foreign Exchange Policies and Foreign Act of 1995 Plunged the Nigerian Economy into Recession"):

1. "The above *two work hand in hand in plunging Nigerian economy into recession.*"
2. "The CBN has been *injecting into the economy* in an effort to *stabilize the naira.*"

SAHARA REPORTERS (December 24, 2016, "2017 Budget Can't End the Recession"):

3. "Nigeria's vast *black market* which is also *experiencing pains* from *inflation.*"
4. "*Sending this economy to the emergency ward* does not arise."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A HUMAN BEING is an **ontological metaphor**; it personifies the economy by attributing human-like qualities, conditions, and actions to it. By personifying the economy, this metaphor evokes empathy and relatability; it portrays the economy as a vulnerable entity in need of care. It emphasises the human impact of the recession. The conceptual metaphors borrow from human experiences, health, emotions and actions in order to explain complex issues of economic recession. Nigeria's economy is portrayed as a vulnerable entity as it evokes empathy and relatability. It "suffers" and struggles to stay "on life support"; it is rushed "on a stretcher" to the "emergency ward". The economy is "experiencing pains" as an "ailing economy"; it needs expert "prescription" to recover from the "dilemma". The "oil price crashed" has added to its woes; stabilising the "naira" is now a pressing concern. These constructions align with Nigeria's cultural values of communal care and collective responsibility. They emphasise the human impact of economic recession.

ECONOMY IS A SHRINKING OBJECT

Source Domain: Physical contraction of objects (e.g., shrinking, diminishing).

Target Domain: Economic recession (e.g., decline, loss of value).

Key Metaphoric Linguistic Expressions:

THE VANGUARD (October 24, 2016, "Nigerian Economic Recession and Entrepreneurial Revolution"):

1. "The GDP had *contracted* by 2.06%, the economy by 0.36%."
1. THE VANGUARD (November 21, 2016, "Recession Deepens as GDP Shrinks Further"):
2. "Recession deepens as *GDP shrinks* further."

THE VANGUARD (December 21, 2016, "Nigeria and Economic Recession: Way Out (3)"):

3. "This *decline* of N99.55 billion in one month alone was due to the *drastic fall* of the price of oil."

DAILY TRUST (December 26, 2016, "2016: Nigeria's Economy Struggles as Recession Persists"):

1. 1. "Contraction was largely caused by *declines in oil and manufacturing sectors*." SAHARA REPORTERS (September 1, 2016, "PDP Calls on Buhari to Resign Amid Economic Recession"):
2. "Nigeria's economy was heading for a recession and *a shrinking naira and diminishing revenues*."
3. "*Sharp contraction* in the oil sector due to huge losses of crude oil products."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A SHRINKING OBJECT is another **ontological metaphor**; it attributes physical properties to the economy, depicting it as a shrinking or contracting entity. This shrinking metaphor emphasises the economy's decline through the imagery of shrinking or contracting objects; it makes the abstract

concept of economic loss more tangible for readers. Nigeria's economy is depicted as fragile, dwindling due to "shrinking" growth and "contracting" revenues; the "price of oil" plunge worsens its woes, with "diminishing revenues" and a "shrinking naira". This portrayal highlights the economy's vulnerability; it aligns with Nigeria's cultural experience of coping with scarcity. In Nigeria, where resource scarcity and the shrinking availability of essential goods are common experiences, this metaphor aligns with the cultural understanding of diminishing resources and their impact on daily life.

ECONOMY IS A CONTAINER

Source Domain: Physical containers (e.g., boxes, rooms, traps).

Target Domain: Economic recession (e.g., entrapment, difficulty escaping).

Key metaphoric linguistic expressions:

THE VANGUARD (December 7, 2016, "Nigeria and Economic Recession: Way Out (1)":

1. "The *economy* is in *recession*."
2. "The *way out of this recession* is entrepreneurial revolution."

THE VANGUARD (August 31, 2016, "Nigeria's Economy in Recession with Record Low Foreign Investment"):

3. "Nigeria's *economy in recession* with record low foreign investment."

- *THE VANGUARD* (December 21, 2016, "Nigeria and Economic Recession: Way Out (3)":

4. "The revival of Agriculture as one of the *ways out of recession*."

DAILY TRUST (September 1, 2016, "Economy in Recession"):

1. "With the Nigerian *economy in recession*, even naira loan repayments are becoming difficult."
2. "The *quick way out of this type of recession* is to inject money into the system."

DAILY TRUST (September 8, 2016, "Nigerian Economy: Recession, Depression and Recovery"):

3. "Public discourse on how to bring our *economy out of dilemma*."

DAILY TRUST (November 19, 2016, "Economic Recession Spurs Massive Job Cuts in Nigeria"):

4. "Nigeria's *economy has sunk into recession*."

SAHARA REPORTERS (August 31, 2016, "Nigerian Economy Officially Enters Recession as Pressure Mounts Buhari Government"):

1. "Nigeria's *economy officially enters recession*."

SAHARA REPORTERS (October 18, 2016, "Mixed Signals: Nigerians Score Buhari Low on Economy and Jobs, Blame Jonathan Govt for Recession"):

2. "Nigeria *fell into recession*."
3. "It is the policy decisions that have been made in the last year that have tipped *Nigerians into recession*."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A CONTAINER is an **ontological metaphor**; it conceptualises the economy as a bounded space that one can be "in", "enter", "sink into", or "get out of", using expressions like "in recession", "into recession" and "way out of recession", to convey the idea of confinement and the need for escape or solution. It emphasises the difficulty of escaping economic hardship and the need for strategic solutions out of recession ("out of dilemma").

In Nigeria, where many people face challenges related to limited opportunities and systemic constraints, this metaphor aligns with the cultural experience of navigating confined spaces and seeking ways to break free.

Economy Is a Broken Object

Source Domain: Broken object (an objects needing repair, a collapsing structure).

Target Domain: Economic recession (dysfunctional economy, need for repair).

Key metaphoric linguistic expressions:

THE VANGUARD (September 1, 2016, "Economy in Recession"):

1. "The National Assembly should look into and debate the emergency powers to fix the economy."

THE VANGUARD (August 22, 2016, "Economic Recession: Buhari was Handed Nigeria on a Stretcher"):

2. "A *collapsing mono economy* and an uncaring administration."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A BROKEN OBJECT functions as a **structural metaphor**; it maps the concept of a broken or collapsing object onto the economy, using linguistic expressions such as "fix the economy" and "collapsing mono economy" in order to highlight the need for repair and intervention to restore functionality of a structure. The economy is framed as a broken object; it emphasises the need for repair or intervention. The economy is compared to a *collapsing* structure; this highlights the urgency of addressing systemic dysfunction. The metaphor aligns with our cultural experiences, Nigerians are familiar with the concept of repairing broken objects to restore functionality.

Note: This metaphor is found only in *Vanguard* and not in the other papers.

Economy is a Vehicle on Wrong Path

Source Domain: A vehicle on a journey (a misguided vehicle)

Target Domain: Economic recession (misguided economic policies, need for correction).

Key Metaphoric Linguistic Expressions

DAILY TRUST (September 8, 2016, "Nigerian Economy: Recession, Depression and Recovery"):

1. "Now that the *economic motor* is *driving along wrongly*."

Analysis: The metaphor ECONOMY IS A VEHICLE ON WRONG PATH functions as an **ontological metaphor**; it conceptualises the economy as a vehicle that has deviated from its intended course, using a linguistic expression "driving along wrongly" to signify the need for correction and proper direction to get back on track. This is a form of journey metaphor which frames the economy as a vehicle on the wrong path; it suggests a misguided journey of the driver of the economy ("driving along wrongly"). The economy is compared to a malfunctioning motor ("economic motor"); this implies the need for correction. The metaphor resonates with cultural experiences; Nigerians understand the consequences of vehicles moving in the wrong direction.

Note: This metaphor is found only in *Daily Trust* and not in *Vanguard* or *Sahara Reporters*.

Discussion of Findings

This study broadly identifies six conceptual metaphors of Nigerian economic recession which fall under structural, ontological and orientational metaphors:

1. **Disaster metaphors:** *Economy is a Disaster*
2. **Journey metaphors:** *Economy is a Moving Object; Economy is a Vehicle on the Wrong Path*
3. **Container metaphors:** *Economy is a Container*
4. **Human metaphors:** *Economy is a Human Being*
5. **Shrinking metaphors:** *Economy is a Shrinking Object*
6. **Structural metaphors:** *Economy is a Broken Object*

These findings align with past studies, although the present study stands out with cultural and contextual distinctiveness. The conceptual metaphors in these studies demonstrate that metaphorical language simplifies complex economic ideas; they make economic concepts easier to grasp. (Zamarina, 2013; Jue, 2009; Chifane, 2013).

The variation of **disaster metaphors** found in this study (ECONOMY IS A DISASTER) are like Chifane's (2013) findings (ECONOMIC PROBLEMS ARE DISASTER; CRISIS IS DEATH); but the study fell within the ambit of international authoritative paper of economic discourse. The study was on American economic recession and Euro-zone crisis which started in late 2009. The variation of natural disaster metaphor as found in the present study are uniquely informed by the Nigerian natural setting and our experiences of natural disasters in Nigerian natural environment.

In addition, the variation of **human metaphors** (personification) found in this study also evoke similar previous research findings of Jue's (2009) ECONOMY IS A PERSON (*aging economy; ...the economy will wake up; this causes headache for the economy*). This suggests that they are common types of metaphors across cultures. Moreover, the **journey metaphors** describe the economy as being in motion; *ECONOMY IS A MOVING OBJECT* and *ECONOMY IS A VEHICLE ON THE WRONG PATH* both suggest dynamic change. Chung, Huang and Ahrens (2003) also found similar conceptual metaphors in their previous study; however, this study uniquely ties its

findings to Nigeria's transport-heavy culture. This suggests that the variations of such metaphors as found in this study contribute inherently to the universal metaphors.

Further, these findings in this study have important implications for future research; notably, conceptual metaphors vary considerably across cultures and contexts. More comparative studies should be conducted. Cultural awareness remains essential for properly understanding economic metaphors.

Conclusion

Overall, this study demonstrates the pervasive use of conceptual metaphors in Nigerian media during the 2016 economic recession; it reveals how metaphors such as ECONOMY IS A DISASTER, ECONOMY IS A MOVING OBJECT and ECONOMY IS A HUMAN BEING reflect Nigeria's cultural, cognitive and contextual realities. The study makes use of qualitative content analysis and Lakoff & Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory; it portrays how conceptual metaphors are used to facilitate understanding of complex economic issues, influence public opinion and highlight the links between language, culture and thought. The results emphasise the cultural distinctiveness of Nigerian metaphorical language; they also align with international studies on universal metaphor patterns. In addition, the study fills a significant gap in the literature; it provides insights for academics, media practitioners and policymakers. During economic crises, it proposes culturally tailored communication strategies; these approaches can enhance public engagement. In the end, the research emphasises metaphors' role in economic discourse; it advances understanding of how language shapes perceptions of economic realities in Nigeria and globally.

References

- Agwuocha, U. A. (2024). Conceptual metaphors in COVID-19 pandemic discourses in the Nigerian print media communication. *ResearchGate*, Advance online publication. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378178648>
- Ahrens, K. (2002). When love is not digested: Underlying reasons for source to target domain pairing in the contemporary theory of metaphor. In Y. E. Hsiao (Ed.), *Proceedings of the First Cognitive Linguistics Conference* (pp. 273–302). Cheng-Chi University.
- Akintayo, J. A., & Olatokunbo, O. (2024). The use of metaphor in Nigerian political discourse: Themes of war and journey. *International Journal of Language, Literature and Culture (IJLLC)*, 4(5). <https://aipublications.com/ijllc/>
- Alverson, H. (1994). *Semantics and experience: Universal metaphors of time in English, Mandarin, Hindi, and Sesotho*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Asiru, H. T., & Batagarawa, A. G. (2019). Journey, rest, gate and garment: A cross-cultural cognitive analysis of metaphors used in breaking news of death. *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 8(1), 1–10. <http://www.journalarjass.com>
- Chifane, C. (2013). Metaphors of the crisis: A reflection of the global financial situation. *Management Strategies Journal*, 85–91.
- Chung, S. F., Huang, C., & Ahrens, K. (2003). Economy is a transportation device: Contrastive representation of source domain knowledge in English and Chinese. In *Proceedings of Special Session for the International Conference on National Language Processing and Knowledge Engineering (NLP-KE)*. Graduate Institute of Linguistics, National Taiwan University. <http://www.researchgate.net>
- Denham, K., & Lobeck, A. (2010). *Linguistics for everyone: An introduction*. Wardsworth.

- Evans, V., Bergen, B. K., & Zinken, J. (2007). *The cognitive linguistics reader*. Equinox.
- Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive Linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Gao, L. F. (2016). A comparative study of conceptual metaphors in English and Chinese economic news headlines. *Creative Education*, 7, 2629–2639. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2016.717249>
- Isyaku, H., Hassan, H., & Kunalan, R. (2016). A study of corruption metaphors in online media of Nigeria, Iraq, and Malaysia. *Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 4(3). <http://www.jallr.com>
- Jue, X. (2009). *Economic metaphors in English newspapers*. <http://www.diva-portal.org>
- Kamalu, I., & Anasiudu, O. (2024). Conflict and warfare metaphors in the Nigerian media conceptualization of corruption. *African Identities*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2024.2310065>
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by* (2nd ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Lawan, M. H. (2016). *A critical discourse analysis of metaphor in selected acceptance and inaugural speeches of President Goodluck Jonathan and President Obama* [master's thesis]. <http://www.kubanni.abu.ng>
- Luporini, A. (2013). *Metaphor in times of crisis: Metaphorical representation of the global crisis in the Financial Times & II Sole 24 Ore 2008* [Doctoral dissertation]. <https://www.journals.openedition.org>

- National Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Nigeria's economic recession report*. Retrieved from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng>.
- Sani, I. (2014). The use of verbal and visual metaphors in the construction of satire in Nigerian political cartoons. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 4(3). <http://www.academicjournals.org>
- Sani, I., & Ruma, B. M. (2014). Concretizing the abstract: Conceptual metaphors in the Holy Quran. *European Academic Research*, 2(8).
- Zamarina, E. (2013). *A comparison of economy-related conceptual metaphors in English and Lithuanian popular economic discourse* [master's thesis]. VytautasMagnus University. <http://www.talpykla.elaba>