

Analysis of Most Common Conceptual Metaphors Used in Boko Haram Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the most frequently used conceptual metaphors by Boko Haram in their discourse. The study employs Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kovecses, 2002) as its theoretical framework. The study finds that the insurgents frequently use metaphors that are related to self-defence as well as metaphors that concealed their communication which help them recruit new members for indoctrination. The study concludes that the insurgents have explored language and create meaning from metaphor as a weapon for their attacks. The study highlights security relevance as it revealed how the insurgents manipulate language to perpetrate attacks and escape attacks. This serves as a veritable source of information on how to curb the menace. The study also highlights social relevance as it established a link to bridge the communication gap that exists between the insurgents and the people of the community.

KEYWORDS: Insurgents, Metaphors, Discourse, Conversation, Conceal.

Introduction

This study examines the most frequently metaphors used by Boko Haram in their discourse and identifies the purpose for which they use them.

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. This means metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language use, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, language users think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. On the contrary, metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thought and action. Metaphor in cognitive linguistics is not only a rhetorical device but an important mental facility and cognitive instrument. A new view of metaphor that challenges the traditional theory in a coherent and systematic way was first developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their seminal study: *Metaphors We Live By*. They challenged the deeply entrenched view of metaphor by claiming that metaphor is a property of concepts and not of words; the function of metaphor is to better understand certain concepts and not just for some artistic or aesthetic purpose; metaphor is often not based on similarity; metaphor is used effortlessly in everyday life by ordinary people; metaphor, far from being a superfluous though pleasing linguistic ornament, is an inevitable process of human thought and reasoning.

Discourse analysis is a methodological approach that deals with the study of language and communication to uncover underlying social, cultural and power dynamics. It treats language as a social construct that reflects and shapes reality, emphasising the significance of context and power relationships. (Renkema;2009; Jorgensen & Phillips,2002). It is a social practice which involves a dialectical link between a discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that framed it.

Boko Haram, as a group, was established by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in the capital of Borno State, Maiduguri, in northeast Nigeria. However, recent debate on the emergence of this group also suggests that Boko Haram emerged as a small non-violent organisation (Muslim Youth Organisation) in 1995, founded by Abubakar Lawan (Nyadera and Bincof, 2020). However, similar to the mobilisation strategy adopted by Mohammed Marwa (founder of Mai Tatsine Sect), Mohammed Yusuf also sought to mobilise youths in northeast in Nigeria who are disenfranchised by very poor economic conditions and lack of access to basic social services. According to Walker (2017), Yusuf opposed any form of Western

democracy and education which he blamed for the social ills facing Borno State. As such, whereas it is commonly highlighted that religion is the primary driver for Boko Haram violence, the reality is that economic inequalities and disenfranchisement are the underlying causes of the violence experienced in northeast Nigeria.

Boko Haram crisis began in 2009. At that time, according, to Tiffany (2023), there was a new government legislation requiring the wearing of helmet by motorcyclists in the State. The Borno State government had ordered the police to enforce the law on the use of helmet by all motorcyclists, a law which the members of the Sect refused to obey. They proceeded to a funeral rite on their motorcycles, without putting on helmets. As a result, the police at the Customs Bridge in Maiduguri stopped them. This resulted in a clash between the police and members of the sect; four members were killed; about eighteen members were injured. Murdtada (2017) explains that the Sect's leader, Yusuf and his allies were enraged by the incident and wrote their famous tirade titled: 'An Open Letter to the Federal Government', in which they asked the Federal Government to take action on the police officers who killed their members or else they would take up arms in revenge. It was after this incident that the leader of the Sect continued preaching for Jihad and confronting the Nigerian security.

After the 2009 uprising, the activities of the group appeared to have waned. However, they regrouped, re-strategized and re-emerged in 2010 under the new leadership of Abubakar Shakau. Since the re-emergence of the group under the new leadership, attacks have escalated in terms of frequency and intensity (Bartolotta,2020).

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study is an exploratory research and a content analysis of utterances of some repentant Boko Haram members of the five Local Government Areas of Borno State. The data for the study was gathered through interviews with the repentant Boko Haram members. Through purposive sampling, the researcher selected fifteen repentant Boko Haram members from the five local government areas under study (three each from local a government area) for the interview and considered three responses for the analysis, totalling fifteen (15) responses. The steps taken in carrying out the analysis of the data including presenting of the most frequently used metaphors by

the insurgents in their discourse; secondly, the presentation of the transcribed extracts from the interviews for translation, interpretation and analysis of each of the selected metaphor to determine the most frequently metaphors the insurgents use in their discourse. The study employs Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Kovecses, 2002) as the theoretical framework.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The steps taken in carrying out the analysis of the data are as follows: first, presenting the most frequently used metaphors by the insurgents in their discourse, secondly, presenting of the transcribed extracts from the interviews for translation, interpretation and analysis of each of the selected metaphor to determine how frequently they are used in their discourse.

The Most Frequently Used Metaphors by Boko Haram in their Discourse: The following are some of the most frequently used metaphors by Boko Haram insurgents in their discourse gathered from the interview, selected for the analysis:

<u>Conceptual Metaphor</u>	<u>Literal Meaning</u>	<u>Metaphorical Meaning</u>
Sundok	Broom	Unity
Suworam	Key	Treasurer
Fatəla	Lamp	Commander
Tolo	Mud	Trap
Halka	Camp	Cycle or group
Riwula	Needle	Suspect
Tarmuna	Rabbit	Escapee
Buta	Kettle	Female
Leda	Polytene-bag	Suspect
Wake	Beans	Suspect
Zare	Thread	Retreat
Njitti	Cricket	Whistle-blower
Ngəri	Antelope	Run/retreat
Jamage	Bat	Stranger (suspect)
Hakori	Teeth	Traitor

Analysis of the Most Frequently Used Metaphors by Boko-Haram

The most frequently used metaphors by Boko-Haram in their discourse collected from the respondents (repentant insurgents) are transcribed, translated, interpreted and analysed as shown below:

Extract One: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko Haram member in Guzamala:

*Sa bātārəm ya de waltaro manyen maa, daji kurandebe **sundok** shin. Daji samman deso citilo waro luwuye bāladā kolliyen.*

Translation:

When we are done with our mission for attacking a town,
our commander will ask us to retreat immediately saying
broom, then we collectively leave the town.

Interpretation and Analysis

Sundok is a Kanuri word which literarily means a broom. However, the finding from the interview reveals that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to mean retreating or withdrawing forces in a fight. The finding shows that the insurgents use structural metaphor to signify broom as a symbol of unity, through which they conceal their conversation and retreat in a fight as a group.

Extract Two: This extract was drawn from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram in Guzamala:

Kazadala ləmande mukkon zən dəro suwuram nyen.

Translation:

We refer to the custodian of our property as a **key**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Suwuram is a kanuri word which means a key, but the findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to refer to a treasurer. The findings further uncover that the insurgents concealed their conversation through the lens of ontological metaphor, not only in attacking but also in their entire dealings as a group.

Extract Three: This extract was taken from an interview with one of the repentant Boko-Haram members in Gubio:

*Kazadala kəriu bedəro **fatəla** nyen*

Translation:

We refer to our **commander** as a **lamp**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Fatəla is a kanuri word which refers to a lamp. The finding, however, reveals that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to refer to their commander. The finding also discovers that the insurgents utilise ontological metaphor by giving an attribute of human being to lamp, and considered their commander as a light that exposes darkness (enemies of attack). This demonstrates how cleverly the insurgents conceal their conversation to escape or perpetrate attacks.

Extract Four: This extract was drawn from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram fighter in Magumeri:

*Sa nalaa mbərsan nyende ruiyaiya, daji amman
dero **tolo** diya wande fattə yende nyen.*

Translation:

When we are not too sure of the safety of a location or suspecting to be dangerous, we ask our compatriots to avoid it as it is a **mud**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Tolo is a kanuri word referring to a mud in English. The finding from the interview however reveals that the Boko-Haram fighters use the word metaphorically to refer to a deadly place suspected to be a trap. The finding further shows how effectively the insurgents applied structural metaphor to conceal their conversation in describing a deadly location for them to escape attack.

Extract Five: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram member in Magumeri:

*Nduwa nduwa naaso **halkanzə** ro
lezə nyen sa kəriuwun walteiya.*

Translation:

We ask each and every member to go to his
respective **cycle** as soon as we return from a fight.

Interpretation and Analysis

Halka is an Arabic word which stands for a domain, but the findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to mean a cycle or group. The finding also discovers that the insurgents employed orientational metaphor in asking their colleagues to disperse to their respective locations. This shows how Boko-Haram fighters were able to use common metaphorical source domains in concealing their conversation.

Extract Six: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram insurgent in Magumeri:

*Loktu kam kusoto mbarsan yende ruiyaiya,
kamandeso
ro hangal gənaza shi adə **riwula** diya nyen.*

Translation:

When we see a stranger who we suspected to be a
threat, we
warn our members to be wary of him as he could be
a **needle**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Riwula is a kanuri word referring to a needle. Findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to refer to a suspicious person. This shows how the insurgents cognitively assigned human attributes to an object through ontological metaphor to conceal their communication.

Extract Seven: This extract was drawn from an interview with one of the repentant Boko-Haram members in Magumeri:

*Loktu kəriu banna tə kasoro ma nyen maa,
tarmuna nyen daji samma kashiya.*

Translation:

When we are losing a fight and want to retreat,
we say **rabbit** for a collective withdrawal.

Interpretation and Analysis

The word *tarmuna* is referring to a rabbit in Kanuri. But the findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to collectively retreat from a fight they are losing. This shows how the insurgents have explored different source domains through structural metaphor in concealing their communication as a group.

Extract Eight: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram insurgent in Chibok: *Idan mutanen mu suka fita yaki, zamu ce su zo da **buta** saboda akoi yan uwan mu da suke bukata.*

Translation

When our men went for a fight, we ask them to bring **kettle** because there are some of our members required it.

Interpretation and Analysis

Buta is a Hausa word referring to a kettle. Findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to refer to a woman. The findings also uncover that the object ‘*buta*’, compared to ‘*woman*’, has no direct relationship, but the insurgents manipulate language using ontological and structural metaphors to conceal their conversation in order to kidnap a female victim.

Extract Nine: This extract was taken from an interview with one of the insurgents in Chibok:

*Lokacin da muka ga mutumin da bamu yadda da shi ba, zamu ce ayi hankali da **leda**.*

Translation:

When we see a suspicious person, we warn our colleagues to be careful of a **nylon bag**.

Interpretation and Analysis

The word *leda* is referring to a nylon-bag both in Hausa and in Kanuri. Findings from the interview reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to mean a suspicious person. The findings also uncover that the insurgents employed structural metaphor in conceptualising the concept from one domain (source) to another domain (target) to conceal their conversation to escape attack.

Extract Ten: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram in Chibok:

Mutumin da bamu sanshi ba kuma

*muna zarginshi zamu ce masa **wake**.*

Translation:

The person whom we do not know and suspect, we refer to him as a **bean**.

Interpretation and Analysis

The word *wake* is a Hausa word referring to a bean in English. Findings from the interview reveals that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to conceal their communication to refer a suspicious person. This comparison between ‘*bean*’ and a ‘*person*’ demonstrates the use of ontological metaphor by the insurgents in coding their communication to escape or perpetrate attacks.

Extract Eleven: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram member in Chibok:

*Idan muka je yaki, amma ba tayi dadi ba, muna so mu gudu, sai commandan mu zai ce **zare**.*

Translation:

When we go for a fight but is not successful, our commander will ask us to retreat by saying **thread**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Zare is a Hausa word referring to a thread; a long, thin and flexible material used in sewing, weaving or in the construction of string. Finding reveals that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to retreat from an unsuccessful fight. The finding discovers that the insurgents applied orientational metaphor to conceal their communication.

Extract Twelve: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram fighter in Gwoza:

Kazaa dala andero je gandoma dāro njitti gulliyen.

Translation

We refer to the person in charge of whistle-blowing as a **cricket**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Njitti is a Kanuri word referring to a cricket in English. Findings reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to mean a whistle-blower. This demonstrates how Boko-Haram fighters relate ‘*cricket*’ and ‘*whistle-blower*’ through structural metaphor, using the attributes of ‘*cricket*’ and *whistle-blowing* (making a sound) to conceal their conversation to escape or perpetrate attacks.

Extract Thirteen: This extract was drawn from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram in Gwoza:

*Kashau suro kəriu belan kazaa dalan
debe gulturo majinmaa, ngəri shin.*

Translation:

When our commander wants us to retreat from a fight, he says **antelope**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Ngəri is a Kanuri word referring to an antelope, a legendary creature having long serrated horn and being hard to catch (a fast and agile animal). Finding reveals that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to retreat or run from a fight. This shows the use of structural metaphor, where the insurgents understand one concept (‘*Ngəri*’ stands for antelope and speed of an antelope) from another domain to conceal their communication and escape an imminent danger.

Extract Fourteen: This extract was taken from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram Fighter in Gwoza:

*Idan muka ga mutumin da bamu yadda da shiba,
cewa muke jamage ne ayi hankali da shi.*

Translation:

When we see a suspicious person, we ask our compatriots to be careful because he is a **bat**.

Interpretation and Analysis

The word *jamage* is a Hausa word referring to a bat in English. Findings reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to refer to a suspicious person. Metaphorical understanding of people through animals, a structural metaphor, is evident in the insurgents' conversation to conceal their communication.

Extract Fifteen: This extract was drawn from an interview with a repentant Boko-Haram member in Gwoza: *Mutumun da acikin mu yake, amma yana*

*cire sirrin mu muna ce masa **hakori**.*

Translation:

Our member who lives with us but suspected to have

been revealing our secrets is referred to as **teeth**.

Interpretation and Analysis

Hakori is a Hausa word referring to teeth in English. Findings from the reveal that the insurgents use the word metaphorically to mean a traitor. The comparison of the word '*Hakori*' (*teeth*) to a person is a conceptualisation of metaphor that helps understand a target from a source domain through ontological means.

Discussion

This study examines the most frequently metaphors used by Boko-Haram in their discourse, using Kovecses (2002) Extended Conceptual Metaphor Model in analysing the fifteen selected extracts. Kovecses (2002) explains that, in conceptual metaphors, one domain of experience is used to understand another domain of experience. Understanding one domain in terms of another involves a set of fixed correspondences technically called **mappings**. As part of the research objectives, the manner and degree to which the insurgents use conceptual metaphors are examined.

The study reveals that the most frequently metaphors used by the insurgent in their discourse are conceptual metaphors for perpetrating attacks,

escaping attacks, recruiting new members as well as identifying targets of their terror. This is illustrated in extracts: 4, 8, 11, 12 and 13. The word ‘Tolo’ in extract 4 and the word ‘buta’ in extract 8 for example, are names of ‘mud’ and ‘kettle’ respectively. The insurgents however used the word ‘Tolo’ to mean a deadly place and the word ‘Buta’ to mean a woman. Metaphors in extracts 11, 12 and 13 are conceptual metaphors the insurgents use to escape attacks. Adam and Julia (2020) claim that metaphor is an excellent tool to disseminate ideology, express emotion and craft gender identities and escape danger. As the analysis reveals that the insurgents frequently use conceptual metaphors that are related to self-defence to protect themselves from attack, escape an attack or strategizing to avoid attacks. This is evident as illustrated in extracts: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 of the analysis.

Sukmi (2018) argues that metaphor is an effective ‘defence mechanism’ that often used in politics. The present study however reveals that metaphors are a tool in the hands of Boko-Haram fighters that are conveniently used to suit their daily attacks and escape attacks in their discourse. Francisco and Sue (2018) submit that metaphor provides conversational interaction that treats both literal and nonliteral comprehension in discourse, and Ida (2014) asserts that metaphors are used in discourse to help people understand complex ideas and shape how they perceive and act on social issues.

The current study also reveals that that the insurgents use metaphors that provide the non-literal message in their discourse purposely to conceal their communication to recruit new members who are victims of their terror so as to indoctrinate them. This is evident as illustrated in extract 8. This study therefore finds that:

- i- The insurgents frequently use metaphors that are related to self-defence. That is, metaphors for escaping attacks from the security or metaphors that help them strategize to avoid attacks from the security outfit or the resident members whom they perceived as threat to them.
- ii- The insurgents use metaphors that conceal their communication, which helps them recruit new members for indoctrination.

Conclusion

This study examined the most frequently metaphors used by Boko-Haram in their discourse using Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory for the analysis. The study showed how metaphors are explored and used by the insurgents, focusing on how they conceal their conversation as a group. The study highlighted security relevance, as it revealed how the insurgents manipulate language to perpetrate attacks and escape attacks. This served as a veritable source of information on how to curb the menace.

The study also highlighted social relevance, as it established a link to bridge the communication gap that exists between the insurgents and the people of the community.

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