Body and Person Metaphors in Nigerian Inaugural Political Speeches 1999-2023

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Abstract

This paper interrogates body and person metaphors in five inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents since the inception of democracy in 1999, also known as the Fourth Republic. Specifically, it identifies metaphorical linguistic expressions in the data and argues that these expressions, though innocuous, have profound ideological and rhetorical potentials in framing political identity, individual speaker agency and national consciousness as well as highlighting interested versions of reality while obfuscating others. Using the synergy of corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics and critical linguistics as espoused in critical metaphor analysis (CMA), and five inaugural speeches of the five Nigerian presidents between 1999 and 2023, the paper respectively identifies the conventional metaphorical linguistic expressions in the selected data by applying the Metaphorical Identification Procedure (MIP) of the Pragglejazz Group, derives the underlying conceptual metaphors in the identified metaphorical expressions through the conceptual mappings in source and target domains and finally subjects them to critical discourse analysis (CDA) to pragmatically explain their rich rhetorical and ideological

underpinnings in the Nigerian socio-political landscape. Findings show preponderance of body and person metaphors cognitively mapping Nigerian nation, electorate, economy, corruption, democracy, government and public institutions ontologically to abstract concepts as sickness, growth, survival, resilience, volition which affect the human body and personhood, or structurally as possessing human bodily attributes with potentials for performing certain actions. While all administrations rely on these body and person metaphors, their emphases shift according to political context and priorities: moral cleansing, generational responsibility, developmental optimism, disciplinary purification, and restorative healing. In all the speeches, the speakers position themselves in paternalistic, messianic and familial relationship with their audiences, thus construing shared obligation towards bodily and personhood preservation. The paper concludes that while this participatory framing can be empowering, it can also subtly shift responsibility for solution of national problems onto the public, thus potentially masking governmental failures by emphasizing collective blame or duty.

Introduction

Language undeniably is a powerful tool in politics. Politicians recognise its power, especially as a rhetorical resource for winning the consent and participation of their potential electorates. Beard (2000) highlights the importance of studying the language of politics as it allows us to understand how language is used by "those who wish to gain power, those who wish to exercise power and those who wish to keep power." In Nigeria, as in other parts of the globe, inaugural speeches provide a platform for political actors to deploy language, often replete with implicit meanings, to not only communicate their ideologies but also to shape public opinion and outline the

government's agenda. Political speeches are powerful sites for understanding how leaders construct national identity, mobilize collective emotions, and frame political realities (Chilton, 2004). In Nigeria, where democratic governance was restored in 1999 after decades of military rule, inaugural speeches have played a particularly symbolic role in articulating visions of national renewal, unity, and progress. These speeches do more than outline policy intentions; they shape how citizens are invited to imagine the nation, its challenges, and their own place within it. One of the ways the power elite utilise language in their political speeches to achieve underlying ideologies and sustain their hegemonies is through the use of metaphor, which allows political actors to translate complex social and political issues into familiar experiential terms, making them cognitively accessible and rhetorically persuasive (Charteris-Black, 2005).

Metaphor studies have pervaded academic inquiry since the advent of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) renowned publication, *Metaphors We Live By*. Before this time, metaphors were viewed as ornamental and a matter of embellishment in language (Richards, 1936). However, with the inception of Lakoff and Johnson's work, strongly re-emphasised in Lakoff (1993) and Kövecses (2010), metaphor is seen as a pervasively cognitive phenomenon that shapes our contextualisation of everyday experiences, and so cognitive linguists have stressed its powerful persuasive and emotive potentials. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) pioneer work shows how metaphor is more a matter of thought than of language *per se* and can highlight certain meanings in our conceptual system while hiding others. That is to say, quite a number of innocuous words we use on a daily basis may hide metaphorical meanings that implicitly guide thought and reality (Gibbs, 1994). The pervasiveness of metaphors in language makes them so conventionalised that they may become naturalised and

undetected in discourse, constituting themselves into taken-for-granted mental models that shape and define the way certain experiences are conceptualised and talked about in the world. So powerful is their potential for framing entities and events through transferences from congruous to oblique forms of meaning that they require critical discourse analysis to unravel their strong persuasive and emotive appeal (Ezeifeka, 2018).

Within the broader field of conceptual metaphor studies, body metaphors and person metaphors are especially significant in political discourse. They draw on deeply embodied human experiences of movement, health, growth, and agency to conceptualize abstract political entities such as the state, democracy, or national development (Johnson, 1987). When leaders describe Nigeria as "standing tall," "healing," or "finding its feet," they activate the conceptual mapping THE NATION IS A PERSON or THE NATION IS A BODY, framing political transformation as a physical or moral process. These metaphors do not merely embellish political language; they structure how political actors and citizens understand responsibility, agency, crisis, and hope. In a context marked by recurring economic challenges, security concerns, and shifting political priorities, the metaphors used by Nigerian presidents offer insight into how each administration interprets the nation's condition and legitimizes its leadership.

This form of analysis is driven by what has been termed conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, 1993; Charteris-Black, 2004; Kövecses, 2010). However, Charteris-Black's critical metaphor analysis (CMA) will be applied in this study, as it integrates and synergises three distinct but related approaches into one framework for analysing authentic texts (Charteris-Black, 2004). These three theoretical underpinnings of CMA are: corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics

represented by conceptual metaphor theory, and critical linguistics, also called critical discourse analysis (CDA). We shall discuss this theory further in the theoretical framework section. Using this framework, this paper interrogates body and person metaphors in five inaugural speeches of Nigerian presidents since the inception of democratic government from 1999 to 2023.

A cursory perusal of these documents reveals subtle encodings of meanings in words that, at first sight, appear innocuous and conventional but arguably hide profound implications. They border on references to the nation as a human body with body parts, kinship affiliations, and needs of survival, sustenance, and growth and as a person with emotions, feelings, hopes, and aspirations. This work will identify these "conventional" metaphorical expressions in the selected inaugural speeches with a view to determining their source and target domains, the motivations for their use, and their pragmatic and ideological potentials.

Statement of the problem

Despite the centrality of metaphor in political communication, few studies have examined metaphor use across Nigeria's democratic inaugural speeches as a unified corpus spanning more than two decades. Existing scholarship tends to focus on individual speeches, isolated administrations, or general rhetorical strategies, without tracing how conceptual metaphors shift across political eras. Musolff (2007) demonstrates how "body" metaphors conceptualise the state as a human organism, evident in expressions such as "body politic," "head of government," and

"three arms of government," and how depictions of the body politic as "ill" or "diseased" justify calls for a "cure," including historically

dangerous framings such as Hitler's portrayal of Jews as "parasites." His later work (2022) further shows how NATION-AS-BODY and NATION-AS-PERSON metaphors in xenophobic discourse frame migrants as diseases or taboo body parts, contributing to marginalisation. Other relevant studies include analyses of corruption metaphors in Nigerian newspapers (Olinya and Ezeifeka, 2019), metaphors constructing IPOB as a national threat (Agugogbua and Ezeifeka, 2023), metaphors in presidential speeches (Kamalu & Iniworikabo, 2016), inaugural metaphors on corruption (Oguegbu and Chukwu, 2020), and broader metaphor use in Nigerian political discourse (Ebi, 2019). Additional works examine metaphors in media, political, and educational discourse (Chigbu *et al*., 2025; Anaekperechi, 2024; Nguyen, 2025; Wang and Habil, 2024; Vladimirovich *et al*., 2015; Otieno *et al.,* 2016), alongside Musolff's wider contributions on political metaphors (2020).

While these studies illuminate metaphor use in various contexts, none specifically investigates how body and person metaphors function in Nigerian inaugural speeches as persuasive strategies for constructing ideological alignments or exclusionary politics. Furthermore, researches addressing body and person metaphors do not consider how Nigerian presidents deploy these strategies to sustain hegemonic power. This study fills that gap by conducting a conceptual and critical metaphor analysis of Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches from 1999 to 2023. In addressing these concerns, the paper raises the following questions; What body and person conventional metaphors are used in Nigerian presidential inaugural speeches from 1999 to 2023? What conceptual mappings are derived from these conventional metaphor use? How do these conceptual metaphors function as ideological, persuasive, and legitimizing strategies for constructing political identity, agency, and hegemonic power? How

do the uses and functions of these metaphors shift or remain consistent across different administrations in Nigeria's Fourth Republic?

Using Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) (Charteris-Black, 2004) and established metaphor identification procedures, the paper examines how body and person metaphors frame national identity, articulate political vision, and shape leader-citizen relationships. By analyzing seven administrations, from Obasanjo to Tinubu, the study highlights continuities and shifts in metaphorical framing across Nigeria's Fourth Republic and demonstrates how embodied metaphors function as cognitive and rhetorical tools for nation-building, persuasion, and political legitimation. More broadly, it contributes to African political discourse studies by showing how such metaphors shape the linguistic construction that underly certain ideological positions of democratic governance in a post-military context.

Conceptual Review

Metaphors

From classical times, metaphor has been classified alongside other tropes - simile, personification, irony, hyperbole, alliteration, paradox, synecdoche, oxymoron and other figurative expressions. These tropes are seen as devices that make literary genres - prose, poetry and drama - memorable and aesthetically appealing. Metaphor, as the king of the tropes, was then a matter of language used as poetic devices. That is why they are called poetic/image/creative/novel metaphors. According to Lakoff (1993), by this traditional definition of metaphor, "all everyday conventional language is literal, and none

is metaphorical. All subject matter can be comprehended literally without metaphor". To Lakoff, this literal-figurative distinction is a misrepresentation of what metaphor really is, which is "a huge system of everyday conventional, conceptual metaphors … that structure our everyday conceptual system." To the cognitive linguist, it is the more ubiquitous taken-for-granted conventional metaphors, often hidden in texts, that deserve the analyst's attention, rather than the more obvious poetic ones. In this cognitive view of metaphor, espoused in Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1993) and Kovecses (2010), cognitive linguists stress the ontological links or correspondence between the entities and events from one completely dissimilar domain to another. This "correspondence" has been called "mapping". Lakoff (1993) has described this correspondence as "cross-domain mappings in the conceptual system", and has emphasised the "ontological association that they induce in our minds". Two domains are identified: the Source and Target domains. The source domain is usually a concrete, easily identifiable entity from which the more abstract target domain is lexicalised by a series of conventional metaphors. This paper distinguishes between these conventional metaphors which are more pervasive in discourse, especially the inaugural speeches that are the subject of our study, from poetic (also called novel/creative/image) metaphors which are more obviously figurative. Because these conventional metaphors hide certain meanings and are more ubiquitous in texts, they are good candidates for critical metaphor analysis and critical discourse analysis. This paper also looks into the difference between conceptual metaphors underlying the different identified metaphorical linguistic expressions from our data.

Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (Pragglejazz, 2007), lexical items that encode body and person metaphors will be

identified. These are referred to as metaphorical linguistic expressions. It is from these conventional metaphorical linguistic expressions that the underlying conceptual metaphors that would tend to map the concepts are derived from the semantic fields of the human body parts, human person and human survival and growth (source domain) unto another from the domains of nationhood, politics and governance (target domain). These conventional metaphors have been classified into three, according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as structural, orientational and ontological metaphors. The three stages of metaphor analysis employed in this study involve metaphor identification at the linguistic level, metaphor interpretation at the semantic level and metaphor explanation at the pragmatic level. These three levels of analysis in turn locate the work within the frameworks of corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics and critical linguistics respectively.

Political Discourse

Political speeches serve as powerful instruments through which leaders articulate, reinforce, and legitimize ideological positions. Far beyond ceremonial or rhetorical flourish, these speeches strategically deploy language to frame political realities, define social problems, construct national identities, and propose visions for the future. Presidential speeches, particularly those delivered by heads of state are powerful tools aimed to inform, create solidarity, establish authority and promote specific ideologies. Beard (2000) writes that presidential speeches often carry a persuasive tone directed to convince the public of the speaker's leadership and vision. Inaugural speeches provide a unique genre within the presidential discourse. They are significant rhetorical events where political leaders outline

their vision, define national priorities, and attempt to unify the citizenry. These speeches are highly symbolic and are often used to establish credibility, express national values, and set the tone for an administration (Campbell and Jamieson, 2008). As political rituals, inaugural addresses also offer insight into the ideological basis of leadership and the discursive strategies used to shape collective identity (Lim, 2002). These speeches provide the platform for political actors to deploy language, replete with implicit meanings, to not only communicate their ideologies but also to outline the government's agenda.

Delivered at the beginning of a political leader's term, they are designed to set the tone for the governance. Campbell and Jameison (2008) describe inaugural addresses as ceremonial and strategic, often containing promises, religious appeals and ideological positioning. These speeches not only articulate values but also reflect the political and social context of the time. Importantly, the language used in such speeches often contains metaphorical and rhetorical framings that subtly define complex issues in emotionally charged terms (Charteris-Black, 2004). Given the position of the people delivering inaugural addresses, the audience and the weighty issues to be addressed, Atkinson (1984) and Thompson (1996) note that features such as repetition, parallelism, metaphor and emotional appeals are included in the speeches to help presidents connect with the people, project leadership and subtly guide public opinion. This framing influences how issues such as national unity, economic development, and security are understood. For instance, metaphors such as "healing the wounds of the nation" reflect moral and emotional appeals designed to legitimize particular courses of action and foster collective alignment.

Chilton (2004) emphasizes that political language is not only representational but also performative. It actively constructs social reality by legitimizing power relations and policy choices. Through inaugural speeches, presidents often position themselves as agents of change or continuity, projecting ideologies that resonate with national sentiment while cloaking them in seemingly neutral or unifying language. These speeches also often draw upon culturally resonant metaphors and national myths, which make ideological content more palatable and emotionally compelling. Moreover, Lakoff (2004) illustrates how political framing is deeply rooted in conceptual metaphors that reflect underlying worldviews. In his analysis of American political language, Lakoff demonstrates how conservatives and progressives employ different metaphorical frames such as "nation as family" to promote contrasting values and policies. Although his work is U.S.-focused, the insights apply broadly as Nigerian political leaders similarly embed metaphors that conceptualize the nation as a person, body, or moral entity, subtly reinforcing ideologies of authority, obedience, or reform. This research explores the use of body and person metaphors in Nigerian inaugural speeches, examining how they are used to create emotional connections and inspire the audience to align with and accept the hegemonies of the power elite

Theoretical Framework

This work adopts the critical metaphor analysis (CMA) framework, which is a synergy of three theoretical orientations: corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics and critical linguistics. CMA, credited to Charteris-Black (2004), draws inspiration from Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) CMT which sees metaphor as a pervasive cognitive phenomenon in everyday utterances, employed to evoke powerful cognitive, persuasive and emotive responses. Charteris-Black traces

the origin of metaphor to Aristotelian rhetoric, which is the use of language for the purposes of persuading the audience to a particular point of view. He introduces the idea of the corpus in the identification of metaphor keywords and advocates for the integration of corpus linguistics, cognitive linguistics and critical linguistics/critical discourse analysis in unravelling the persuasive potentials of the identified metaphors in a corpus.

These three areas would require the researcher in CMA to analyze metaphor at three levels: linguistic level which involves identification of metaphorical linguistic expressions in authentic corpus, cognitive semantic level, involving the interpretation of identified metaphors using conceptual metaphors and mappings in source and target domains, and finally, pragmatic level analysis, which requires the explanation of the sociocultural and ideological implications of metaphors with powerful and strong rhetorical and emotive potentials. CMA thus adopts the three-stage procedure - metaphor identification, metaphor interpretation and metaphor explanation which align respectively with the above-mentioned three areas of focus in CMA (Charteris-Black 2004: 35-40). Charteris-Black's three-tier model of analysis, like Fairclough's three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1995) and van Dijk's (2001) discourse-cognition-society triangle (in Wodak and Meyer, 2001), asserts that for effective analysis in CMA, an account of the linguistic, cognitive semantic and pragmatic levels is inevitable. The three-tier model is discussed below (Charteris-Black, 2004:13-34).

Corpus linguistics: Metaphor Identification

In metaphor identification, Charteris-Black (2004: 21) claims that metaphors are incongruous linguistic expressions that create semantic tension, either at linguistic, cognitive or pragmatic levels, resulting in

shifts in domain use. This transference from one congruent domain of reference to another more oblique realisation of meaning makes metaphors more cognitively imbued than just a matter of language *per se* as is the traditional view of metaphor (Lakoff, 1993). Proponents of the cognitive view of metaphor such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1993) and Kovecses, (2010) claim that "conventional metaphors" as opposed to "poetic/creative/novel/image metaphors" reside in existing corpus and represent diverse linguistic ways of representing the world by different individuals or groups in line with the preferred positions and interest in ongoing discourse and it is these conventional metaphors which hide in existing corpus that present problems of identification to the analyst.

McEnery, Xiao and Tono (2006) define corpus as a "collection of machine-readable authentic texts (including transcripts of spoken data) that is sampled to be representative of a particular natural language or language variety." In his own definition, Charteris-Black (2004: 31) argues that "a corpus is any large collection of texts that arise from natural language use; in a linguistic context, it is in contrast to other types of text that were invented specifically for illustrating a point about language". So, a corpus must be real texts emanating from naturally occurring language use, should not be confused with contrived texts and any conscientious study of metaphor should utilise an authentic data corpus. In our study, the selected inaugural speeches constitute real life texts emanating from Nigerian past presidents from 1999 to 2023 and so serve as authentic corpus for this study.

For metaphor identification, Charteris-Black postulates two approaches, namely: first, the analyst should undertake a close reading of the text (corpus) to identify metaphor keywords, even if they have become conventionalized; it is argued that it is these conventional metaphors that are key candidates for CMA. Second,

the analyst should examine the corpus contexts to determine whether each use of a keyword is metaphorical or literal. The Pragglejazz MIP, a systematic method for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse, is used to identify metaphorical linguistic expressions on our corpus which are the selected inaugural speeches.

Cognitive Linguistics: Metaphor Interpretation - Conceptual Metaphor Theory

This stage involves interpreting the identified conventional metaphors in terms of the conceptual mappings in source and target domains. Beyond cognitive structures, metaphors can be seen as transference of meaning, where attributes from one entity are also projected onto another. Charteris-Black defines conceptual metaphor as the underlying idea behind metaphorical expressions. These ideas help explain the relationships between seemingly unrelated concepts (2004). He emphasizes this by stating, "the central notion of metaphor is one in which meanings are transferred." He notes that metaphor involves movement and change, a semantic shift that evokes emotional and cognitive responses. According to him, this movement gives metaphors the power to persuade, clarify, or even manipulate, especially in ideological contexts such as political discourse.

Lakoff (1993) extensively discusses these cross-domain mappings and the ontological correspondence metaphors induce in our minds between "the source domain" and "the target domain". The term, domain, as used here, refers to the ontological traits associated with a specific idea or entity. The source domain is said to consist of a set of literal entities, attributes, processes and relationships linked

semantically in terms of spatial, causal and temporal relationships, derived from basic human experiences and stored in the mind. Littlemore (2009) explains that such metaphors arise from recurring experiences and are often linked to bodily interactions with the world through what is known as image schemas (Saeed, 2009). These image schemas are mental patterns formed by interacting with the physical environment. They provide the structure for conceptual mappings between domains (Charteris-Black, 2004). These schemas act as cognitive building blocks that help people organize and interpret abstract concepts through more familiar experiences.

The target domain, on the other hand, is derived from the abstract concept of our experiences which takes its structure from the source domain. This system of metaphorical mappings is not random but systematic. It provides coherence and structure to how abstract experiences are linguistically and cognitively processed. For instance, let us illustrate with the well-known example of conceptual metaphor given by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) ARGUMENT IS WAR. From this conceptual metaphor may be derived the underlined metaphorical linguistic expressions as exemplified below:

Your claims are **indefensible**.

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

His criticisms were right on **target**.

I **demolished** his argument.

His position was a **counter-attack** to my motion.

I've never **won** an argument with him.

He **shot** down all my points.

If you use that **strategy**, he will **wipe** you out.

These expressions are not neutral; they shape the way we understand and engage with disagreement as combative rather than cooperative. Through these expressions, people conceptualize arguments using the language of battle. At this stage of the analysis, the conceptual metaphors are formulated based on the identified linguistic metaphors in the selected corpus and the semantic fields or domains from which they were drawn. The underlying conceptual metaphors, derived from cross-domain mappings, are described using uppercase letters in the conventional formula: X IS (or AS) Y, where *X* represents the target domain and *Y* the source domain. This follows Lakoff's (1993) mnemonic: TARGET DOMAIN IS/AS SOURCE DOMAIN. In our study, the identified metaphorical linguistic expressions will be used to formulate appropriate conceptual metaphors based on the different semantic fields evoked by each metaphor keyword and their mappings in source and target domains.

Critical linguistics or Critical Discourse Analysis: Metaphor Explanation

Metaphor as a linguistic and conceptual phenomenon has been implicated as a strategic tool of persuasion that predisposes one understanding of reality over others. This characteristic makes it a serious subject of study in CDA which takes particular interest in ideologically-biased discourses and how they are used strategically as repressive apparatus for the less privileged in society. Hart and Lukes (2007) write that CDA has been implicated as an interesting area of study, investigating how language contributes to the construction of social relations, identity, knowledge, and power in various settings such as schools, the media, and politics. As an area of inquiry, CDA is a research paradigm that questions the use, misuse and abuse of

power and dominance in texts perpetrated by those with greater access to societal power. Major proponents of CDA see texts as "sites of struggle for power" (Wodak, 2001), and CDA as a means for "the elision of power/domination in theory and analysis of texts" (Fairclough, 1995; 17) and "emancipatory linguistics; "a linguistics with a conscience and a cause" (Wardhaugh 2006; 10, Widdowson, 77), which stays on the side of the oppressed to interrogate the activities and textual representations of those that has more access to societal and political power.

In critical discourse analysis (CDA), metaphors are seen as more than just figures of speech as the traditional view of metaphor would have us believe. They are more a matter of thought than of language and are powerful tools that help people conceptualise complex issues in familiar ways. When politicians talk about a country as if it were a person or a body, they are using person and body metaphors to explain political and social issues. These metaphors can make abstract ideas (like democracy, unity, or development) seem real and relatable. When a leader says "Nigeria must rise again," the country is being described like a person who has fallen and needs to stand up. Calling the nation "sick" might make it seem like strong leadership is needed to "heal" it, but it can also ignore the voices of citizens or deeper structural problems. While this may sound inspiring, it also hides complex issues and presents a simple way of seeing problems and solutions. CDA asks important certain questions about these metaphors such as: Why was this metaphor used? Whose interest does it serve? What ideas or people are being left out or hidden? Political metaphors are chosen carefully as they are meant not only to persuade but also manufactures consent of the electorate and create strong emotional responses that enable leaders sustain and perpetuate hegemonies that may be repressive. It is such textual representations

that CDA interrogates in order to bring up for critical scrutiny marginalisations, suppressions and dominant ideological positions that may be hidden metaphorically as taken-for-granted naturalised orders of discourse.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature, and the data were obtained from the inaugural speeches of past and present Nigerian leaders using a purposive sampling technique. The speeches were sourced from online archives, and the data were analyzed using the Pragglejaz Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) (2007). The four MIP steps used in this study were:

1. The entire text-discourse was read to establish a general understanding of its meaning.
2. The lexical units in the text-discourse were identified
3. For each lexical unit:
    a. The contextual meaning was determined, taking into account the surrounding text (that is, how the word applied to an entity, relation, or attribute in the situation evoked by the text)
    b. It was then assessed whether the lexical unit had a more basic, contemporary meaning in other contexts than in the given one. Basic meanings were typically:

- More concrete and easier to imagine, see, hear, smell, or taste
- Related to bodily action
- More precise rather than vague
- Historically older

- Not necessarily the most frequent meaning of the word.

c. If a lexical unit had a more basic meaning that differed from the contextual one, but the contextual meaning could be understood by comparison with the basic one, it was marked as metaphorical.

4. If these conditions were met, the lexical unit was identified as metaphorical (Pragglejaz Group, 2007, in Kövecses, 2010).

After the identification stage, the conventional metaphors were interpreted by generating appropriate conceptual metaphors, based on the semantic fields from which each metaphor keyword was drawn. Subsequently, the pragmatic implications were analyzed in line with the meanings derived from each conceptual metaphor. The selected speeches are coded for ease of identification and reference as follows:

Table 1: Codes for Selected Speeches

S/N	Speech	Code	Date Delivered	No of Extracts
1.	Tinubu's 2023 speech	TIN2023	May 29, 2023	4
2.	Buharis 2015 speech	BUH2015	May 29, 2015	5
3	Jonathan's 2011 speech	JON2011	May 29, 2011	17
4.	Yaradua's 2007 speech	YAR2007	May 29, 2008	12
5.	Obasanjo's 1999 speech	OBA1999	May 29, 1999	16

Textual data from each of the five speeches containing body and person metaphors were purposively chosen for the study, thus justifying the varied amount of data in each of the speeches. These metaphors are subjected to the above recommended procedure of metaphor identification. For metaphor interpretation, the identified metaphorical linguistic expressions containing body and person metaphors are mapped to their source and target domains as presented in the tables in the data analysis section. These mappings in source and target domains inform the formulated underlying conceptual metaphors, representing the cognitive semantic level of analysis in CMA. These derived conceptual metaphors are written in small capitals at the right column of the tables. At the final stage of the analysis and discussion, the rhetorical and ideological implications of these conceptual metaphors are pragmatically explained to buttress how political actors appeal to these bodily metaphors and those of personhood to manufacture consent and sustain hegemonies.

Data Presentation

The tables below contain excerpts from the five (5) inaugural speeches of Nigeria's past presidents since the inception of democracy. Data exemplify how these presidents deployed body and person metaphors in their speeches as rhetorical tools of persuasion.

Table 2: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors in TIN2023

S/N	Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Metaphors
1	We have shouldered the heavy burden	NATION IS OVERBURDENED SHOULDER

2	Our nation will break apart, even perish	NIGERIA AS A FRAGILE/MORTAL BEING
3	We have stumbled, but our resilience … have kept us going	NIGERIANS AS A COLLECTIVE HUMAN ON A JOURNEY WITH DETERMINATION TO SUCCEED
4	We are here to further mend and heal this nation, not tear or injure it	NIGERIAN NATION AS SICK BODY IN NEED OF HEALING

In Table 2; the underlined linguistic expressions in the left column represent linguistic choices in the data that carry more meaning than their literary senses. Such meanings seem to construe human bodily experiences of *shouldering* burdens, *perishing, stumbling, mending, healing* or capable of being *injured.* With the human body being a cherished asset of its owner, such innocuous linguistic choices may evoke profound rhetorical appeals to the electorate than when other choices that are not metaphorically imbued are used. On the right column, we present the underlying conceptual metaphors (in small capitals) which such metaphorical linguistic expressions seem to convey, and argue that they are rhetorically and ideologically loaded. In Tables 3 to 6, similar metaphorical linguistic choices in the remaining four speeches and their underlying conceptual metaphors are presented.

Table 3: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors in BUH2015

S/N	Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Metaphors
1	Today marks a triumph for Nigeria and an occasion to celebrate her freedom and cherish her democracy	NIGERIA AS A FEMALE PERSON (with volition and emotion/freedom) DEMOCRACY ARE PERSONAL POSSESSIONS
2	For their part, the legislative arm must keep to their brief of making laws, carrying out oversight functions	POLITICAL SYSTEM AS HUMAN BODY (with parts – arm, head)
3	The judicial system needs reform to cleanse itself of its immediate past	JUDICIAL SYSTEM IS DIRTY BODY PART/NEEDING A BATH
4	It is only when the three arms act constitutionally that govt will be enabled to serve the country optimally	POLITICAL SYSTEM AS HUMAN BODY (with parts – arm, head)/ POLITICAL ACTORS ARE SERVANTS
5	Constitutionally, there are limits to the powers of each of the three tiers of government, but that should not mean that the Federal government should fold its arms and close its eyes to what is going on in the states and local governments	GOVERNMENT AS HUMAN BODY (with parts – arm, head, eyes) FOR ACTION

Table 4: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors in JON2011

S/N	Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Metaphors
1	I would like to specially acknowledge the presence in our midst today of Brother Heads of States and Governments	THE NATION/STATE AS HUMAN BODY WITH HEAD/POLITICAL ALLIES AS FAMILY MEMBERS
2	Representatives of heads of states	THE NATION/STATE AS HUMAN BODY WITH HEAD/LEADERSHIP IS HEAD
3	To members of the PDP family	POLITICAL PARTIES/ORGANISATIONS AS FAMILY
4	Lift our fatherland to the summit of greatness	NATION AS MALE HUMAN PARENT
5	At the polls we saw the most dramatic expressions of the hunger for democracy	DEMOCRACY AS FOOD/DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATION IS CRAVING FOR FOOD
6	Such determination derives from typical Nigerian spirit of resilience in the face of the greatest of odds	THE NATION AS A HUMAN BODY WITH METAPHYSICAL STRENGTH

7	We will not allow anyone exploit differences in creed or tongue	THE NATION IS A PERSON WITH ORGAN FOR SPEECH/HUMAN LANGUAGE IS A BODY ORGAN
8	These brave men and women paid the supreme price in the service of our fatherland	NATION AS A MALE PARENT/NATION AS FAMILY
9	We must make a vow that together we will make the Nigerian enterprise thrive	THE NATION AS ILL/SICK/AILING NEEDING NOURISHMENT
10	We live in an age where our country can survive on its own	THE NATION AS ILL/SICK/AILING
11	To drive our overall economic vision, the power sector reform is at the heart of our industrialization strategies	NATION ECONOMY AS PERSON WITH FORESIGHT/ ECONOMIC STRATEGIES AS PERSON WITH HEART
12	The resolution of the Niger Delta issue is crucial to the health of the nation's economy.	NIGERIAN ECONOMY AS SICK/ILL/AILING
13	The fight against corruption is a war in which we must all enlist, so that limited resources of the nation will	NIGERIAN ECONOMY AS RETARDED HUMAN (with potential for growth)/ CORRUPTION IS A PERSON/COLLECTIVE WAR

	be used for the growth of our commonwealth	
14	We owe ourselves and posterity the duty of making this country respectable in the comity of nations	NATION AS PERSON (with integrity)
15	Nigeria as a responsible member of the international community will remain committed to the maintenance of global peace and security	NATION AS PERSON (with integrity)
16	Nigeria in partnership with African Union will lead the process of democracy and development in Africa	NIGERIAN NATION AS LEADER (in Africa)
17	Africa must develop its vast resources to tackle poverty and underdevelopment	AFRICA AS A PERSON (with volition for action)

Table 5: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors in YAR2008

S/N	Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Metaphors
1	This is a historic day for our nation, for it marks an important milestone in our march towards maturing democracy	NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY AS A GROWING HUMAN PERSON/HUMAN GROWTH AS PATH
2	…this occasion is historic also because it marks another kind of transitional generational shift when the children of independence assume the adult responsibility of running the country at the heart of Africa	NIGERIA AS A BODY PART OF AFRICA (HEART)
3	. My fellow citizens, I am humbled and honoured that you have elected me and Vice president Jonathan to represent that generation in the task of building a just and humane nation, where its people have a fair chance to attain their fullest potentials	NIGERIA AS A HUMAN BEING WITH EMOTIONS/NATION AS A PERSON WITH CAPABILITIES
4	I salute you Mr President, (Obasanjo), for your vision, your courage and your boundless energy in creating the	NIGERIAN ECONOMY AS SICK/AILING/NIGERIA ECONOMY AS FLEDGLING

	roadmap toward the united and economically thriving Nigeria that we seek.	
5	Today, we are talking about Nigeria's potential, to become one of the 20 largest economies in the world by the year 2020	NIGERIA AS A PERSON WITH CAPABILITY
6	Our economy already has been set on the path of growth	NIGERIA ECONOMY AS A GROWING BODY/HUMAN GROWTH AS PATH/JOURNEY TO DESTINATION
7	The state must fulfill its constitutional responsibility of protecting life and property	THE NATION/STATE AS A GUARD PERSON/WATCHDOG
8	In our larger African family, you have our commitment to the goal of African integration	AFRICA AS A FAMILY/NIGERIA AS MEMBER OF AFRICAN FAMILY
9	We will continue to collaborate with fellow African states to reduce conflict and free our people from the leg chains of poverty	NIGERIAN'S POVERTY AS LEG CHAINS/POVERTY AS PHYSICAL CAPTIVITY
10	Let us work together to restore our (country's) time-honoured values of honesty, decency, generosity, modesty,	NIGERIA AS A PERSON BEREFT OF GOOD/MORAL VALUES

	selflessness, transparency and accountability	
11	These foundational values determine societies that succeed or fail	NIGERIA AS A PERSON DETERMINED TO SUCCEED
12	I ask you fellow citizens to join me in rebuilding our Nigerian family, one that defines the success of one by the happiness of many	NIGERIA/NATION AS A FAMILY UNIT

Table 6: Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions and Conceptual Metaphors in OBA1999

S/N	Metaphorical Linguistic Expressions	Underlying Conceptual Metaphors
1	Nigeria is wonderfully endowed by the Almighty with human and other resources	NIGERIA AS HUMAN BEING WITH NATURAL ENDOWMENTS
2	We experienced in the last decade and half ... persistent deterioration in the quality of our governance, leading	NIGERIAN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS AS HUMAN BODY (WITH FAILING AND UNSTABLE HEALTH)

	to instability and the weakening of all public institutions	
3	Relations between men and women who had lived together in peace for many generations became bitter because of the actions and inaction of government	NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT AS HUMAN BEING WITH VOLITION FOR ACTION/INACTION
4	Government and all its agencies became thoroughly corrupt and reckless (hiding human agency in Govt-as-person)	GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AS (CORRUPT) HUMAN BEINGS
5	…government agency had to bribe another government agency to obtain release of their statutory allocation	GOVERNMENT AGENCIES AS (CORRUPT) HUMAN BEINGS
6	The impact of official corruption is so rampant and has earned Nigeria a very bad image at home and abroad	NIGERIAN NATION AS HUMAN BEING WITH IMAGE TO PROTECT
7	All these have brought the nation to a situation of chaos and near despair	NATION AS HUMAN BEING WITH EMOTION

8	This is why laws are made and enforced to check corruption so that society will survive	THE NATION AS SICK/AILING/NATION AS LIVING PERSON
9	No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full-blown cancer it has become in Nigeria	NIGERIA AS SICK BODY WITH CANCER/CORRUPTION AS CANCER
10	Where official pronouncements are repeatedly made and not matched by action, government forfeits the confidence of the people and their trust.	GOVERNMENT AS PERSON WITH ABILITY TO MAKE CHOICES
11	I shall quickly ascertain the true state of our finances and the economy and I shall let the nation know	ECONOMY IS SICK/AILING/ NATION AS HUMAN BEING WITH COGNITION
12	Nigeria, once a well-respected country and a key role player in international bodies became a pariah nation	NIGERIA AS A HUMAN BEING WITH LOST INTEGRITY/UNTRUSTED PERSON
13	It is our firm resolve to restore Nigeria fully to her	NIGERIA AS A HUMAN FEMALE WITH LOST PRESTIGE/NATION

	previous prestigious position in the comity of nations	STATUS IS PERSON"S LOCATION IN SPACE
14	Harmony with the three arms of government …	GOVERNMENT AS BODY WITH COORDINATED BODY PARTS/LIMBS
15	I call on all Nigerians but particularly our religious leaders to pray for moral and spiritual revival and regeneration of our nation	NIGERIA AS SICK, AND IN NEED OF (MORAL AND SPIRITUAL) HEALING
16	…and that Nigeria will be great and will become a major world player in the near future	NIGERIA AS A SPORTS PERSON/INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IS A GAME BETWEEN PERSONS

Analysis

From the data presentation in Tables 2 to 6, it would be seen that the left columns contain excerpts from our corpus; the five inaugural speeches, thus satisfying the linguistic level of analysis in CMA, which is metaphor identification and corpus linguistics. The underlined linguistic expressions on the left column of the tables are selected because their use "results from the shift in the use of a word or phrase from the context or domain where it is expected to occur to another context or domain where it is not expected to occur, thereby causing semantic tension" in their interpretation, according to Charteris-Black (2004: 21) and so are picked out as metaphorical. The

second level of analysis, which is cognitive linguistics analysis, is presented in the right column where the underlying conceptual metaphors are formulated from the identified metaphorical linguistic expressions in our corpus. Thus, the analyses in the tables answer the first and second research questions raised for this study and satisfy first two levels of analysis in CMA which is metaphor identification and metaphor interpretation.

In answer to the third and fourth research questions, we go into the third level of analysis in CMA which is the pragmatic level of metaphor explanation. This level fall under the critical linguistics or critical discourse analysis CDA level. Across the five administrations examined, body and person metaphors function as powerful ideological, persuasive, and legitimizing strategies that construct political identity, national agency, and presidential authority. OBA1999 speech uses metaphors of illness, corruption as disease, and moral regeneration to portray Nigeria as a sick body in urgent need of treatment. This speech construes the nation as a naturally endowed person, suffering from self-inflicted sickness of poverty, corruption, instability and bad governance, but also with equal capacity to cure itself of the ravaging cancer and spiritual illness. This framing legitimizes the speaker's role as a messiah and moral restorer tasked with cleansing and rebuilding the nation after military rule, encouraging citizens to see loyalty to the nation as a personal, emotional and spiritual obligation. As Chilton (2004) notes, such metaphors create proximity between leaders and citizens, strengthening persuasive appeal. YAR2007 continues this pattern but shifts toward metaphors of maturity, growth, and responsibility, presenting Nigeria as an adolescent body moving toward adulthood. Nigeria is conceptualised as a person bereft of morals, replete with corruption and bad economy, but at the same time is capable of self-

enabling, and self-redeeming from the shackles of corruption and poverty. This positions his administration as a parent guiding the nation through a generational transition. JON2011 expands the metaphorical repertoire by emphasizing family, hunger, and economic health, constructing the nation as a family unit with a head that provides bodily nourishment and healing as well as emotional succour that enhances physical growth and emotional wellbeing. The economy is also conceptualised in this speech as a living organism that must be nourished. Together, these metaphors soften power relations and encourage emotional loyalty while legitimizing his developmental agenda. This aligns with Musolff's (2022) observation that nation-as-person metaphors often frame political development as a life trajectory, thereby legitimizing leadership as guidance along that path.

BUH2015 inaugural speech intensifies metaphors of purification, discipline, and bodily coordination, framing the state as a body with "arms" and "eyes" that must function properly. He presents the state as volitionary being with vast tentacles and huge untapped potentials for survival and growth. This supports his anti-corruption stance and justifies strong central authority as necessary to cleanse and stabilize the political body. TIN2023 returns to metaphors of burden, fragility, and healing, portraying Nigeria as a strained, overburdened and vulnerable body requiring repair, but at the same time highly resilient and determined to survive. This positions his administration as the agent capable of relieving national suffering and restoring its immense bodily potentials. While all administrations rely on body and person metaphors, their emphases shift according to political context and priorities: OBA1999's moral cleansing, YAR2007's generational responsibility, JON2011's developmental optimism, BUH2015's disciplinary purification, and TIN2023's restorative healing.

Each speech adapts these metaphors to the political challenges of the era and despite these shifts in emphasis, from illness to growth, family to discipline, burden to healing, a strong continuity emerges: Nigeria is conceptualized as a living being whose fate is tied to the speaker's capacity to heal, guide, discipline, or uplift it. One dominant ideology reflected in these metaphors is paternalism which portrays the speakers as parental figures tasked with "protecting life and property" or "restoring the nation's honour." This paternalistic ideology is also evident in the way political leaders speak of the "Nigerian family" or call on the people to "join hands" in "rebuilding the nation." Such metaphors present the state as a home and the government as a head of the household, suggesting unity, interdependence, and mutual responsibility. This continuity reinforces hegemonic power by presenting presidential authority as natural, benevolent, and indispensable.

Additionally, describing Nigeria as a body with "arms" of government, a "heart" of policy, or suffering from "illness" like corruption, the speakers invoke a sense of fragility, vulnerability, and interdependence. This framing places the citizens in a child-like position, dependent on the guidance and discipline of those at the apex of state authority. At the same time, it calls for collective care, urging citizens to act as caretakers of the national "body." These metaphors stir empathy, national pride, moral responsibility, and a sense of personal engagement, reinforcing a shared identity between the leaders and the people where leaders cast themselves as moral guardians and caretakers of the public good. When the country is framed as a patient suffering from corruption or disunity, the solution is often presented as moral cleansing or internal healing, rather than systemic reform. This reflects an ideology that views national problems as the result of individual moral failure, rather than

structural or institutional weaknesses, while fronting the messianic predispositions of the speakers. While this can promote a sense of solidarity, it can also obscure the unequal distribution of power and limit public critique of authority. In this way, the metaphor quietly legitimizes the concentration of power in the hands of a few, as long as those leaders are perceived to be acting in the family's best interest as saviours. This persistent metaphorical framing pattern reveals how Nigerian presidents strategically deploy embodied metaphors to shape political identity, mobilize collective emotion, and legitimize their governance across the Fourth Republic.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine how Nigerian presidents from 1999 to 2023 used body and person metaphors in their inaugural speeches to construct political identity, shape national agency, and legitimize their authority. The analysis shows that these metaphors are not random stylistic choices but deliberate rhetorical strategies that help leaders frame the nation, its challenges, and their own leadership roles in familiar human and bodily terms. Although the underlying metaphorical logic remains stable, each administration adapts these metaphors to their unique political context. These shifts show how metaphors help each president define national problems, justify policy directions, and secure public consent. At the same time, the continuity of body and person metaphors across administrations reveals a stable rhetorical tradition in Nigerian political discourse, one that naturalizes presidential authority by linking national well-being to the leader's capacity to heal, guide, or protect the nation. Across all five administrations, Nigeria is consistently portrayed as a living being - a body that can be sick or healthy, weak or strong, growing or declining, and a person with emotions, dignity, and moral character.

This shared metaphorical pattern allows presidents to present themselves as healers, guardians, parents, disciplinarians, saviours or guardians whose leadership is necessary for the nation's survival and progress. By referring to the "task of building a just and humane nation," or urging citizens to "join in restoring national values," the public is cast not merely as voters or spectators, but as co-builders of the national project. This participatory framing can be empowering, but it also subtly shifts responsibility for national problems onto the public, potentially masking governmental failures by emphasizing collective blame or duty.

To reduce the gap between metaphorical language and political action, this research suggests that Nigerian leaders and political communicators more broadly must adopt more responsible and accountable rhetorical practices. First, metaphors should be used not only to inspire but also to guide concrete policy commitments. If a president describes the nation as "ailing," then the administration must demonstrate clear, measurable steps toward "healing," such as transparent reforms, inclusive governance, and effective service delivery. Second, leaders should avoid metaphors that oversimplify complex issues or shift blame onto abstract entities. Instead, metaphors should be paired with honest explanations of structural challenges and realistic pathways for change. Third, institutions such as the media, civil society, and academia should play a stronger role in holding leaders accountable for the promises embedded in their metaphors. Political discourse should not only analyze what leaders say but also evaluate how their actions align with their locutions in the images they create. Finally, future administrations can strengthen democratic trust by using metaphors that emphasize shared responsibility, collective agency, and long-term nation-building rather than body and person metaphors that centralize power in leadership

to gain ethos while at the same time shirking such responsibilities by subtle inclusive indictment of the electorate.

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