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How ECONOMY survives across political regimes in Nigeria: A corpus-assisted analysis of metaphors in Nigerian political discourse (1960-2023)

Nigeria is a low-middle-income (LMI) country which has been led by military and civilian regimes at different points in time. This paper explores the metaphors of Nigerian ECONOMY and the extent to which ECONOMY metaphors vary across two distinct political cultures: the autocratic culture of the military regimes and the democratic culture of civilian governments in Nigerian political discourse (henceforth, NPD) over time. Although research has looked at how metaphors are employed in conceptualising ECONOMY (e.g., Sardinha, 2012; Chow, 2014) and how they vary across time (e.g., Burgers & Ahrens, 2020; Zeng et al., 2021), most of these studies have mainly focused on the high-and-upper-middle-income (HUMI) economies. Understanding how metaphors vary across political regimes (or culture), especially in low-middle-income economies that switch between different political ideologies would allow us to examine how these ideologies may influence how ECONOMY is conceptualized. Moreover, existing studies have not taken into account if the source domains (or SDs) for HUMI ECONOMY differ from LMI ECONOMY. Therefore, this study examines the ECONOMY metaphors in NPD and how they vary across political cultures and economic periods in Nigeria, namely: pre-oil boom (1960-1969), oil-boom (1970-1985), structural-adjustment (1986-1999), and post-reform (2000-2023).

To examine these, a corpus of Nigerian political speeches delivered by elected civilian presidents and military heads of state between 1960 and 2023 was used. The corpus consists of 871,777 tokens and is divided into two sub-corpora: a civilian corpus (429,284 token; 173 speeches) and a military corpus (442,493 token; 166 speeches). Steen et al.'s (2010) MIPVU and Ahrens and Jiang's (2020) verification procedure were adopted for metaphor identification and source domain verification, respectively. The analyses of the metaphors are based on the integration of Ahrens' (2010) conceptual mapping model (CMM) and Charteris-Black's (2004) critical metaphor analysis (CMA) approaches. The integration of CMM and CMA would provide stronger insight into connection between metaphor use and real-world economic management.

The result of a pilot study indicates that the ECONOMY is framed using dominant SDs, namely: LIVING ORGANISM, BUILDING, and WAR across the two regimes with different patterns of concepts (or Mapping Principles, Ahrens (2010) being highlighted by the military regime as compared with civilian governments. In addition, the first two SDs are also used to conceptualised the HUMI ECONOMY (Burgers & Ahrens, 2020), but the WAR SD is used specifically for the LMI ECONOMY and more significantly is used extensively by the military during the Structural-Adjustment era.

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