

## METAPHOR AS A PERSUASIVE DEVICE IN THE INAUGURAL SPEECH OF PRESIDENT GOODLUCK JONATHAN

Ondo Journal of Arts, Faculty of Arts, Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Vol. 2. No. 1, 2026

Metaphor as a Persuasive device  
in the inaugural Speech of  
President  
Goodluck Jonathan

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### Abstract

*This study examines President Jonathan's inaugural speech as a vehicle for political persuasion, wherein linguistic choices and rhetorical strategies serve to articulate his political agendas. While existing research on Nigerian presidential inaugurals has largely concentrated on the persuasive functions of metaphor through stylistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic lenses, the present study adopts a cognitive perspective to identify the underlying conceptual metaphors projected in them. Grounded in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory and employing Charteris-Black's (2004, 2005) Critical Metaphor Analysis, the study undertakes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of metaphorical expressions. The findings reveal eight source domain metaphors: Journey, Building, Personification, Family, Conflict, Business, Plant, and Food, with four of these proving particularly productive. The resulting conceptual metaphors include: Nigerians as travellers along a path towards a destination, Nigeria as the vanguard of democracy in Africa, the Nigerian nation as a building in progress, Nigeria's social challenges as enemies or opponents, and Nigeria as a family with African nations as its extended Kin. By deploying these cognitive structures, the speeches effectively convey the country's socio-political realities while seeking to inspire and persuade the citizenry.*

**Keywords:** Presidential inaugural speech, political persuasion, conceptual metaphor theory, critical metaphor analysis, cognitive linguistics.

### Introduction

A presidential inaugural address constitutes a spoken text delivered by a nation's president at the commencement of a new administration, marking the formal start of a term that

may span four or five years, depending on the constitutional framework of the respective democracy. Charteris -Black (2005)

describes inaugural speeches as persuasive political texts that use rhetorical and metaphorical strategies to construct leadership identity and legitimize authority.

In a similar vein, Akinseye (2015) characterises a presidential inaugural speech as a genre in which political ideologies, processes, actors, and events are clearly defined and presented to the nation through strategic linguistic choices. In many respects, such a speech functions as a blueprint or foundational document wherein the president's political ideologies and policy directions are expressed. A key area frequently addressed in the speech is the prevailing sociopolitical concerns within the country. Although the inaugural speech is not intended to solicit votes, it must nevertheless secure the backing of the broader citizenry for the new government's agenda. To accomplish this, the language of the inaugural address, as a form of political discourse, must be carefully constructed to fulfil its persuasive purpose.

Persuasion is understood as an effort to influence an individual's beliefs, attitudes, intentions, motivation, or behaviour (Gass and Seiter, 2010). More specifically, it refers to the speaker's capacity to deploy linguistic resources in a manner that successfully convinces, converts, influences, or directs the audience to perceive issues from the speaker's viewpoint. The use of language for persuasive ends remains a defining characteristic of political discourse.

A substantial body of scholarly work has examined the speeches of political leaders through various linguistic frameworks. Among these studies, Yusuf (2003) investigates the use of dysphemism in the speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Adetunji (2009) offers a comparative pragmatic analysis of the second-term election speeches of President Olusegun Obasanjo and former United States President George Bush. In another study, Ayeomoni (2012) applies systemic

functional grammar to analyse the grapho-syntactic features of speeches delivered by Nigeria's military heads of state, concluding that such speeches are frequently marked by poorly constructed syntax and punctuation.

Research focusing on the cognitive function of metaphor in political discourse is evident in the work of Vestermark (2007), who explores the metaphorical personification found in selected inaugural addresses of four American presidents, identifying three principal conceptual metaphors: *the nation as a person*, *the nation acting as a human*, and *the world as a community*. Vestermark contends that the conceptual metaphors in these addresses were deliberately employed, though they are not always readily identifiable. Taiwo (2010) examines the use of metaphor in Nigerian political discourse, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor (1980) and employing Charteris-Black's (2005) critical metaphor analysis as the methodological framework. Taiwo identifies three target domains, namely *nation*, *politicians*, and *politics*, as the primary sources of conceptual metaphors in the data. Within this framework, the nation is conceptualised as a *family* and as a *person*, politicians are conceptualised as *builders*, and politics is conceptualised as a *battle* and as a *journey*.

### Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT)

The study of metaphor boasts a long intellectual history, having captivated linguists, writers, and philosophers from time immemorial. For centuries, metaphor was predominantly understood through a traditional perspective which framed it as a purely linguistic device, a rhetorical flourish used to embellish communication, particularly in political discourse. However, a paradigm shift occurred with the advent of cognitive semantics, a branch of cognitive linguistics. From this perspective, metaphor is no longer seen as merely a matter of words; it is understood as a

fundamental component of thought and action. Consequently, metaphor is now recognised as a cognitive phenomenon, with scholarly focus shifting from metaphor as a linguistic expression to metaphor as a conceptual structure.

The principal proponents of conceptual metaphor theory are George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. In their seminal work, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), they posited that metaphor is pervasive in everyday conversation, structuring not only language but also thought and action. They argued that human conceptual systems are fundamentally metaphorical in nature, with the essence of metaphor residing in understanding one kind of experience in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980:4). This conceptual nature of metaphor thus informs Lakoff's postulation of conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphor claim that both thought and language are metaphorical. Conceptual metaphor comprises two conceptual domains in which one domain is understood in terms of another. The conceptual domain from which we draw metaphorical expressions to understand another conceptual domain is called source domain, while the conceptual domain that is understood this way is target domain (Kovesses, 2010:4). A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience (Kovesses, 2010:4). The coherent organization means CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN A symbolizes the 'target', which is same as CONCEPTUAL DOMAIN B, the 'source'. Conceptual correspondence between the two domains is referred to as mapping. The implications of this framework can be illustrated through a canonical example. The systematic mapping of experience from the source domain of WAR onto the target domain of ARGUMENT fundamentally shapes how the latter is understood. Our comprehension of ARGUMENT is activated and structured by expressions such as indefensible, attack, and target, which in turn influence both the conduct of the argument and its conceptualisation (Lakoff & Johnson, (2002:8). Even in the absence of physical conflict,

the concept of WAR structures our engagement with argument; we do not merely speak of arguments in these terms, but we think about them accordingly. We conceive of arguments as being won or lost, we formulate strategies, we identify weak points in a position, we attack an opponent's claims, and we defend our own stance. In this way, the metaphor organises our actions within the domain of ARGUMENT Lakoff & Johnson, (2003:4).

Furthermore, metaphors exert a selective function: they emphasise certain dimensions of a concept while obscuring others. Within the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor, for instance, the competitive and adversarial elements are brought to the fore, whereas cooperative dimensions are rendered less visible Lakoff & Johnson, (2003:10).

### The Data

The primary data for this study consist of President Jonathan's inaugural address, delivered on May 29, 2011. The speech was obtained from an online publication by Vanguard News, accessible at the URL [vanguardngr.com](http://vanguardngr.com) under the title "Jonathan's inauguration address."

### Analytical framework

The analytical framework adopted for this study is based on Charteris-Black's critical metaphor analysis, which is particularly well-suited to the research objectives while remaining grounded in the principles of conceptual metaphor theory. As Charteris-Black (2005) explains, critical metaphor analysis integrates conceptual metaphor theory with critical discourse analysis. This approach not only identifies which metaphors are used but also explores the underlying reasons for their use. In the context of political speeches, Charteris-Black emphasises that metaphor analysis must take into account both the social context in which a speech was delivered and

the broader verbal environment surrounding the metaphors. According to Charteris-Black (2011), the primary aim of this theory is to reveal the intentions and ideological positions of political figures as embedded in their language. The analytical process consists of three stages: metaphor identification, interpretation, and explanation. He further notes that a metaphor can be identified by observing whether a word is used in a sense that differs from its more common or basic meaning.

### Data Analysis

**Table 1: Metaphorical/Linguistic expressions realising the various source domains in the inaugural speech of President Jonathan**

Source domain metaphor	-----	Tokens
JOURNEY	has begun, march, begins, today, take -off on the path of, lead, journey (x2) direction	8
BUILDING	to build (x3), laid the foundation, transform, transformation (x2), built, build (x2), reform	11
PERSONIFICATION	Nigeria, as a responsible member of the international community,	3
FAMILY	Brother, founding fathers, our fatherland	
CONFLICT	overwhelming force of our collective determination, fight war ... enlist; fight for democratisation, to tackle poverty and underdevelopment, to fight for your future	5
BUSINESS	to flourish, Nigeria Enterprise thrive	2
PLANT	Grow	1
FOOD	Hunger	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>32</b>

### Socio-Political Background of the Inaugural Speech

Following the death of President Musa Yar'adua while in office, his Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, was sworn in as the new leader and completed the remaining years of the late President's term.

President Goodluck Jonathan later secured his party's ticket as the flag bearer of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) in the subsequent presidential elections. After winning the election, he was sworn in as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on May 29, 2011. President Jonathan was deeply familiar with the prevailing socio-political challenges in Nigeria, not only as a citizen but also through his previous roles as Governor of Bayelsa State, Vice President of Nigeria, and ultimately as a democratically elected President. He was therefore well informed about the socio-political and economic problems confronting the nation. It was expected that the President would address issues such as corruption, security, the economy, infrastructural deficits, unemployment, and political ideology in his inaugural address. These themes are reflected in Table 1, which summarises the metaphorical expressions drawn from various source domains in President Jonathan's speech. The President employed metaphors from the source domains of Journey, Building, Personification, Family, Conflict, Business, Plant, and Food to conceptualise the nation's challenges. However, only a qualitative analysis of the most prominent and resourceful metaphors will be undertaken.

### **Journey Metaphors**

The journey metaphor is understood as a motion in direction metaphor, introduced by Lakoff (1993), to describe long-term purposeful activities. In conceptual metaphor theory, a journey involves a change of location and is associated with a particular direction. Charteris (2004:93) argues that within journey metaphors, the political goals of leaders are conceptualised as the destinations of travellers. He emphasises that journey metaphors generally evaluate policies positively because the ends are socially valued. As Hunston and Thompson (2004:14) rightly note, something good helps to achieve a goal, whereas something bad prevents or hinders the

achievement of a goal. Consequently, journey metaphors suggest that social efforts are directed towards achieving worthwhile objectives. Charteris Black (2004) further states that journey metaphors carry a strong positive orientation. Even when the negative aspects of a journey are highlighted, such as the burdens to bear, the effort required is still evaluated as worthwhile. Journey metaphors also underline the need for patience, as reaching a destination takes time and effort. The use of journey metaphors in this way is rhetorically effective because it encourages the public not to expect immediate results from government policies and prepares them to accept sacrifices or hardships in pursuit of national goals.

### **Analysing President Jonathan's Inaugural Speech for Journey Metaphor**

Before President Jonathan assumed office, Nigeria had already experienced twelve years of unbroken democratic rule, the longest such period in the nation's history. Nigeria's democratic journey had often been interrupted by military coups. Upon assuming office, President Jonathan used the following journey metaphors in his inaugural speech to describe the nation's democratic progress: "Our decade of development has begun, the march is on, the day of transformation begins today, we are ready to take off on the path of sustained growth, ... with the African Union, will lead the process of democracy."

Since a journey is an abstract phenomenon, Nigeria's struggles and efforts to achieve social goals are depicted as travelling towards a destination. The metaphorical expressions, such as has begun, the march begins today, take off on the path of, journey and other related forms are derived from the source domain of JOURNEY. This mapping involves applying source domain notions to the target domain. In this study, the conceptual target domain of political goals or destinations is presented in terms of the source domain, a journey.

**Table 2: Mapping correspondences between Source Domain and Target Domain in relation to Journeying or travelling to a destination**

Elements of the mapping	Source Domain: Journey	Target Domain: Socio political goals
A fresh start	has begun, begins today, take off on the path of a new beginning	movement towards achieving sociopolitical goals/a destination
A walk	March	trekking to a destination
Championing a cause	Lead	be in a vanguard/head a movement for democratic ideology

This mapping is evident in the following extracts from the speech.

1. Today, our unity is firm, and our purpose is strong. Our destination is unshakable. Together, we will unite our nation and improve the living standards of all our people, whether in the North or in the South, in the East or in the West. Our decade of development has **begun**. The **march** is on. The day of transformation **begins today**.
2. The moment is right. The signs are heart-warming. We are ready to **take off on the path of** sustained growth and economic development.
3. We will now fight for democratisation. Nigeria, in partnership with the African Union, **will lead** the process for democracy and development in Africa.
4. Cynicism and scepticism will not help our journey to greatness. Let us all believe in a new Nigeria.
5. Join me now as we begin the journey of transforming Nigeria.
6. I know your pain, because I have been there. Look beyond the

hardship you have endured. See **a new beginning**, a new direction, a new spirit.

These extracts illustrate that social goals are conceptualised in terms of journeying or travelling. President Jonathan refers to Nigeria's decade of unbroken democratic rule as unprecedented, given the history of military interventions. Although the ten years of democracy had not produced dramatic social change, he assured citizens that the movement towards socio-political and economic goals, described as a march or walk to a destination, would begin with his administration. In extract (5), he invites Nigerians to join him on the journey. Extract (6) shows the idea of movement towards political goals through the metaphors of new beginning and new direction, urging Nigerians to remain positive as they journey towards greatness. Extract (3) presents democracy as a preferable ideology, also framed as a movement or journey. Here, Jonathan aligns Nigeria with democracy and pledges to establish it not only in Nigeria but across the African continent. The journey metaphors in Jonathan's speech suggest three conceptual metaphors: Nigerians are travelers along a path towards a destination; democracy is the preferred ideology in Nigeria; democracy is the preferred path to development in Africa; and Nigeria is the vanguard of democracy in Africa.

### Building metaphors

Charteris Black (2004:95) observes that building metaphors share similarities with journey metaphors. Both involve progress in stages toward a goal. However, while journeys involve horizontal movement, building involves vertical increase. Both activities imply a positive evaluation of policy and require a plan or guide.

**Analysing President Jonathan's Speech for Building Metaphors.**

In his inaugural speech, President Jonathan acknowledged the contributions of Nigerians and the founding fathers in laying the foundation to build the nation. He expressed confidence that the leadership had the capacity to transform Nigeria, assuring that transformation would occur across all critical sectors and that the Nigerian dream could be achieved through hard work. He invited Nigerians to work together with him to build the nation.

The following corresponding conceptual mappings can be identified between the source domain BUILDING and the target domain SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES in the inaugural speech.

**Table 3: Mapping correspondences between Source Domain and Target Domain in relation to Building the Nigerian nation, identified in the building metaphors were:**

Elements of the mapping	Source Domain: Building	Target Domain: Socio-political goals
Constructing a solid base for the Nigerian nation	to build (x3), laid the foundation, built, build (x3)	Some efforts made in the Nigerian nation -building process
Moves/steps to take for development/progress	to transform, transformation (x2), reform	initiating positive changes/policies

Examples of building metaphors in Jonathan's speech include the following extracts.

7. I want to specially thank all Nigerians for staying the course in our collective commitment to **build** a democratic nation.
8. I also wish to pay tribute to our founding fathers, whose enduring sacrifices and abiding faith in the unity and greatness of our country **laid the foundation for the** nation.
- 9.

Such determination derives from the typical Nigerian spirit of resilience in the face of the greatest of odds. That spirit has, over the years, stirred out our hopes, doused our fears, and encouraged us to gather ourselves **to build** a strong nation even when others doubted our capacity.

10. We must demonstrate the leadership, statesmanship, vision, capacity, and sacrifice **to transform our nation**.
11. Fellow citizens, the leadership we pledged is decidedly transformative. The transformation will be achieved in the entire critical sector by harnessing the creative energies of our people.
12. The Nigeria of our dreams must be **built** on hard work and not on shortcuts.
13. Let me salute the Nigerian workers who **build** our communities.
14. To drive our overall economic vision, the power sector reform is at the heart of our industrialisation strategy.
15. Let us work together **to build** a great country that we will be proud of.
16. I call on all the Presidential candidates who contested with me to join hands with me as we begin the **transformation** of our country.
17. Let us work together; let us **build** together.

In these extracts, the metaphor *to build* conceptualises Nigeria as a building in progress. The act of building involves many people, so Jonathan salutes Nigerians for their commitment to democratic culture and their spirit of resilience, which he views as essential materials for nation-building. In extract (8), *laid the foundation* recognises the crucial contributions of Nigeria's founding fathers. Based on real-world knowledge, a house must have a strong foundation to withstand storms, and that foundation was laid by the founding fathers. In extracts (15) and (17), the metaphors *to build* and

*build* invite Nigerians to join the process of nation-building. In extracts (10) and (11), *to transform* and *transformation* signify instituting significant changes. The President positively evaluates Nigerians as capable and visionary people who can bring about positive change. In extract (11), he pledges to ensure positive changes in all critical sectors. In extracts (15), (16), and (17), as the President-elect, he rallies all Nigerians, including other presidential candidates, to work together for good changes. The metaphorical expressions in Jonathan's speech realise the conceptual metaphor NIGERIA AS A BUILDING IN PROGRESS.

### Conflict Metaphor

Another prominent metaphor in President Jonathan's inaugural speech is the conflict metaphor, used to conceptualise abstract social phenomena such as corruption and poverty as enemies of Nigeria. Howe (1988:95), cited in Charteris Black (2004:91), argues that when politics must be portrayed as ruthless or treacherous, speakers often resort to military metaphors. Charteris Black (2004:91) suggests that this view holds when individual politicians describe particular disputes. The domain of conflict highlights the personal sacrifice and physical struggle that speakers claim are necessary to achieve social goals. Conflict metaphors can be used for positively evaluated abstract social goals, such as rights, freedom, and faith, or against negatively evaluated social phenomena, such as poverty, disease, and injustice. These social ills are conceptualised as enemies.

### Analysis of Conflict Metaphors in Jonathan's Inaugural Speech

When President Jonathan assumed office, Nigeria was still struggling with socio-political challenges, including corruption, poverty, insecurity, and unemployment. In his inaugural speech, he assured Nigerians that he would address these problems. The

metaphorical tokens are military metaphors used to describe a struggle against enemies, which in this context are poverty and corruption, presented as physical entities.

The following correspondences identified between the source domain of CONFLICT and the target domain POLITICAL ACTIONS/STEPS were observed in the table below:

**Table 4:** Mapping correspondences between Source Domain and Target Domain in relation to physical engagement against Nigeria's social challenges in Jonathan's inaugural speech

Elements of the mapping	Source Domain: War, Sport	Target Domain: Socio-political goals
A total offensive/intolerable	overwhelming force	political actions/steps against corruption
Physical engagement, military confrontation	fight, war	Political actions/steps against the menace of corruption
An invitation to be part of the forces against corruption	Enlist	Everyone should rise against the social malaise
Approach/method to end the evils	Tackle	strategy/tactic to end poverty and underdevelopment
Struggle/physical engagement for democratic ideology	Fight	for political actions to entrench democracy

To convince Nigerians of his government's readiness to confront social malaise, President Jonathan used conflict metaphors, as seen in the following extracts.

18. Fellow citizens, in every decision, I shall always place the common good before all else. The bane of corruption shall be

- met by the **overwhelming force** of our collective determination to rid our nation of this scourge.
19. The **fight** against corruption is a **war** in which we must all **enlist**, so that the limited resources of this nation will be used for the growth of our commonwealth.
  20. Your Excellency, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, this is a new dawn for Africa. We fought for decolonisation. We will now **fight** for democratisation.
  21. Africa must develop its vast resources to **tackle** poverty and underdevelopment.
  22. I will continue to fight for your future because I am one of you.

In extracts (18) and (19), corruption is conceptualised as an enemy of the country. President Jonathan uses conflict metaphors such as overwhelming force, fight, war, and enlist to suggest political action against corruption. In extract (21), poverty and underdevelopment are also conceptualised as enemies, evaluated negatively. In extracts (20) and (22), conflict metaphors are deployed for positively evaluated abstract social goals. The conceptual metaphor realised from the source domain of conflict is NIGERIA'S SOCIAL CHALLENGES ARE ENEMIES.

### The Family Frame

Another productive metaphor in Jonathan's inaugural speech is the family metaphor. Charteris Black (2011:29) explains that metaphors from the family domain help impart a feeling of security and a sense of belonging within the nation. According to Charteris Black (2019), in his work on the Metaphor of Brexit, metaphors deriving from family and other relationship types, such as being a friend or partner, communicate moral and political issues. He categorises this into two frames: the nation as a person frame and the nation as a family frame.

When a nation is framed as a person, its relationships with other nations resemble interpersonal relationships. For example, an outward alliance with another country can be metaphorically called a marriage. The nation as a person frame allows two nations to become, metaphorically, a family through symbolic links such as royal families. The nation as a family frame, by contrast, frames the nation as a whole as a family. This frame implies that a shared sense of belonging is best found within the nation itself, motivating words such as fatherland or referring to people as brothers and sisters because they share a common history and nation. This metaphor overcomes internal divisions and relies on the moral foundation of loyalty among family members.

### Analysing the speech for family metaphors

The following conceptual mappings are identified between the source domain FAMILY and the target domain.

*Table 5: Mapping correspondences between Source Domain and Target Domain in relation to Family frame*

Elements of the mapping	Source Domain:	Target Domain:
Family		Sociopolitical goals
Relationship	brothers, our founding fathers, our fatherland	to evoke positive emotional feelings among Africans, to promote unity among Nigerians

President Jonathan referred to Nigerians as brothers and sisters, and also addressed other African leaders as brothers, as shown in the following extracts.

23. I would like to specially acknowledge the presence in our midst today of **brother** Heads of State and Government, who have come to share this joyous moment with us.

24. I also wish to pay tribute to **our founding fathers**, whose enduring sacrifices and abiding faith in the unity and greatness of our country laid the foundation for the nation.
25. We take enormous pride in their contributions. The pivotal task of this generation is to lift **our fatherland** to the summit of greatness.

In example (23), Jonathan refers to another African brother to evoke positive emotional feelings of brotherhood and care associated with one's own family. Extracts (24) and (25) evoke emotions of unity among Nigerian citizens. The President conceptualises the nation of Nigeria in terms of family. Nigeria is a heterogeneous country with over 400 languages, which, among other factors, has contributed to disunity, especially among the three major ethnic groups. As a leader, the President's utterances needed to promote unity and the continued existence of the country. The metaphorical expressions employed by Jonathan realise the conceptual metaphors NIGERIA IS A FAMILY and AFRICAN NATIONS ARE MEMBERS OF NIGERIA'S EXTENDED FAMILY.

### Conclusion

The study found that President Goodluck Jonathan employed journey metaphors to serve both rhetorical and ideological ends. These metaphors suggest that achieving socio economic and political objectives in governance is comparable to undertaking a movement or travelling toward a destination. In addition, he utilised building metaphors to recognise the foundational contributions of Nigeria's founding fathers to the nation building process and to advocate for constructive changes moving forward. The analysis further showed that President Jonathan drew on military terminology to address social challenges, reassuring Nigerians that government responses to these issues would be firm and resolute. Family metaphors were also

identified in the data, through which the President sought to foster a sense of unity among Nigerians and to encourage a spirit of brotherhood across African nations. The conceptual metaphors derived from these source domains include the following: Nigeria is the vanguard of democracy in Africa; the Nigerian nation is a building in progress; nation building in Nigeria requires positive change; Nigeria is a family; and African nations are members of Nigeria's extended family. By employing this linguistic device to articulate Nigeria's socio-political realities, these conceptual metaphors were effectively used to persuade and inspire the Nigerian populace.

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