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CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR IN SELECTED HAUSA MARRIAGE SONGS

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the conceptual metaphor in Hausa marriage songs, applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) to uncover how metaphors serve both linguistic and cultural functions. Hausa marriage songs are deeply embedded in ritual contexts and serve as platforms for transmitting cultural values, social expectations, and gender roles. Drawing on a qualitative methodology, the study analyzes ten metaphor-rich extracts from traditional Hausa wedding songs, sourced from field recordings, interviews, and published song collections. Each metaphor was examined for its conceptual mapping between source and target domains, metaphor type (ontological, structural, or orientational), and discursal function. The analysis reveals that metaphors such as "Marriage is a Journey," "Marriage is a Marketplace," and "Marriage is a Clay Pot" are prevalent. They communicate complex ideas through culturally familiar imagery. These metaphors consistently emphasize virtues such as *hakuri* (patience), *hankali* (wisdom), and emotional endurance, primarily directed at women. While they function as tools of moral instruction and cultural preservation, the metaphors also reinforce patriarchal ideologies by assigning the emotional and ethical burden of marriage predominantly to women. The study concludes that metaphors in Hausa marriage songs are not mere artistic embellishments but cognitive instruments that shape marital understanding and perpetuate societal norms. By highlighting the mental, cultural, and ideological roles of metaphor, this research contributes to the fields of cognitive linguistics, gender discourse, and African oral literature, offering insight into how metaphor functions as a mechanism of cultural transmission and social control within Hausa marital traditions.

Keywords: Hausa marriage songs; conceptual metaphor; Metaphorical Mapping, Cognitive Linguistics

Introduction

Metaphor, once viewed merely as a stylistic or decorative feature of language, has been redefined as a central cognitive mechanism through the development of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). This theory posits that individuals understand abstract concepts by mapping them onto more concrete, familiar experiences, making metaphor a foundational structure in human cognition. One such abstract concept is marriage, a complex and deeply rooted institution across cultures. In Hausa society, marriage is not only a personal and spiritual union but also a social contract laden with expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Hausa marriage songs, which are performed during various stages of traditional wedding ceremonies, are rich in metaphorical content and serve to communicate communal ideals and moral instruction about marital life.

However, despite the cultural importance of these songs, there is limited scholarly engagement with the conceptual metaphors they contain—particularly those related to marriage. Most existing studies on Hausa marriage songs tend to focus on their musical form, social significance, or ceremonial function, while overlooking the metaphorical structures that shape how marriage is cognitively and culturally understood. Although previous research has examined metaphor in Hausa political and love songs, the domain of marriage has not received comparable analytical attention. This oversight presents a clear gap in understanding how metaphor operates as a tool for representing and reinforcing societal views on marriage within Hausa oral traditions.

This study, therefore, aims to explore and analyze conceptual metaphors in selected Hausa marriage songs using the framework of Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Specifically, it seeks to identify metaphorical expressions within these songs, classify them into structural, ontological, and orientational types, and analyze the conceptual mappings between their source and target domains. Furthermore, the study examines the discursal functions of these metaphors in conveying marital expectations, reinforcing gender roles, and reflecting broader cultural ideologies about the institution of marriage.

The significance of this research lies in its interdisciplinary contribution to cognitive linguistics, gender studies, and African oral literature. By applying CMT to the metaphorical content of Hausa marriage songs, the study reveals how metaphor functions not only as a linguistic device but also as a cultural and ideological tool. It shows how metaphors are used to teach brides about patience, loyalty, and responsibility—thereby shaping their understanding of marriage as a journey, a duty, or a moral obligation. These metaphors also encode cultural values that emphasize the emotional labor expected of women, reflecting deeply rooted patriarchal structures within Hausa society.

By addressing this research gap, the study will contribute a culturally grounded application of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and deepen our understanding of how marriage is conceptualized, taught, and regulated through traditional discourse. It underscores the importance of metaphor in shaping social thought and transmitting cultural norms, particularly about marriage and womanhood in Hausa culture.

Related Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The Concept of Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphor is a fundamental mechanism in human cognition through which individuals understand one conceptual domain in terms of another (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This foundational idea laid the groundwork for what is now known as Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). Kövecses (2010) builds on this by defining conceptual metaphor as a cognitive mechanism that maps knowledge from a source domain onto a target domain, allowing people to make sense of abstract concepts through more concrete experiences. Similarly, Barcelona (2000) emphasizes that these mappings are not random but systematic correspondences between two domains. From a psychological standpoint, Gibbs (1994) highlights how conceptual metaphors are embedded in everyday thought, influencing not only how we speak but also how we perceive, think, and act. Integrating this idea within the broader field of cognitive linguistics, Evans and Green (2006) describe conceptual metaphor as a reflection of underlying mental structures that govern language and thought. Together, these scholars underscore that metaphor is not merely a linguistic device but a pervasive and structured element of human cognition.

Types of Conceptual Metaphor

Conceptual metaphors can be divided into three categories. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), the first category is Structural Metaphor, where one concept is understood through another

concept based on systematic correlations with everyday experiences. This type of metaphor influences how people perceive, think, and act. For example, the metaphor "ARGUMENT IS WAR" interprets an argument in terms of war.

The second category is Orientational Metaphor, which (Lakoff and Johnson: 1980) described as relating to the spatial orientation of human experiences, such as up-down, in-out or front-back. It uses actual spatial or physical experiences to help us understand abstract or complex ideas. For example, happiness is associated with "up" and sadness with "down."

The third category is Ontological Metaphor. As explained by Lakoff and Johnson (p. 34), this type involves describing something physical as if it were human, allowing us to understand nonhuman interactions in terms of human motivations and behaviours. It often involves personification and represents abstract concepts in tangible ways. For example, in the phrase "Life teaches me how to be a tough person," life is metaphorically depicted as engaging in teaching actions.

Components of Conceptual Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson 1980 divided metaphor into two components: **the target domain** and **the source domain**. The target domain is the conceptual area being explained or understood, often of an abstract nature. The source domain, on the other hand, is the concept used metaphorically to facilitate understanding of another concept, also often of an abstract nature. This domain typically involves a concrete object.

Mapping

Mapping refers to the process by which elements from the source domain are used to describe and understand the target domain. This involves the mental organization of information within domains, driving metaphorical usages in language. Mapping is closely related to image

schemas, which are mental representations used to extend spatial and physical principles to more complex situations.

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) is a systematic method developed by the Pragglejaz Group and elaborated by Steen et al. (2010) for identifying metaphorically used words in discourse. It involves analyzing the contextual meaning of a lexical unit, comparing it to its more basic, concrete meaning, and marking it as metaphorical if the contextual meaning can be understood in terms of the basic meaning.

Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive Linguistics is a branch of linguistics that explores the relationship between language and the mind, emphasizing that language reflects general cognitive abilities rather than being governed by a separate linguistic module. According to Evans and Green, Cognitive Linguistics is fundamentally concerned with understanding how language relates to thought and embodied experience. They argue that linguistic expressions are shaped by the same cognitive processes involved in perception, categorization, and reasoning, highlighting the non-arbitrary and experience-based nature of language use.

Lakoff further elaborates that language is not independent of the conceptual system; instead, it reveals how people structure their experiences through metaphor, categorization, and mental models. This idea is central to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which argues that abstract concepts are typically understood through more concrete and familiar experiences, such as understanding time as money or marriage as a journey.

Similarly, Langacker emphasizes that grammar itself is a reflection of conceptual organization. He views grammar as meaningful and grounded in imagery, rejecting the idea of it being a purely syntactic system. Croft and Cruse describe Cognitive Linguistics as a usage-based

model that views meaning as context-dependent and shaped by actual language use in social and cultural settings.⁴ In the same vein, Taylor asserts that linguistic knowledge is constructed from human interaction with the physical and social environment, emphasizing that cognition, culture, and language are inseparably intertwined.

Collectively, these scholars underline that Cognitive Linguistics views language as a mirror of the mind, a tool shaped by and shaping human experience. It does not isolate language from thought, but rather treats it as a window into the conceptual structures and cultural models that govern how people make sense of the world. This makes Cognitive Linguistics especially valuable for analyzing metaphoric genres such as Hausa marriage songs, where language serves as both an expressive and instructional medium grounded in shared cultural cognition.

Marriage songs

The songs are a vital component of Hausa oral tradition, performed primarily by women during wedding ceremonies to celebrate, advise, entertain, and reinforce cultural expectations around marriage. These songs, often rich in metaphor and symbolism, serve as a means of transmitting cultural values, gender norms, and social roles to the bride and groom, while also providing a platform for social commentary—sometimes through satire or indirect criticism.

As Furniss (1996) notes:

“Marriage songs among the Hausa are not merely celebratory; they are culturally loaded texts that communicate social ideologies, educate young women, and reinforce gendered expectations within the framework of Islamic and traditional values.”

Similarly, Bagari (2001) observes:

“Through poetic devices, Hausa marriage songs function both as a repository of tradition and as a form of gendered discourse, offering insights into women's perspectives on love, duty, and social identity within marriage.”

Types of Hausa Marriage Songs

Yahaya (1979) categorized Hausa marriage songs into several distinct types, each tied to specific rituals and moments within the wedding process:

Gudu Song – Sung during a bride's procession with her friends as they visit her brothers' homes. It celebrates marriage and symbolizes her transition, ending with her temporary concealment in a designated house.

Kamu Song – Performed by elder women during the “kamu” ritual, where the bride is ceremonially “captured.” These songs enhance the festive and communal spirit of the event.

Wanka Song – Sung during the bridal shower, this category strengthens bonds between both families and adds to the celebratory atmosphere.

Kunshi Song – Performed during the bride's preparation, these songs teach etiquette and discipline, and promote friendship, often accompanied by handclapping.

Boko Song – Highlights moral values and politeness, promoting unity and ethical behavior among participants.

Buɗar Kai Song – Sung at the final stage of the wedding, focusing on educating the bride about marital responsibilities, decorum, and respect. This ritual also includes advice from both families.

Empirical Review

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), fundamentally altered how metaphors are understood, shifting them from rhetorical flourishes to fundamental structures of thought. Their claim that people conceptualize abstract experiences through concrete domains, such as thinking about time as money or love as a journey, initiated a large body of empirical research aimed at testing, extending, and applying this theory. Gibbs (1994)

conducted a series of psycholinguistic experiments that demonstrated how people comprehend and process metaphorical language in real-time, suggesting that metaphorical mappings are not merely linguistic features but mental representations deeply embedded in cognitive processing. These experiments confirmed that metaphors are not peripheral to language use but central to how individuals think, reason, and make sense of the world.

Ibrahim 2020 also used critical discourse analysis CDA to examine Rarara's songs in support of political elites. Using Van Dijk's CDA framework, the study analyzed five of his songs released during the 2019 elections. The analysis showed how metaphor, repetition, and loaded vocabulary were used to legitimize political authority and delegitimize opposition.

Similarly, Wakili (2018) examined metaphor and symbolism in Hausa love songs. Using Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory, he identified recurring metaphors such as LOVE IS WAR and WOMAN IS A FLOWER. His empirical sample included transcribed lyrics and interviews with singers and audiences. The study highlighted the cultural underpinnings of conceptual metaphors in Hausa romantic discourse.

In the domain of emotion, Kövecses (2000) compiled extensive examples of how English metaphorically conceptualizes emotional states, showing that expressions like "he exploded with rage" or "she's boiling with anger" reflect an underlying metaphor of ANGER IS A HOT FLUID IN A CONTAINER. Citron and Goldberg (2014) supported this with neuroscientific evidence, showing that metaphorical expressions activate brain regions associated with emotional processing more than literal expressions do. Their findings suggest that metaphors are not only cognitively useful but also enhance affective resonance, thereby influencing perception, memory, and decision-making.

While there is limited research on conceptual metaphor in Hausa marriage songs, this research paper aims to address this knowledge gap.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a cognitive linguistic model first proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). According to CMT, metaphor is not merely a rhetorical figure but a fundamental mechanism of human thought. It enables people to understand one domain of experience (the target domain) in terms of another, more concrete domain (the source domain). For example, in the metaphor Marriage is a Journey, the abstract concept of marriage is understood using the concrete experience of traveling.

Kövecses (2010) elaborates that while many metaphors are universal due to shared bodily experiences, their specific linguistic realizations and cultural interpretations are often shaped by local traditions, beliefs, and environments. This framework is particularly relevant for analyzing Hausa marriage songs, where metaphors emerge not only from individual cognition but from shared social knowledge embedded in performance and ritual.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to analyze metaphorical expressions in selected Hausa marriage songs. Data were collected through a combination of field recordings from traditional marriage ceremonies, informal interviews with traditional singers and community elders, and a review of published materials such as *WakoKinBikinAure* by Ibrahim YaroYahaya (1988). A total of 10 metaphor-rich stanzas from the songs were transcribed, translated into English, and assigned as individual data points (e.g., extract 1, extract 2). Each metaphor was analyzed to identify its conceptual mapping between source and target domains, its metaphor type (ontological, structural, or orientational), and its discursive function in conveying cultural values related to gender roles, marital expectations, and social norms. Translations and interpretations were cross-validated with native Hausa speakers and cultural informants to ensure linguistic accuracy and cultural

relevance. This methodological framework allowed for an in-depth exploration of how metaphors function within Hausa marriage songs as tools of both artistic expression and social instruction.

Analysis

Extract 1

(Aurey a fi zama da zuciya a fiye da kudi.)

"Marriage depends more on the heart than on money."

This reflects the conceptual metaphor MARRIAGE IS AN EMOTIONAL INVESTMENT, where love, commitment, and patience (the heart) are prioritized over material wealth.

Source Domain: Emotional depth (heart)

Target Domain: The foundations and sustainability of marriage

Metaphor Type: Ontological metaphor — internal feelings viewed as concrete tools for building a relationship

This metaphor challenges the increasingly materialistic view of marriage. In Hausa marital songs, it reminds listeners — especially women — that emotional integrity and sincerity are central to marital harmony. It also aligns with Islamic values that prioritize *niyya* (intention) and *sabr* (patience) over material comfort.

Extract 2

(Matar kirki, fure ce a cikin gida.)

"A good woman is a flower in the home."

This metaphor, WOMAN IS A FLOWER, uses the imagery of beauty, delicacy, and natural value to depict the woman's role in a household.

Source Domain: Flower — soft, beautiful, and fragrant element of nature

Target Domain: Woman's presence in the home

Metaphor Type: Ontological metaphor — physical beauty and moral virtue equated with a flower

The metaphor emphasizes femininity, charm, and peace. In Hausa wedding songs, this portrays the ideal woman as soft-spoken, graceful, and aesthetically pleasing, not just in appearance but in behaviour. However, it also subtly reinforces gender expectations that prioritize pleasing others over personal assertiveness.

Extract 3

(Auren mace hanya ce, tana bukar tafiya da hankali.)

"A woman's marriage is a road that must be walked with wisdom."

This metaphor reflects MARRIAGE IS A PATH, where the act of walking signifies endurance, progress, and caution.

Source Domain: Road/travel — requiring navigation, awareness, and time

Target Domain: Marital experience and emotional maturity

Metaphor Type: Structural metaphor life experiences represented as journeys

This metaphor urges brides to embrace long-term thinking and wisdom. Hausa marital songs often caution women to anticipate both joy and hardship, and to move with hankali (wisdom).

The journey metaphor allows for the idea of growth and changing landscapes, reflecting marriage as a lifelong process, not a static achievement.

Extract 4

(Mace mai hakuri itace ginshikin zaman aure.)

"A patient woman is the pillar of marital life."

This reiterates the conceptual metaphor WOMAN IS THE FOUNDATION OF MARRIAGE, where patience becomes the defining structural virtue.

Source Domain: Pillar/support structure — something that holds up a building

Target Domain: Emotional stability and resilience in marriage

Metaphor Type: Ontological metaphor — patience personified as physical strength

The metaphor reinforces the cultural ideal that a woman's ability to endure, forgive, and remain calm ensures the survival of the marital institution. Hausa songs use this metaphor to morally educate brides about the virtue of hakuri (patience) as nonnegotiable. It reinforces gendered expectations of emotional labour and composure from women.

Extract 5

(Auren ki kamar gonar ki ne, yadda kika noma haka zaki girba.)

"Your marriage is like your farm – as you cultivate it, so shall you harvest."

The metaphor here is MARRIAGE IS A FARM, drawing on agricultural imagery to represent effort, nurture, and reward.

Source Domain: Farming/agriculture — involving planting, patience, and harvesting

Target Domain: Marital life and the outcomes of one's behavior and choices

Metaphor Type: Structural metaphor — effort result structure applied to marriage

This metaphor teaches cause and effect in marriage, especially for women. It emphasizes active participation, patience, and intentional effort in nurturing the relationship. In Hausa songs, it often serves as a moral lesson: a woman should invest in good behaviour, kindness, and

tolerance, and in return, she may reap happiness and stability. It reinforces agency while also placing responsibility squarely on the woman.

Extract 6

(Gidan aure, kamar tulu, sai an kula da shi, karya fashe.)

"A marriage home is like a clay pot — it must be cared for lest it breaks."

The metaphor here is MARRIAGE IS A CLAY POT, symbolizing fragility, value, and the need for attentive care.

Source Domain: Clay pot (tulu) — easily breakable yet useful and cherished

Target Domain: Marital relationship and domestic stability

Metaphor Type: Ontological metaphor — family dynamics represented through physical objects

This metaphor reinforces the delicate balance of marriage. Like a pot, it must be handled gently and with consistent care. Hausa songs using this image typically instruct women on how to be vigilant in maintaining harmony, avoiding conflict, respecting their husbands, and managing household roles. It also reflects the idea that once broken (divorce), restoration is difficult or impossible.

Extract 7

(Gidan aure kamar kasuwa ne akwai riba da asara.)

"Marriage is like a marketplace, there is profit and loss."

This metaphor is MARRIAGE IS A MARKETPLACE, where emotional, social, or spiritual gains and losses parallel commercial outcomes.

Source Domain: Marketplace — site of exchange, risk, gain, and loss

Target Domain: Marital life with its benefits and challenges

Metaphor Type: Structural metaphor — economic activity mapped onto human relationships

This metaphor reflects realism and balance in expectations about marriage. It suggests that marriage, like business, involves continuous investment and risk. Hausa songs use this metaphor to urge both patience and practicality, especially to women, highlighting that not every day will bring joy or satisfaction. However, perseverance may yield long-term "profits" like children, stability, and companionship

Extract 8

(Aure hanya ce mai cike da kwari da tsaunuka.)

"Marriage is a road filled with valleys and mountains."

This metaphor is MARRIAGE IS A JOURNEY WITH OBSTACLES, portraying it as a long path requiring stamina and endurance.

Source Domain: Terrain — with complex features like valleys (kwari) and mountains (tsaunuka)

Target Domain: The ups and downs of married life

Metaphor Type: Structural metaphor — journey mapped onto emotional and relational experience

This metaphor prepares couples, especially women, for the realities of hardship in marriage. Hausa marriage songs use it to instil a mentality of resilience and maturity. The uneven road signifies phases of happiness and hardship. The message is not to quit the journey when hardship comes, but to climb and descend with hakuri (patience) and hankali (wisdom).

Extract 9

(Zaman aure yana buƙatar tukwici da tausayawa kamar kula da jariri.)

"Marital life requires pampering and compassion like caring for a baby."

This metaphor is MARRIAGE IS CHILDCARE, comparing nurturing a marriage to raising an infant.

Source Domain: Childcare — feeding, comforting, and nurturing a baby

Target Domain: Emotional management and attention in marital life

Metaphor Type: Structural metaphor — caregiving mapped onto spousal relations

This metaphor portrays marriage as something that must be constantly cared for, else it "cries" or fails. In Hausa songs, it underscores the importance of gentleness, compromise, and attentiveness, especially from women. It subtly implies that marriage is not self-sustaining; it needs emotional and behavioural investment, much like raising a fragile human being.

Extract 10

(Aure madubi ne, yana nuna gaskiyar hali.)

"Marriage is a mirror; it reflects true character."

The central conceptual metaphor here is MARRIAGE IS A MIRROR. A mirror reflects reality as it is, suggesting that marriage reveals inner truths about individuals that may remain hidden outside such an intimate institution.

Source Domain: Mirrors and reflection — instruments that display appearance or essence

Target Domain: Marital relationship — revealing a person's true character or emotional disposition

Metaphor Type: Ontological metaphor — an object (mirror) used to understand an abstract concept (truth of personality)

The metaphor functions to convey that marriage tests not just the relationship, but the individuals within it. It aligns with Hausa cultural emphasis on *halinmutum* (a person's character), suggesting that one's true nature emerges in marriage through how one handles responsibility, conflict, or loyalty. This metaphor in marital songs serves both as insight and caution: marriage is a proving ground where authenticity, not pretence, determines success.

The functions of these metaphors within Hausa culture reveal how they convey social values, emotional tones, and cultural norms.

Discussion of Research Findings

The discussion highlights how conceptual metaphors in Hausa marriage songs function as both linguistic and cultural tools that communicate expectations, shape behaviour, and reinforce social values. Metaphors such as Marriage is a Journey, Marriage is a Marketplace, and Marriage is a Clay Pot help translate abstract experiences into concrete, relatable images. These metaphors frame marriage as a process that demands emotional resilience, patience, and continuous effort, especially from women, thus reflecting the cultural ideal of a morally strong and emotionally enduring wife.

The analysis further reveals that these metaphors serve a didactic purpose, particularly during wedding ceremonies, where they guide brides on how to approach marital life. They emphasise virtues like *hakuri* (patience) and *hankali* (wisdom), reinforcing moral lessons drawn from both Islamic and Hausa cultural values. However, they also expose a strong gender bias, as the metaphors overwhelmingly assign the responsibility of marital success to women, while men's roles remain largely unaddressed or assumed.

Ultimately, the metaphors do more than beautify language—they actively shape social thought and cultural expectations. They serve as cognitive tools that simplify complex marital realities and as ideological tools that naturalise gender hierarchies. Through these metaphors, Hausa

marital songs not only preserve cultural knowledge but also perpetuate traditional views of marriage and womanhood.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the conceptual metaphors embedded in Hausa marriage songs, revealing their significant role in expressing cultural values, societal norms, and personal emotions associated with marriage. By employing Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), the research identified and classified these metaphors, uncovering their discoursal functions and thematic relevance.

The analysis reveals that conceptual metaphors in Hausa marriage songs serve as powerful tools for expressing cultural values, shaping marital expectations, and reinforcing gender roles. By mapping abstract ideas like love, endurance, and responsibility onto familiar domains such as farming, roads, and marketplaces, these metaphors provide moral guidance and social instruction—particularly for women. The metaphors consistently position women as the emotional and moral foundation of marriage, reflecting a patriarchal worldview embedded in traditional discourse.

The paper will contribute to cognitive linguistics, gender discourse, and African oral literature by applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to an underexplored genre. It highlights how metaphor functions not only as a linguistic device but also as a vehicle for cultural transmission and social control. By uncovering the ideological weight of metaphor in Hausa marriage songs, this research deepens our understanding of how language shapes thought, gender norms, and marital behaviour in African societies.

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