METAPHORIC DISCOURSE AND SOCIAL CONTEXT IN *MOROUNTODUN*

MELE, MOHAMMED LAMINU, *PH.D.*
Department of English
University of Maiduguri
E-mail: mohdmele@yahoo.com

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MOHAMMED, TALATU RAZINAT
Department of English
University of Maiduguri
Tel: +2348065305791
E-Mail: talitamo2000@yahoo.com

Abstract

The play Morountodun represents an attempt to depict the archetypal Nigerian society in a dramatic narrative fashion. Though the drama genre is employed as a tool for depicting social situations or exposing social ills, the importance of lexico-cognitive elements in the creation of such social representation is not much considered. Thus, the goal of the paper is to explore the relationship of the metaphorical contents of

the play with the social context from the point of view of cognitive metaphor and explicate their use in depicting the socio-political issues such as corruption and social injustices, inter alia, that are raised in the play. It specifically focuses on the types of metaphorisms used to represent actors and their acts as well as the relationship of the expressions in terms of social status and power. It is found that the metaphorical expressions employed are mainly satirical but principally portray contemporaneous states of affairs which are more or less similar to those captured when the play was written a quarter of a century ago. Through mainly orientational metaphors, the play indirectly frames the actors' perception of aspects of socio-political sphere of life in Nigeria.

Introduction

The theatre has for long been an arena in which playwrights and societies converge in a bid to correct societal misdeeds by enlightening members of a community about negative social practices. It is common knowledge that playwrights employ different modes of presentation such as humour and rhetoric in their productions, with metaphorical expression used because of its attractiveness. In order to create a symbolic representation of their observations or imaginations, as the case might be, playwrights usually employ figurative language and blend these in the creative messages they convey to their audience. The fact that figurative language and other rhetorical tropes in their plays can create logical conjunctions or disjunctions in the presentation of fact or fiction is underestimated. In this paper, therefore, instances of metaphoric usages in Ola Rotimi's *Morountodun* are identified on the bases of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) classification of metaphors. They are then explicated not just in terms of socio-political issues found in the play but in terms of the interplay of lexico-semantic choice with the larger pragmatic context.

Metaphor and Metaphoricism

The term metaphor, from the Greek *metaphora* (transfer) is defined as language that compares seemingly unrelated subjects usually by

expressing the unfamiliar (the 'tenor') in terms of the familiar (the 'vehicle'). The tenor and the vehicle are normally unrelated and the process of metaphor understanding involves making an imaginative attempt to recognize the resemblance to which a fresh metaphor alludes. As Muller (2008:3) puts it, *a metaphor is a function of language use; it emerges in the creation of a novel sentence in which two distant semantic fields clash and provoke a novel metaphoric sense: a vital metaphor*. Metaphors appear unconventional because they apparently disregard 'literal' or denotative resemblances. Despite this, metaphors have been described as ubiquitous occurrences in political discourse and indeed in many other types of discourse (Zinken et al., 2003).

Historically, one can refer to Hobbes (1651/1985) who regards metaphor as one of the four abuses of speech – the others being *inaccuracy*, *prevarication* and *invective*; these, he believes, lead to error of reasoning and absurdity. Similarly, Orwell, in his *Politics and the English Language* (1946/1961) includes metaphor in his list of 'bad habits' that render political language cloudy and imprecise; his reason being that metaphor tends to conceal the gaps between the actual and stated aims of political actors. However, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) see metaphor from a new, positive perspective. They expounded what has come to be known as the *Cognitive Theory of Metaphor* based on the premise that 'most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured; that most concepts are partially understood in terms of other concepts' (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 56). They are in essence subscribing to Roman Jakobson's proposition that metaphor and metonymy are the two fundamental modes of communicating meaning which form the basis for much of our understanding in everyday life (Chandler, 2006).

Lakoff and Johnson, (1980:5) identify s*tructural, orientational* and *ontological metaphors* as three categories of conceptual metaphors that are pervasive in everyday language. In *structural metaphors,* one concept is structured in terms of another, such as *time is money; orientational metaphors* have their basis in physical and/or cultural

experience organizes a whole system of concepts with respect to one another and are related to spatial orientations like up-down, in-out, front-back, on-off, etc. These, they believe, arise from the fact that we have bodies of the sort we have and that they function as they do in our physical environment. For example, SAD IS DOWN and HAPPY IS UP. GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN etc.

Ontological metaphors are based on our ways of viewing events emanating from our experience with physical objects   and that our minds are embodied in such a way that our conceptual systems draw largely upon the peculiarities of our bodies and the specifics of our physical and cultural environments (Gibbs, 2006b; Yu, 2009). Such experiences with physical objects (including our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, like activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances. *Ontological metaphors* serve various purposes and the various kinds of metaphors there reflect the kinds of purposes served.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) further point out that metaphors structure a variety of standard idioms which are not themselves perceived to be metaphorical, for example, *waste of time*, *time well spent, upward mobility*, *lower class*; *cultural elites* etc. and in so doing, they also structure our understanding of the concepts that such usages describe. They stress that though metaphor is traditionally regarded as a unique form of linguistic expression associated with literature, it is central to language as well as to human cognition. They based their arguments on two principal contentions: that metaphorical use is in fact very ordinary and commonplace and that metaphors are 'a matter of thought not language' (Lakoff and Turner, 1989: 107). They explain that metaphorical mappings are stored as mental schemata from which people draw on automatically in order to process metaphorical usages. Thus, rather than see them as linguistic embellishments, metaphors are best seen as primary means by which people make sense of the world around them (Zubair, 2008). They help in our attempts at constructing reality, reasoning about as well as evaluating it (Ellis, 2001).

The role of metaphor in different discourses has received significant attention (Chilton and Lakoff, 1995; Musolff, 2004; Gibbs, 2006b; Yu, 2009). Metaphor is seen as a fundamental and ubiquitous structure of language representing a fundamental cast of mind in so far as particular core words within the lexicon structure determine perception of the world and ways of thinking about the world (Carter, 2004). For example, Hobbs (2008) examines the use of metaphorical concepts in political discourse in order to justify policies and define events. She specifically analyses the metaphors used to describe President Bush's military plan to increase US forces in Iraq by exploring the mechanisms by which the meanings of novel metaphors are negotiated in the political arena. Her study reveals, among other things, that vivid imagery in such usages can generate persuasive force in political language. Hobbs (2008) observes that metaphors are seen to frequently attain the status of idioms and, as a result, they pass unnoticed while retaining their ability to frame perspectives. However, she discovers that political discourse does not limit itself to such lexicalized metaphors but makes use of new metaphors or new uses of existing metaphors that are specifically designed to attract attention.

Metaphor can thus be seen as involving a symbolic as well as an iconic quality. As such, metaphoric signifiers tend to highlight the signifier rather than the signified (Chandler, 2006). In relation to these, van Dijk observes that across different discursive levels are found the prominence of overall strategy of *positive self-presentation* of the dominant in-group, and *negative other-presentation* of the dominated/ out-groups (Van Dijk, 1993a, 1998b). He further explains this as the polarization of *us* and *them* which typifies shared social representations and their underlying ideologies. These are said to be expressed and reproduced at all levels of text and talk such as metaphor, hyperbole, variable formulations in text schemata, syntactic forms, lexicalization, sound structures and images (Van Dijk, 1998b).

Analysis

Extracts from the play are presented here and the analyses follow from the general perspectives in the metaphorical types (*structural, orientational* and *ontological metaphors).*

Physical to Mental Metaphorical Leap

In classical metaphorical usages one concept is structured in terms of another unrelated concept. In the expression *time is money,* for example, the concepts *time* and *money* are anything but related in their literal frames. The meanings they convey in such contexts are highly context dependant emanating first as a factor of the socio-economic worldview of the economic man and as a biological being surrounded by the necessary dictates of time. For *time* to be comprehended as money, one has to take a leap from the physical context of money in terms of its socio-economic uses and influences to an abstract temporal realm in which one relates to the fact that an economic engagement takes a while to grow and yield profit. Only from such a scenario can one make a connection of sorts between money and time.

Similar metaphorical leaps such as the one illustrated abound in the play. An example is given below:

Titubi: *We have respect for the law though the law is a donkey.*

These beggers have been riding it with glee down our spine all these days (p8)

Note that though the expression ...*the law is a donkey* is derived from the common idiomatic usage ...*the law is an ass,* its meaning is arrived as through a complex process of logical deduction. Part of that process can be represented as a series of thoughts that link:

> *Laws are ubiquitous societal realities.*
> *Their complexities sometimes make them contradictory.*
> *One who frequently contradicts self is not wise.*
> *One who is not wise is stupid.*
> *Stupidity is more a feature of animals than humans.*

> *The law is like an animal that is believed to be foolish.*
> *Donkey is an animal regarded to be foolish.*
> *The law is a donkey.*
> *The law is a fool.*

The comparison to donkey in may be seen as a kind of literary embellishment but it can be argued that it represents a matrix of social issues – the basis of which can be the dissatisfaction of individuals or a group of people with state of affairs vis-à-vis the enactment and enforcement of rules and regulations. It raises fundamental questions about social justice, social equality and social discrimination. It can indeed be described as a dissident statement in that it challenges the powers that are; challenges the authority that preaches egalitarianism but dishes out biased justice on the populace. Dragging the lofty law to the level of a basal beast is not a mere literary act but rather a social act of protest.

Another dimension is added to the expression with the appended *riding... with glee* which on one hand downplays the enormity of the message with its humorous twist but on the other hand, at the objectified social level, it represents a relegation of status – say for instance, riding a donkey is less dignified compared to riding a horse. The added expression *...down our spine all these days* introduces the dichotomous social relation between the *we* and *them* as can be seen in this extract:

We have respect for the law though the law is a donkey.

These beggers have been riding it with glee down our spine all these days (p8)

With respect to the players in the expression, two positions related to attitude and to law and authority can be recognized:

We...	**They...**
have respect for the law..	*(Implied) have no respect for the law*

know the law is a donkey.	*know the law is a donkey.*
are keeping the law.	*are breaking the law.*
are irked by their breaking of the law.	*are happy breaking the law.*

The different perspectives discernible from the extract illustrate how structural metaphors enable the channelling of images to enact preferred representations by given social actors. By referring to the act of riding, the expression allows a highly structured and clearly delineated linguistic concept to systematically structure correlations between the objects of thoughts expressed in language with the objects of our experiences. Thus, the example above, in addition to entertaining the audience with its literary dexterity also makes a serious social commentary.

Cultural or Experiential Metaphorical Frame

Some of the metaphors in the play have their source in common physical or cultural experience or both, as we find many metaphorical usages that are created form the realities experienced by Nigerians or people living in a Nigerian community and familiar with the antics of Nigerians from different spheres of life. The extracts given below illustrate some instances of that:

Police Corporal: Y*ou think we can't recognize a rioter when we see one, eh? Slandering a <u>decent woman?</u>*

The expression *decent woman* can be explicated from two perspectives here: First, with reference to the conceptualisation of *decency* derivable an assumed Nigerian background – which can be regarded as a *given* in the play, and secondly, the literal, universal meaning of *decent*. In the case of the play, the woman in question is a prostitute and hence, from the Nigerian cultural background at least, and certainly from most cultural/societal perspectives, not deserving of the appellation *decent*. It follows, therefore that the universal sub set of decent individuals excludes this woman. Based on the two

accounts, the statement *Slandering a <u>decent woman</u>?* by the policeman presents an incongruous orientation-metaphoric relationship because the resultant meaning is in an apparent but sarcastic taking of side. What emerges from this is the social-ethic positions – first, is it *decency* to try to protect one's wealth by crooked means (rioting in this case) and second, does one acquire decency merely by virtue of the status bestowed upon one because of wealth notwithstanding the means that wealth is acquired (in this case through prostitution)?

In-Group Discourse Positioning

In the play, the metaphoric usages based on social experiences tend to reflect the existing power struggles and social inequality in society depicted in the play. There is an implied ideological bias underlying the lexical choice of certain actors that follows a rather clear strategic pattern for different groups. This stresses the importance of discourse strategies in determining group identity or expressing group attitude or sentiment. Consider the following extracts:

Titubi: *Watch your tongue…I wasn't <u>bred in the gutter</u>.*

Titubi: *<u>They</u> come here night after night and <u>throw bricks</u> at <u>us</u>.*

Superitendant: *<u>The peasants</u> are <u>strong</u>…<u>invincible</u> cos they are solidly united by the <u>greatest force in the world</u>…hunger*

Titubi & co: *Wipe out the insane lovers of poverty*

Away with hypocrites

Crush the peasant revolts

Stand, Fight to be rich

For happiness

With good luck and stubbornness

With sweat sweat and cleverness

Oh, fight for your share and do not care P7

Police Corporal: *I gave you your chance to beat it. I shouted from a good distance. The others took the cue and ran but you…all you could do was offer your yansh*. Well, the law's going to kick it.*

Titubi: *…we didn't ask anybody's father not to be rich…*

Did we see anybody's grandmother trading and overturn her wares?...

Titubi: *Did we send locust to anybody's farm?*

Police Corporal: *You didn't think it wise to run abi? You heard the law approaching and you dared to wait? 10*

The extracts afirms the findings from inter-group, stereotyping studies and social cognition research that in general, members of groups, their friends and allies tend to be described in positive terms, while out-groups or opponents are described in negative terms (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; Turner and Giles, 1981). Thus, in terms of the ideological underpinnings of CDA, we see a playing out of a power struggle between a powerful group and a suppressed one with the linguistic choices exposing the institutionalised social inequalities of that community. We can illustrate that as shown below:

Endearing WE	**Despicable THEM**
NOT bred in the gutter	bred in the gutter
throw bricks at us	They hate us
United by a loftier cause	united by the …hunger – a basal cause

The police corporal and Titubu make it clear which side of the divide they belong to and their divergent talking-points first exhibit discourse

structures that enact positive and negative judgements about the two groups. For instance, through semantic implicatures, they succeeded in highlighting their position or belief: that as a group, they are of noble birth as they are NOT *bred in the gutter* as others are impliedly are; that they are the ones wronged by the other group who *throw bricks* at them; that whereas the other group are united by a supposedly a basal cause, hunger, they are, impliedly united by a loftier cause. Thus, emphasis is a very general structural notion and as we have seen, it is employed as a means of enacting the attitudinal representations of these groups. It determines the overall evaluative concepts used as well as influence lexical selection. The choice here is seen in the complex metaphoricity rather than simple lexical structures.

The following structures and strategies of text and talk have been put forth as ideologically relevant for in-groups and out-groups respectively:

Descriptive Strategies for In-Group/Out-Group Actions

IN-GROUP	OUT-GROUP
Emphasis	*De-emphasis*
*I **wasn't** bred in the gutter* – through negation	
*They come here **night after night** and **throw bricks** at **us***.	*They* – distant, impersonalised
Hyperbole	*Litotes*
*They come here <u>night after night</u> and <u>throw bricks</u> at **us***.	
<u>*The peasants are strong*</u>…<u>*invincible*</u> - sarcasm	*Invincible...solidly united by the* <u>*greatest force in the*</u> <u>*world*</u>…**hunger**
Prominent Position	*Lowly Position*

I gave you your chance to beat it. *I shouted from a good distance.* *Well, the law's going to kick it.* *You heard the law approaching and you dared to wait?*	*The others took the cue and ran but* *you…all you could do was offer your yansh*.* *You didn't think it wise to run abi?* **buttocks*
Objectified Goals *Oh, fight for your share and do not care* *For happiness* *With good luck and stubbornness* *With sweat sweat and cleverness* *Stand, Fight to be rich*	***Subjectified Goals*** *insane lovers of power* *hypocrites* *peasant revolts*
Argumentative Support *…we didn't ask anybody's father not to be rich…* *Did we see anybody's grandmother trading and overturn her wares?...* *Did we send locust to anybody's farm?*	***No Argumentative Support***

It should be noted that rather than just serving literary, aesthetic function, the lexical choices and their metaphoric choices and descriptions position social actors in a social power play. The description and attribution of negative actions, which generally will tend to be de-emphasized for in-groups as we have seen above in, argumentative support, attribution to personality, prominent positioning, hyperbolic expression and emphasis. These principles are

well-known in the social psychology of attribution and intergroup relations, and also apply to discursive strategies.

Conclusion

The highlights presented reveal that metaphorical usages are not merely literary devices as commonly seen used in literature but are significant sociologically tools used in the enactment of different kinds of social representations. Revelation of the processes leading to such representations will help not only in the explication of literary work at a much more deeper level than the language and theme style of analysis frequently employed by in literary analysis – especially by upcoming literary scholars, it will as well enable a pragmatic understanding of pressing societal issues related to social status, role assignment and inequalities among others. For instance, through analysis of metaphorical usages in *Morountodun*, one begins to comprehend how liberty for misdemeanour is discursively enacted in the discourse of a dominant group –especially when it is correlated with wealth and power of individuals.

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