

Metaphors Amali Writes By:
A Cognitive Stylistic Study of Efeega: War of Ants

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Abstract

Idris Amali is a contemporary Nigerian poet who speaks on issues bordering around the ills and vices of his immediate society as well as of those marring the development of the world at large. Several scholarly studies have been carried out in interpreting his work, however leaving out a look at his cognition which plays a pivotal role in his packaging of message. This paper experiments a cognitive stylistic tool (Conceptual Metaphor Theory) into the thought process of this expressive poet to reveal the conceptual metaphors that shapes his understanding of concepts as manifested in his language construct. Conceptual metaphor is a theory of metaphor in cognitive stylistics which sees metaphorical patterns as neither just linguistic embellishment nor trope but as the basic components of human thought process. It is the understanding of concepts or experiences in terms of other concepts or happenings. The poems analysed in this work are strictly those from the book, *Efeega: War of Ants*; and the concepts surveyed are the sun, rain, nation/cities and victory. His linguistic representation of these concepts are analysed using CMT and the conceptual metaphors drawn from them are revealed. The paper concludes that indeed the poet thinks of concepts in terms of other distinct unrelated concepts. His thoughts are shaped and pervaded with metaphors that follow a systematic pattern which influences his painting and portrayal of ideas to his readers.

Introduction

Idris Amali is a Professor of Oral Literature presently with the Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Lafia, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. To his credit are three publications of poetry: *Generals without War*, *Back Again at the Foothills of Greed* and *Efeega: War of Ants*. These three publications have put him forth as a poet who speaks on the economic, political, social and moral vices especially of his immediate society. He is a prolific writer who has creatively and colourfully employed literary devices in packaging his messages to his audience.

His style of writing embraces symbolism, imagery, strident tenor, persistent rhetorical questions among others (Egya 281). Several successful attempts have been carried out by literary and non-literary scholars alike in describing the poet's works thereby coming up with several interpretations of his message. All efforts to tag appropriate meaning to literary texts would be complete if readers would have access to a writer's mind, which is not an impossible thing as supported by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, a theory embraced into cognitive stylistics. Stylistics, a branch of language study which examines ways meaning is created through language, among a number of its functions, provides tools for the unravelling of the cognitive aspects involved in the crafting of meaning by writers. This aspect is covered in cognitive stylistics, a branch of stylistics, also known as cognitive poetics simply put by Peter Stockwell as being "all about reading literature" (1). This branch of stylistics concerns itself with the state of mind of both writers and readers; and what goes on while reading literature. Among the various exhaustive frameworks encompassed in this branch of stylistics is the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). It is a theory that is anchored on the understanding that our thought processes are pervaded with metaphorical patterns and as such speakers/writers perceive concepts in terms of other concepts. A bunch of metaphors is said to exist in the conceptual system of writers/speakers and this is evident in their linguistic construct and way of life as they live/write by them.

This work studies Idris O. O. Amali's *Efeega: War of Ants* with the aim of revealing the conceptual metaphors that are fundamental to his thought process in order not to only further buttress and exemplify the conceptual metaphor theory which has recently faced a number of criticism but also to facilitate a better understanding of the poet himself and to enhance appropriate interpretation of his work. The paper surveys the language constructs of Idris Amali in this collection and reveals the conceptual metaphors that pervade his thoughts and explores the mappings of conceptual domains in his cognition. In a simple sentence, this work reveals the conceptual metaphors that Amali writes by.

Empirical Review of Studies on Amali

Since the publication of his first collection of poems, *Generals without Wars*, in 2000 where he recreates the military misrule in Nigeria, many scholars

have been incited to study this fearless north central poet. Amali has been studied as a poet filled with anger over the mismanagement and misrule in his society.

Effiok Uwatt, in his work "Scorpion Pains: Thematic and Stylistics Preoccupations in Idris Amali's *Generals without War*", brings to light the fact that Amali's poems are "missiles in Amali's cannon against all those who constitute themselves into "scorpion stings" in the lives and socio-political fabric of the people" (477), stating clearly what constitute Amali's „scorpion stings" to include "corruption and embezzlement at high places, dilapidated school buildings, ill-equipped libraries and laboratories, epileptic electricity supply, high rate of infant mortality, short longevity, and the frustration of the academia, medical practitioners and technocrats" (483). Furthermore in his comparative study of Odia Ofeimun's *Go Tell the Generals* and Amali's *Generals without War*, Uwatt concludes that though both poets are filled with anger and have repugnance towards military misrule, Amali's poetry, however is less preoccupied in approach with militancy and activism like Odia Ofeimun's (215). In the same vein, Emmanuel Sule Egya describes Amali as one who speaks with "anger, lamentation, and pessimism", further stressing that "his narrative(s) reminds us of the social function of art that rejects silence and lethargy" (272). Wakili studies Amali's *Back Again at the Foothills of Greed* as a collection that brings to the awareness of the masses, the unproductiveness of corruption, crisis, environmental neglect, and greed to the society (53-61).

Taking a different dimension to the conclusions of the above studies, Benjamin Onwuka Orji-Mba contends that Amali is more of an environmental poet than what has been "ascribed to him" (Eco-Critical Imagery, 2). Orji-Mba concludes in this work that Amali, conscious of his environment, portrays the disasters and destructions the environment faces to the world. Inspired by this, this paper focuses on the linguistic construct of poems portraying the poet's projection of the nature of his environment and also on the concept of national victory which is the purpose of the fight he calls for: a major thematic preoccupation of his works.

In Amali's most recent collection of poems, *Efeega: War of Ants*, like a complaining child who never quits until his/her demands are met, he persistently captures issues he is known to fight for. In a review of the work, Orji-Mba projects the book as a demonstration of "an uncanny sense of rage against the destroyers of the Nigerian (in fact African and global) people and place..." which

he added “takes a radical step forward to call for an “armless” war against the looters of the commonwealth of the people” (ANA Review, 230).

Since *Efeega: War of Ants* captures the poet’s major thematic concerns, already the concerns of many other works and to avoid being common place, therefore this work focuses on the linguistic constructs of this collection to access Amali’s conceptual system and thereby show the metaphors that pervade it.

Review of Conceptual Metaphor

Traditionally, a metaphor is a direct comparison of two dissimilar entities. This is the simplest and most straightforward definition of the term metaphor. Unlike simile, in metaphor the comparison of items is not done explicitly. While simile, explicitly uses „as“ or „like“ in comparison, metaphor simply states an item to be what it is being compared with. Metaphorical expressions bring to light some hidden similarities between distinct items thereby rendering some clarity to the item described. To the traditionalist, a metaphor is typically seen as a kind of linguistic embellishment, a trope and a figure of speech used in comparing an entity or idea with another unrelated one. The two compared items are distinctively different but similar. There is usually a subject and term in metaphorical expressions. Ivan Armstrong Richards in his *The Philosophy of Rhetorics* (1936) termed the subject as „tenor“ and the metaphorical term as „vehicle“.

Unlike in rhetoric or traditional approaches to figurative language, cognitive linguistics approached views metaphor beyond being a mere linguistic colouring realised at the level of sentence and utterance but moves further to explain it as perceptions realised in the cognition of man. Metaphors are seen as fundamental and central to how humans understand the world. The traditionalists at best treat metaphor “as if it were always the result of some operation performed upon the literal meaning of the utterance” (“Conceptual Metaphors”, 453). In cognitive linguistics, metaphor is conceived as a thought process of construing concepts in terms of other concepts. It occurs in the mind and guides a speaker in making the utterances or sentences that represent their thoughts. It is worthwhile to note that metaphorical patterns are not necessarily displayed in linguistic representation of thoughts but are themselves patterns that shape thoughts. This manner of perceiving metaphors is captured in cognitive linguistics’ Conceptual Metaphor Theory. Nina Norgaard, Beatrix Busse and Rocio Montoro summarise

the argument of the theory thus: “Conceptual metaphor theory (CMT for short) defends that metaphorical patterns are a pervasive and fundamental component of the human thought process and not simply a linguistic device to enhance language, especially as found in literary discourses” (60).

This suffices to assert that humans think in metaphors. The human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical. Our understanding and thoughts about concepts are based on other concepts which are usually unrelated and this tends to occur at the cognitive level, not in utterances or sentences. It is the argument of CMT that the conceptual system of humans which dictates the way they perceive things and act is metaphorical in nature. Humans experience several happenings in life and tend to think of other situations in terms of their different unrelated experiences. One of the typical examples of Lakoff and Johnson is the argument-is-war conceptual metaphor which they came up with from the conventional ways in which people express their impressions about argument as presented below:

Your claims are *indefensible*.
He *attacked every weak point* in my argument.
His criticisms were *right on target*. I
demolished his argument.
I’ve never *won* an argument with him. You
disagree? Okay *shoot*!
If you use that *strategy*, he’ll *wipe you out*.
He *shot down* all my arguments. (“Conceptual Metaphors”, 454)

The expressions *indefensible*, *attacked every weak point*, *right on target*, *demolished*, *won*, *shoot*, *strategy*, *wipe you out*, *shot down*, are all expressions found in the register of war but are used here to express perceptions about argument. Points in arguments are attacked, demolished, wiped out, shot at and defended like in a war. They are linguistically constructed as a war. This indicates that people naturally think of argument in terms of war, hence, the metaphor argument-is-war, exists in their conceptual system.

The different situation of which man thinks in line with are technically termed „conceptual domains“. This indicates that our understanding of one conceptual domains is shaped by other conceptual domains. What then constitutes a conceptual domain is what Zoltan Kovecses simply explains as “any coherent organisation of experience” (4). They include the experiences of war, love, health

and illness, movements and directions, morality, emotions and desires, life and death, etc. Humans tend to think about events along these experiences. The domain in which traits are drawn from to establish a relationship of equivalence is the „source domain“ while the domain the traits are applied to is the „target domain“. The source and the target domains are equivalent to vehicle and tenor respectively of I.A. Richards. The blending of such opposite domains gives rise to conceptual metaphors and the process of shift of one domain to the other is called „mappings“. The mapping of both domains is irreversible as the source domains constitute concrete patterns of experiences such as war, sports, movements and directions as opposed to target domains which include abstract aspects of life such as love, argument, emotions, anger, etc.

Lakoff and Johnson identify three types of conceptual metaphors: Structural, orientational and physical metaphor. Physical metaphor occurs when a concept is portrayed in substance status which it inherently does not possess. The following expressions project non-tangible phenomenon with entity status. *My fear of insects is driving my wife crazy. You've got too much of hostility in you. The brutality of war dehumanizes us all.* Orientational metaphors orient concepts in terms of space. This type of metaphor gives concepts spatial orientation such as up-down, far-near, etc. Hence the conceptual metaphors happiness-is-up, sadness-is-down, deduced from conventional expressions such as *I'm feeling up. That boosted my spirit. My spirits rose. You're in high spirits. Thinking about her always gives me a lift. I'm feeling down. I'm depressed. He's really low these days. I fell into a depression. My spirits sank.* This type of metaphor organises the systems of a concept in respect to space. Structural metaphors, on the other hand, structure concepts metaphorically in one experiential domain in terms of other concepts in another unrelated experiential domain (Lakoff and Johnson, Conceptual Metaphors, 461-462).

The metaphorical patterns in which individuals think are realised through linguistic manifestation of their thoughts. People think in certain lines automatically and the lines in which they think in terms of are not obvious because our conceptual system is something we are unaware of. Now, linguistic expressions are a way of accessing man's thinking line. The nature of embedded experiences rather than similarities triggers the existence of conceptual metaphors and as Vyvyan Evans states, "linguistic expressions provide an important line of evidence for the existence of the conceptual metaphors" (77).

Conceptual Metaphors from Efeega: War of Ants

Studies have revealed that Amali's thematic preoccupation predominantly reflects corruption, greed and a war against societal and political vices to attain national victory. This study narrows its concerns to the exploration of the representation of the concept of national victory and that of Amali's social setting and environment. A number of aspects of nature namely: flies, wind/sand, stars, moon, sun, trees, rain, mountains, cities/nations, ants, horses, etc. are covered in *Efeega: War of Ants*. The most harped on, however, are cities/nations, which are the thematic concerns of twenty poems, the sun, projected in five poems, and the rain in three poems. The analysis of the work therefore gears its attention towards the language use in the poet's crafting of the concept of sun, rain, cities/nations and victory.

His linguistic construct in these poems is analysed, the conceptual metaphors drawn from them are presented in bold capital letters and a tabular summary, adopted from Evans (2014), of the mappings of the two domains of each conceptual metaphor is given after each description.

The Sun

Awaiting the eye of the sun (line 5, "The Eye of the Sun"),

The sun etched in militant steps at dawn chasing heels of immobile earth/
His retinue:/ fat flies, tiny armour headed ants (Line 11-14, "Maiduguri
of Dying Dreams")

Evening rain clouds matured, raped by the sun (Line 26, "Reporting the
Sun")

Even when the sun/ Goes to sleep/ and snores/ its anger left
behind/ Chases us in the dark/ as its earth/ Emits heat for a spoil (line 1-
7, "Yelwa")

And the sun at its quick march/ brought out its army of hate from its
armoury of heat (line 2-3, "The Sun of Today").

Maiduguri is a humid area known for its sun that exudes harsh heat. The poet portrays the sun in substance status peculiar to humans which it naturally does not possess. The undesired heat that comes with the rising of the sun is portrayed as „etched“; a human attribute, qualified by the adverbials, „in militant steps at

dawn". This points to the poet's understanding of the rising of the sun as dreadful as the coming of militant soldiers. People run at the sight of militant soldiers. So also do people run from the heat of the sun, a situation fashioned with the transitive verb „chase" in which the sun is the subject. The structuring of the scorching heat that comes with early morning sun which is naturally expected to be warm is like that of a hurried „quick march" of militant soldiers eager to harm. Like a militant soldier, the sun is structured to have „retinue", that is, the „fat flies" and „tiny armour headed ants" that worsen the unbearable heat of the sun. The sudden appearance of the sun after a thick cloud without rain he structured as a deliberate act of „rape" on the part of the sun. Sunset is designed as if the sun deliberately puts itself to „sleep" and as it completely disappears at night, the poet linguistically projects it as a human in a deep sleep usually signified by „snores". The heat that pervades the air even without the presence of the sun is portrayed like an „army" of militant soldiers left in its „armoury" to torment its victims at night. Amali fashions the sun, its rising, setting and the effect of its heat on people, as well as other factors that make the heat more unbearable in terms of the activities of militant soldiers. Hence, the conceptual metaphor **SUN IS A MILITANT SOLDIER**. Activities from the source domain – militant soldier, are transferred to the target domain – sun, to portray the poet's understanding of the sun.

Source domain: MILITANT SOLDIER	Mappings	Target Domain: SUN
The eye, militant steps and their dreadful quick march.	→	Early sunrise which immediately emits scorching heat
Retinue of the soldiers	→	Worsening factors to the heat like ants, flies, dust, etc.
They sleep and snores	→	Sunsets and night times
The anger, army, armoury and acts of chase	→	Unbearable heat left by the hot sun which makes people leave their rooms at night to sleep outside.

Acts of Rape	→	Sudden appearance of sun after a dark cloud without rain.
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The Rain

Again and again the rain:/Rumbled/ Grumbled/ Gambled... As the rains die in their foetus of rains/ In Maiduguri of dying dreams ("Maiduguri of dying dreams")

Evening rain clouds matured, raped by the sun/ As no single drop visited the land (line 26-27, "Reporting the sun")

The experience of rainfall in Maiduguri is physically structured in terms of the condition of an overpowered person. Knowledge of a subjugated person which is the source domain here is employed to project the experience of rain – the target domain. The rain is portrayed in verbs – rumbled, grumbled, gambled, die, mature and visit, which it inherently cannot do. The sound of thunder without rain is portrayed like the act of a subjugated person who complains to no avail. Thick clouds which herald heavy rain is structured linguistically like the maturity of a person while its drizzles are qualified with the adjective foetus an adjective used to describe humanly state. The sudden disappearance of thick cloud signalling a heavy rain is projected as an act of „rape by the sun“. The verb „visit“ is used to portray the act of rainfall, which scarcely occurs in Maiduguri, giving it human status. Rain is painted physically as oppressed by the sun, an exhibition which reveals the existence of the physical conceptual metaphor **RAIN IS A SUBJUGATED PERSON**. A reader only needs to employ the state of an oppressed person to grasp the state of rain in Maiduguri.

Source Domain: Subjugated Person	Mappings	Target Domain: Rain
Fruitless complaints and grumbles	→	Sounds of thunder without rain
Foetus of man	→	Drizzles of rain

Maturity	→	Thick clouds
Dies and gets raped by oppressors	→	Ceases due to sudden appearance of the sun

CITIES/NATIONS

There has to be a citadel of learning/as the quiet sleeping city of Lapai/at the edge of life/Bestowed the hosting right of knowledge... As Lapai owner of hosting right of knowledge/In the new toga/Awake from a decade of snoring slumber/Wearing a new face/to break concrete darkness of decade past/To embrace a course for humanity ("Lapai" 1-9, 22-28).

The amputated city of Gaza... Acrobatic aerial combat embattled with the air/Trembling Gaza with fireworks of death... The chemical warfare reigns and rains/On the armless city of Gaza... As the unarmed city of Gaza/is pounded into rubbles... And Gaza must bleed the orphan blood ("Watching Gaza live")

Maiduguri, the unfortunate child/Born on the threshold of peace/Crowned the home of peace (Maiduguri of peace) we are back again Lagos/into the womb of Lagos... But into the warm embrace/of Ajegunle and Ojuelegba/to feel the warmth of the oozing stench of the slums... As the lean stomachs of:/Obalende, Ojuelegba and Ajegunle/Turn into balloons hung ("Back Again: Lagos")

Gwosh erupts again/More violent than ever/In hot-tempered heart beyond wisdom... 24 hours curfew persists/But the hate-tempered city/Remains hot-tempered Gwosh (To "Mohammed: In Bradford")

Where is the soul of the NATION?/Ours is without a soul ("To Labaran Maku(i)")

Amali structures cities/nations in physical human qualities which they inherently lack. The discovery of a town is structured like the birth of a man which marks the beginning of his existence. The central part of a person which homes his vital organs is the stomach and the most productive part of a human body is the womb; and here the liveliest area with commercial activities of a city is structured in terms of the womb and stomach. The poet structures the peace he feels in a city like the physical warm embrace of a man which signals love and hospitality. A man in a state of slumber or sleep is usually unproductive and can only become active and productive only when awake; a state in which a non-developing city is

said to be in, which when educational and economic developments begin, is seen as having awoken. An amputated, armless and unarmed man can hardly defend himself and is therefore prone to helpless attacks; it is in this line that the poet structures a helpless city (Gaza) under attack. The poet physically fashions a nation in war like a violent hot tempered man that brings no peace and a corrupt nation as a man without a soul which is considered heartless without any sense of righteousness. All these point to the existence of the conceptual metaphor **CITIES ARE HUMANS**. More evidence to the fact that Amali conceptualises town/cities/nations in terms of his understanding of a human being is seen in the poem „To Heladzira Balami (i)“, where he unambiguously and denotatively asked the addressed (a former colleague of his at the University of Maiduguri),

“If this nation had been a human being/Full hot blooded and breathing Like you and I...Where would it have been?”

Also he addresses cities as humans, as seen in: “Jos: We do not now know”, “Maiduguri of peace”, “Lagos: the calls” among others, as if in a direct conversation with a human being.

Source Domain: Human	Mappings	Target Domain: City/Nation
Birth of a man	————→	Discovery of a city/nation
Man’s warm embrace	————→	City’s peace and liveliness
State of sleep and slumber	————→	State of not developing
Awaken state	————→	State of social and economic development
Amputated and armless	————→	Without military arsenals
Violent and hot tempered	————→	In war
Heartless and wicked	————→	Filled with corrupt citizens

VICTORY

Let’s rise brothers and sisters... Resolved to regain our stolen rights...
Let’s rise brothers and sisters... Against these brethren/Of this season of loot (“Rise”).

How long shall we pride ourselves...Awaiting our turn to loot these barns/Of our treasure...How long shall we look into the sky?. And

watch the cubs we fed devour daily: Our hopes/Our aspiration... (“How long?”).

When shall we rise/Rise against these thickening clouds...Against these choking clouds...Against these gluttonous clouds...Against these choking clouds/Before they eclipse our hopes (“When shall we rise”).

Victory is oriented spatially to be above. It is structured as if it is above and the fight for it is an upward movement. For one to achieve victory against the despoilers of the nation’s value, it is portrayed as if one has to literally move upward towards the sky and remain there. In most of the instances in which he encourages a fight against the vices of the society he employs the expression „rise“, signifying that victory is up and an upward movement is a fight for it. Lethargy is structured as an act of watching and waiting without physically moving to an upward position. The expression „How long shall we look into the sky“ reveals that his mind orients the concept of victory to be up and an imagery of the masses watching victory above without moving to it is created here. This manifests the conceptual metaphor **VICTORY IS UP**. He therefore encourages them to move up to that victory above against the despoilers of the nation’s treasure.

Source Domain: Up	Mappings	Target Domain: Victory
Waiting and watching above	————→	Lethargy
Upward movement	————→	Fight
Up	————→	Victory

Conclusion

From the study of the language construct of Amali’s *Efeega: War of Ants*, it is revealed that the poet conceptualises the concept of victory, cities/nations, the sun and rain in Maiduguri, a town he spent more than thirty decades of his sojourn on earth in, in the following metaphors respectively: **VICTORY IS UP**, **CITIES/NATIONS ARE HUMANS**, **SUN IS A MILITANT SOLDIER AND RAIN IS A SUBJUGATED PERSON**. The conceptual metaphor **VICTORY IS UP** is a conventional one while **CITIES/NATIONS ARE HUMANS**, **SUN IS A MILITANT SOLDIER AND RAIN IS A SUBJUGATED PERSON** are novel

metaphors. The way people live, write and speak shows they naturally orient positive phenomena of life in the domain of success, health, victory, etc. to be up. Amali is no exception to this as exposed in this work. However, the novel metaphors point out that he exclusively conceptualises his experience of the sun and rain in Maiduguri in terms of a militant soldier and its victims. Like militant soldiers subjugate their victims not allowing them their full right, the intense scorching sun allows not the rain to frequently fall in desert Maiduguri. The novel conceptual metaphor, CITIES/NATIONS ARE HUMANS, indicates that he uniquely thinks of cities/nations in terms of human beings thereby explicating his belief and value for them. Like any human being, lands have rights that ought to be valued, respected and upheld, not to be destroyed but developed.

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