



## Conceptual Metaphor: Semantics of Taglines in Big Brother Naija

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**Abstract:** This study investigates a semantic analysis of taglines in Big Brother Naija. It identifies semantic structures which are synonymous with the taglines of ten various seasons of BB Naija in sequence. The taglines of the BB Naija's seasons which constitute data for the study are collected from the internet. The researchers explore Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a linguistic theory for the semantic analysis. The study reveals that expressions which are semantically synonymous with one another can differ in structures and the BB Naija's taglines as conceptual metaphors denote happenings in Nigeria implicitly. The concepts of the taglines and their synonymous semantic structures function to inform, encourage or warn. They inform to note that life is a field of games; there is compounded problem; and there is restriction. They encourage to note that excellence entails hard-work, and progress. They warn by commanding Nigerian(s) to be smart and to protect oneself. The study concludes that expressions which are semantically synonymous can differ in structures.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor, Semantic Structure, Taglines, Source Domain, Target Domain

### 1.0 Introduction:

Language as an indispensable device for humans' communication is explored to express intentions, and pass messages across people in a society and beyond. The vital tool that language is, serves as thought-transmission channel through which the ideas and feelings are shared amongst people. The spine of language use is the ability to articulate or perceive its properties and process the same for understanding of the conceived meaning there-in. Both language and meaning are therefore interdependent. People use language with the intention of conveying meaning. According to Thomas (2019) as cited by Willie and Isong (2024), "language is used to



instigate, influence, induce, control and express change". Sequel to the view on language, meanings are embedded in language which give capacity to function as required. If meaning is lacking in what is said, the function of instigation or influence will be impossible. Result of this, concepts in utterances are structured with a view to informing, encouraging or warning.

The passage of information, encouragement or warning through the derived meaning in the language is not, more often than not, direct. The language users play games of language devices in their utterance. The utterances or expressions which are not direct need their meanings derived by mental process. The cognitive process is therefore instrumental to affordances to decipher or deduce meanings from the indirect language structures. Indirect language structures entail construction of expressions in not direct manner but with involvement of human speech figures comprising metaphor.

According to Igbeneghu (2024), "metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon, but also a cognitive one". The involvement of metaphor in the construction of a conceptual structure definitely needs application of cognitive services for realisation of meaning constructions synonymously associated with the metaphor deployed in the expressions. Holliday (1985) explains that metaphor as a language device is employed to represent something similar to that which it refers to, the epitomes comprise shift from concrete domain to non-representational sense, and category of these is from source domain to cognitive domain. Holliday (1985) submits further that metaphor is best described as "variation in the use of words". The description and definition of metaphor are centred and bothered on how meanings are expressed rather than how words are used. Metaphor in language is used to denote one thing in terms of another by transferring of X qualities to Y. All is to convey conceived meanings. Tay (2014) reports that generative-semanticists submit that "expressions which are (roughly) synonymous..., might differ very considerably in their wordings, always share a common semantic structure". The report or submission of the linguists is a cutting-edge pathway to logical conclusion that various concepts may share same semantic effect or they may be synonymous with another wordings. This forms alignment to the study of use of words in context for meaning explication. The context of words' use is thus the determinant of the meaning irrespective of the words' structure or concept.



This study therefore, subjects concepts of taglines in Big Brother Naija to cognitive process and context of use in order to figure out the synonymous and semantic realisation to each of the concepts. Every spoken/written concept conveys meaning in tandem with the intention of the speaker/writer. As such, the taglines with linguistic analysis, using conceptual metaphor, foreground semantic negotiation of information, encouragement and warning.

## **2.0 Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) constitutes theory for this study. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is propounded by three major publications. The publications are seminar presentations titled "Metaphor We Live By" by Lakoff and Johnson (1980); "The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor" by Lakoff (1993); and "Philosophy in the Flesh" by Lakoff and Johnson (1999). It is evident the seminar papers emerge the conceptual metaphor theory and the theory is emanated from the concepts of metaphor.

Metaphor simply means endowment of one's qualities to another. It is making one object behave like another or use of an object to denote another object. Therefore, A is said to be B by transferring the qualities A to B or vice versa. This is only possible by playing the language games for effect of rhetoric and semantic negotiation. Tay (2014) notes that CMT positions itself "as contemporary, conceptual and major pillar of the cognitive linguistics paradigm, proceeds to argue for the relationship between linguistic metaphors and human cognition". This linguistic note establishes that finding meanings for metaphorical expressions demands application of cognition in addition to linguistic rules. Kovecses (2015) submits that "metaphor occurs in thought", mental thinking or medulla oblongata should be in use if adequate semantic structure be found to match the expressed meaning in the compressed language of the metaphorical expressions. Kovecses (2002) quotes Lakoff and Johnson (1980) stating that a conceptual metaphor is a systemic set of correspondences between two domains of experience. The identified domains are source domain and target domain. In language use involving conceptual metaphor, the speaker uses the experience (concrete domain/source domain) to map intention (abstract domain/target domain) in their expressions. Critical mental thinking with context and



other language parameters are employed for discovery of the target domain even though source domain is provided.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, to many linguists, suggests that metaphors are all-pervasive because they are not only rooted for analysis in certain genres for creation of dramatic effects in literature but also in the most neutral. That is, most non-deliberately used forms of language. Sources of non-deliberate use of language forms such as conceptual metaphors include television broadcast, radio broadcast, dictionaries, newspapers, magazines, conversations to mention a few (Kovecses, 2005). This study collects its data from Big Brother Naija, a Nigerian International Television Show with many seasons where taglines are not made deliberately to form conceptual metaphors. Therefore, application of CMT as theory for the data analysis to produce target domain for the provided source domain is apt.

### 3.0 Methodology

The data for this study are taglines or subtitles of Big Brother Naija's Seasons, the Nigerian International Television Show. The Big Brother Naija is fondly abbreviated to BB Naija. It produces ten seasons so far. The ten BB Naija's seasons with their taglines and years constitute the data which are collected from the internet where they are readily available for consumption. The researchers explore alpha-numeric coding strategies to name the data for easy reference and identification. The researchers analyse the data applying Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory on the data. The analysis identifies synonymous and semantic structures to each of the BB Naija's taglines.

### 4.0 Data Presentation and Discussion

Big Brother Naija has so far produced ten seasons in Nigeria with distinct taglines of each of the ten shows. The seasons, years of the shows, taglines of the shows and semantic structures of the shows are presented on Table 4.0.

Season	Year	Tagline	Semantic Structure
1	2006	Big Brother Naija	Life as a Field of Game
2	2017	See Gobe	There are Troubles
3	2018	Double Wahala	Compounded Problem



4	2019	Pepper Dem	Inflict Pain on them
5	2020	Lockdown	Restriction
6	2021	Shine ya Eye	Be Smart
7	2022	Level up	Progress
8	2023	All Stars	Celebrities
9	2024	No Loose Guard	Protect Oneself
10	2025	10/10	Excellent

#### 4.1 Big Brother Naija Figures Life as a Field of Games

The nominal phrase "Big Brother Naija" is metaphorical and semantically conceived. The metaphorical message embedded in the season one is conveyed by mapping the target domain "life as a field of games". This semantic structure is mapped by the source domain "big brother naija". Generative semanticists note that expressions that are synonymous with each other can differ in syntactic structures but share common semantic structures. Therefore, "big brother naija" is metaphorically synonymous with "life as a field of games" in Nigeria. The target domain concept is also deciphered to be won by only person equipped with wherewithal comprising strength, ruggedness, grace and favour. The metaphorical concept "big brother naija" shows implication of "life as a field of games" when role of background in Nigeria context is in play in relation to linguistic semantics. The notion of the concept solely bothers on "big brother" with meaning realisation as "favoured personality". A differently favoured or seriously blessed person is named "a big brother" in Nigeria. The source domain "big brother" therefore conveys semantic structure "favoured personality" in whatever form. The tagline "big brother naija" as source domain mentally represents "life as a field of games", the abstract (target) domain. The source domain draws on conceptual metaphor whose semantic structure produces semantic representation of how Nigerians contest in real life, how they are appraised, motivated or condemned by the relations. The conceptual structure of source domain semantically implies that the motivated Nigerians "big brother" win the games and the condemned lose out. The source domain does not only convey semantic description of realities in Nigeria about contests but also



show understanding of how target domain should be cognitively captured by transferring knowledge of the physical games to the games in abstract.

#### 4.2 See Gobe Figures There are Troubles

Season two of BB Naija's tagline, "see gobe" is a clause whose metaphorical representation suggests that there is trouble in Nigeria. In a chain of word association involving denotation, "see" is an action word which can be substituted for "observe or notice". In terms of assemblies of semantic features, "see" is synonymous with "observe" or "notice". "Gobe" is a pidgin word and it semantically represents trouble. The clausal structure, "see gobe" is a conceptual metaphor negotiating meaning realisation of "there is trouble". Trouble, which cannot be seen is conceptualised as an object to be seen and touched. The purpose of use of the semantic structure is to draw attention of Nigerians to an unexpected sordid situation of confusions in Nigeria. "See gobe", the semantic structure of the surface form of the expression shares common semantic structure with the target domain "there is trouble" in the land. Metaphorically, the semantic representation of "see gobe" covers such trouble in Nigeria in 2017 as: Bokoharam insurgency, corruption, inter-communal cash, restructuring argument, political defection, economic meltdown, security power abuse, unions' strike, among others. The target domain constitutes the metaphorical concept of the source domain "see gobe". There is no higher "gobe" than the aforementioned.

#### 4.3 Double Wahala Figures Compounded Problem

BB Naija's season three tagline in 2018 is subtitled "double wahala". Double Wahala is a cognitive structure which gives clear message that Nigeria's problem is compounded and become enormous. Conventionally on one hand, "double" semantically realises explicit meaning of "two matching or of twice the quantity". On the other hand, wahala emanates from Hausa language meaning "problem". This has been borrowed into pidgin and it is being used as so. The combination of "double and wahala" constitutes conceptual structure that is metaphorical; it is an expression signalling a desired semantic effect. The conceptual metaphor does not literally mean two problems but it is metaphorically synonymous with intensified difficulty. The source domain "double wahala" suggests target domain as "terse anguish and great problem". The



metaphorical expression "double wahala" in the source domain is constructed by mapping problem as physical loads, and intensity as quantity. This gives impression that the source concept is experientially concrete and it possesses some kind of visible and bodily basis while target concept is abstract and it cannot directly be measured but experienced and perceived. Problem in Nigeria is unmeasurable but "double wahala" leans on role of background that provides specific knowledge about Nigeria suffering condition to quantify the problem. In a real sense, Nigeria and Nigerians get many more problem as listed in season two.

#### **4.4 Pepper Dem Figures Inflict Pain on them**

Big Brother Naija's tagline for season four "pepper dem" is conceptually metaphorical. The conceptual metaphor has various semantic and pragmatic properties or implications. Pepper in "pepper dem", the source domain, literally, refers to a hot spice causing burning sensation in a person. Metaphorically, pepper however, realises semantic effect as to intimidate, inflict pain on, suffer, hurt, or oppress. "Dem" in the same concept is a pidgin word with semantic structure "them" in standard English. It refers to members of the outgroup because it is third person plural pronominal "dem" (them) in objective case of the clause "pepper dem". It indicates non-inclusive of the ingroup of first and second person (speakers and listeners) in the conversation. "Dem" in "pepper dem" is therefore a signifier of members of opposition. According to van Dijk (2006) every society is polarised or bifurcated into ingroup and outgroup for the purpose of exercising power and dominance. The target domain for the expression "pepper dem" is metaphorically captured to portray how groups of the Nigerian society are hellbent in oppressing, suffering, dominating or inflicting pain on outgroup. The conceptual structure "pepper dem" is not about meal but social conflict, dominance, power, affliction, intimidation, victimisation and oppression. In Nigerian political context, "pepper dem" is a common language from a political party against the other. It is commonly uttered by the ones in power to mean that the opposition should feel their heat.

#### **4.5 Lockdown Figures Restriction**

Lockdown, the source domain in season five of BB Naija is metaphorical structure which maps onto restriction as its target domain. Lockdown, the conceptual metaphor provides mental



picture of COVID-19 pandemic and makes concrete of inadequacies in Nigeria which result in Nigerians' restrictions. Lockdown depicts experience reality of Nigerians in terms of politics, education, economy and social life. The concrete domain "lockdown" semantically negotiates restriction, isolation, or limitation of many Nigerians against some legitimate rights. It further implies metaphorical representation of unpleasant concepts of which the semantic structure depicts Nigerians' lives are restricted, isolated or controlled by the oppressors. The metaphorical structure maps to show that Nigerians are locked down, the reason they wallow in abject poverty; and suffer ups and downs endlessly. The negative structures are experientially synonymous with the concept of lockdown. The source domain is therefore a conceptual metaphor whose qualities reflect poverty, hunger, under-development, immobility, hardship, and blockage. The negative concepts are mapped or inferred from lock down because they are semantically synonymous. Lockdown as a conceptual metaphor is polysemous in nature with notion of negative meanings conceived there-in.

#### **4.6 Shine ya Eye Figures Be Smart**

The concept "shine ya eye" is a metaphorical expression marking season six of BB Naija and it is full of various semantic representations. The etymology of the conceptual metaphor of "shine ya eye" is rooted in pidgin and simply denotes "be smart". Denotatively, the expression implies to "open one's eyes wide". The semantic content is the surface form of meaning realisation. At the deep level of meaning making, it is "art of studying people and their intention aimed at eluding the people fall victim of unpleasant incidents". The meaning realised at the deep level is the target domain for the source domain "shine ya eye". In addition, at the deep level of semantics, the metaphorical structure represents being smart, or vigilant. The tagline leans on semantic logic to inform Nigerians that life is full of atrocities and people who are equipped with mental illumination, careful attentiveness and exhibition of smartness can survive or succeed. Ultimately, "shine ya eye" is a conceptual metaphor which mentally maps or cognitively connotes alertness, awareness, sharpness or smartness.

#### **4.7 Level up Figures Progress**



The phrasal verb "level up" is a metaphorical expression that is synonymous with many semantic structures. It bears nearly the same meaning with "shape" another phrasal verb which means "progress in the way you want". "Level up" literally denotes "move to next stage". The phrasal verb being used as conceptual metaphor means progress or develop in a manner one wishes. The semantic structure functions as imperative and it is deciphered to be instructive informing one to improve on behaviour and meet up with the required standard. The function of the metaphor provides mental picture or cognitive meaning deeper than denotation. The deep level meaning realisation depicts the feature of the concept as metaphorical structure. The source domain maps the target domain using "level up" to convey "progress". The metaphorical representation therefore connotes "advance", "improve", "grow", "develop", "rise up", "move higher", "get promoted", or "progress" as synonymous semantic structures. BB Naija's season seven tagline "level up" reflects mapping which encodes social upward mobility of Nigerians irrespective of degree of difficulty being encountered. The target domain, therefore, bothers on "progress" the semantic structure which is semantically relational and substitutional to the provided phrasal verb "level up" BB Naija's tagline.

#### **4.8 All Stars Figures Celebrities**

The concept of "all stars" provides conceptual mapping attributes of Nigerian celebrities. "Stars, denotatively, function to shine, illuminate and draw attention. All stars logically connotes the qualities of Nigerians who are represented with the stars to mean celebrities in their careers. It is habitual or factual stars are ubiquitous and the quality is transferred on Nigeria using metaphor as Nigerians are everywhere around the world. All stars, a nominal phrase is employed metaphorically as source domain whose qualities are made to describe Nigerians as celebrities in different professions, the target domain. It is however semantically realised in Nigeria context to have stars or celebrities in two forms, negative or positive. Example of negative form is epitomised in political thugs who become stars or celebrities by hooliganism while positive form has many celebrities by legitimate professions.

#### **4.9 No loose Guard figures Protect Oneself**



The wordings which make the concept "no loose guard" as a semantic structure are metaphorical. "No" is a signifier of negator which foregrounds semantics of negation. The word implies prohibition, showing direct command. The language unit "loose" is a verb denoting many semantic structures as "unfasten", "relax", "free" or "undo". Each of the provided structures is semantically synonymous with "loose". "Guard" is a nominal which has synonyms of "vigilance", "security", "alertness", "defence" or "protection". The clause emanated from pidgin "no loose guard" is composed with a semantic negation of being "vigilant, conscious, at alert, protective, or defensive". It implies beef up security. The concept "no loose guard" a conceptual metaphor which metaphorically maps militaristic defence and semantically produces warning for Nigerians to do not be careless and do not relax their defences. The source domain "no loose guard" is expressed to connote that Nigerians need to get prepared to defend themselves. The concept is constructed metaphorically exposing the Nigeria's security challenges and the consequences on Nigerians. The conceptual metaphor provides clear-cut meaning of informing that relaxing one's shield, self-defence and self-protection is capable of making Nigerians fall victim of vulnerability. The aforesaid is the target domain captured with the pidgin expression of "no loose guard".

#### **4.10 10/10 Figures Excellent**

The numerator and denominator of a numerical figure "10/10" is metaphorically synonymous with the semantic structure "excellent". The numerical figure constitutes conceptual metaphor of evaluation being mapped onto excellence. Excellence does not just emerge without conscious efforts. Therefore, the metaphor hints for co-occurrence of hard-work, assessment and excellence. "10/10" figuratively represents maximum score and the best in ratings which are achieved by modality of measurement. The source domain exposes steps to excellence, greatness or perfection signalled as "10/10". The numeracy capturing the conceptual metaphor implies that life has a perfect standard for anyone who strives to exceed the expectations before catching up with success. The source domain "10/10" as a tagline in season ten of BB Naija is a metaphorical structure conveying excellence, and how excellent grade is achieved.



## 5.0 Conclusion

This study investigates semantic effects of the non-deliberate use of metaphors in the taglines of Big Brother Naija's ten seasons so far in Nigeria. The study reveals that two domains of source and target are indispensable in the analysis of language devices related to conceptual metaphor and its semantic structure. It reveals further that the wordings of the conceptual metaphors in the BB Naija's taglines are obviously different from the semantic structures associated with them though with nearly the same semantic effect. The study therefore concludes that the expressions which are semantically synonymous can differ in structures. The study recommends that linguists should conduct language studies using other linguistic theories for analysis of BB Naija's taglines.

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