

AN ANALYSIS OF HATE SPEECHES AS A CULTURAL METAPHOR OF STEREOTYPES IN FACEBOOK STATUS UPDATE

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Abstract

The study is on hate speeches as a metaphors of cultural stereotypes by some Facebook users while updating their status. The study is aimed at examining hate speeches as a metaphorical expression used in the language of cultural stereotypes. The theoretical framework considered for this study is eclectic; Cognitive Metaphor and theory of Cultural Stereotype. Twenty (20) status update were sampled from a Facebook by some subscribers and the conversation that ensued among the interlocutors of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. In the data analysis, the research found out that the conversation which was supposed to be a political discourse turned out to be an emotionally-charged one, with all the interlocutors making derogatory statements against one another. The result shows that; the kind of slur language that ensued was a reflection of the assumptions each interlocutor holds against the other on account of the different ethnic nationalities they came from. It was discovered that sixteen (16) out of the twenty (20) statements realized in the status update were structural metaphors. The recurrence of structural metaphors indicates that there are feelings of disaffection in the society.

Keywords: Hate Speeches, Cognitive Metaphor, Cultural Stereotypes, Facebook Status Update

Introduction

Language is a critical phenomenon that has continued to shape relationships between individuals, amongst groups, communities and nations. Stephen Levenson points out that, communication is the connection between what the speaker says and the assumptions he holds, or shares with the hearers or what is said before which becomes basic for language understanding (34). By implication, language is the most vital tool of communication, taking into cognizance the context in which it takes place – the participants, the purposes, beliefs and other non-linguistic tools that inform human social interactions, (Akmajian et al 244-245).

This research was born out of the fact that the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria has continued to play a vital role in how inter-group or cultural rivalries shape linguistic behaviors of interlocutors. Oftentimes, speakers, resulting from their different assumptions or perceptions of each other, make statements that are usually viewed as stereotypical of their out-group. As a result

of this growing trend, researchers in language have continued to explore linguistic theories and specific language models that will account for such stereotypical utterances that may be viewed as hurtful expressions.

The research is, thus, aimed at analyzing metaphorical expressions as used in Facebook Status Update (FSU) and the conversation that ensued therein. This is taking into cognizance individuals' or group's perceptions of their fellow interlocutors that they view as out-group or culturally exclusive and how such utterances set the tone for the language of stereotype. The objective of the research is, therefore, a cognitive approach to the study of metaphorical expressions involving individuals of different ethno-cultural backgrounds that are stereotypical of each other.

Conceptual Review

Cognitive Linguistics

Language, as the most potent means of communication, has continually being

explored by language scholars with the aim of relating human utterances/statements with the context in which the utterances are made. Geoffrey Leech is of the view that language basically functions to convey individual's experience of the world and how he expresses such experience through his attitude or behavior and, of course, the influence of his behavior to the hearers. Secondly, language also functions to convey the interpretation of the speaker's expression by the audience through logical deductions. (Leech 56-57).

The concept of Cognitive linguistics was developed from the fact that our utterances are not just mere abstract linguistic expressions or "a combination of a set of universal abstract features of uninterpreted symbols... but are motivated by experience, in many cases, by bodily experience" (Barcelona and Valenzuela 3). It is an embodiment of linguistic concepts encapsulated in physical, social and cultural experience as factored by the human mind or perception. It also implies that language is a product of general cognitive abilities coordinated by the human brain and neurological evidence.

As defined by Evans too, cognitive linguistics is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and the mind, and the socio-physical experience, or what he refers to as "glimpses into hitherto hidden aspects of human mind, human experience and, by consequence, what it is to be human (IX). Craft and Cruse, contributing, relate cognitive linguistics with cognitive psychology and artificial intelligence which, according to them, accounts for expressions and "continuities between language and experience through organization of concepts based on experience" (8-28). Cognitive linguistics, therefore, as implied by Janda, evolved as a continuity in language development as it adds to the meaning of language, which linguistic models, as generated from phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics "operate in unison with

greater phenomena of general consciousness and cognition"(6).

The most cardinal about cognitive linguistics, therefore, is the relationship between language and our experience of the world, and how that shapes our thoughts and perception of things. This is because language, according to Evans and Green (2006), offers a window into cognitive function, providing insights into the nature, structure and organization of thoughts and ideas".

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is eclectic, exploring the theory of Cognitive Metaphor and that of Cultural Stereotype. In this regard, the study explores language use in form of cognitive metaphor; as discussed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their work "The Metaphor we Live By". In connection, the work also explores the theory of Stereotype, bringing into fore, the views of Viliñbakhova Elena in her work titled: "The Notion of Stereotype in Language Study". It also looks at the work of Hilary Putnam; "The Meaning of Meaning" and other related works. In essence, the study looks at cognitive metaphors used as cultural stereotypes in relation to the context of utterance.

Cognitive Metaphor

Metaphor, as an aspect of cognitive linguistics and a relatively new model of linguistic investigation, has attracted researchers who attempt to relate the concept to sociological, psychological and pedagogical aspects of human lives. Accordingly, there have been contemporary studies on linguistic metaphor to derive maximum meaning from human expressions and interactions.

Before the exploration in Cognitive Linguistics, metaphor has originally been confined to literature, used as a figure of speech liken to simile in meaning – only differentiated by the use of 'like' and 'as' (in simile). Instead of saying A is like or as

B, it is simply said A is B. In Cognitive Linguistics, however, it has been discovered that the difference between simile and metaphor goes beyond the presence of 'like' or 'as' in the former and the absence of such in the latter. According to Laura Janda, "Metaphor is present in all kinds of syntactic situations. . . and that metaphorical expressions have less to do with syntactic variation than the substance" (16).

Cognitive Metaphor, therefore, has been conceived as a term used in "expressing one kind of thing in terms of another. . . (as) we act in the way we conceive of things" (Lakoff and Johnson 5). What the duo imply here is that our metaphorical expressions always reflect our conceptualization of things garnered through our experience of the world; what they referred to as "cultural and personal previous experience" (154). Metaphor, therefore, is a naturally-occurring language phenomenon realized in our everyday physical experience and is explored in language use of cultural stereotype (Attila Imre 73).

Lakoff and Johnson further argue that, contrary to the notion, especially purveyed by literary critics, that metaphor is a poetic device that only depicts the aesthetics of language or for rhetorical purposes, metaphor is actually "pervasive in thought and action", they said, contending that "our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical" (4). This postulate gives credence to the fact that metaphors are expressions we use in our daily lives as we interact and communicate. And, because our communication is always hinged on our ability to express our perception of things around us, metaphor, thus, denotes how we use our conceptual system in thinking and acting through language. That is why the duo claims that, "the metaphor is not merely in the words we use, it is in our very concept of an argument. The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical, it is literal...

(Because) we act according to the way we conceive of things" (6).

Adding their voice, Evans and Green posit that central to the study of metaphor is the fact that language cannot function well without the human experience and human mind (44). This view was also supported by Feldman (2006) (qtd. in Janda) who states that "metaphor is consistent with the architecture of human brain" (16), implying that metaphor is neurologically formed from the brain, after the conceptualization of an idea from the mind, to the physical world. In other words, the formation of metaphor is a cognitive process that materializes to our thoughts which are, in turned, transferred to either spoken or written words. In doing so, the brain transmits the exact perception of an issue in the mind in relation to the context of utterance or communication.

According to Lakoff and Johnson, conceptual metaphor cognitively refers to conceptualization of an idea in one domain to implement the concept in another domain. The domain in which such a concept or human knowledge is formed is called the Source Domain, which is the brain, while the referent which could be ideas, emotions, state of being, et cetera, is called the Target Domain (Janda 16). In other words, the source domain is the idea conceived in the mind, from which we draw our metaphorical expressions. The target domain, on the other hand, is what is inferred to as a representation of the conceived idea (Kovecses and Gunter 6). For example, in the expression "peace is priceless", "Priceless" is the source domain because it is an idea conceived and generated from the speaker's perceptual experience. The target domain here is the word "peace", which is the emotional representation of the conceived idea and which is a phenomenon shared between the speaker and the addressee.

Metaphors are categorized into Orientational, Ontological and Structural.

But for the purpose of this research, the paper looks at the last two types; the ontological and the structural metaphors. According to Janda “ontological metaphor is the conceptualization of non-things (emotions, abstract ideas, ambient phenomena) as if they were things. . . usually entities, substances, or places...” (16). The ontological metaphor strives to relate our experience with physical objects. It implies “our ability to understand our experiences in terms of objects and substances (which) allows us to pick out parts of our experience and treat them as discrete entities or substances. . .” (Lakoff and Johnson 26). In other words, as interlocutors, our experience of the world enables us to view emotions or ideas and ascribe to them the state of being some entities. In expressing such metaphors, we use our experience as the source domain from where our knowledge of the world is acquired and give them the status of some entities, objects or places. For instance, in the statement “peace is priceless”, “Priceless” here is a source domain and, in the speaker’s experience, ‘priceless’ has become a commodity that worth more than human being can purchase. ‘Priceless’ has, therefore, become an entity that can be referred to, can be quantified and can be categorized while ‘peace’, on the other hand, becomes the target domain which is actually the emotional representation of the speaker’s perceptual experience.

Ontological metaphors thus, are in tune with our everyday experience because they are much used in our everyday conversations. This is because their expression entails the use of experiential phenomena such as emotions, ideas and abstractions which our mind or brain conceives. Evans and Green argue that ontological metaphor which is derived from human experience, is analogous and central to human mind and language use (44). This is why Lakoff and Johnson impute that ontological metaphors enable us “to deal rationally with our experience” (27). This is because they are an outburst of our

conceptualization of an issue in relation to our understanding of another issue that shares common property. The ontological metaphors are, therefore, pervasive in the sense that they are expressed in different forms and purposes.

Structural metaphor, on the other hand, according to Janda, is using a nominal that is rich in value or experience as source domain (16). For example; an expression like “Fulani are killers” is a structural metaphor as it uses a nominal ‘killers’, which is a conceptualization of the speaker, as the source domain. It is rich in value because the word ‘killers’ denotes danger that every human being dreads. ‘Fulani’, on the other hand, is a target domain because it is a knowledge shared between the speaker and the addressee. What they do not share is the conceptualization by the speaker that “Fulani are killers”.

As an aspect of cognitive linguistics, the concept of stereotype is understood in two perspectives. The first is that stereotype is a fixed expression, form or content. The second perspective is that stereotype denotes a fixed mental image of a person, an object or an event (Elena, “the Notion of Stereotypes”). Given credence to this notion, Hilary Putnam also defines stereotype as “a conventional, frequently malicious ideas which maybe inaccurate of what X looks like or acts like, or is” (249). Stereotype, according to the two perspectives, implies derogatory expressions, usually fixed or codified, frequently used by individuals or groups to other individuals or groups with the purpose of maligning them. This usually happens when there are inter-ethnic, inter-cultural, inter-religious, and, indeed, inter-political misgivings between such groups that lead to unwholesome perceptions of each other.

Explaining more, Putnam divides stereotype into two categories. He calls the first “linguistic obligation” which he refers to as shared information amongst language users in a given speech or linguistic community who have minimum level of

competence in language and communication. The second category, according to Putnam, is called “division of linguistic labour”. This implies that some members of the linguistic community – the elites – are more knowledgeable and, thus, determine what characteristics an object possess to qualify for a given name, or what appellation to give to certain individuals or groups to suit a particular purpose. This becomes an acceptable definition of such object or appellation of such a group which the entire linguistic community must adopt. In this case, the ordinary speakers’ understanding of the words, phrases or statements does not have to be complete or objective as they rely on what the linguistic experts in the community decide as the acceptable expression (249).

Culture, for instance, has been identified as having intrinsic relationship with human cognition, given credence to the notion that certain linguistic expressions are associated with particular socio-linguistic groups who share the same cultural experience. By extension, the same group shares cognitive experience that manifest in their linguistic behavior. This is because language is the strongest source of cultural affinity and strength (Ungerer and Schmid 2017). By implication, it denotes that, like other linguistic models such as syntax, semantics and pragmatics, cognitive linguistics models are not universal; they function in different ways in different ethno-linguistic and cultural settings. According to Richard Nordquist (2018), cognitive models “depend on the culture in which a person grows up and lives. The culture provides the background for all the situations that we have to experience in order to be able to form a cognitive model. . . cultural models can be seen as cognitive models that are shared by people belonging to a social group or sub-group”.

This view is accentuated by the fact that, in a society where ethno-cultural affiliations reign supreme and are manifest in the socio-political conversations of the people, such

situations create a social distance between the groups such that each group always feels stereotyped, on the one hand. On the other hand, certain linguistic expressions are stereotyped to a particular ethno-linguistic group which comes to bear in inter-group conversational interactions that are driven by sentiments. Accordingly, a speaker may rely on this stereotypical characteristic of the addressee to make statements or pass judgments which he does with or without recourse to the feelings of his addressee and which himself has little or no understanding of the stereotyped expressions, on the one hand. On the other hand, the addressee, relying on his perceptual experience with the speaker or his in-group, the former feels. For instance, a statement such as “You this Fulani” by, say, a Tiv person, might create a derogatory feeling in the addressee who considers the statement as offensive. This feeling is induced by the assumption held by the referent (Fulani) on the speaker whose ethnic group, Tiv, has presumably been antagonistic of Fulani ethnic group. Because there already existed a social distance between the two ethnic groups occasioned by their different perceptions of each other, this emotional underpinning has impeded the addressee to even contemplate that the utterance “you this Fulani” might, perhaps, be a compliment or that the speaker’s intention was actually not to hurt him. His failure to use his cognition to analyze the utterance as harmless has brought about his conceptualization of the utterance as a slur on him; thus, stereotypical.

This view is supported by the fact that, if the same words, “you this Fulani” were uttered by a Hausa man whose ethnic group they (Fulani) had a long history of good relationship, the addressee will simply laugh it off and, in this case, he will assume the utterance to be a compliment. This goes to buttress the presupposition that, rather than the words, the addressee was swayed by the different assumptions he holds on the two different speakers - Tiv is an antagonist while the other – Hausa, is a friend. This is

what Imre means when e says that a metaphor is a naturally-occurring language phenomenon realized in our everyday physical experience and is explored in language use of cultural stereotype (73).

This indicates that certain words may not elicit contempt or emotions if they were made by those we consider friends. Similarly, an addressee may perceive a speaker's utterance as offensive. But that is not necessarily because the latter's intentions are meant to hurt the addressee. On the contrary, the speaker may actually be polite in his expression. However, because the addressee has already stereotyped the speaker and, perhaps, his in-group, he, the addressee, automatically feels offended by the speaker's utterances, especially those coded with stereotypical words or phrases.

Research Methodology

The method adopted in this research was designed with a view to arriving at the intended analysis of the naturally-accruing language data. This is with the aim of finding out whether or not the data collected could account for the language of cultural stereotype. The research thus, uses two models of linguistic investigation in cognitive linguistics. They are; cognitive metaphors and cultural stereotype. The research design, therefore, is descriptive, exploring the choice of words that may be termed stereotype language in relation to the context of utterance.

In collecting the data for this research, two sources were used. They are the primary source and the secondary source. The primary source is the sampling of the corpus designed for the study – the Facebook status update that discusses inter-ethnic issues that are often emotionally inclined. The Secondary source comprises of the various literature that explore the issues designated for the study. These include literature materials on cognitive metaphors and language stereotype. The aim of this is to determine whether these linguistic models

could account for the language use in the data collected.

The sampling technique adopted in this research is a selection of social media conversations done on Facebook platform. Twenty (20) status update were sampled from a Facebook by some subscribers and the conversation that ensued among the interlocutors of different ethnic groups in Nigeria, using status update of a subscriber. The study, thus, samples a conversation that is laced with metaphorical expressions in form of phrases or statements found in the selected data for analysis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Facebook Status Update

- i. **Chukwudi:** President Buhari is a religious bigot. His Islamization policy is gradually taking shape. Look at all his appointments in strategic positions; President, North; Senate President, North, all service chiefs, North – no single Igbo person in all these positions. Why?
- ii. **Suleiman Nazi:** It is because Igbos are fools. They don't know how to play their political card. Their politics is always about money.
- iii. **Danladi:** Leave them, they are Biafran dogs.
- iv. **John Uche:** It is your father, Buhari that is a dog. He is a jihadist that sucks people's blood in the name of Islam, a religion of violence.
- v. **Sylvester:** Buhari the sponsor of Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen, you mean?
- vi. **Danladi:** And who told you that all Fulani are herdsmen?
- vii. **Sylvester:** Shut up my friend! No matter how you want to dress it, all Fulani Are herdsmen.
- viii. **Kayode Salau:** You people should sheath your swords. This hatred against each other will not fetch us anything in Nigeria. We will never progress with this.

- ix. **John Uche:** See who is talking. So you can also open your stinky mouth and talk? You this boot licker.
- x. **Chukwudi:** why won't he talk, since Buhari has bought their conscience? He gave them Vice President and other big appointments. He is constructing beautiful roads in Yoruba lands. Fools!
- xi. **Suleiman Nazi:** Hahaha! You are crying because you have lost your foolish calculation again. You will never smell the presidency. Even your grandfather Ojukwu lost it talkless of you these rats...hahaha!
- xii. **John Uche:** It is your grandfather Ahmadu Bello that has lost it. He is the first religious fanatic in Nigeria. That is why all Northerners have no brains.
- xiii. **Abel Benjamin:** Not all Northerners, say the Hausa Fulanis. We in the Middle Belt pass their power.
- xiv. **John Uche:** Yes. You are right, because the Middle Belters are wise people. They refused to be colonized by these blood sucker-Fulanis. The spirit of Christianity is in you, my brother.
- xv. **Suleiman Nazi:** See this wawa, fool! Who told you the Middle Belt is Christian-dominated? Go and check the statistics and, by the way, where is Middle Belt in Nigeria? Karnuka kawai!
- xvi. **John Uche:** Onyara! Which statistics are you talking about, the son of a terrorist?
- xvii. **Sylvester:** He is a terrorist himself. You know they baptize them with terrorist water after birth. That is why they are always thirsty for Blood.
- xviii. **John Uche:** Yes, and Boko Haram are terrorists. In fact, all Muslims are terrorists.
- xix. **Danladi:** Ubanka Ojukwu was the father of terrorism. He spearheaded the massacre of more than three million people in Nigeria. Banza dan iska, a product of child-factory kawai!
- xx. **John Uche:** Onyoshi! See this bastard! Your mother was f***cked by many terrorist Fulanis in the bush and you were also born in the bush. Stupid!

S/N	Status Update	Kind of Metaphor	Source
1	President Buhari is a <u>religious bigot</u> . His Islamization policy is gradually taking shape. Look at all his appointments in strategic positions; President, North, all Service Chiefs, North – No single Igbo person in all these positions. Why?	Structural Metaphor	Chukwudi
2	It is because <u>Igbos are fools</u> . They don't know how to play their political card. Their politics is always about money.	Structural Metaphor	Suleiman Nazi
3	Leave them, <u>they are Biafran dogs</u> .	Structural Metaphor	Danladi
4	It is your father Buhari that is a dog. <u>He is a jihadist</u> that sucks people's blood in the name of Islam, <u>a religion of violence</u> .	Ontological Metaphor	John Uche
5	<u>Buhari the sponsor of Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen</u> , you mean?	Structural Metaphor	Sylvester
6	And who told you that <u>all Fulani are herdsmen</u> ?	Structural Metaphor	Danladi
7	Shut up my friend! No matter how you want to dress it, all <u>Fulani are herdsmen</u> .	Structural Metaphor	Sylvester
8	You people should sheath your swords. This hatred against each other will not fetch us anything in Nigeria. We will never progress with this.		Kayode Salau
9	See who is talking. So you can also open your stinky mouth and talk? <u>You this boot licker!</u>	Structural Metaphor	John Uche
10	Why won't he talk, since Buhari has bought their conscience? He gave them Vice President and other big appointments. He is constructing beautiful roads in Yoruba lands. Fools.		Chukwudi
11	Hahaha! You are crying because you have lost your foolish calculation again. You will never smell the presidency. Even your		Suleiman Nazi

	grandfather Ojukwu lost it talkless of <u>you these rats...</u> hahaha!	Structural Metaphor	
12	It is your grandfather Ahmadu Bello that has lost it. He is the first religious fanatic in Nigeria. That is why all Northerners have no brains.	Structural Metaphor	John Uche
13	Not all Northerners, say the Hausa Fulanis. We in the Middle Belt pass their power.		Abel Benjamin
14	Yes. You are right, because <u>the Midle Belters are wise people</u> . They refused to be colonized by these blood suckers-Fulanis. The spirit of Christianity is in you, my brother.	Structural Metaphor	John Uche
15	See this wawa, fool! Who told you the Middle Belt is Christian-dominated? Go and check the statistics and, by the way, where is Middle Belt in Nigeria? Karnuka kawai!		Suleiman Nazi
16	Onyara! Which statistics are you talking about, <u>the son of terrorist</u> ?	Structural Metaphor	John Uche
17	He is a terrorist himself. You know they baptized them with terrorist water after birth. That is why they are always thirsty for blood.		Sylvester
18	Yes, and <u>Boko Haram are Terrorists</u> . In fact, all Muslims are terrorists.	Structural Metaphor	John Uche
19	<u>Ubanka Ojukwu was the father of terrorism</u> . He spearheaded the massacre of more than three million people in Nigeria. Banza dan iska, <u>a product of child-factory</u> kawai!	Structural Metaphor Structural Metaphor	Danladi
20	Onyoshi! See this bastard! Your mother was f***cked by many terrorist Fulani in the bush and you were also born in the bush. Stupid!		John Uche

Number of Occurrence

- Aggregate expressions =20
- Structural metaphors = 16
- Ontological metaphors = 1
- Non-occurrence = 3

Interpretation of the Analysis

It is important to state that the relationship between metaphor and cultural stereotype presupposes coherence between cultural values, nurtured through physical or emotional experience of a particular socio-cultural group, and metaphorical concepts that denote them. What this means is that metaphorical expressions by a socio-cultural group, more often than not, reflect some values or assumptions which the members of the group share. As stated earlier, cultural stereotype means that a particular socio-cultural group will consciously or unconsciously subsume certain linguistic expressions into their vocabulary which they use to stereotype their perceived out-group. And, relating this to cultural-linguistic behavior of a group, it connotes that there are certain assumptions that we share which become recurrent in our lives that they manifest metaphorically as our expressions.

In the data presented above, there are a lot of metaphorical statements made by the interlocutors that have cultural connotation. They are, thus, stereotypical statements that define the different socio-cultural backgrounds of the speakers. For instance, the expression “Boko Haram are terrorists” has already been subsumed into linguistic expressions of most Nigerians who have, over the years, been devastated by the inhuman activities of this separatist group. The expression, which is a stereotype of the dreaded group, is metaphorical because it implies using the term “terrorists”, which, according to Janda, is using a nominal that is rich in value or experience as source domain (16) in understanding the phrase “Boko Haram”, which becomes the target domain. The statement “Boko haram are terrorists” therefore gives credence to the

notion that most metaphorical phrases are conventionalized expressions that depict perceptions and conceptualization of certain cultural norms by particular socio-cultural groups. This is because, according to Imre, “metaphors transport the images, feelings, values, thought patterns, etc entrenched in our cultures” (75).

The expression “Boko Haram are terrorists”, for instance, has succeeded in transporting the feelings and mental image” of Nigerians into a cultural stereotype depicting the dreaded group that has achieved notoriety in shooting, slaughtering and bombing human beings in some parts of Nigeria. This is because the expression “Boko Haram are terrorists” - a fact shared by all well-meaning Nigerians, irrespective of any creed they belong to. “Boko Haram”, which is the target domain, therefore, connotes danger which mention sends shivers down our spine.

However, the expression “Muslims are terrorists”, as expressed by one of the interlocutors, will elicit emotional outburst from Muslims who view this as hate speech against the religion they profess. To the speaker who makes the expression “Muslims are Terrorist”, he was not sorry for the utterance because, as far as he is concerned, what he said was the outcome of his perception of the context of utterance which, according to Churchland (1995) (qtd. in Janda 17) was generated from his perceptual experience that informed his opinion on Muslims. Because, to him, those people who maim and kill people in the name of “Boko Haram” are Muslims and are doing so in the name of the religion. To the second person or addressee who does not share this perception and who, probably, is a Muslim, sees himself as being stereotyped by the statement.

So, two different metaphorical statements; “Boko Haram are terrorists” and “Muslims are terrorists” connote different metaphorical interpretations. The former is a stereotype to only the dreaded group that

perpetuates the crime; a perceptual experience shared by every good citizen of Nigeria and, by extension, holds the same assumptions on the fact that “Boko Haram are terrorists”. This collective perception therefore becomes a cultural stereotype of all Nigerians. The latter, “Muslims are terrorists”, however, is a stereotype to all Muslims, not only in Nigeria but the world over. In this case, only non-Muslims, or those who do not share this perception, share the same cultural stereotype.

Another example of metaphor in form of stereotype is the expression “Fulani are herdsmen”. The expression, ordinarily, is an obvious assertion that needs no any argument. However, given the contemporary Nigerian experience where people are killed in their farms by the so called herdsmen, any mention of the word ‘Fulani’ will trigger emotions because ‘Fulani’ has become synonymous with killer-herdsmen simply because of the fact that ‘Fulani’ constitute more than 90% of pastoralists in Nigeria. Any such utterance as “Fulani are herdsmen,” therefore, is the same as “Fulani are killers” to, especially people who have been depressed by the dastardly acts of these killers presumed to be Fulani in the present security situation in Nigeria. Here, the word “herdsmen” has become a stereotype given to all Fulani, whether or not they herd cows. In the same way, Nigerians, especially those who share the same perceptual experience of herdsmen raiding their farms, killing them and raping their women, they share the same cultural stereotype that all Fulani are herdsmen and, indeed, killers.

Conclusions

The investigation of the use of metaphorical expressions vis-à-vis cultural stereotypes in the Facebook status updates is, arguably, a unique study that marries human expressions in relation to individuals and group perceptions against those they consider out-groups. This is considering the socio-cultural, ethnic and religious sentiments that are continually defining

coexistence in Nigeria. This study, thus, shows that the kind of slur language that ensued in the data collected was a reflection of the assumptions each interlocutor holds against the other on account of the different ethnic nationalities and religious persuasions they belong to. It was discovered that sixteen (16) out of the twenty (20) statements realized in the status updates explored were structural metaphors, indicating that there are feelings of disaffection in the society.

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