



“Journey, Rest, Gate and Garment”: A Cross-cultural Cognitive Analysis of Metaphors Used in Breaking News of Death

Hameed Tunde Asiru^{1*} and Aminu Galadima Batagarawa²

¹*Department of English and French, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria.*

²*Department of Nigerian Languages and Hausa, Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria.*

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author HTA designed the study, analysed the data, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author AGB provided the data for Hausa metaphorical expressions. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

How is death conceptualized in Hausa and Yoruba languages? Are there any linguistic similarities or differences in the ways they break news of death? This paper notes that language is not carelessly used to establish interactional and transactional functions among interactants; rather it is creatively used depending on the context of usage. One such context of usage that involves more caution and wisdom is breaking news of death to the deceased loved ones. This particular context is mostly achieved through the use of some metaphors and idiomatic expressions to present, euphemistically, unpleasant news about the death of a person. There is no contrastive research effort, at present, which has examined conceptualization of death in Hausa and Yoruba languages for possible similarities and differences. In this paper, therefore, an attempt was made to conceptualize death as a domain through the cognitive, cultural and religious windows that are available in these native Nigerian languages. In the course of the investigation, the paper argues

*Corresponding author: Email: asiru.hameed@umyu.edu.ng;

that even though metaphors are ubiquitous in every community and are presented in different ways in breaking news of the departed friends and enemies, there abound areas of metaphoric convergence and divergence in the description of death. The convergent and divergent points are results of the universality in the conceptualization of aspects of human body/experience such as death. In particular, we argued, that the similarities in the identified four source domains (journey, rest, garment and gate) and their differences are conditioned by cultural or religious constructs and contacts, and the linguistic variance between the two languages. Finally, the paper lends credence to the claim that primary metaphors are shared by all human languages.

Keywords: Cognitive Metaphor Theory; Yoruba and Hausa languages; metaphorical expressions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country with heterogeneous make-ups of culturally and religiously diverse people. Each major ethnic group has its own language and cultural idiosyncrasies which further mark the differences among the people of Nigeria. Nevertheless, in recent years, Nigeria has also enjoyed high rate of intermarriages among the ethnic groups. The intermarriages may thus translate to culture contact which could enhance some forms of similarities and changes as the case may be in ways and language practices of the people. The present study uses a Cognitive Linguistics approach to explicate how the concept of death is understood in different cultural experiences, and the metaphorical expressions used to break news of death. Metaphorical expressions are used just like euphemisms in different communicative situations to serve as a shield against what is culturally feared, unpleasant and disliked. In a communicative situation such as breaking the news of a dead loved one, metaphors allow a smooth conveyance of the news without upsetting the deceased family. In situations where children are involved or are present, metaphorical expressions are used to mitigate the dangers or shock the news could cause. Cognitive Linguistics includes some theories, such as conceptual metaphor theory, which deals with various aspects of linguistics. It may be defined as the inquiry into the conceptual structures behind language [1].

In Cognitive Linguistics, hence CL, metaphors are 'devices that allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another' [2]. For instance, *DEATH is a JOURNEY*. Here we tend to conceptualize death regarding another concept which is the journey. In the terminologies of [2], the ontological trait of a *journey* is mapped onto the abstract noun *death* to enhance an adequate understanding of what death means. This means that properties in the domain of

journey, such as travellers, vehicle, correspond systematically with properties of death such as the transition to another destination through different means. The rationale behind conceptual metaphors is to try and understand concepts that are more elusive using more familiar concepts. This type of mapping is unidirectional [3], because the metaphor is used, in this case, to map certain conceptual properties of the journey which is the conceptual source domain onto a conceptual target domain (death) thereby creating a new understanding of the target domain. The source domain and target domain could also be referred to as the domain in which a concept originates and the domain to which a concept is mapped.

Similarly, an expression such as '*eyin lohun*' (speech is delicate) which could literally be translated as '*SPEECH is EGG*' and in Hausa *MAGANA ZARAR BUNU CE* (Speech is like pulling out of thatch) is an attempt to understand the meaning of 'speech' using the conceptual domain of 'egg'. The target domain in this expression is *SPEECH /OHUN/MAGANA* while *EGG /EYIN/ZARAR BUNU* are the source domains. This could translate to mean that properties of egg such as fragility, irreparability are transferred to speech; once it is uttered or ejaculated, it cannot be redeemed or undone. In relation to the present study, when a king is dead in traditional Yoruba settings, breaking the news of such an occurrence to his subjects requires using metaphorical expressions. This is possible as a form of respect to the supposedly 'powerful person who is usually eulogized as second to the gods'. Breaking the news of such a figure as being dead just like the way other creatures die may be seen as derogatory. Such an expression, therefore, is used to attribute social reverence to people. That is why a king does not die in Yoruba settings. The metaphorical expression, '*Oba w'aja*' is used and it means the king ascends to the great beyond. *Aja* means roof of a house. A place where people can climb and store farm

items and other belongings usually for preservation. Similarly, in Hausa, one of such metaphorical expressions to announce the death of a king is *Sarki ya faku* (The King has bid the world bye).

Several attempts which examined how death is conceptualized in English and other languages have been recorded but none has been done in Yoruba language. In addition, a contrastive endeavour such as the present study is non-existent in the two languages under focus. These further accentuate the importance and significance of this study in cognitive linguistics researches in Nigeria. Among the previous studies on record is [4]; they examine the concept of death using two conceptual source domains; Journey and Rest, in Ekegusii which is spoken in the western part of Kenya. The study observes that the concept of death in Ekegusii tilt more towards life than being dead as a result of the Christians religious belief in existence after death. The two domains thus help the bereaved to accept death and to also serve as some forms of consolation. In a related study by Golzadeh and Pourebrahim [5], death metaphors in religious texts were examined using a cognitive semantics approach. The study uses the Holy Qur'an and Book of Nahjul Balagha as the sources of data and discovers that death is realized both metonymically and metaphorically. There are also three forms of metaphors prevalent in the study; the structural, orientational and ontological. The study concludes that the most highlighted and mapped upon component of the source domains is 'death power'. One thing that cuts across many studies on metaphors is the fact that metaphor analysis involves two domains which make concepts and ideas clearer and easily understood by people.

The concept of death itself has also been used as a theoretical metaphor for social ostracism because they share some properties or characteristics. One who is being ostracized is excommunicated and severs social relationship with other members of the community. This further shows that metaphors can be powerful tools for theory building in psychological sciences [6]. From the reviewed studies, it is apparent that no study has been conducted to investigate metaphorical expressions used in breaking news of death in the two languages. Also, no effort has been recorded in literature to have compared metaphors usage in the two languages. This study is thus significant as it bridges the vacuum in previous studies. Therefore, the study will

benefit researchers in comparative linguistics and add to literature on metaphors. Though prior literatures are conducted on different languages and contexts, they do benefit the present study by showing that metaphor is a universal phenomenon. Also, the present study differs from previous studies because it is a comparative study of two different indigenous Nigerian languages. In the same vein, the present study examines four domains to investigate areas of metaphorical similarities and differences in the two languages.

2. APPROACHES TO METAPHORS

Metaphor in the traditional sense of it is an ornament or 'novel poetic language' [7] just like other figures of speech; irony, idioms, metonymy. It is used to compare two things which share certain features. That is, metaphor is a 'two part expression' [8], where something is something else. The comparison creates vividness and distinction when metaphor is used as an artistic device. As a result, its meanings could be hidden and obscure sometimes, hence difficult to understand. That is why [9] argues that metaphor should be banned from argumentation. This notion is a classical perspective different from the contemporary thought.

Contemporarily, critical linguists see the cognitive potentials in metaphor as a way of expressing and describing experiences, emotions and beliefs in our everyday conversations. Little wonder, they hold the view that metaphor underlies our cognitive processes as human. Among the proponents of metaphor in CL, [7] assert that metaphor does not only serve as a figure of speech in poetry but it also abounds in everyday use of language. Apart from its abundance of daily conversations, it is a powerful cognitive tool that helps our thinking and reasoning, and to conceive and understand our world.

As cognitive tools, metaphors are used to make sense of abstract phenomena. According to Zhang and Hu [10] 'metaphor is more a vehicle of cognizing the world than purely a rhetorical device'. It, therefore, follows that metaphor is both linguistic and cognitive since we can use it to understand a concept by using another concept or domain. Such concepts or domains are expressed through metaphorical expressions which are instantiations or manifestations of such conceptual metaphors. It is also a conventional mental mechanism whose expressions should

not be confused [11]. In all, the two thoughts on metaphor understanding developed from Aristotle who maintains that metaphors involve two main discursive locations; the source of its origin and the location to which it is transferred.

3. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

In this study, [2] Conceptual Metaphor Theory, hence CMT is adopted. CMT is a 'pattern of conceptual association' or mapping of a related structure or domain unto another domain for better understanding [12]. This is how the understanding of metaphor works. The two domains are the concrete source domain which ontologically transfers some traits unto the abstract target domain. The source domain is a 'set of literal entities, attributes, processes and relationships linked semantically and apparently stored in mind' while target domain tends to be abstract and derives its linguistic structures from the source domain through the metaphorical link [13]. This means that thought precedes language. The target domain is the item a speaker wants to express or understand in the light of the source domain. Metaphors in the source domain create some forms of mental images which help us to think and communicate effectively.

However, according to Lakoff [7] the mappings are not 'arbitrary, but grounded in the body and everyday experience and knowledge'. Metaphors operate in such a way that the source domain transfers parts of its ontological meanings to the target domain thereby creating a form of an entailment which guides the understanding of that particular target domain. According to Barcelona [14] the conceptual metaphor is 'a cognitive mechanism whereby one experiential domain is partially mapped onto a different experiential domain, the second domain being partially understood in relation to the first one'.

Kovecses [15] also shares the similar thought on cross-mapping in conceptual metaphor; it is partial because "[w]hen a source domain is

applied to a target, only some (but not all) aspects of the target are brought into focus". The mapped domain is the source or donor domain while the target or recipient domain is the beneficiary that receives the mapping. According to [15], the conceptual metaphor is 'when we talk and think about life in terms of journeys, about arguments in terms of wars, about love in terms of journeys, about theories in terms of plants...'. To [16], "the overriding current of the cognitive view of metaphor is that it is pervasive in human thought and everyday language, and its use does not require any special talent or skill". However, metaphors usage could be culturally bound in some instances as a result of culturally shared experiences peculiar to certain speech community.

Regarding the directionality of mapping, scholars have diverse opinions. Some of them claim that metaphorical mapping is uni-directional [3]; such that the mapping is from the source domain to the target domain and not the reverse. As for [17], it is bi-directional; the mapping is from the source domain to the target domain and vice versa. The third perspective contends that the mapping is neither uni-directional nor bi-directional; it is blending of the two spaces or domains [18]. CMT operates at the level of thinking. The thinking process helps in extending the structural organization of metaphors beyond a similarity-based account of individual words to 'activating fixed mappings that reconceptualise one whole area of experience in terms of another.

The figure shows the directionality of the mapping in conceptual metaphor. The target domain A partially equals to B in a unidirectional way but B is not equal to A. For instance, some properties of the target domain are mapped onto the source domain but not the other way. For instance, in the expression of love or affection, it is commonly heard in English that someone has *a heart of gold*'. Here, the concept of the heart is understood using a more concrete object, gold. The direction here is from the target domain to

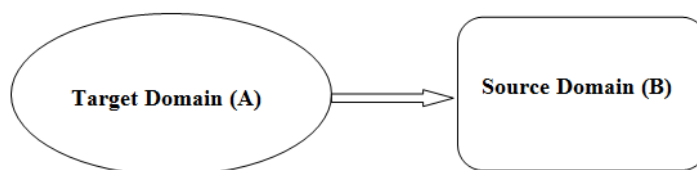


Fig. 1. Conceptual metaphor mapping

the source domain and not vice-versa. The mapped properties from gold include *purity* and *admiration* which translate to the sincerity and beauty of the character in question.

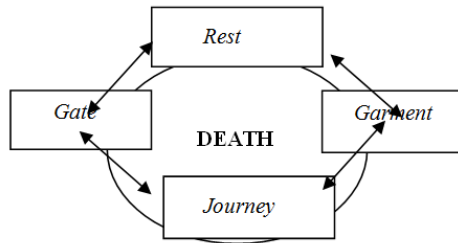


Fig. 2. Conceptual source domains of death

4. METHODOLOGY

In this paper, we adopt strictly a qualitative approach without any need for quantification since we deal with the interpretation of a linguistic phenomenon, and there is no need to investigate which of the metaphorical expressions are more predominant in the expression of death in the two languages. In our data gathering, we agreed with [19] that identification of conceptual metaphors involves naming the linguistic expressions that realize them (18). As a result, we gathered the linguistic expressions, first, and it must be noted that we did not record the metaphorical expressions on site, that is, in communicative situations where the news of a dead person is being relayed. We relied on contributions from wide-ranging sources, such as ten lecturers and fifty students who are native speakers of Hausa and Yoruba languages extracted from the University of Ibadan and Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina. The study did not consider age, status, religion and other sociolinguistic parameters because of the nature of the data expected to be generated. The study also collected data from obituaries, and from social media (Facebook). The analysis projected from identifying the major source domains in the metaphorical expressions. We identified four domains which are *death as a gate/door*, *death as a journey* and *death as a garment* and *death as rest/sleep*. We then categorized the various metaphorical expressions used in breaking news of death under the four domains. Each expression is interpreted by looking at the properties of the source domains that are mapped unto the target domains in order to break the unpleasant news of the death of a person. Similarly, the

expressions are also compared to see the areas of convergence and divergence in the two languages and the influence of religious and other cultural beliefs.

The figure two above shows the four conceptual source domains that are explored in this study to represent death or break news of death. The figure indicates the interrelationship that exists among the different but homogenous source domains of death.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Death is a Journey

The conceptual metaphor for death in the above sentence is *JOURNEY*, its metaphorical linguistic expressions are presented below in both Yoruba and Hausa languages.

From the expressions above, it is a shared linguistic practice in both languages to associate death with journey. In all the above metaphorical expressions, the properties of journey, such as movement, transition, the traveller, act of returning etc. are all mapped unto the domain of death. The examples in the two languages show that death involves a journey of no return, and the individual involved in the journey bids the world bye to another world. All these point to one thing; the concept of death is common in the two languages. When a Yoruba says '*iku ti mu lo*' (death has taken him away), it means that death, acting in the capacity of a driver, has driven the dead (passenger) to the great beyond. Similarly, *anyi rashi* (a certain person has left the world) presupposes that the person has travelled on a journey leaving his family and other belongings behind.

Similarly, *JOURNEY* as a metaphor of death implies that life and death are both indications of a starting point and end point of all mortals. An example such as '*o ti pari irinajo e*' (He/she has come to the end of his/her journey) shows that throughout life, man is in a continuous journey towards the end which is marked by death. Thus, human existence is characteristically construed as a process of embarking on a journey which has a time span; the starting point is the birth of an individual while the end is death. In actual fact, the arrival (birth) precedes the journey (lifetime) while departure (death) marks the end. These three phases are also marked by time feature which determines the end of every phase.

Table 1. Expressions for death is a journey

Yoruba	English translation
1. Awayemalo o si	No one comes to the earth without leaving it
2. Ikuti mu lo	Death has taken him away.
3. O ti dagbere f'aye	He has bid the world bye.
4. O ti re iwaleasa	He has gone to 'iwaleasa'. (a place of no return)
5. O ti re ibi agba nre	He/ she has gone to where elders go.
6. O jade laye	He has left the world.
7. O wa iwo esin lo	He has gone to look for the horn of horse.
8. O ti lo je olorunni'pe	He has gone to answer the call of God.
9. Ore ajo aremabo	He has travelled on a journey of no return.
Hausa	English translation
1. Yarasu	He passed away.
2. An yirashi	A certain person has left the world.
3. Yazamababu	He has bid the world bye.
4. Yayiwafati	Death has taken him away.
5. Raiyayihalinsa	Death has taken him away
6. Wane yacika	He/she has become a passenger to heaven
7. Yazoyanabacci	He (baby) came to the world a dead person
8. Yariga mu gidangaskiya	He has travelled on a journey of no return
9. Yakoma	Death has taken him away

There is also another spiritual connection or reunion involved in the metaphorical conception of death as a journey. In Yoruba traditional beliefs, it is held religiously that when a person dies, it means he has transited to the great beyond or metaphysical space to reunite with spirits or ancestors. Hence an example such as 'o ti re iwale asa' is a good example to show that death is conceived as a journey of reunion. Africans, traditionally, believe in existence after death but the existence is different from Christianity or Islamic point of views whose beliefs in existence are anchored on rewards of paradise or hell. According to Pilaszewicz [20] the eschatological reality of rewards of paradise for exemplary conduct and hell as chastisement for offences are uncommon concepts in Africans traditional religious thoughts.

5.2 Death is a Gate/Door

The conception of death here is a partial mapping of some features of a gate to the

concept of death. The examples below are some metaphorical instantiations of the target domain.

In examples above, death is metaphorically conceived as a gate/door. That is, the ontological properties of a gate/door have been transferred to death to understand it further.. Therefore, anyone who dies is conceived as having passed through a gate to the other side. This also has religious undertone according to both Islamic and Christian religious beliefs which are the two major religions in the two regions. It is a belief common to the two religions that death is not the end of mortals, rather a passage to another form of life, hence an example such as 'ya kau' (He has crossed to the other side). The difference between life and death is a thin divide or boundary such that when a person dies, it is not a total break but a continuum or an extension of the mortal world. In Islam, death is seen as a natural threshold to the ensuing phase of existence because it is believed that there is life after death. To, therefore, experience the form of

Table 2. Expressions for death is a gate/door

Yoruba	English translation
Won ti si ilekun orun fun	They have opened the gate of heaven for him/her.
O ti soda si odikeji	He/she has crossed to the other side.
O ti ja'se	He has crossed the line.
Hausa	English translation
Ya kau	He has crossed to the other side.
Mutuwa ta qwanqwasa masa qofa	Death knocked at his doors.

eternal existence that awaits all mortals, one must pass through the gate of death.

In a similar metaphorical expression, *'Iku ti wole too'* *Mutuwa ta qwanqwasasa masa qofa* (death has knocked on his doors) reifies the conception that death is a visitor who comes when expected and otherwise. Generally, in many of the metaphorical expressions of death, the ontological traits of man are transferred to death, that is death is personified. Personification makes us to 'comprehend a wide variety of experiences with nonhuman entities in terms of human motivations, characteristics, and activities' [2]. Abilities such as knocking, visiting, taking along, etc. are all practices of man. From religious points of views, the two languages believe that 'death' is one of the angels of God whom He sends down anytime to take man's life. He is called Angel Asraeel according to Islamic belief. This possibly explains why death is personified in many metaphorical expressions of both languages. For instance in the Holy Qur'an, death is personified in the following verse; "Wherever you people may be, death will overtake you even if you are in the well-built fortresses [21]

In another example, *'Iku ja niro* (Death calls him a liar/*He lost the battle to death*) is popularly used in situations when someone struggles over an ailment for some time and eventually dies. Some qualities of human, such as lying, fighting, etc. have been attributed to death to make it personified as human. Death, therefore, assumes the position of an enemy in such situations because the person with an ailment tries to fight it in order to live but loses the battle to death in the end.

5.3 Death is a Garment

In the examples that follow, death is seen as a garment meant for everyone. Some metaphorical expressions to explain this notion are found in the two languages.

Table 3. Expressions for death is a garment

Yoruba	English translation
O ti teri gba'so	He has accepted the shroud
Hausa	English translation
An yi masi sitra	He has been shrouded.

The example in the Yoruba depiction of death above indicates that the deceased has surrendered himself (unwillingly) to the last garment or shroud that is used in covering the dead. In Islamic tradition, the shroud is very important; it is the white loin that is used in dressing up the dead before interment. On the other hand, in Christianity, the same practice is obtainable but the type of garment is different. They prefer suit, wedding gowns, church attires, or any traditional attire to serve as the last garment. In these examples, certain aspects of the source domain are highlighted while others are hidden. This is consistent with [22] who believe that "when a target is structured in terms of a particular source, this highlights certain aspects of the target while simultaneously hiding other aspects".

5.4 Death is Rest/Sleep

Lakoff and Turner [3] picture death as sleep and we found some examples in the two languages under investigation.

In the depiction of death as sleep, the rationale is consistent with the thought of [23] that metaphors serve as a suitable ground for euphemistic reference to concepts considered too blunt, offensive or frightening. Therefore, metaphors are used to hide, deny or mitigate those aspects of such concepts which may cause fear, social embarrassment, or inconvenience, thus helping highlight some comforting, less harsh, less upsetting, less insulting or less straightforward aspects of those concepts.

Table 4. Expressions for death rest/sleep

Baba ti lo sinmi	Baba has gone to rest in the
laya olugbala	chest (abode) of his Lord.
'o ti sun orun	He has slept the last sleep
igbehin'	

In the expressions above from Yoruba language, the metaphorical conception of death is mostly informed by Christian religious belief that when a person dies, he/she has gone to rest. This is also consistent with [24] who observes that the concept of death is metaphorically described as sleep while resurrection is waking up. The first example is a popular expression to break news of death of a loved one. This example shows that the passage or journey to the life after is characterized as an end to ones earthly struggles, "a sleep or rest after a toilsome life"

[25] and pains, and it also represents respite, peacefulness and relief. In a similar metaphorical formation, the properties of sleep are transferred to death. It is observed equally that the mapping in these examples is partial, not all the features of sleep domain are transferrable to death domain. Death domain as explained by Kovecses [15] is “the utmost human disability in which we are blind, deaf, dumb, immobile, etc.” Some of these conceptual correspondences are borne out of the semantic and physiological semblance between the two domains. “The resemblance between a sleeping person and a dead person is obvious; both are unconscious and in a quiet, immobile state” [25].

We found another example such as *‘o ti sun orun igbehin (He has slept the last sleep)* which means the person has died. In this example, there are obvious physical similarities (unconsciousness and horizontal positioning) between a sleeping person and a dead person. It is obvious in the two languages that death is conceptualized similarly because it is a universal a phenomenon that is rooted in our physical and bodily experience. In addition, the domain of rest/sleep mapped onto the target domain of death is an indication that death is temporal just like rest/sleep. It is temporal in the sense that, it is a passing stage to another existence. This is confirmed by the verse of the Qur’an which says “Again, on the Day of Judgment, will ye be Raised up.” [21].

6. CONCLUSION

Mankind has always found it very difficult to come to terms with the issue of death and dying and this has been pervasive in different times and societies [26]. Heyndericks et al. [27] also support this by admitting in their study that metaphors help to cope with death, which in modern society is still taboo. This reluctance has necessitated using different metaphorical and less straightforward terms. Consequently, in this study, conceptual metaphors are regarded as crystals; clusters of meanings which enable certain abstract target domains to be understood through the windows of some source domains. Thus, death as an all-encompassing matter cannot be understood through single conceptual metaphor but a network of interrelated, yet, divergent source domains whose ontological, structural and orientational properties are mapped to it. The source domains of *‘journey’*,

‘gate’, *‘rest’* and *‘garment’* have given more understanding to the metaphorical expressions used in breaking news of death in the two languages explored in this study. The domains are borne out of physiological traits of a dead person, religious system of beliefs and socio-cultural beliefs and practices. It is apparent that the entire domains share a literary property of personification such that death is personified as human, a denier, ‘reaper, devourer or destroyer’ [22] even though metaphors have ‘mitigating capacity’ [26].

In a similar vein, the religious undertone or influence on the conceptualization of metaphor has made it very difficult to, in totality identify, all the source domains in the depiction of death because of the multiplicity of metaphors of death. However, the multiplicity of death metaphors shares a lot in common and part of which are the four domains examined in this study. The idea of death as a passage and the notion of existence is all religious belief having roots both in Islam and Christianity. Similarly, there is an experiential relationship between death as rest and death as sleep because both experiences involve some form of immobility. However, rest is embedded in sleep. When a person sleeps, it is believed that the person is equally resting.

From the data gathered, the results suggest the source domain of death as a journey is more dominant and well shared in the two languages than other source domains. One of the reasons for having similarities in the conceptualization of death in the two languages is as a result of physiological experiences of death which are common to human race. The difference in their conceptualization of death is only on a religious system of beliefs and socio-cultural beliefs which give room for the varying levels of acceptance and consolation over the death of a loved one. Further investigation can explore how metaphors are used in classroom discourse or other domains from a comparative approach. The present study did not consider metaphors as used in political space, hence it is a potential area for further studies.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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