

A Cognitive Linguistic and Psycho-Social Study of Metaphor in Niyi Osundare's *Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe*

¹ Moses Olusanya Ayoola & ² Hannah Oluwatobi Odulaja

Department of English and Literary Studies, Bamidele Olumilua
University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere-Ekiti

¹ORCID ID: 0000-0003-1291-2675; ²ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8753-5558

Corresponding Author: **Moses Olusanya Ayoola**

Abstract:

This study examines the use of metaphor in *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* through a combined cognitive-linguistic and psychosocial framework. The concern here is to examine how metaphors in the poem construct Nigerian socio-political Realities. The primary objective of the study is to investigate how metaphorical structures in the poem shape cognitive perception, moral evaluation, and social consciousness about corruption. The study has as its theoretical framework Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, which views metaphor as fundamental to human thought rather than merely a stylistic device. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative textual analysis, focusing on the identification and interpretation of conceptual metaphors and image schemas embedded in the poem. These metaphors are analysed in relation to their source and target domains, as well as their psycho-social implications within the broader context of Nigerian socio-political realities. Findings reveal dominant conceptual metaphors such as CORRUPTION IS A COMMODITY, CORRUPTION IS DIRT, CORRUPTION IS INFILTRATION, and JUSTICE IS A MARKET. These metaphors function not merely as poetic embellishments but as cognitive tools through which socio-political realities are constructed and interpreted. The analysis further demonstrates that metaphor in the poem performs ideological and psycho-social functions by exposing collective frustration, normalisation of corruption, and institutional dysfunction in contemporary Nigerian society. The study concludes that metaphor in Osundare's poem functions as a powerful mechanism for both critique and cognition, revealing how language constructs and sustains social realities. The study contributes to scholarship in cognitive poetics, African literary stylistics, and discourse studies by demonstrating how metaphor operates as both a cognitive and socio-cultural mechanism for representing political and moral crises in African poetry.

Key Words: Cognitive linguistics, metaphor, corruption, psycho-social analysis, poetry, Socio-cultural context, social consciousness, literary discourse, Socio-political realities, Judicial corruption

Introduction

Metaphors have been recognised as playing a crucial role in various cognitive activities such as learning and education (Indurkha 1991). Metaphor is an important cognitive tool as it enables the person to not only understand but also to make sense of their experiences, as well as to have a remarkable insight into life. In literary works, metaphors are the most important means of expressing complicated ideas and feelings in a more subtle and meaningful way. Niyi Osundare, the well-known Nigerian poet, is the master of the art of metaphor, which he uses to mirror the socio-political and personal situations in Nigeria. Metaphor has long been recognised as a central feature of poetic language, traditionally viewed as a stylistic ornament that enhances aesthetic expression. From the review done by Alharbi (2023), There exists several theoretical perspectives that differ in their approaches to the nature and functions of metaphor- starting from Aristotle's Approach to Metaphor (1902), Richards' Approach to Metaphor (1936), Black's Approach to Metaphor (1963), Reddy's Approach to Metaphor (1979) and Lakoff and Johnson's Approach to Metaphor (1980). The study of metaphor in the line of rhetoric can be traced back to Aristotle. According to Martinengo (2020), Aristotle defines metaphor as a figure of speech that consists of applying to something a noun that properly applies to something else. This transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, or from species to species; or it may be a case of analogy". Richards (1936), while proposing Interaction Theory, asserts that the essence of metaphor lies in an Interaction between a metaphorical expression and the context in which it is used. Reddin (2017) asserts that Aristotle views metaphors as decorative elements designed to dress up language. He went further to say that Aristotle explained that metaphor "gives style, clearness, charm, and distinction as nothing else can". To Hawkes (1972), metaphor refers to a particular set of linguistic processes, which involve the transference or 'carrying over' of aspects of one subject to another, such that the second object is mirrored in the image of the first. Hawkes claims that the word 'metaphor' comes from the Greek word 'Metaphora', which was derived from meta meaning 'Over' and Pherrin, 'to carry'(Hawkes 1972, Okpe 2017). However, the recent developments in cognitive linguistics have fundamentally redefined perspectives on metaphor as a core mechanism of human thought and understanding. According to Okpe (2017), "metaphor was seen as an exclusive possession of the literary artists or an ornamental tool used for rhetorical purposes. But more recent views are emancipatory as they present metaphor as a cognitive phenomenon that is pervasive in our everyday language us". No doubt, there are Several views on the subject of metaphor, but they all affirm that it involves transference (Alharbi 2023), and to the cognitive linguists, metaphor is a cognitive phenomenon.

From the foregoing, no doubt, metaphor has long attracted scholarly attention in literary studies, philosophy, rhetoric, linguistics, and cognitive science because of its central role

in meaning construction and human thought. Traditionally, metaphor was regarded mainly as a stylistic or rhetorical device used for artistic embellishment in literary discourse. However, metaphor concept has been proposed by the cognitivist researchers, specifically by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, as the grounding element in thinking as well as talking. Cognitive linguistics views language as an integral part of human cognition, emphasising that meaning arises from conceptualisation grounded in experience (Evans & Green, 2006). Unlike formalist theories, it posits that linguistic structures reflect mental representations shaped by bodily interaction and cultural context. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) have pointed out that metaphors are not only braille but also dominant modes of flora through which people feel the world and interpret it.

There is a sense in which the very power of metaphor has been explored in literary studies, with critics often pointing out the metaphor's ability to touch emotions, create vivid visual images, and contain complex concepts. Within literary discourse, metaphor functions not only as an aesthetic strategy but also as a powerful cognitive and ideological resource through which writers encode social realities, political experiences, and psychological conditions. In African literature, particularly, metaphor frequently serves as a medium for critiquing corruption, oppression, leadership failure, poverty, and socio-political instability. Nigerian poets such as Niyi Osundare have consistently deployed metaphorical language to challenge injustice and expose institutional decay in postcolonial society. Niyi Osundare stands out among African poets for his poetry, characterised by satire, political criticism, and ideological engagement.

Existing studies on Osundare's poetry have largely concentrated on themes of environmentalism, political protest, stylistics, and discourse analysis. While these studies provide valuable insights into his poetic artistry, relatively little attention has been paid to the cognitive structures underlying his metaphorical expressions and the psycho-social meanings encoded within them. More specifically, previous scholarship has not sufficiently examined how metaphorical mappings in *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* construct collective perceptions of corruption, moral collapse, and institutional dysfunction in Nigerian society. This gap limits scholarly understanding of the relationship between metaphor, cognition, and socio-political consciousness in contemporary African poetry.

This study, therefore, investigates the cognitive and psycho-social dimensions of metaphor in Osundare's *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980) as its analytical framework. The study aims to identify the dominant conceptual metaphors in the poem, examine the source and target domains underlying these metaphors, and analyse how they construct socio-political meaning and ideological critique. The study is significant because it contributes to cognitive poetics, African literary stylistics, and discourse studies by demonstrating how

metaphor functions as both a cognitive structure and a socio-cultural instrument for representing corruption and social disillusionment in Nigerian society.

Literature Review

Scholarly interest in metaphor has expanded significantly from rhetorical and literary traditions to approaches that are cognitive and discourse-oriented. Early metaphor studies viewed metaphor primarily as an ornamental linguistic feature employed for stylistic embellishment. However, the emergence of cognitive linguistics transformed this perception by emphasising the conceptual and experiential basis of metaphor. Particularly, the work of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson has provided a robust framework for understanding metaphors as fundamental to human thought and communication. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors are not merely linguistic embellishments but essential mechanisms through which people conceptualise and make sense of their experiences. Altavilla et al.(2025) argue that “Metaphors have been acknowledged as crucial for understanding and articulating complex experiences, helping individuals make sense of emotional and social challenges, especially during tough times.”

Several studies have explored metaphor in literary and political discourse from cognitive and ideological perspectives. Zou, Fuller, and Wang’s (2025) work on the interplay between cultural models and metaphor understanding adopts a cross-cultural cognitive perspective and employs grounded theory as the methodological framework to analyse how cultural models influence metaphor understanding. The study uses a coding analysis of 148 domestic and international texts to construct a four-element model comprising thinking patterns, cognitive frameworks, language communication, and social consensus. The study affirms that thinking patterns shape cognitive frameworks, which are articulated and transmitted through language communication, ultimately contributing to the formation of social consensus within cultural groups. The study concludes that these four interrelated elements work together to support deeper and more accurate metaphor comprehension in intercultural contexts. By integrating theory with empirical analysis, the study offers a novel conceptual framework for future research on metaphor in cross-cultural communication. Stockwell (2002) examines the role of cognitive poetics in literary interpretation and argues that metaphor contributes significantly to readers’ conceptual understanding of texts. Similarly, Kövecses (2010) demonstrates that conceptual metaphors reflect cultural experiences and ideological orientations. While these studies establish the theoretical relevance of metaphor in meaning construction, they focus largely on Western literary and linguistic contexts with limited attention to African socio-political discourse.

In the Nigerian context, studies on metaphor have predominantly examined political speeches, media discourse, and literary texts. Dahunsi and Babatunde (2017) use Systemic

Functional Grammar to analyse mood structure and thematic organisation in Niyi Osundare's *my lord tell me where to Keep Your Bribe*. The study is, then, limited by its focus on grammatical structure, neglecting cognitive and metaphorical dimensions. Ogungbemi (2018) examines metaphor as a discourse strategy, identifying its role in Ideological critique and cultural expression. Even though the study is very insightful, it lacks engagement with cognitive linguistic theories, treating metaphor as a textual rather than a conceptual phenomenon. Meanwhile, all these studies demonstrate the ideological significance of metaphor; they focus mainly on political rhetoric rather than literary discourse.

Metaphor in African poetry and Osundare scholarship has attracted growing attention, though often rhetorically rather than cognitively. Some of these studies on Osundare's poetry have emphasised the socio-political context and the poet's engagement with Nigerian culture and politics. Amuta (1989) and Okunoye (2002) have explored how Osundare uses poetic language to critique societal issues and advocate for change. Amore & Amusan (2019) investigated the aspects of conceptual metaphors in selected poems of Niyi Osundare. It identified that Osundare's linguistic idiolect is reflected in his Cognitive and aesthetic function of poetic metaphor, and this has helped him convey the truth and beauty of African tradition. They observe that Osundare's metaphors illuminate "pristine African concepts and traditions" (Amore & Amusan 2019). They conclude that his conceptual metaphors are serving cognitive and aesthetic functions. However, they pay limited attention to the cognitive structures underlying his metaphorical representations.

The present study differs from previous studies in two major ways. First, it specifically adopts a cognitive linguistic approach focusing on mappings of conceptual mappings rather than general stylistic description. Second, it extends metaphor analysis to the psycho-social domain by examining how metaphor constructs collective emotions, moral disillusionment, and socio-political consciousness within the Nigerian context. The study therefore contributes to the emerging intersection between cognitive poetics, discourse studies, and African literary criticism. Integrating cognitive linguistics with cultural and psycho-social perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of metaphor in Osundare's poem.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in cognitive linguistics, with a particular focus on the conceptual metaphor theory developed by Lakoff and Johnson. This theory posits that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but fundamental to human thought processes, shaping how individuals perceive and interact with the world. By mapping abstract concepts onto more concrete experiences, metaphors enable people to understand and navigate complex ideas and emotions. The foundation of this study is Conceptual Metaphor Theory, developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. The theory

proposes that metaphor involves systematic mappings between source domains (concrete) and target domains (abstract). Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), as originally propounded by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), views metaphor as a cognitive mechanism through which abstract concepts are understood in terms of more concrete and familiar experiences. Unlike traditional theories that regard metaphor as a decorative linguistic device, CMT argues that metaphor structures human perception, reasoning, ideology, and communication.

Lakoff and Johnson's Approach to Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson in their book, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), have argued that metaphor functions as a cognitive and relational tool, a means of grasping, framing, and communicating aspects of experience that are difficult to access through literal language (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980,). they think of metaphor as fundamentally a pervasive cognitive phenomenon, which can be observed not only in the way people speak, but also in the way they think and act. In their view, the essence of metaphor “is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another.”(Lakoff & Johnson 1980, Alharbi 2023). According to Lakoff & Johnson (2008), conceptual metaphors are the result of mental construction used as analogous principles involving the conceptualisation of two elements. Then, those are cognitive mechanisms in which the experience (source domain) is mapped to other realms of experience (target domain) so that the second realm is understood from the initial realm. Besides, the source domain is understood as the abstract domain, while the target domain is the destination. According to Zhang & Gao (2009), metaphor is all mapping in the conceptual domain, and the mapping function is a set of ontological correspondences that remain between entities in the source domain and target domain. The main function of mapping is to clarify the relationship between the target and the conceptual domain. Lakoff and Johnson also identified three different kinds of conceptual metaphors: orientational, ontological, and structural.

Orientalional Metaphors: The name of the orientational metaphor arises from the fact that some who serve this function correlate with basic human spatial orientations. Orientalional metaphors relate to the orientation of human experiences, such as Up-Down, In-Out, Front-Back, etc. (Kovecses, 2010). The example provided to illustrate this sort of conceptual metaphor is ‘HAPPY IS UP, SAD IS DOWN,’ in which the concept of happiness is associated with an upward orientation, whereas sadness is associated with a downward one. The orientation of space arises because of human physical experience in regulating the direction of daily life. In line with the opinion of Lakoff & Johnson (2008), orientational metaphors provide spatial orientational concepts. According to Kovecses (2010), one concept is another type of metaphorical concept in another case, and one type

does not arrange concepts in other respects but regulates the system to respect each other.

Ontological Metaphor: An ontological metaphor is a conceptual type of metaphor that functions to conceptualise something in the form of a person's thoughts or experiences that are from the abstract to something that has a physical or clear nature. In other words, the ontological metaphor makes abstract things concrete, such as efforts to portray events, emotional activities, and ideas as non-physical into concrete phenomena (Evans & Green, 2006). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) define ontological metaphors as conceptual metaphors that give non-physical entities concrete forms. According to them, ontological metaphors are “among the most basic devices we have for comprehending our experience. They also point to three different sub-types of ontological metaphors: container, entity, and personification.

In a container metaphor, an abstract concept is represented as having an ‘inside’ and an ‘outside,’ thereby capable of holding something else. In an entity metaphor, an abstract concept is depicted as a tangible, physical entity. This is different from the container metaphor described earlier, where the dichotomy of *in* and *out* is of primary significance. Personification metaphor is regarded by Lakoff and Johnson as the most obvious subtype of ontological metaphors, in which a non-human thing or quality is represented in human form.

Structural metaphors are the relationship of systemic correlations in everyday experience based on two domains, which are the target and source domains. Lakoff and Johnson use the term ‘structural metaphors’ to refer to the kind of conceptual metaphors in which a highly abstract and complex concept is structured and expressed in terms of another clearly identifiable and familiar concept. According to Lakoff & Johnson (2008), structural metaphors have an important role because these two things, structural and conceptual metaphors, are culturally based on culture sourced from our experience in material, then based on personal experiences that have systemic correlations. Then, structural metaphor functions are more than just orienting concepts, but referring to or being able to measure them. It can be used as a logical metaphor that is clearly illustrated and structured to catch up with others. Structural metaphors are not only based on the source and target domains but also on systematic correlations of daily life.

In sum, Lakoff and Johnson’s cognitive theory of metaphor provides a potent and rigorous analytical lens for understanding how meaning is constructed through systematic mappings between source and target domains, as well as how these mappings are shaped by embodied experience and socio-cultural realities. Metaphor is inherently culturally embedded, reflecting shared values and social realities. As research indicates, metaphor and culture are inseparable, with cultural context shaping conceptual mappings and interpretation. From a psycho-social perspective, metaphor encodes collective emotions,

shapes public perception, Influences ideological positioning. Scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Gibbs (1994), and Stockwell (2002) demonstrate that metaphor is central to both everyday cognition and poetic expression. According to Zou, Fuller and Wang (2025), “metaphor, as a fundamental mechanism of human cognition and communication, carries deeply embedded cultural connotations. It enables individuals to frame abstract concepts through culturally shaped imagery and reasoning”.

In addition to cognitive linguistics, this research draws on psychosocial theories to examine how metaphors shape social identities and cultural narratives. Cultural Models Theory (Holland & Quinn, 1987; Shore, 1996) explains how shared systems of meaning are built by culture and stored in our minds. Shore (1996) defines cultural models as mental frameworks that organise collective knowledge, values, and practices within a society. From this perspective, metaphors act as cognitive and cultural tools that both reflect and shape these shared ways of understanding. They help us see how communities organise experiences and interpret social reality through culturally rooted concept frameworks. Together, these theories provide a strong psychosocial view of how metaphor functions as both a language feature and a means of creating and maintaining cultural stories and social identities. Cognitive linguistics is concerned with the conceptual workings of the embodied mind, all aspects of human experience and behaviour, whether from the perspective of the writer, from the perspective of the reader, or from the perspective of the text itself, are relevant and are integrated into a cognitive understanding of the literary experience.

Adopting these theoretical models, the present study moves beyond viewing metaphor as mere stylistic ornamentation to examining it as a conceptual and ideological tool embedded in language use. Consequently, the data analysis section of this study applies these theoretical insights to the study of “*My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe*” by Niyi Osundare, identifying and interpreting the dominant conceptual metaphors in the poem and demonstrating how they reveal underlying cognitive patterns and psychosocial meanings. Conceptual metaphors in Lakoff and Johnson’s work are written in capitals. This has become the standard practice found in the literature. Therefore, this study maintains the standard in presenting conceptual metaphors in the analysis section.

Methodology

We employ qualitative textual analysis. The poem is examined line by line to extract metaphorical expressions in Osundare’s *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe*. Niyi Osundare’s poem *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* (October 2016) was written in a moment of intense public outrage against the judiciary following the exposure of widespread judicial corruption in Nigeria. The poem was written particularly after the raids on judges by the Department of State Services in October 2016. The poem of 24-

stanzas where Niyi Osundare, a leading figure in contemporary African poetry and a master in the use of metaphor, deploys satire and dramatic monologue to interrogate the moral collapse of the judiciary system in Nigeria, is the data for analysis in this study. Using conceptual mapping, we classify metaphors according to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). The study proceeds in methodological stages. First, a cognitive linguistic analysis identifies metaphorical expressions in the poem. Using Lakoff's criteria, each metaphor is mapped to its source and target domains, and the source and underlying schemas are identified. The psycho-social analysis seeks to explain why certain metaphors are used: what do they imply about power relations, social identity, and values? Combining these, we synthesise how cognitive structure (Lakoffian mappings) and social context interact.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This session presents a cognitive linguistic analysis of *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* by Niyi Osundare, using Conceptual Metaphor Theory and image schema theory. The analysis identifies recurring conceptual metaphors and image schemas, and interprets their cognitive and psycho-social implications.

Table 1: Conceptual Metaphors in the Poem

| S/N | Textual Expression | Conceptual Metaphor | Source Domain | Target Domain | Type of Metaphor | Function |
|-----|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--|
| 1 | "Where to keep your bribe?" | CORRUPTION IS A COMMODITY | Trade/Storage | Corruption | Economic/Material | Normalises bribery as routine |
| 2 | "My Lord" | POWER IS UP | Spatial hierarchy | Authority | Spatial | Reinforces inequality |
| 3 | Giving a bribe | JUSTICE IS A MARKET | Commerce | Legal system | Economic | Shows the commercialisation of justice |
| 4 | Hidden bribe | CORRUPTION IS DIRT | Filth/contamination | Moral decay | Moral/Physical | Evokes disgust and critique |
| 5 | Speaker-judge interaction | SOCIAL RELATION IS A TRANSACTION | Exchange | Social relations | Social/Economic | Depicts corruption as routine |
| 6 | "Drop it | CORRUPTION | Space/Container | Institution | Spatial | Shows |

| | | | | | | |
|----|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | in your chambers” / “immaculate mansion” | IS INFILTRATION | ner | ions | | corruption invading sacred spaces |
| 7 | “Bury it in water tank / septic tank” | CORRUPTION IS WASTE | Waste/Decay | Corruption | Physical/Environmental | Portrays corruption as polluting |
| 8 | “Money can deodorize the smelliest crime” | MONEY IS A CLEANSING AGENT | Cleaning/Smell | Moral judgment | Personification /Sensory | Shows moral distortion by wealth |
| 9 | “Conjure the walls to open up” | CORRUPTION IS MAGIC/CONCEALMENT | Supernatural/Illusion | Corrupt acts | Concealment | Highlights secrecy and manipulation |
| 10 | “Corruption stands, naked...” | CORRUPTION IS A PERSON | Human body | Corruption | Personification | Exposes shamelessness and impunity |

The table above presents a structured mapping of metaphorical expressions in *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe*, revealing how language encodes deeper cognitive and socio-cultural meanings. The poem does not rely on isolated metaphors; instead, it constructs a network of conceptual mappings that collectively shape how corruption is understood. A close reading of the entries shows a consistent reliance on concrete, familiar domains (trade, space, dirt, exchange) to structure the abstract concept of corruption. Thus, the dominant conceptual metaphors in the poem are explained below:

1. Corruption is a Commodity

One of the dominant conceptual metaphors in the poem is the representation of corruption as a commodity that can be exchanged, transferred, stored, negotiated, and circulated within society. This metaphor emerges prominently in the title itself: *“My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe.”* The lexical item “bribe” is treated as a physical object capable of being possessed, transported, hidden, and deposited. This commodification is further reinforced in the poem through expressions such as:

“Or carry the heavy booty to your immaculate mansion.”

and

“They will surely know how to keep the loot”

Similarly, the lines:

“Many, many days to count this booty”

and

“A million dollars in Their Lordship’s bedroom

A million euros in the parlor closet

Countless naira beneath the kitchen sink”

All these represent corruption as accumulated material wealth and transferable economic goods. These and other expressions within the poem portray bribery as an item of exchange between individuals and institutions

Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory, the source domain is COMMODITY/TRADE, while the target domain is CORRUPTION. Corruption is therefore conceptualised as an economic product capable of ownership, exchange, transportation, and storage.

The psycho-social implication of this metaphor is profound. By portraying bribery as a routine commodity, the poem reveals the extent to which corruption has become institutionalised and normalised within Nigerian society. Ethical principles are displaced by transactional values, and social advancement becomes dependent on economic exchange rather than merit or justice. The metaphor also reflects collective desensitisation to corruption, where bribery is treated as an ordinary social currency.

2. Power is Up

The poem also constructs power through orientational metaphors associated with vertical elevation and spatial superiority. Expressions referring to “high places,” “top offices,” and elevated authority figures symbolically associate power with vertical elevation. The speaker’s deferential address to “My Lord,” which is the revered address for the judges, further reinforces hierarchical social ordering in which authority occupies an elevated position above ordinary citizens. The adjective “lofty” metaphorically associates authority and social status with height and elevation. Similarly, the repeated address:

“My Lord”

positions the judicial figure symbolically above ordinary citizens within the social hierarchy.

Within this metaphorical structure, the source domain is VERTICAL ELEVATION/UPWARD POSITIONING, while the target domain is POWER AND AUTHORITY. This reflects Lakoff and Johnson's orientational metaphor POWER IS UP.

The psycho-social implication is that authority in Nigerian society is perceived as socially elevated, distant, and inaccessible. Power becomes associated with superiority and dominance rather than accountability and service. The metaphor critiques institutional elitism and the unequal distribution of influence within governance structures.

3. Justice is a Market

The poem metaphorically represents the judicial system as a commercial marketplace in which judgments and justice are bought and sold. The title itself implies negotiation between legal authority and bribery. Expressions suggesting the strategic placement of bribes indicate that justice operates according to economic exchange rather than moral or legal principles. The poem repeatedly conceptualises the judicial system as a commercial marketplace where judgments and legal outcomes are purchased by the wealthy. This metaphor is strongly expressed in the lines:

“Corruption stands, naked, in its insolent impunity

For sale to the highest bidder”

and

“Opulent criminals shop for pliant judges”

The market imagery continues in:

“Just one judgement sold to the richest bidder”

These expressions frame justice as a tradable commodity subject to commercial negotiation.

The source domain here is MARKET/COMMERCIAL EXCHANGE, while the target domain is JUSTICE AND JUDICIAL PROCESS. Judicial outcomes are metaphorically understood in terms of buying and selling. This metaphor exposes widespread public distrust in legal institutions and reflects collective perceptions of judicial corruption.

The psycho-social implication is that justice loses its moral credibility when it becomes commercialised. Citizens begin to perceive the legal system not as an institution of fairness but as a transactional structure accessible primarily to the wealthy and politically connected. The metaphor, therefore, encodes social frustration, institutional disillusionment, and ideological cynicism toward governance structures in Nigeria, where the masses no longer perceive justice as impartial or ethical but as accessible primarily to those with economic power.

4. Corruption is Dirt

Another dominant conceptual metaphor in the poem represents CORRUPTION AS DIRT, contamination, and foulness. This is evident in expressions such as:

“Since money can deodorise the smelliest crime”

and

“Is a rot and riot whose stench is choking the land”

The metaphor intensifies further in:

“The roof is roundly perforated

By termites of graft”

and

“Nigeria is a huge corpse

With milling maggots on its wretched hulk”

Within this mapping, the source domain is DIRT/DECAY/CONTAMINATION, while the target domain is CORRUPTION.

The psycho-social implication of this metaphor is powerful because dirt naturally evokes disgust, impurity, and rejection. Corruption is therefore cognitively associated with moral pollution and institutional decay. The imagery of “stench,” “rot,” “termites,” and “maggots” suggests that corruption has spread deeply into the national structure, consuming institutions from within. The metaphor reflects collective frustration, moral revulsion, and societal despair. The metaphor, therefore encodes both condemnation and helplessness within the socio-political environment.

5. Social Relation is a Transaction

The poem further constructs social and institutional relationships as transactional exchanges driven by economic interest and material gain. This is evident in the speaker’s constant negotiation concerning the handling of bribe money:

“Shall I give a billion to each of your paramours”

and

“May help themselves to a fraction of the loot”

Similarly, the lines:

“Protect the criminal, enshrine the crime”

All these suggest institutional complicity motivated by transactional interest. Interactions between citizens and authority figures, such as judicial officers, are mediated through bribery, negotiation, and material exchange rather than ethical principles or social trust.

The source domain here is ECONOMIC TRANSACTION, while the target domain is SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP.

The psycho-social implication is that social trust and ethical responsibility have been replaced by opportunism and self-interest. Human interactions become governed by economic benefit rather than moral principles. The metaphor exposes the

commodification of social relations and the erosion of communal ethics within Nigerian society.

6. Corruption is Infiltration

In the poem, corruption is also conceptualised as an invasive force penetrating institutional structures and spreading through society. This is reflected in expressions such as:

*“Behind the antiquated wig
And the slavish glove
The penguin gown and the obfuscating jargon
Is a rot and riot whose stench is choking the land”*
and
“As Corruption usurps his gavel.”

The verb “usurps” suggests forceful occupation and infiltration of institutional authority. The source domain is INFILTRATION/PENETRATION, while the target domain is CORRUPTION.

The psycho-social implication is that corruption is no longer external to institutions but deeply embedded within them. The metaphor reflects collective anxiety concerning the inability of social structures to resist moral contamination. Corruption is represented as systemic and invasive rather than isolated or individual. It reflects collective anxiety concerning institutional vulnerability and the inability of governance structures to resist moral decay. The metaphor further suggests that corruption reproduces itself within social systems until it becomes embedded within everyday institutional practices.

7. Corruption is Waste

The poem repeatedly portrays corruption as wastefulness, deterioration, and societal destruction. The National resources and institutional integrity are implicitly represented as being squandered through corrupt practices. This is evident in the imagery of ruined national structures:

*“The ‘Temple of Justice’
Is broken in every brick”*
and
*“The roof is roundly perforated
By termites of graft”*

The metaphor extends to national collapse in:

“Nigeria is a huge corpse”

The source domain is WASTE/DESTRUCTION/DECAY, while the target domain is CORRUPTION.

The psycho-social implication is that corruption consumes national resources and destroys institutional integrity. The metaphor reflects widespread frustration concerning failed governance, underdevelopment, and the destruction of collective national aspirations.

8. Money is a Cleansing Agent

This is an ironic metaphorical construction in the poem, which represents money as a means of cleansing wrongdoing and legitimising corruption. This appears explicitly in the line:

“Since money can deodorize the smelliest crime”

Money metaphorically functions as a cleansing substance capable of masking moral corruption.

The source domain is CLEANSING/PURIFICATION, while the target domain is MONEY/BRIBERY. Money acquires metaphorical power to erase guilt, facilitate access, and neutralise institutional resistance.

The psycho-social implication is deeply ironic because financial influence replaces ethical accountability. Wealth becomes a mechanism for erasing guilt and securing institutional favour. The metaphor reflects societal perceptions that economic power can neutralise justice and manipulate judicial processes.

9. Corruption is Magic/Concealment

The poem also constructs corruption through metaphors of secrecy, disappearance, and magical concealment. This appears in expressions such as:

*“Or shall I conjure the walls to open up
And swallow this sudden bounty”*

and

“In places too remote for the sniffing dog”

The idea of hidden bank accounts also reinforces concealment:

“With their names on overflowing bank accounts”

The source domain is MAGIC/CONCEALMENT, while the target domain is CORRUPTION.

The psycho-social implication is that corruption operates through secrecy and hidden networks of complicity. The metaphor reflects public distrust of institutional transparency and the perception that corruption survives through concealment and covert operations.

Corruption is a Person

The poem personifies corruption by attributing to it human agency, with mobility, intentionality, and power. Corruption metaphorically behaves like a living entity capable

of entering institutions, influencing decisions, and interacting with society. This is evident in the lines:

“Corruption stands, naked, in its insolent impunity”

and

“As Corruption usurps his gavel.”

The metaphor intensifies in:

“Where Impunity walks the streets

Like a large, invincible Demon”

The source domain here is HUMAN BEING/PERSON, while the target domain is CORRUPTION.

The psycho-social implication is that corruption acquires autonomous social existence and overwhelming power. Corruption is represented not merely as an abstract condition but as a living and dominant force controlling institutions and society. The metaphor reflects collective helplessness and fear concerning the persistence of systemic corruption.

Table 2: Image Schemas in the Poem

| S/N | Expression | Image Schema | Structure | Cognitive Meaning |
|-----|--------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | “keep your bribe” | Container | In–Out boundary | Concealment of corruption |
| 2 | Giving process | Source–Path–Goal | Movement trajectory | Corruption as a process |
| 3 | “My Lord” | Up–Down | Vertical hierarchy | Power imbalance |
| 4 | Speaker–judge link | Link | Connection | Corrupt relationship |
| 5 | Pressure to comply | Force | Compulsion | Lack of agency |
| | | | | |

The image schemas in the poem, as shown in the table above, demonstrate that corruption is not only described linguistically but structured cognitively and reproduced socially through discourse. By grounding corruption in schemas of containment, movement, hierarchy, connection, and force, Osundare reveals a system that is hidden yet pervasive, Structured yet unjust, Personal yet institutional, as seen in the discussion below:

1. Container Schema: Corruption as Concealment

The expression *“keep your bribe”* activates the container schema, structured around an *inside–outside boundary*. This is reinforced by lines such as:

- *“Do I drop it in your venerable chambers?”*

- “*Shall I bury it in the capacious water tank?*”

These expressions portray bribery as something that must be hidden within enclosed spaces, suggesting secrecy and deliberate concealment. From a discourse perspective, this reflects a social system where corruption is not eradicated but managed through concealment strategies. The container schema, therefore, encodes a culture of silence and complicity.

2. Source–Path–Goal Schema: Corruption as a Process

The *giving process*, implied in “*Where to keep your bribe?*” and the various suggested locations, reflects a Source–Path–Goal schema, where:

- **Source:** The Giver (speaker)
- **Path:** the act of transferring the bribe
- **Goal:** the judge (“My Lord”)

This schema constructs corruption as a structured, almost procedural activity, not a spontaneous act. Socially, it suggests institutionalisation: bribery follows predictable “routes” within the legal system. In discourse terms, corruption becomes normalised as a routine pathway to achieving justice.

3. Up–Down Schema: Power and Hierarchy

The address “*My Lord*” clearly activates the Up–Down schema, where authority is conceptualised as being “above” others. This vertical hierarchy positions:

- The judge as superior (*up*)
- The speaker as subordinate (*down*)

This schema encodes power imbalance and social distance, reinforcing obedience and submission. Within social discourse, such language legitimises inequality and frames corruption as something the less powerful must comply with to access justice.

4. Link Schema: Corruption as Relationship

The interaction between the speaker and the judge reflects a Link schema, which conceptualises social relations as connections. The repeated engagement—questioning where to place the bribe—suggests an established, almost expected link.

This indicates that corruption is not merely an act but a relationship sustained through mutual understanding. From a discourse standpoint, it reveals how corruption becomes embedded in social networks, transforming institutional roles into interactive, transactional bonds.

5. Force Schema: Compulsion and Loss of Agency

The *pressure to comply* is captured through a Force schema, where individuals are compelled to act under external influence. Although not always explicitly stated, it is implied in the speaker’s tone of anxious compliance:

- The speaker does not question *whether* to give a bribe, only *how*

This reflects a lack of agency, where systemic pressure forces individuals into corrupt practices. Socially, this suggests that corruption is sustained not only by willing participants but also by coercive structures that limit choice.

Discussion of Major Findings

The analysis presented indicates that Niyi Osundare utilises conceptual metaphors in *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* as cognitive and ideological devices to depict systemic corruption and the deterioration of institutions in Nigerian society. The key metaphors identified in the poem are CORRUPTION IS A COMMODITY, JUSTICE IS A MARKET, SOCIAL RELATION IS A TRANSACTION, and MONEY IS A CLEANSING AGENT. These mappings conceptualise corruption as a negotiable and tradable economic commodity embedded within the judicial, political, and social frameworks. Consequently, the poem illustrates a society where legal processes, the integrity of institutions, and personal relationships are increasingly influenced by financial transactions and material exchange rather than by moral values, justice, or a sense of shared responsibility.

The findings also reveal that Osundare uses metaphors of dirt, waste, decay, infiltration and personification to depict corruption. Nigeria is described as morally corrupt and institutionally decayed through metaphors of “rot,” “stench,” “termites,” “maggots,” and “corpse.” Likewise, the image of corruption as a force that ‘usurps’ authority and ‘walks the streets’ speaks to collective imaginings of corruption as deeply embedded, invasive, and hard to eradicate. These metaphors invoke psycho-social experiences of anger, frustration, helplessness and disillusionment among citizens, while at the same time revealing the complicity of political and judicial institutions in perpetuating corruption.

Overall, the study confirms that, in the poem, metaphor functions not aesthetically but cognitively as a lens for understanding socio-political realities. The metaphors allow the reader to understand abstract experiences of corruption through familiar experiential domains such as trade, contamination, concealment and decay. By so doing the poem turns literary discourse into a powerful mode of ideological critique and psycho-social commentary on the moral crisis facing contemporary Nigerian society.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the use of metaphor in Niyi Osundare’s *My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe* serves as a significant cognitive and ideological tool for highlighting corruption, failures within institutions, and the decline of socio-political standards in Nigeria. By employing conceptual mappings based on themes such as commerce, impurity, waste, secrecy, infiltration, and personification, the poem vividly converts the notion of corruption from an abstract political matter into tangible experiences that readers can understand on both cognitive and emotional levels. As a

result, the findings support the primary assertion of Conceptual Metaphor Theory that metaphor is not just ornamental language but a crucial framework through which individuals comprehend social experiences and create ideological significance.

The research makes a notable contribution to cognitive poetics, the stylistics of African literature, the study of political discourse, and psycho-social literary analysis. It illustrates how metaphor influences political awareness and shared emotional reactions within the context of African literary discussions. This work builds upon earlier studies of Osundare's poetry by emphasizing the cognitive and psycho-social aspects of his metaphorical constructs, rather than concentrating only on thematic or stylistic elements. More generally, the research demonstrates that metaphor in African poetry acts as a tool for political resistance, moral inquiry, and collective social remembrance. Through its use of metaphor, the poem reveals the harmful effects of corruption while also urging readers to face the ethical and institutional challenges that define current Nigerian society.

References:

1. Alharbi, A. N. (2023). Theoretical Evolution of Metaphor. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 26(3), 1-8. Available from: www.cscanada.net
2. Altavilla D, Mazzaggio G, Deriu V, Garelo S, Vecchi A, Adornetti I, Chiera A, Canali S and
3. Ferretti F (2025) Metaphor as a cognitive and relational tool for self-narrating experience of addiction: a qualitative-quantitative analysis. *Frontier Psychology*.
4. Amore, K & Amusan, K. (2019). Aspects of conceptual metaphors in selected poems by Niyi Osundare. 232-246.
5. Amuta, C. (1989). *The theory of African literature: Implications for practical criticism*. Zed Books.
6. Black, M. (1962). *Models and metaphors: Studies in language and philosophy*. Cornell University Press.
7. Dahunsi, T.N., & Babatunde, S.T. (2017). Mood Structure Analysis and Thematisation Patterns in Niyi Osundare's "My Lord, Tell Me Where to Keep Your Bribe". *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7, 129.
8. Evans, V., & Green, M. (2006). *Cognitive linguistics: An introduction*. Edinburgh University Press.
9. Gibbs, R. W. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding*. Cambridge University Press.
10. Hawkes, T. (1972). *Metaphor*. London: Methuen and Co. Ltd

11. Holland, D., & Quinn, N. (Eds.). (1987). *Cultural models in language and thought*. Cambridge University Press
12. Huszka, B., & Aini, I. (2026). Metaphor: A Historical Perspective. *GPH-International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 9(02), 151-166.
13. Indurkhyan, B. (1991). Modes of metaphor in metaphor and symbolic activity. *6(1)*, 1-27
14. Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.
15. Kövecses, Z. (2010). *Metaphor: A practical introduction* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
16. Lakoff, G. (1987). *Women, fire, and dangerous things: What categories reveal about the mind*. University of Chicago Press.
17. Lakoff, G. (1993). The contemporary theory of metaphor. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (2nd ed., pp. 202–251). Cambridge University Press.
18. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.
19. Martinengo, A. (2020). Metaphor. In: Vercellone, F., Tedesco, S. (eds) *Glossary of Morphology. Lecture Notes in Morphogenesis*. Springer, Cham.
20. Ogungbemi, O. D. (2018). Conceptual metaphors in Nigerian political speeches. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 8(5), 120–129.
21. Okpe, A.A.(2017). Perspectives on Metaphor. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria* (20), 1
22. Okunoye, O. (2002). Alter/native traditions of modern African poetry: The example of Niyi Osundare. *Research in African Literatures*, 33(3),
23. Reddy, M. J. (1979). The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought* (pp. 284–324). Cambridge University Press.
24. Richards, I.A. (1936). *The Philosophy of Rhetorics*. London: Oxford University Press
25. Shore, B. (1996). *Culture in mind: Cognition, culture, and the problem of meaning*. Oxford University Press.
26. Stockwell, P. (2002). *Cognitive poetics: An introduction*. Routledge.
27. Zou, J., Fuller, C., & Wang, L. (2025). The interplay between cultural models and metaphor understanding: A cross-cultural cognitive perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1539784.
28. Zhang, Y., & Gao, X. (2009). A cognitive perspective on metaphor. *Asian Social Science*, 5(12), 98–102.