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“WE ROSE FROM THE ASHES OF DESPAIR”: A PRAGMA-STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF METAPHOR IN PRESIDENT TINUBU’S 2024-2025 DEMOCRACY DAY SPEECHES

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Abstract: In post-authoritarian democracies, commemorative speeches serve as crucial sites for reinforcing national cohesion and legitimising state power, yet they remain largely understudied in political discourse analysis. Addressing this gap, this article investigates the metaphorical construction of political meaning in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches, framing presidential rhetoric as a highly institutionalised form of professional discourse. The aim is to examine how metaphor functions as a cognitive, communicative, and stylistic resource in presidential rhetoric. Drawing on an integrated pragma-stylistic framework combining Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Speech Act Theory (SAT), and Stylistic Theory, the study uncovers how metaphors frame national history and construct leadership legitimacy. The corpus, totaling 4,875 words, was analysed using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). The analysis identified 22 active metaphors (14 from 2024; 8 from 2025) grouped into six thematic domains: rebirth and struggle, war and resistance, living democracy, light and vision, economic restoration, and sacred destiny. Findings reveal that these metaphors operate as pragmatic tools for reframing political struggle and mobilising citizen responsibility. Specifically, rebirth and struggle metaphors construct national resilience. Journey and light imagery provide forward-looking frames that guide public expectations. Economic metaphors simplify complex reforms by framing hardship as structural renewal, and sacred metaphors elevate democratic practice within moral registers resonating with Nigerian socio-cultural values. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that metaphor in commemorative discourse performs vital ideological work, shaping how citizens interpret democratic progress and national identity while executing the organisational objectives of state leadership. By analysing a neglected genre of Nigerian presidential rhetoric, this study expands existing scholarship on African political discourse and highlights the relevance of a triangulated pragma-stylistic approach for understanding metaphor as a layered discursive phenomenon.

Keywords: political metaphor, pragma-stylistics, Democracy Day, President Tinubu, speech act, conceptual metaphor, Nigerian political discourse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In post-authoritarian and transitional democracies, political speeches serve not merely as vehicles for information but as strategic acts of narration, identity construction, and ideological legitimisation. In such contexts, metaphor functions as a powerful rhetorical device that enables political actors to frame abstract processes such as governance, reform, sacrifice, or unity through concrete, emotionally resonant imagery (Aremu, 2017; Kwasau and Abdulrasheed, 2025). In Nigeria, where the trauma of military dictatorship and the fragility of democratic consolidation remain part of the collective memory, presidential speeches become crucial sites for reinforcing national cohesion and legitimising state power. This paper examines how President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, in his 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches, employs metaphorical language to frame Nigeria’s democratic identity, leadership ethos, and national direction.

A substantial body of scholarship affirms the centrality of metaphor in political discourse (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2005; Musolff, 2006), including its role in shaping national ideology (Penninck, 2014) and constructing political personas (Pilyarchuk & Onysko, 2018). Within the Nigerian context, studies have explored metaphor use in inaugural and campaign speeches (Aremu, 2017; Osisanwo, 2017; Jegede & Lawal, 2023), identifying how figures such as Buhari and Tinubu deploy metaphors to frame their intentions and ethos. Other studies have analysed presidential discourse through the lens of speech act theory (Anyanwu, 2023; Kwasau & Abdulrasheed, 2025), stylistics (Mobolaji et al., 2024; Okunade et al., 2025), rhetoric (Eze & Nwasogwa, 2023; Olawe, 2024), or intertextuality (Eburuaja, 2023). A growing number of works now focus specifically on President Tinubu’s speeches, often analysing his 2023 inaugural address through stylistic (Amoussou et al., 2024), discourse-analytic (Obitube et al., 2023), or pragmatic (Lucas, 2022) frameworks. Some have also examined economic or ideological framing (Chinaguh et al., 2025; Onwudinjo & Ogar, 2024). However, there remains a conspicuous gap in metaphor studies on commemorative political genres, particularly Democracy Day addresses – ceremonial but ideologically potent occasions that blend history, national reflection, and political messaging. Moreover, very few studies combine metaphor analysis with an integrated pragma-stylistic framework, a gap this study seeks to fill.

This study asks:

1. What conceptual metaphors are used to frame democracy, leadership, and national development in Tinubu’s Democracy Day speeches?
2. What pragmatic functions do these metaphors serve in constructing political legitimacy and national identity?
3. How do stylistic choices enhance the emotional and ideological force of these metaphors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on political metaphor have been shaped significantly by foundational works in cognitive linguistics (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Charteris-Black, 2005; Musolff, 2006), which argue that metaphor is central to how political actors conceptualise and communicate abstract political realities. While these global studies emphasise the cognitive and ideological functions of metaphor, scholars of African political discourse note that metaphors in postcolonial contexts operate within additional layers of meaning rooted in communal memory, religious symbolism, and histories of state violence. Thus, political metaphor in African settings often blends imported democratic imagery with indigenous cultural schemas, creating hybrid rhetorical forms that require context-sensitive analysis.

Within the Nigerian context, early work such as Aremu (2017) focused on conceptual mappings in presidential inaugural speeches and revealed a dominance of journey and war metaphors used to inspire unity and frame development as a moral struggle. Although insightful, his study remained largely cognitive in focus and did not examine the pragmatic or stylistic functions of metaphor. Subsequent scholarship shifted toward pragmatic perspectives. Osisanwo (2017) and Jegede and Lawal (2023) examined pragmatic acts embedded in President Buhari's speeches, demonstrating that metaphors do more than conceptualise. They perform illocutionary functions such as assuring, cautioning, or legitimising. These works collectively underscore that metaphor in political communication is multifunctional; however, they still privilege either cognitive or pragmatic dimensions, rarely integrating both with stylistic analysis.

Beyond Nigeria, Mwombeki's (2019) pragma-dialectical study of Tanzanian campaign speeches showed how African politicians maneuver debate through culturally rooted metaphors, reinforcing the need for analytical frameworks that capture local rhetorical traditions. Tella's (2018) work on multimodal political memes expanded the field by illustrating how figurative language, including metaphor, circulates in digital political communication. However, this work focuses on visual and humorous discourse rather than formal presidential rhetoric.

More recent studies turn directly to President Tinubu's emerging rhetorical style. Anyanwu (2023) and Amoussou et al. (2024) applied speech act and pragma-stylistic frameworks to Tinubu's inaugural speech, showing how metaphors help soften policy messages and construct a populist persona. Similarly, Kwasau and Abdulrasheed (2025) compared Tinubu and Peter Obi's campaign rhetoric and identified metaphors of rebirth and healing as dominant strategies to address national fatigue. While these studies enrich understanding of Tinubu's rhetorical patterns, they tend to focus on inaugural speeches or campaign discourse, with limited attention to commemorative genres.

Stylistically oriented studies such as Obitube et al. (2023), Akinseye (2023), and Mobolaji et al. (2024) highlight foregrounding, lexical patterning, and ideological positioning in Tinubu's speeches. Although they recognise metaphor as a stylistic resource, these analyses remain largely descriptive and do not explore how metaphors simultaneously function as cognitive mappings and pragmatic acts. Additional works (e.g., Olawe, 2024; Chinaguh et al., 2025; Onwudinjio & Ogar, 2024) examine metaphors in Tinubu's economic and policy discourse, identifying how figurative language frames hardship and reform. Yet these studies generally address isolated sectors or specific catchphrases rather than holistic metaphorical architectures across speeches.

Taken together, existing scholarship confirms that metaphor in Nigerian presidential discourse is essential for constructing legitimacy, reframing crisis, and mobilising collective memory. However, two critical gaps remain. First, research overwhelmingly focuses on inaugural, independence,

and campaign speeches, while Democracy Day speeches, which are ceremonial yet ideologically powerful texts that blend national history with present governance, remain underexplored. Second, few studies integrate cognitive, pragmatic, and stylistic dimensions into a unified analytical model, despite increasing recognition that political metaphor operates across these levels simultaneously. This study addresses these gaps by offering a pragma-stylistic analysis of conceptual metaphors in President Tinubu's 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches, thereby providing a more comprehensive account of how metaphors function as cognitive schema, communicative action, and stylistic foregrounding within commemorative political rhetoric.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Speech Act Theory (SAT), and Stylistic Theory. The combination is necessary because political metaphor operates simultaneously as a cognitive structure, a communicative act, and a stylistic resource. No single theory adequately captures all three dimensions; therefore, a triangulated model offers a more comprehensive analytical lens.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) provides the foundation for identifying the conceptual mappings that structure political thought. According to CMT, metaphors allow speakers to understand abstract political concepts such as democracy, governance, or reform through more concrete experiential domains. In Tinubu's Democracy Day speeches, metaphors like "We rose from the ashes" or "to midwife our democracy" illustrate mappings such as NATION IS A PHOENIX or DEMOCRACY IS A CHILD. These mappings resonate with what Musolff (2022) terms "metaphor scenarios," which highlight the culturally conditioned models that shape political interpretation. CMT therefore enables this study to uncover the conceptual architecture underlying Tinubu's rhetorical choices.

However, cognitive analysis alone does not explain what metaphors *do* in actual political communication. Speech Act Theory (Searle, 1969; Mey, 2001; Verschueren, 1999) is incorporated to account for the illocutionary and socio-pragmatic functions of metaphor. Within SAT, metaphors are understood as performative acts that assert, reassure, promise, or persuade. For instance, "We rose from the ashes" functions not only as a conceptual mapping of rebirth but also as an assertive act that affirms national resilience and an expressive act that celebrates collective memory. SAT, therefore, reveals how metaphors enact leadership, manage public sentiment, and construct political legitimacy within their situational context.

Stylistic Theory forms the third component of the framework and highlights the aesthetic and linguistic construction of metaphor in political discourse. Drawing on Leech and Short (2007) and Simpson (2004), stylistic analysis focuses on foregrounding strategies such as repetition, parallelism, lexical patterning, and semantic intensification. For example, expressions like "keep the fire burning, keep the torch lit" show how rhythmic repetition and figurative clustering enhance rhetorical force. As Vogiatzis (2025) notes, these stylistic devices amplify the metaphor's ideological and emotional impact. Stylistics, therefore, accounts for the linguistic craftsmanship through which metaphors gain salience and memorability.

These three theories are applied in a complementary rather than an isolated manner. Each metaphorical expression identified in the speeches is analysed at three levels: cognitively, to determine the underlying conceptual mapping; pragmatically, to identify the illocutionary acts it performs; and stylistically, to examine how linguistic choices foreground its rhetorical effect. This integrated framework aligns with Charteris-Black's (2004, 2005) model of Critical Metaphor Analysis,

which emphasises the need to examine metaphor as a cognitive, pragmatic, and ideological tool. By synthesising these perspectives, the study interprets metaphor as a layered phenomenon that structures political thought, performs social action, and shapes discourse aesthetics.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, pragma-stylistic research design to investigate the metaphorical framing strategies employed in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches. The corpus consists of two consecutive speeches delivered on June 12, 2024, and June 12, 2025. These texts were purposively selected because Democracy Day occupies a symbolically significant position in Nigeria's political history, commemorating the annulled 1993 elections and the subsequent struggle for democratic governance. Examining them comparatively across two post-election years allows the study to trace potential shifts or continuities in metaphorical framing. The transcripts were sourced from official government archives and reputable media outlets to ensure authenticity and completeness. With a combined word count of 4,875 words, the corpus aligns with established practices in qualitative metaphor studies that prioritise depth over size (Charteris-Black, 2005; Musolff, 2022).

Metaphorical expressions were identified using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007). This procedure involves: (1) a holistic reading of the text; (2) segmentation into lexical units; (3) comparison of basic and contextual meanings; and (4) determination of metaphorical status when a contrast is detected. All metaphorical expressions identified through MIP were included in the analysis; no illustrative sampling was used. In total, twenty-two metaphorical expressions were identified. Of these, fourteen occurred in the 2024 Democracy Day speech, while eight occurred in the 2025 speech. Their frequencies and distribution across conceptual domains were tabulated to provide descriptive support for the qualitative interpretation. After identification, metaphors were grouped into thematic domains based on shared source–target mappings and communicative functions.

It is important to note that the study deliberately excluded highly conventionalised or “dead” metaphors, which are no longer cognitively salient in contemporary usage (e.g., “*steps taken*,” “*in the framework*,” or “*at the heart of policy*”). Following Charteris-Black (2005) and Musolff (2022), the analysis prioritised deliberate and rhetorically functional metaphors that actively contribute to political framing, persuasion, and ideological positioning. As a result, only metaphors that displayed clear source–target tension and contextual communicative relevance were retained. This selective approach explains the relatively modest number of identified metaphors and aligns with qualitative pragma-stylistic traditions that emphasise analytical depth and interpretive significance over raw frequency.

The analysis proceeded through three interrelated lenses: (a) conceptual analysis using Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to map source and target domains; (b) pragmatic analysis using Speech Act Theory (SAT) to determine illocutionary force (e.g., assertive, directive, commissive); and (c) stylistic analysis to examine rhetorical features such as parallelism, lexical deviation, and semantic intensification. Some metaphorical expressions were double-coded across thematic domains due to their multifunctional cognitive, pragmatic, and stylistic roles. Such expressions were counted once in the overall metaphor frequency to avoid inflating the total number of metaphors. Table 1 illustrates an excerpt of the coding procedure.

Table 1. *Sample pragma-stylistic coding of metaphorical expressions*

Metaphorical expression	Literal meaning	Contextual meaning	Conceptual mapping	Communicative function
“We rose from the ashes”	Rebirth from fire	Nigeria’s recovery from dictatorship	NATION IS A PHOENIX	Assertive, expressive
“Midwife the birth...”	Assist childbirth	Facilitate democratic emergence	DEMOCRACY IS A CHILD	Commissive, legitimating
“Keep the fire burning”	Maintain flame	Sustain democratic values	DEMOCRACY IS A SACRED FLAME	Directive, mobilising
“Torch lit for generations”	Hold a torch aloft	Pass democratic legacy	DEMOCRACY IS A GUIDING LIGHT	Declarative, moral continuity

To enhance validity, two independent linguistic scholars reviewed the identified metaphors and their categorizations. Inter-rater reliability was assessed using Cohen’s Kappa, which yielded a coefficient of $k = 0.72$, indicating substantial agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached. A coding journal documenting interpretive decisions was maintained to ensure transparency and replicability. While metaphor analysis necessarily involves interpretive judgment, the study minimised subjectivity by adhering strictly to established theoretical frameworks and by triangulating analyses across conceptual, pragmatic, and stylistic perspectives. Ethically, the study raises no concerns, as it relies solely on publicly available political texts. Although the findings are not generalisable due to the limited corpus, the study offers a detailed, context-rich account of metaphor use during a critical national rhetorical moment and provides a foundation for future comparative research on African political discourse.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Using the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by the Pragglejaz Group (2007), a total of twenty-two (22) metaphorical expressions were identified across the two Democracy Day speeches. Each metaphor was coded according to its underlying source–target mapping and grouped into six conceptual categories. Table 2 presents the distribution of these metaphors.

Table 2. *Conceptual Metaphor Categories and Frequency Distribution*

Category	Number of metaphors identified
Metaphors of struggle and rebirth	5
Metaphors of war, resistance, and sacrifice	4
Metaphors of democracy as a living entity	5
Metaphors of light, vision, and enlightenment	4
Metaphors of economic reform and restoration	3
Metaphors of destiny and sacred oath	2
Total	22

Note: Total represents unique metaphorical expressions. One expression was double-coded across two categories, resulting in a category sum of 23.

These categories provide the structural basis for the subsequent analysis. Some metaphorical expressions are double-coded across conceptual categories due to their multifunctional cognitive and pragmatic roles. Category frequencies, therefore, reflect analytical overlap, while the total count (22) represents unique metaphorical expressions. Their distribution reflects the speeches’ thematic priorities, with rebirth, vitality, and moral vision emerging as dominant frames. The relatively small number of metaphors reflects the study’s methodological decision to exclude

conventionalised expressions and to focus exclusively on salient, discourse-active metaphors that perform identifiable cognitive, pragmatic, and stylistic functions within the speeches. The coded metaphors served as units for pragma-stylistic interpretation across cognitive (CMT), pragmatic (SAT), and stylistic dimensions in the discussion that follows.

5.1. Metaphors of struggle and rebirth

In President Tinubu's 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches, rebirth metaphors dominate the rhetorical frame. These metaphors draw heavily on ritual, mythical, and biological domains to present democracy as not inherited but painfully birthed, initiated, and rekindled after destruction. The following excerpts illustrate the key metaphorical expressions in this category.

Excerpt 1

"On this day, 31 years ago, we entered our rites of passage to becoming a true and enduring democratic society" (2024).

Excerpt 2

"Since 1999, democracy has risen from the ashes and destitution of military rule" (2025).

Excerpt 3

"I was among those who took the risk to midwife the birth of our democracy" (2024).

Excerpt 4

"Let's continue to keep the fire of democracy burning. Let's keep the torch lit for generations to come" (2024).

Excerpt 5

"It was a long and difficult journey, but we have emerged stronger, reborn and resolved" (2025).

Across these excerpts, Tinubu employs a blend of ritual, biological, and elemental metaphors to present Nigeria's democratic path as a sacred transformation. Excerpt 1 frames June 12 as a *"rite of passage,"* invoking a cultural schema of spiritual initiation. This maps onto the conceptual metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A RITUAL TRANSFORMATION, and pragmatically functions as an assertive and commemorative act that elevates a historical date into a moral turning point. Stylistically, the use of *"enduring"* and *"true"* adds permanence and value-laden emphasis. Excerpt 2 presents democracy as a phoenix rising from military *"ashes."* This metaphor draws on the PHOENIX schema, in which destruction is a precursor to rebirth. The metaphor enacts the conceptual mapping NATION IS A PHOENIX, situating Nigeria's political evolution within a narrative of suffering followed by transcendence. Pragmatically, the metaphor performs an assertive act, positioning democracy as the product of endurance and moral victory. Stylistically, the contrast between *"ashes"* and *"risen"* intensifies the semantic register, invoking both visual and spiritual registers.

In Excerpt 3, democracy is personified as a child, and the speaker is framed as a midwife, enacting the schema DEMOCRACY IS A CHILD / LEADER IS A CAREGIVER. The metaphor performs a commissive speech act, expressing personal commitment and historical participation. Notably, the use of *"midwife"* (a traditionally feminine role) for a male president introduces lexical deviation and role reversal, subtly infusing the speaker's ethos with emotional nurturing and sacrificial connotation. Excerpt 4 fuses flame *"the fire burning"* and light-bearing imagery *"torch lit,"* to depict democracy as a sacred, intergenerational legacy. These expressions merge elemental and ritualistic metaphors, suggesting democracy is both a sacred flame and an intergenerational torch. The conceptual mapping DEMOCRACY IS A SACRED FLAME frames civic participation as a duty of vigilance and preservation. The metaphor performs a directive speech act, urging citizens

to sustain democratic ideals. Stylistically, the syntactic parallelism and repeated use of “keep” amplify its rhetorical rhythm and memorability. Lastly, Excerpt 5 explicitly names rebirth: “*emerged stronger, reborn and resolved.*” This expression crystallises the transformation narrative. It compresses the metaphorical journey into a declarative summation, combining the journey, battle, and resurrection metaphors under the broader conceptual theme of DEMOCRACY IS A NEW LIFE. Together, these metaphors construct a master narrative of transformation from ruin to redemption. Democracy is cast not as a constitutional arrangement but as a living memory, moral passage, and generational fire, requiring constant renewal.

5.2. Metaphors of war, resistance, and sacrifice

In Tinubu’s rhetorical framing of Nigeria’s democratic history, war and resistance metaphors play a central role. These expressions draw on the domains of combat, protest, and national struggle to depict democracy not as a gift but as a hard-fought victory. They not only sanctify the democratic movement but also recast the speaker and his allies as frontline combatants. This metaphorical war narrative enables Tinubu to link past sacrifice with present legitimacy. Below are the key metaphorical expressions in this category.

Excerpt 6

“We could not have won the battle against military dictatorship without the irrepressible Nigerian journalists who mounted the barricades along with the pro-democracy activists” (2024).

Excerpt 7

“This is the great battle of our day and the major reason we specially celebrate this Democracy Day” (2024).

Excerpt 8

“We must never forget the heroes who laid down their lives for this democracy” (2025).

Excerpt 9

“I have fought long and hard for this democracy” (2025).

These war metaphors present Nigeria’s transition to democracy as a battlefield defined by moral courage, sacrifice, and enduring resistance. Excerpt 6 fuses military and protest imagery: “*battle,*” “*barricades,*” and “*activists.*” The metaphor constructs a coalitional ethos between civil society and political actors, activating mappings such as JOURNALISTS ARE SOLDIERS and DEMOCRATIC STRUGGLE IS COMBAT. Pragmatically, it performs both a commemorative and assertive speech act, honouring past resistance while reaffirming the speaker’s role within it. Stylistically, the term “*irrepressible*” adds elevated moral status to the journalists, portraying them as heroic, defiant, and essential to national liberation. Excerpt 7 extends the war metaphor to the present day, suggesting that democracy remains under threat. By calling current democratic efforts “*the great battle of our day,*” the speaker frames democracy as perpetually under siege. This metaphor performs a directive act, invoking historical continuity of resistance while calling for vigilance. It creates a sense of present-tense urgency, suggesting that while formal dictatorship may have ended, democratic consolidation remains a contested terrain. The term “*great battle*” functions as a scalar intensifier, dramatizing political engagement as a heroic duty.

Excerpt 8 solemnizes political activism through the phrase “*laid down their lives,*” which draws from military funeral rhetoric. The metaphor aligns with the schema POLITICAL SACRIFICE IS WAR DEATH and performs an expressive act, evoking reverence for fallen heroes. Its stylistic register is elegiac, invoking national memory and moral indebtedness. This metaphor also implicitly legitimises current democratic structures as the hard-earned fruit of martyrdom. In Excerpt 9, Tinubu personalises the war narrative by asserting, “*I have fought long and hard for*

this democracy.” This explicitly casts him in the role of a battle-hardened veteran, strengthening his political ethos. The metaphor enacts the conceptual schema POLITICAL LIFE IS COMBAT, and the phrase “long and hard” intensifies the speaker’s perceived endurance. Pragmatically, it performs a self-legitimizing assertive act, not just recounting struggle, but justifying authority. Stylistically, the sentence’s simplicity enhances its declarative force. Across these excerpts, these metaphors transform Nigeria’s democratic history into a collective war story, complete with barricades, fallen heroes, and enduring fighters. They offer moral clarity by dividing the past into sides, those who fought and those who didn’t, while positioning Tinubu and his allies as survivors of battle. Through these metaphors, democracy is not procedural but sacrificial: a prize earned through blood, resistance, and unrelenting struggle.

5.3. Metaphors of democracy as a living entity

In President Tinubu’s Democracy Day speeches, democracy is repeatedly personified as a sentient, evolving, and nurturing being. These metaphors frame democracy not as a static constitutional system but as a dynamic organism, capable of breathing, growing, protecting, and demanding care. The conceptual mapping central to this theme is DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING BEING, and this framing allows the speaker to evoke emotional intimacy, shared responsibility, and moral obligation. The following excerpts illustrate how these metaphors function to humanise and animate the abstract concept of democracy.

Excerpt 10

“Democracy is neither a foreign nor abstract concept. It is a living, breathing reality for Nigerians” (2024).

Excerpt 11

“True democracy shines its light into the daily lives of the people who live under its nurturing wings” (2024).

Excerpt 12

“We must keep democracy alive through our words, actions and commitment” (2025).

Excerpt 13

“Democracy does not function on its own; it must be protected and nurtured” (2025).

These metaphors cast democracy as a vital, animate being, one that lives, breathes, and nurtures. This personification creates moral intimacy between democracy and the citizenry, transforming governance from a mechanical structure into a relational, living force. In Excerpt 10, democracy is described as a *“living, breathing reality.”* This metaphor draws directly from human physiology and establishes the schema DEMOCRACY IS A LIVING BODY. The phrase performs an assertive speech act, refuting claims that democracy is alien or imposed. By describing democracy as something that breathes, the speaker positions it as organically Nigerian, rather than imported or synthetic. Stylistically, the repetition of present participles, *“living, breathing”*, intensifies immediacy and tangibility. Excerpt 11 introduces a maternal metaphor, framing democracy as a force with *“nurturing wings.”* This draws from familial and protective imagery, activating the schema DEMOCRACY IS A CAREGIVER / PARENTAL FIGURE. The metaphor operates pragmatically as a reassuring directive, encouraging national loyalty by promising protection and guidance. It also supports the ideological narrative that democracy is not oppressive but benevolent. Stylistically, the coupling of *“shines its light”* with *“nurturing wings”* fuses visual and emotional resonance, enhancing poetic depth.

Excerpt 12 emphasises democratic vitality through the phrase *“keep democracy alive.”* This metaphor invokes the schema DEMOCRACY IS A FRAGILE LIFEFORM, implying it can perish

without active care. It performs a commissive and cautionary act, reminding listeners that democracy is a shared responsibility. Stylistically, the triad, “words, actions, and commitment”, amplifies the metaphor’s moral urgency through rhythmic enumeration. In Excerpt 13, Tinubu asserts that democracy “*must be protected and nurtured.*” Again, the speaker invokes care and growth metaphors, reinforcing the mapping DEMOCRACY IS A DEPENDENT ENTITY. The phrase functions as a directive, a call to civic vigilance. It also implies that political progress is never complete, but always conditional on collective effort. Stylistically, the paired verbs “*protected*” and “*nurtured*” suggest both defense and affection, blending firmness and empathy. Collectively, these metaphors work ideologically to collapse the boundary between system and citizen. Democracy becomes a relational actor, one that breathes with the people, shelters them, and depends on their sustained attention. In doing so, Tinubu positions himself and his audience not just as participants in a political process, but as caregivers to a living national organism whose well-being reflects their collective character and responsibility.

5.4. Metaphors of light, vision, and enlightenment

President Tinubu frequently employs metaphors of light and vision to frame democracy and leadership as pathways of clarity, moral direction, and progressive insight. These metaphors are deeply rooted in cultural associations of light with truth, goodness, and future hope, while darkness symbolizes tyranny, ignorance, or stagnation. By casting democracy as a beacon and Nigerian citizens as participants in a shared visual field, these metaphors perform persuasive work by aligning political reform with enlightenment. The following excerpts illustrate how light-based imagery functions metaphorically within the speeches.

Excerpt 14

“We dare not slumber lest the good things awaiting our immediate future pass us by” (2024).

Excerpt 15

“We cannot remain in idle standstill in the middle of the intersection of hope and despair” (2024).

Excerpt 16

“The initial rays of a brighter tomorrow now appear on the early horizon.” (2024).

These expressions present democracy and reform as light-bearing forces that expose, guide, and empower. They rely on the conceptual mapping DEMOCRACY IS LIGHT / PROGRESS IS ILLUMINATION, where vision symbolizes national awareness and civic awakening. As seen earlier in Excerpt 11, the speaker metaphorically frames democracy as a luminous presence that “*shines its light*” into everyday life. This enacts the schema GOVERNANCE IS ILLUMINATION, suggesting democracy enables visibility, safety, and direction. Pragmatically, it performs an assertive and reassuring act, affirming that Nigerian democracy is materially beneficial rather than abstract. Stylistically, the expression combines visual and emotive elements, “*true,*” “*daily lives,*” “*nurturing wings*”, creating a soft, morally elevated tone that blends light and familial care metaphors. In Excerpt 14, the phrase “dare not slumber” uses sleep as a metaphor for political apathy or moral blindness. It draws on the mapping IGNORANCE IS SLEEP / AWARENESS IS WAKEFULNESS, and functions as a directive speech act, warning citizens to remain vigilant. The metaphor builds temporal urgency, tying inaction to lost opportunity. Stylistically, “lest” introduces a formal and cautionary register that invokes biblical or prophetic rhetoric, enhancing the solemnity of the warning.

Excerpt 15 introduces spatial metaphor through the phrase “*intersection of hope and despair.*” This draws on a navigation schema, where civic choice is likened to a moment of directional de-

cision at a crossroads. It maps onto CHOICE IS A CROSSROAD, and operates pragmatically as both expressive (acknowledging national uncertainty) and directive (urging forward movement). Stylistically, the phrase “*idle standstill*” adds negative connotation to inaction, while “*intersection*” implies that the country’s fate hangs in the balance. Similarly, excerpt 16 uses the sunrise metaphor, “*rays of a brighter tomorrow*”, to signify optimism and future prosperity. It enacts the schema THE FUTURE IS DAWN / HOPE IS LIGHT, performing a motivational and expressive act. The expression reframes current suffering as temporary darkness preceding national renewal. Stylistically, the phrase “*early horizon*” evokes pastoral imagery, offering emotional release and poetic closure. Together, these metaphors construct a moral geography in which political clarity, vigilance, and forward motion are aligned with light and vision. The discourse positions Tinubu’s leadership as a guiding force through a transitional dawn, while inaction or criticism is indirectly likened to blindness or regression. These metaphors, therefore, serve not only to uplift but also to discipline and direct, reinforcing the ideological link between democratic progress and national illumination.

5.5. Metaphors of economic reform and restoration

In addressing Nigeria’s economic challenges, President Tinubu draws on metaphors from structural engineering, mechanical repair, and nation-building. These metaphors frame the economy as a physical structure, damaged, unstable, and in need of urgent intervention. Through this lens, reform is not framed as political or ideological but as technical repair work, thereby shifting blame to past “flawed foundations” and positioning the speaker as a corrective architect. The following excerpts illustrate this technocratic metaphorical framing.

Excerpt 17

“Our economy has been in desperate need of reform for decades. It has been unbalanced because it was built on the flawed foundation of over-reliance on revenues from the exploitation of oil” (2024).

Excerpt 18

“There is no doubt the reforms have occasioned hardship. Yet, they are necessary repairs required to fix the economy over the long run” (2024).

Excerpt 19

“I pledge to do whatever is necessary to cement democracy as our way of life.” (2024).

These expressions present the Nigerian economy and democratic institutions as built structures, vulnerable to collapse unless properly reinforced. They rely on the conceptual mappings: THE ECONOMY IS A BUILDING, REFORMS ARE REPAIRS, and DEMOCRACY IS A STRUCTURAL FOUNDATION. This metaphorical framing promotes a rational, apolitical narrative of national repair and long-term endurance. Excerpt 17 equates Nigeria’s economic dysfunction with structural imbalance: “*built on the flawed foundation.*” This metaphor constructs the economy as a building, with an unstable base due to past mismanagement. The mapping ECONOMY IS A STRUCTURE allows the speaker to reframe economic hardship as an engineering flaw, rather than leadership incompetence. The metaphor performs an assertive and diagnostic act, shifting blame onto a distant, systemic past. Stylistically, phrases like “*flawed foundation*” and “*unbalanced*” employ technical vocabulary that projects analytical credibility and deflects moral critique.

In Excerpt 18, Tinubu justifies hardship by likening his policies to “necessary repairs.” This metaphor presents reform as a repair regime, evoking a mechanical intervention model where discomfort is a prerequisite for stability. The mapping REFORMS ARE REPAIRS reframes controversial policies as maintenance work rather than political decision-making. Pragmatically, it

functions as a commissive act, acknowledging pain while reaffirming long-term goals. The phrase “*necessary repairs*” uses euphemism to soften the perception of austerity, aligning with what Charteris-Black (2005) describes as a metaphor for political sanitisation. Excerpt 19 extends the construction metaphor to democratic permanence, with the phrase “cement democracy as our way of life.” This metaphor blends construction and bonding imagery, mapping DEMOCRACY IS A PERMANENT STRUCTURE. The verb “*cement*” implies durability, finality, and structural integration. Pragmatically, it functions as both a commissive and ideological act, expressing resolve while reinforcing the permanence of democratic norms. Stylistically, the word “*cement*” contrasts with softer metaphors used elsewhere, creating a tone of executive determination and technical authority. Collectively, these metaphors recast governance as technical expertise rather than political judgment. Democracy is a structure to be fortified, and economic failure is a mechanical breakdown rather than a moral or policy flaw. The speaker is thus positioned as an engineer-statesman, shielded from direct blame while appearing to operate with rational foresight and infrastructural legitimacy.

5.6. Metaphors of destiny and sacred oath

Among the more spiritually resonant devices in President Tinubu’s speeches are metaphors that frame leadership and national trajectory in terms of divine will, sacred duty, and prophetic inevitability. These metaphors are less frequent but symbolically powerful. They evoke a transcendent order in which political roles are predetermined by divine decree and sustained through solemn vows. This rhetorical strategy frames governance as morally elevated and potentially resistant to contestation by implying that political authority is beyond human dispute. The following excerpts reveal how these metaphors function within the broader narrative of legitimacy.

Excerpt 20

“Fate is written from above. I am your President because I am one of you. I am here to serve” (2025).

Excerpt 21

“I pledge before God and all men that I shall live up to the duties and expectations that the office demands of me” (2025).

These expressions project governance as the outworking of a divine script, rather than a merely electoral outcome. The dominant mappings are LEADERSHIP IS DESTINY and PRESIDENCY IS A SACRED OATH, both of which position the speaker within a divinely authorized narrative. Excerpt 20 opens with the declaration, “*Fate is written from above*”. This metaphor directly invokes the mapping DESTINY IS DIVINE TEXT, suggesting that political leadership is preordained and sanctified. The phrase “*written from above*” echoes religious scripture, implicitly removing leadership from the realm of electoral contest and placing it within a spiritual frame of inevitability. Pragmatically, it performs an assertive and legitimating speech act, aligning Tinubu’s presidency with cosmic order. Stylistically, the biblical tone of “*written from above*” adds moral gravitas, while the closing line “*I am here to serve*” softens the hierarchy with pastoral humility. Excerpt 21 casts leadership as a sacred commitment. The metaphor equates presidential responsibility with a sacred vow, drawing from the mapping POLITICAL DUTY IS A MORAL COVENANT. The phrase “*before God and all men*” fuses legal and religious registers, performing a commissive speech act while elevating the speaker’s accountability to a universal moral standard. Stylistically, the sentence’s formal structure echoes oath-taking rituals, reinforcing the solemnity and ethical seriousness of the speaker’s commitment. These metaphors function as ideological closing moves in the broader discourse. By invoking divine authorship and spiritual duty, they

portray governance as a moral responsibility beyond human questioning. The use of religious diction, ceremonial register, and universal audience appeal (“God and all men”) lends these metaphors a sacralising force, neutralizing dissent and reinforcing legitimacy. From a pragma-stylistic perspective, they perform both self-legitimizing and audience-binding functions, transforming political allegiance into a shared moral imperative.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The analysis of President Tinubu’s 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches demonstrates that metaphor serves as a central discursive strategy for legitimising authority, framing national identity, and managing public emotion. Across six conceptual categories, rebirth, resistance, vitality, vision, restoration, and sacred destiny, metaphor functions as both a rhetorical and ideological device, simplifying complex democratic realities and connecting them to culturally resonant schemas.

The findings reveal that President Tinubu’s Democracy Day speeches rely heavily on metaphors of rebirth, journey, fire, and guardianship, which collectively construct a narrative of national endurance, moral responsibility, and ongoing democratic struggle. These metaphors do not merely describe Nigeria’s political condition; they actively shape public understanding and behaviour, managing public expectations, and influencing political engagement. Metaphors of rebirth, such as “We rose from the ashes,” foreground themes of national renewal and historical triumph, evoking shared memories of past authoritarianism and the sacrifices associated with democratic restoration. These metaphors do more than evoke nostalgia; they actively legitimise the present leadership by linking contemporary governance with earlier democratic heroes. By doing so, the speaker positions Nigeria’s democratic trajectory as a continuum of struggle, encouraging citizens to view current hardships as part of a long historical journey rather than isolated failures of governance. This narrative serves as a political coping mechanism, subtly shifting responsibility for current economic challenges and policy failures onto past regimes. By reframing hardship as part of a collective journey, these metaphors aim to soften public criticism. They also encourage public support for ongoing reforms. They encourage the population to be patient, suggesting that democratic consolidation is inherently difficult but necessary for national progress.

Journey metaphors, such as “the path we have chosen” and “our democratic course,” frame Nigeria’s political development as a collective expedition requiring perseverance, unity, and incremental progress. These mappings are particularly powerful in a socio-political context marked by economic instability, political contestation, and public skepticism. The journey metaphor subtly positions citizens as co-travelers in this national expedition, encouraging them to accept difficulties as necessary stages of progress. These metaphors serve as tools of political reassurance, attempting to manage public expectations by framing the political process as a long-term project. The speaker emphasises that current challenges, whether economic or political, are temporary obstacles that can only be overcome through collective commitment and cooperation. In a politically volatile environment, this framing increases public tolerance for economic and political challenges by positioning citizens as partners in democratic growth. For many Nigerians, this framing may evoke a sense of shared sacrifice and encourage citizens to stay engaged despite economic hardship. This metaphor may also encourage patience among younger people who are more likely to be critical of the slow pace of democratic development and the perceived inefficiencies of government.

Metaphors of fire, torch-bearing, and light, such as “keep the fire burning” and “the torch lit for generations,” invoke images of vigilance, moral duty, and intergenerational responsibility.

These metaphors highlight democracy's fragility, suggesting that it requires constant effort and active citizen participation. They imply that democracy is not guaranteed by institutions alone but must be actively maintained by the people. These metaphors have significant socio-political consequences. They position democracy as an ongoing moral project that requires sustained attention. By framing democracy as an intergenerational torch, these metaphors encourage civic participation and place responsibility for democratic continuity on citizens. This may push individuals to take greater responsibility for national progress and to participate actively in democratic processes, such as voting and civic activism. This metaphor likely resonates emotionally with the population, particularly when framed within the context of Nigeria's history of military rule. It reinforces the notion that democracy is fragile and requires vigilance from all sectors of society to thrive. By invoking intergenerational responsibility, these metaphors appeal to older generations who may see themselves as the torchbearers of the democratic struggle and encourage younger generations to embrace their role as guardians of the future.

The metaphor DEMOCRACY IS A CHILD, as seen in phrases like "midwife the birth of our democracy," portrays democratic governance as delicate and still developing. In Nigeria's politically charged environment, this framing encourages patience and understanding, suggesting that democracy's full maturation will take time and require cooperation. This metaphor legitimises slow reforms by framing them as part of the necessary nurturing process for democracy's maturation. It may also reduce criticism of democratic setbacks or slow progress, portraying them as natural growing pains rather than failures of governance. In a politically volatile environment, such a framing can increase public tolerance for ongoing economic and political challenges, positioning citizens as partners in the democratic growth process. The child metaphor could be particularly effective in reducing discontent in younger Nigerians who might be more impatient with slow reforms. It reassures them that democratic development, like the growth of a child, takes time and requires collective nurturing.

Collectively, these metaphors function as ideological instruments that both reflect and shape socio-political realities. They reinforce narratives of resilience, justify government policy by situating hardship within a metaphorical continuum of struggle, and invoke communal responsibility to foster emotional unity. Within a context of economic pressure, public discontent, and political contestation, the metaphors operate as strategic tools of reassurance, persuasion, and legitimacy-building. Thus, the speeches' metaphorical architecture performs work beyond mere rhetorical ornamentation: it constructs a symbolic world in which democracy is fragile but sacred, governance is a shared journey, and national rebirth is both ongoing and attainable. As Mobolaji et al. (2024) note, Tinubu's rhetorical style combines poetic resonance with political messaging, crafting metaphors that instruct, console, and legitimise. These findings affirm the ideological utility of metaphor in Nigerian political discourse, where leadership is not merely asserted but sanctified as a historical responsibility and divine trust (Anyanwu, 2023).

7. CONCLUSION

This study examined the metaphorical construction of political meaning in President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 2024 and 2025 Democracy Day speeches using an integrated pragma-stylistic framework that draws from Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), Speech Act Theory (SAT), and Stylistic Theory. Through the systematic application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP), twenty-two metaphorical expressions were identified and analysed across six thematic domains: rebirth and struggle, war and resistance, living democracy, light and vision, economic

restoration, and sacred destiny. The findings demonstrate that metaphor functions as a multifaceted resource that shapes thought, performs communicative action, and enhances rhetorical effect within commemorative political discourse. The analysis shows that metaphors of rebirth, renewal, and struggle enable the speaker to frame Nigeria's democratic history as a trajectory marked by endurance and collective triumph. These mappings reconstruct past political challenges as shared achievements and reinforce a narrative of national resilience. Metaphors conceptualising democracy as a living or fragile entity highlight expectations of vigilance, stewardship, and shared responsibility, thereby promoting a participatory understanding of democratic practice. Similarly, metaphors of light and vision offer forward-looking imagery that conveys hope, direction, and continuity, framing democratic progress as both moral and aspirational.

The speeches also employ economic and technocratic metaphors, such as construction, repair, and foundation, to contextualise ongoing reforms and position economic hardship as part of a broader restructuring process. These metaphorical choices help to organize complex policy matters into accessible conceptual frames for public audiences. Lastly, metaphors invoking destiny and sacred duty underscore the moral weight of political leadership and situate democratic governance within broader spiritual and ethical narratives that resonate strongly in Nigeria's socio-cultural environment.

Although this study is limited by a small corpus, which restricts the generalisability of the findings to other genres of Nigerian presidential discourse, the systematic application of the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) ensures high analytical rigour. Nonetheless, metaphor interpretation inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity, despite efforts to minimise bias through coder triangulation. The analysis also focuses solely on verbal metaphors in written transcripts and does not account for multimodal elements present during live delivery. Additionally, the study does not include empirical audience-reception data, meaning the socio-political implications discussed remain interpretive rather than measured. Despite these constraints, the study provides a rigorous foundation for understanding metaphor use in commemorative political rhetoric and offers directions for future research. The study demonstrates that metaphor in Democracy Day speeches extends beyond linguistic ornamentation; it is a fundamental instrument of professional discourse. In the highly institutionalized sphere of the presidency, metaphor operates as a strategic organizational resource for narrating history, articulating policy vision, managing public sentiment, and anchoring executive identity. The integration of cognitive, pragmatic, and stylistic perspectives provides a richer understanding of how metaphor functions simultaneously as a conceptual, communicative, and aesthetic device. By analysing commemorative speeches, a relatively underexplored genre in Nigerian political discourse, this study contributes new insight into the ways national memory, political legitimacy, and civic identity are rhetorically constructed in moments of symbolic national reflection.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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