

Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County

By

¹Muthusi Kimwele, ²Dr Mwangi Gachara and ³Dr Khadi Gimode

¹Muthusi Kimwele, Doctoral Candidate, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Email of corresponding author: mthusikimwele@gmail.com

²Dr Mwangi Gachara, Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Kenya

³Dr Khadi Gimode, Lecturer, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Abstract

Religious metaphors are valuable for enriching communication and fostering a deep spiritual connection. Interpreting religious metaphors may, however, be difficult due to their cultural distinctions and context-dependent meanings. It is against this backdrop that this study employed the principle of conceptual mappings to analyze the religious metaphors commonly used by the clergy in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County. The research was anchored within descriptive research design. Primary data was collected through audio recordings of sermons in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County. The collected data were transcribed, translated, and then subjected to the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU) in which four annotators were used to identify religious metaphors. Eight religious metaphors that are commonly used by the clergy to express their message in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County were identified through MIPVU. The religious metaphors were then subjected to the principle of conceptual mappings to reveal their meaning. The article reveals that most pastors in charismatic fellowships use religious metaphors to not only illustrate religious concepts and inspire faith, but also to connect scripture to everyday life experiences. Furthermore, use of religious metaphors enhance understanding and emotional engagement within congregations. The study concludes that religious metaphors are useful tools of communication and should be interpreted within the Cognitive Linguistics framework.

Keywords: Religious Metaphors, Conceptual Structure, Cognitive Linguistics, MIPVU, Machakos County

Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County

By

¹Muthusi Kimwele, ²Dr Mwangi Gachara and ³Dr Khadi Gimode

1.0 Introduction

Charismatic fellowships are Christian communities that emphasize the active presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers (Howe, 2006). These fellowships often focus on spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing, and miracles. They believe that these gifts are available to all Christians today, just as they were in the early church. According to Hollenweger (1997), worship in charismatic fellowships tends to be lively and expressive, with an emphasis on contemporary music, spontaneous prayer, and personal testimonies. Members often seek a personal and experiential relationship with God. They place a strong emphasis on direct encounters with the Holy Spirit. Hollenweger (1997) also note that charismatic fellowships typically prioritize communal support by encouraging members to share their spiritual experiences and grow together in their faith. This movement, which gained significant momentum in the 20th century, spans various denominations and often seeks to renew and invigorate traditional church practices.

In Machakos County, charismatic fellowships embody the active presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers with a vibrant and culturally rich expression of faith (Muthama, 2016). The fellowships are notable for their enthusiastic worship services, often held in local language (Kikamba) and infused with traditional Kamba music and dance. This creates a unique blend of contemporary charismatic practices and local cultural elements. The emphasis on spiritual gifts is particularly strong, with many members actively engaging in and witnessing prophecy, speaking in tongues, and healing (Muthama, 2016). This is believed to bring tangible evidence of the Holy Spirit's work. Testimonies of miraculous interventions and personal transformations are common, and they reinforce the community's belief in the immediacy of God's presence and power. These fellowships also play a crucial role in social cohesion by offering support networks that address both spiritual and practical needs, such as education, health care, and economic assistance. This claim is buttressed by Kipkorir (2014) who notes that charismatic fellowships in Machakos County foster spiritual growth through activities such education, health and economic assistance to the congregants. By engaging in such community responsive programmes, the charismatic fellowships contribute significantly to the well-being and empowerment of their members, thus, making the charismatic ideology influential in both religious and social spheres especially in Machakos County, Kenya.

The clergy, especially in charismatic fellowship churches in Machakos County, employ a variety of techniques to engage and inspire their congregations, one of which is the use of metaphorical language (Mwangi, 2013). By drawing on vivid, relatable images and stories, they make spiritual concepts more accessible and impactful. For example, most pastors in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County often describe faith as a mustard seed that grows into a mighty tree. They normally use the mustard seed metaphor to illustrate the potential for small acts of belief to yield significant results. The use of metaphor may, however, present difficulties in comprehension due to the multiple interpretations which may be assigned to each of the metaphors. Consequently, the metaphors that are used by most

charismatic fellowship leaders may be represented and interpreted differently by the congregants. It is against this background that the present study identifies and describes the metaphors commonly used by charismatic Christian preachers in Machakos County. The study describes the conceptual structure of the metaphors to unveil metaphorical meaning.

Analysis of the metaphors used in CCFs in the present study is anchored within Cognitive Linguistics (CL) framework. Etymologically, CL was adopted in the 1960s as a new framework to study language, social-physical experiences, and the human mind as inseparable entities and as concepts borne in the mind (Fillmore, 1975). CL was proposed by linguists such as George Lakoff, Ronald Langacker and Len Talmy among others. CL considers language as an instrumental tool for organizing, processing and conveying information. According to Janda (2010), CL began as a protest against the formal approaches to language that could not effectively account for the idealized cognitive models (ICMs) that include metaphor, metonymy, counterfactual reasoning and analogy. Therefore, CL was founded to provide appropriate cognitive models to effectively explain linguistic phenomena such as metaphor that are considered deviant by the formal approaches of Linguistics.

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) linguists argue that, like sound, meaning is a property of language (Janda, 2010; Charteris-Black, 2004). Hence CL treats language as part of human cognition because human beings have one faculty that processes language as well as other disciplines such as Mathematics and Art among others. CL emphasizes the centrality of human intellect in language creation. This school of thought contends that language and cognition influence each other (Semino, 2008; Gibbs, 2008). Henceforth, within the CL framework, metaphor is looked at from the dimension of language forms, thought and meaning (Charteris-Black, 2004).

In defining metaphor, cognitive linguists contend that metaphor originates from a process of cognitive constructions that take place in the mind. These mappings entail mental correspondences that help figure out the abstract from the physical and the vice versa (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Steen, 2011). Fauconnier (2010) adds that metaphors are not just ornamental semantic innovations but vehicles through which human beings increase their sense of reality by moving away from ordinary usage. Metaphor, thus, allows us to express complex ideas and emotions in a more vivid and relatable manner. In addition, metaphors enable individuals to perceive and articulate deeper truths about their experiences and the world around them, hence, enriching their understanding and engagement with reality.

Data for the present study was collected from Machakos County. Machakos County is situated in the Eastern region of Kenya and it boasts of a diverse religious landscape shaped by a blend of traditional African beliefs, Christianity, Islam, and a myriad of other faith traditions. The predominant religious affiliation in Machakos County is Christianity, with various denominations and expressions present throughout the region (Kipkorir, 2014). This Christian presence includes mainstream denominations such as the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, and diverse Protestant groups. There is also a notable representation of Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, which have gained substantial popularity among the local population in Machakos County (Mwangi, 2013). Moreover, traditional African religions and cultural practices continue to hold significance in the lives of many residents, influencing various aspects of social, spiritual, and communal life within Machakos County (Oduyoye, 2012). Additionally, Islam maintains a notable presence, particularly in certain areas, and it contributes to the religious diversity within Machakos County (Ondicho, 2019).

Charismatic Christian fellowships (CCFs) have emerged as prominent expressions of Christian faith and have deeply influenced the religious landscape in Machakos County

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

(Muthama, 2016). CCFs exhibit distinct characteristics such as: emphasizing dynamic worship experiences, fervent prayer sessions, and a strong belief in the manifestation of spiritual gifts as described in the New Testament (Muthama, 2016). Within the county, charismatic churches often attract a considerable following. CCFs often draw believers who seek a more experiential and emotionally engaging form of worship that is often characterized by enthusiastic praise and worship, spontaneous prayers, and a belief in the active presence and workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives (Muthama, 2016; Mwangi, 2013). This charismatic movement within Machakos County reflects a shift toward a more vibrant, emotionally charged expression of Christianity that resonates deeply with many individuals seeking a direct and personal encounter with the divine.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Data analysis for the present study was guided by Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). CMT's core principle posits that metaphors are fundamental to both language and cognition (Ntabo, 2022). Scholars such as Gibbs (1994), Lakoff and Turner (1989), and Kövecses (2005) have further refined CMT. These scholars have highlighted the significance of CMT in metaphorical studies by explaining how metaphor allows us to understand one concept in terms of another.

Another key theoretical pillar of CMT is its use of two conceptual domains: the source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD). The source domain is where the metaphor originates while the target domain is where it is applied (Ntabo, 2022). Gibbs (1994) posits that the source domain is usually concrete and physical while the target domain is abstract and intangible. Kövecses (2005) adds that both domains are mental representations where the target domain's characteristics are understood through the source domain.

Conceptual mappings (CMs) between the SD and TD also form a critical foundation of CMT. CMs are systematic correspondences between elements of the SD and TD (Ntabo, 2022). CMs create a cognitive model that connects the SD and the TD, thus, facilitating understanding of one concept in terms of another. The present study employed the principle of CM to establish the conceptual structure inherent in the metaphors used in CCFs in Machakos County. Worth noting is that the principle of CMs has the capacity to uncover the underlying cognitive and cultural frameworks that shape how residents of Machakos County understand and communicate complex ideas through metaphor.

3.0 Methodology

The study employed descriptive research design. According to Anudo (2012), the goal of a descriptivist is to document the current state of affairs at a particular point in time. Thus, researchers aim to identify, categorize, and evaluate research phenomena as they currently exist. In this study, the primary data, which are the terms employed by the clergy to convey their message in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County, were gathered through audio recordings of the sermons. The audio-recorded text was first transcribed and then translated into English. Transcription involved careful listening of the audio recording and accurately writing the text. The transcribed text was then translated into English which was the language of analysis. The research employed Normal Sentential Translation (NST) to translate the text from Kikamba to English. This decision was guided by Kobia (2016) who argues that many significant aspects of religious discourse are readily translatable. Translation was also done meticulously to preserve the original meaning and context. The researchers then identified terms which were considered metaphorical by comparing their basic meaning with their

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

contextual use. On this basis, ten terms were considered metaphorical because their literal meaning significantly contrasted with their contextual use.

The study then subjected the ten terms to the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU) by Steen et al. (2010) to establish their metaphoricity. MIPVU is a metaphor identification procedure developed by scholars at Vrije University in Amsterdam that provides a clear procedure of identifying metaphors for study (Gathigia, 2014). Four annotators, including the researchers, employed MIPVU to validate the metaphorical nature of each of the ten terms. According to MIPVU guidelines, a term is classified as a Metaphor-Related Word (MRW) if its contextual meaning differs from its basic meaning. The terms were also subjected to an inter-rater reliability test in which consensus of at least three out of the four annotators was considered sufficient to mark a term metaphorical. This is in line with Cameron (2003) who posits that MIPVU requires a consensus of at least three annotators to confirm a term as metaphorical in an inter-rater reliability test. Each annotator, as guided by MIPVU, was required to assign a score of 0.25 (25%) to a term considered metaphorical. From the annotation procedure, eight out of the ten terms were marked metaphorical and, therefore, considered for the present study. The eight metaphors were then subjected to the principle of conceptual mappings to establish their meaning.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

The study identified eight metaphors, as shown in Table 1.1 below. These metaphors were analyzed using the principle of conceptual mappings to uncover their meanings. This principle, central to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), provides a framework for understanding how language mirrors and influences our cognitive processes. It posits that we often comprehend abstract or complex ideas by mapping them onto more concrete and familiar domains. This method aids in understanding by anchoring abstract concepts in tangible experiences.

Table 1. 1: Metaphors in Charismatic Christian Fellowships in Machakos

County

| NO | Kikamba | Gloss |
|-----------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1 | <i>Ngai ni ngao</i> | God is a shield |
| 2 | <i>Ukilisto ni kyalo</i> | Christianity is a journey |
| 3 | <i>Akilisto ni munyu</i> | Christians are salt |
| 4 | <i>Utangiyo ni isyoki</i> | Salvation is a yoke |
| 5 | <i>Mumaitha ni muuwaani</i> | Satan is a carnivore |
| 6 | <i>Ngai ni muithi</i> | God is a shepherd |
| 7 | <i>Utangiio ni uvosyo</i> | Salvation is healing |
| 8 | <i>Ngai ni kyeni</i> | God is light |

Source: Field Data (2024)

The metaphors in Table 1.1 above are commonly used by the members of the clergy in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County to preach the gospel. As pointed out by Naicker (2016), metaphors are crucial for preachers because they make abstract spiritual concepts more relatable and understandable to their audience. They are often used to connect complex theological ideas to familiar and everyday experiences. An example is metaphor (1) below which draws comparison between God and a shield. A shield is often used to provide refuge and defense against life's adversities. Thus:

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

(1) *Ngai ni ngao* -“God is a shield”.

Metaphor (1) above was subjected to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to establish its conceptual structure. According to Ntabo (2022), conceptual structures take place unidirectionally from the source domain (SD) to the target domain (TD) in metaphors. For example, in metaphor (1), *a shield* is the source domain (SD) while *God* is the target domain (TD). The underlying sets of systematic correspondences between *a shield* and *God* occur as indicated in Figure 1.1 below:

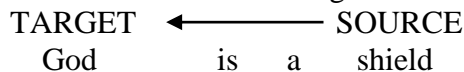


Figure 1.1: Mapping for the Shield Metaphor

As indicated in Figure 1.1 above, the attributes of shield were employed to conceptually make sense who God is. It is the correspondences between what is known about a shield that is used to comprehend the nature of God that is referred to as metaphorical conceptual structure in this study. The conceptual structure for metaphor (1) is presented in Table 1.2 below:

Table 1.2: The Conceptual Structure of *God is a Shield Metaphor*

| No | SD: A Shield | | TD: God |
|----|---|---|--|
| 1 | Physical thing | → | Spiritual being |
| 2 | Offers physical protection | → | Offers spiritual protection |
| 3 | A shield is a symbol of strength and power in warfare as it provides the bearer with a means to withstand attacks | → | God is often depicted as omnipotent and all-powerful capable of providing strength to believers in times of need |
| 4 | Can be used to guide and direct the course of a battle | → | Believed to guide and direct believers’ lives by providing them with a sense of purpose and direction. |
| 5 | Offers refuge and shelter to the one who holds it | → | Believers often view God as their ultimate refuge and shelter in times of trouble or distress. |

Source: Field Data (2024)

On the basis of the conceptual structure in Table 1.2 above, the conceptual meaning for (1) above is that God provides protection, strength, and refuge to His believers, much like a shield does for a warrior in battle. The conceptual meaning is illustrated by the fact that a shield is a physical object that offers tangible protection in combat by defending its bearer from physical harm. This is contrasted to God who is believed to be a spiritual being that provides intangible but profound spiritual protection to believers. This conceptual mapping helps to convey the idea that just as a shield safeguards a warrior, God offers spiritual defense against life's adversities. This interpretation is buttressed by Dozier et al. (2020) who depict God as a protector of His followers.

Furthermore, a shield is revealed to symbolize strength and power in warfare. It allows its bearer to withstand attacks. This notion is mirrored in the depiction of God as omnipotent and all-powerful. According to Schoeneborn et al. (2022), God is believed to provide His believers with strength and support in times of need. It is also revealed that a shield also guides and directs the course of a battle by enabling strategic movements and

offering refuge to the one who holds it. Similarly, believers view God as guiding and directing their lives by providing them with purpose and direction. This claim is authenticated by Naicker (2016) who notes that in times of uncertainty, believers rely on God's guidance to navigate challenges and make decisions. Moreover, in moments of trouble or distress, just as a shield offers immediate refuge on the battlefield, God is seen as the ultimate refuge and shelter. It is clear that the clergy in Machakos County use metaphor (1) to effectively convey the protective, empowering, guiding, and comforting attributes of God. This makes the abstract spiritual concepts more accessible and relatable to believers by grounding them in familiar and concrete experiences.

Metaphors (2) below makes reference to a journey. According to Nyakoe, Ongarora and Oloo (2014), a journey involves movement from one place to another. It is often marked by a series of experiences and challenges along the way. It requires planning, perseverance, and adaptation to changing circumstances to reach the intended destination. It is, therefore, acceptable for the clergy in Machakos County to compare Christianity with a journey. Thus:

(2) *Ukilisto ni kyalo* –“Christianity is a journey”.

Metaphor (2) above was used by a preacher in a charismatic church in Machakos County. According to Holden (2009), journey metaphors are pervasively used by preachers to explain the scripture. Preachers often use journey metaphors to help congregants understand their spiritual path as a series of steps and transitions toward a deeper connection with God. Holden (2009) also observes that these metaphors help congregants visualize their faith journey as a series of transitions and milestones leading to a closer relationship with God. By depicting spiritual development as a journey, preachers provide a framework for understanding the challenges and progress that shape one's faith.

The conceptual structure for metaphor (2) between the SD which is *a journey* and the TD, *Christianity* was revealed as follows: one, travelers often embark on a physical journey with the intention of reaching a destination. This corresponds with Christians who are encouraged to embark on a spiritual journey with the goal of deepening their faith and relationship with God. This mapping underscores the dynamic nature of the Christian life by highlighting the continuous process of learning, maturing, and encountering God along the way. This aligns with Lynch (2004) who argues that the journey of faith is filled with obstacles and trials, but also with opportunities for spiritual growth and development.

The second conceptual mapping for metaphor (2) emphasizes the communal aspect of the Christian journey. In this, the conceptual structure is communal travellers in a journey which is equated with communal worshippers. Within charismatic fellowships in Machakos County, believers are viewed as fellow pilgrims walking together on the path of faith (Muthama, 2016). It is on this backdrop the preacher who used this metaphor asked the congregants to embrace Christian community, fellowship, and mutual support as they navigate the ups and downs of their spiritual journey. Just as travelers in a caravan provide assistance and companionship to one another, Christians are encouraged to support and encourage each other in their walk of faith. This communal pilgrimage fosters a sense of belonging, unity, and shared purpose among believers.

The third conceptual structure for metaphor (2) is the physical encounters and experiences a long a journey which correlates with the idea of spiritual encounters and experiences along the Christian journey. In Machakos County, charismatic preachers often emphasize the importance of moments of divine revelation, inspiration, and empowerment that believers experience as they progress in their faith. These encounters serve as milestones on the journey as they signify moments of deep intimacy with God and greater alignment

with His purposes. This conceptual structure underscores the transformative power of God's presence in the lives of believers which motivates them to press on in their journey of faith with anticipation of encountering God afresh at every turn.

Metaphor (3) below compares Christians with salt. Salt is a crystalline substance that is primarily composed of sodium chloride and is commonly used to enhance the flavor of food. It has preservative qualities that help to inhibit the growth of bacteria and extend the shelf life of various products. Salt also has a distinct, salty taste that is integral to many culinary traditions and applications. Associating Christians with salt is, therefore, ideal. Hence:

(3) *Akilsto ni munyu* – “Christians are salt”.

Metaphor (3) above was subjected to the principle of conceptual mappings to reveal its connotations. Salt is the SD while Christians is the corresponding TD for metapho (3). The corresponding information between the SD and the TD in this case include: first, just as salt enhances the flavor of food, Christians are seen as enriching the moral and spiritual life of their communities by bringing out positive qualities and values. Salt transforms the ordinary into something more vibrant and flavorful, similarly, Christians are seen as bringing a transformative influence that elevates the spiritual and ethical quality of their surroundings. Through their actions and teachings, Christians are expected to highlight and amplify virtues such as compassion, integrity, and love. On the basis of this conceptual structure, metaphor (3) underscores the idea that, like salt, Christians in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County are expected to contribute to the betterment and enrichment of their communities by making noticeable and meaningful differences.

Second, salt acts as a preservative by preventing decay and extending the shelf life of food. This parallels with how Christians are viewed as preserving moral and ethical standards in a society prone to moral decline. Consequently, just as salt helps to keep food fresh and uncontaminated, Christians are expected to play a crucial role in preserving the integrity of societal values and principles. This conceptual structure is fundamental in highlighting the role of Christians in sustaining and protecting societal moral frameworks. Finally, salt is known for its distinct and recognizable taste. This symbolizes how Christians are expected to stand out and make a significant impact through their distinct beliefs and actions. Christians in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County are, therefore, expected to differentiate themselves through their unique values and ethical practices. Their distinct beliefs should influence their behavior in ways that visibly impact their communities. This visibility is intended to inspire others and demonstrate the transformative power of their faith.

Metaphor (4) below marks salvation as a yoke. A yoke is a wooden crosspiece fastened over the necks of two animals, usually oxen, and attached to the plow or cart they are to pull. It allows the animals to share the load equally and work together efficiently. Yokes are an essential part of traditional farming practices in many parts of the world. Metaphor (4) is, therefore, employed by most pastors in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County to suggest that attaining salvation involves bearing a shared burden. Thus:

(4) *Utangiyo ni isyoki* – “Salvation is a yoke”.

The present study employed Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory to establish the conceptual meaning for (4) above. The information in the SD, a yoke, was mapped onto the corresponding one in the TD, salvation, to reveal the meaning for (4) above. The conceptual mappings for metaphor (4) are: First, the yoke's function of binding animals together to share a burden maps onto the idea of communal support in salvation. This

suggests that believers are expected to work mutually to support one another in their spiritual journey. According to Lynch (2004), collaboration among religious believers often helps to strengthen their faith. Christians are able to navigate challenges and grow together in their commitment to living a righteous life when they support one another.

The second conceptual structure is: the guidance provided by a yoke, which ensures animals move in the same direction corresponds to the spiritual direction and leadership provided by faith. This emphasizes that salvation involves following a shared path towards righteousness. This shared journey is important in fostering a sense of community and mutual accountability in living a godly life. The third conceptual structure is that: the yoke's facilitation of cooperative work maps onto the concept of collective responsibility in salvation. Each believer, particularly those in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County, are expected to contribute to the communal effort of living a godly life. Metaphor (4) is, therefore, used to highlight the interconnectedness, guidance, and cooperative nature of the salvation experience that the brethren in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County are expected to embrace.

The fifth metaphor in this research draws a comparison between Satan and a carnivore. According to Rundell and Fox (2007), a carnivore is an animal that primarily feeds on the flesh of other animals. These predators have specialized teeth and digestive systems adapted for hunting and consuming meat. Use of the term carnivore, therefore, assigns a negative metaphor axiology to Satan. Hence:

(5) *Mumaiitha ni muuwaani* –“Satan is a carnivore”.

In (5) above, a carnivore is the SD while Satan is the corresponding TD. The conceptual structures for this metaphor are: First, the predatory nature of a carnivore, which hunts and devours its prey, maps onto the idea of Satan as a relentless force seeking to destroy and corrupt souls. Holden (2009) argues that Satan is known to constantly tempt individuals to stray from their moral and spiritual paths. He is also regarded as a devil that is believed to use deception and manipulation to lead people into sin and away from righteousness. Holden further notes that the persistent and insidious influence associated with Satan underscores the ongoing spiritual battle believers face against his malevolent intentions.

Metaphor (5) is, therefore, used to beseech the charismatic congregants in Machakos County to shun evil practices and turn to God for solace.

Second, the sharp teeth and powerful jaws of a carnivore that are designed for tearing flesh parallel the deceptive and destructive tactics Satan uses to ensnare and harm individuals. According to Hollenweger (1997), Satan is believed to employ cunning lies and temptations to deceive individuals into making harmful choices. He distorts truth and exploits weaknesses to lead people away from righteousness. These tactics aim to entrap and ultimately destroy their spiritual well-being. The third conceptual structure is: a carnivore's instinctive and unyielding drive to satisfy its hunger reflects Satan's insatiable desire to lead people away from righteousness and towards evil. This highlights the persistent and dangerous threat Satan poses to believers' spiritual well-being. On the basis of the conceptual mappings for (5) above, emphasis on Satan's aggressive, cunning, and insidious nature is revealed. The brethren in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County are, therefore, encouraged to embrace what is righteous and desist from that which is evil.

Instantiation (6) below labels God as a shepherd. Psalms 23:1 states that "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" (The Holy Bible, 1982). This illustrates God's role in guiding,

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

protecting, and providing for His people. It is, therefore, acceptable for members of the clergy in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County to use (6) below. Therefore:

(6) *Ngai ni muithi* –“God is a shepherd”.

The characteristics of a *shepherd* that is the SD were mapped onto the corresponding ones of *God* which is the TD to reveal the conceptual meaning for (6) above. The conceptual structure for (6) above include: First, just as a shepherd guides their flock to safe pastures and waters, God is depicted as leading and directing His followers towards spiritual nourishment and safety. Eagleton (2007) authenticates this assertion by noting that God is a supreme being who is considered to offer direction through divine teachings and wisdom. He is believed to help his believers to navigate life's obstacles. His protection is evident in the way He guards them from dangers and uncertainties.

Second, a shepherd protects their sheep from predators and danger. This mirrors how God is portrayed as a divine protector who shields His people from harm and adversity. This claim is corroborated in Psalm 91:1-2 where God is portrayed as a divine protector who shields His people from harm and adversity (The Holy Bible, 1982). Third, the shepherd's role in caring for and tending to the needs of each sheep reflects God's attentive and nurturing nature. From the conceptual structure for (6) above, it is clear that most pastors use this metaphor to portray God as a caring, guiding, and protective presence in the lives of the charismatic believers in Machakos County.

In metaphor (7) below, comparison is made between salvation and healing. Rundell and Fox (2007) provide that healing is the process through which the body or mind restores itself to a state of health and well-being after injury or illness. It can involve physical repair of tissues, as well as emotional and psychological recovery. Use of the term healing, in the context of charismatic fellowships in Machakos County, suggests spiritual well-being. Thus:

(7) *Utangiio ni uvosyo* –“Salvation is healing”.

Information regarding healing, which is the SD, was mapped onto that of salvation that is the TD to reveal the meaning for (7) above. The conceptual structure for metaphor (7) was constructed as: first, physical restoration in healing maps to the spiritual renewal in salvation. This suggests that just as the body heals from wounds or illness, the soul is restored and purified from sin. This mapping is corroborated by Wimbush (2000) who notes that our soul is often restored and purified from sin when spiritual healing takes place. This restoration signifies a return to a state of grace and harmony with one's faith or higher power. It often involves practices such as repentance, forgiveness, and spiritual growth which lead to a renewed sense of purpose and inner peace.

Second, emotional recovery in healing corresponds to inner peace and redemption in salvation. This implies that the relief from emotional pain parallels the serenity and forgiveness found in spiritual salvation. It is, therefore, clear that just as emotional healing brings inner peace and freedom from past hurts, spiritual salvation offers tranquility and forgiveness. This often frees individuals from the burdens of guilt and sin. Lastly, preventative care in healing, which involves taking steps to maintain health and avoid illness, maps to the living of a righteous life in salvation. This suggests that just as we maintain our physical health through good practices, we sustain our spiritual well-being by living according to moral and religious principles. On the basis of the conceptual structure for (7) above, it is, therefore, clear that the process of achieving spiritual redemption and wholeness is comparable to the process of physical and emotional recovery and restoration.

In (8) below, light is used to mark God. According to Sopory and Dillard (2002), light is often used to represent God's presence and divinity. It often symbolizes purity, truth, and

guidance. In religious texts, God is frequently described as a source of light, illuminating the path for believers and dispelling darkness and ignorance. This symbolism is evident in practices like lighting candles in worship and the depiction of divine radiance in religious art and literature. Use of metaphors (8) by pastors in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County is, therefore, justified. Hence:

(8) *Ngai ni kyeni* –“God is light”.

To reveal the conceptual meaning for (8) above, its conceptual structure was established. In this, the structure in *light* (the SD) was mapped onto *God* (the TD) to help make sense of metaphor (8). As a result, it was revealed that illumination represents enlightenment and guidance; just as light illuminates darkness. On basis of this conceptual structure, it is revealed that it is God who provides spiritual insight and direction. This proposition is buttressed by Naicker (2016) who notes that in Christian faith, it is believed that God provides spiritual insight by helping individuals understand deeper truths about life and existence. Additionally, God offers direction by guiding people on the right path and helping them make wise decisions. This guidance often comes through sacred texts, prayer, and the inner promptings of conscience (Naicker, 2016). Believers, therefore, find clarity and purpose in their lives through God’s divine illumination.

Another conceptual structure for metaphor (8) above is that light is often associated with purity and cleanliness which is mapped onto God's sinless and perfect nature. In this regard, pastors in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County use metaphor (8) to preach about God’s absolute holiness and moral perfection. The pastor’s, therefore, use metaphor (8) to explain that God embodies the highest standards of goodness, justice, and righteousness without any flaw or error.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that the principle of conceptual mappings is resourceful in interpreting the metaphors employed by pastors in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County. The principle is useful in revealing how the cultural and emotional contexts of charismatic fellowships shape the pastors' understanding and use of spiritual metaphors. The mappings are also crucial in unveiling the dynamic and evolving nature of religious language, especially in reflecting faith experiences and theological concepts.

Additionally, MIPVU is revealed to be an effective method for identifying religious metaphors for study. MIPVU provides clear analytical procedures which aid in the identification of metaphors for study. It offers a systematic and replicable method for identifying and analyzing metaphors, ensuring consistency and accuracy.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends using the principle of conceptual mappings to interpret religious metaphors. This principle provides deeper insights into how abstract spiritual concepts are structured and understood through more tangible and familiar experiences. Conceptual mappings also help to uncover the cultural and cognitive patterns that influence religious expression, thereby enhancing cross-cultural communication.

Moreover, studying religious metaphors such as those used in charismatic fellowships in Machakos County using Cognitive Linguistics (CL) framework is recommended. This is because CL allows for a comprehensive analysis of how these metaphors reflect underlying cognitive processes and cultural influences. This approach can reveal the metaphorical and conceptual structures that shape religious discourse which helps to enhance our

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

understanding of how people relate with the divine. Moreover, CL provides valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between language, thought, and social interaction, thus, offering practical applications in communication and religious studies.

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

References

- Anudo, C. N. (2012). *Sexual dysphemisms and euphemisms in South Nyanza Dholuo: A cognitive linguistic approach* (Unpublished MA thesis), Kenyatta University.
- Cameron, L. (2003). *Metaphor in educational discourse*. Continuum.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2004). *Corpus Approach to Critical Metaphor Analysis*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dozier, J. L., et al. (2020). Abortion attitudes, religious and moral beliefs, and pastoral care among Protestant religious leaders in Georgia. *PLoS One*, 15(7), 65-125. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0235971>
- Eagleton, T. (2007). *The meaning of life*. Oxford University Press.
- Fillmore, C. (1975). An alternative to checklist theories of meaning. In C. Gogen, H. Thompson, & J. Wright (Eds.), *Proceedings of the first annual meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (pp. 123-131), Berkeley Linguistics Society.
- Fauconnier, G. (2010). *Ten lectures on cognitive construction of meaning*. Foreign Language and Teaching Research Press.
- Gathigia, M. G. (2014). *Metaphors of love in Gikuyu: Conceptual mappings, vital relations and image schemas* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Kenyatta University.
- Gibbs, R.W. Jr. (1994). *The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, and language and understanding*. CUP.
- Gibbs, R. (2008). *The Cambridge Handbook of metaphor and thought*. CUP.
- Holden, A. (2009). *Religious cohesion in times of conflict*. Continuum.
- Hollenweger, W. J. (1997). *Pentecostalism: Origins and developments worldwide*. Hendrickson Publishers.
- Howe, B. (2006). *Because you bear this name: Conceptual metaphor and the moral meaning of 1 Peter* (Vol. 81). Brill.
- Janda, L. A. (2010). Cognitive Linguistics in the year 2010. *International Journal of Cognitive Linguistics*, 1, 1-5.
- Kipkorir, B. E. (2014). The role of African traditional religion, culture and world-view in the context of post-colonial society: A case study of Kenya. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(12), 1-6.
- Kobia, M. J. (2016). A conceptual metaphorical analysis of Swahili proverbs with reference to chicken metaphor. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 4(2), 217-228.
- Kövecses, Z. (2005). *Metaphor in culture: Universality and variation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, G., and Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. The University of Chicago Press.
- Lynch, B. (2004). *John Bunyan and the language of conviction*. Christian Liberty Press.
- Muthama, R. (2016). The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement and social transformation in Kenya: A case study of Nairobi. *African Studies Quarterly*, 16(2), 1-19.
- Mwangi, W. (2013). The charismatic movement in Kenya: A theological and historical reflection. *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 34(1), 1-7.
- Naicker, S. (2016). *A cognitive linguistic analysis of conceptual metaphors in Hindu religious discourse with reference to Swami Vivekananda's complete works* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), University of South Africa.
- Ntabo, V. (2022). *Metaphorical conceptualization of the males in Ekegusii: A cognitive linguistic perspective* (Unpublished doctoral thesis), Laikipia University, Kenya.

Citation: Kimwele, M; Gachara, M & Gimode, K. (2025). Conceptual Structure of Metaphors in Christian Discourse: A Study of Charismatic Fellowships in Machakos County. *Journal of Popular Education in Africa*. 9(1), 20 – 33.

- Nyakoe, G. N., Ongarora, D. O., & Oloo, P. (2014). An analysis of the food metaphor in EkeGusii HIV and AIDS discourse. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 4 (1), 221 -228.
- Ondicho, T. O. (2019). *A historical and sociological study of Islam in Kenya*. Routledge.
- Rundell, M., & Fox, G. (2007). *Macmillan English dictionary of advanced learners*. Macmillan publications.
- Semino, E. (2008). *Metaphor in discourse*. CUP.
- Schoeneborn, D., Vásquez, C., & Cornelissen, J.P. (2022). Theorizing the role of metaphors in co-orienting collective action toward grand challenges: The example of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In A. Marti, E. Trittin-Ulbrich, & C. Wickert (Eds.), *Organizing for societal grand challenges* (pp. 69-91). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Sopory, P., & Dillard, J. P. (2002). The persuasive effects of metaphor: A literature review and meta- analysis. *Human Communication Research*, 28, 382-419.
- Steen, G. (2011). The contemporary theory of metaphor-now new and improved. *Review of Cognitive Linguistics*, 9(1),26-64.
- Steen, G., et al. (2010). *A method for linguistic metaphor identification*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- The Holy Bible (1982). *New King James Version*. National Publishing Company.
- Wimbush, V. (Ed) (2000). *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred texts and social textures*. The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.