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## STORIES WE LIVE BY: CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS AND ECOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION DISCOURSES IN SELECT NIGER DELTA POEMS

Prof. Chukwu, Ephraim<sup>1</sup> Agwuocha, Ugomma Anaekeperechi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of English and Literature, NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

Corresponding author: \*Agwuocha, Ugomma Anaekeperechi  
Email: [ugommaagwuocha@gmail.com](mailto:ugommaagwuocha@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

The quest for environmental protection is no longer domesticated only within the natural sciences. Academic researchers from language and literature are also contributing to such clarion call to oppose activities that degrade the environment. In contribution, this paper studied selected Niger Delta poems on environmental degradation within the purview of ecolinguistics. Using the purposive sampling technique, twenty-seven excerpts of the data were taken from 'Delta Blues' and 'When Green was the Lingua Franca' written by TanureOjaide. Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis and, Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory guided the qualitative analysis of the selected data. The findings revealed the various metaphorical expressions with which the poet used to depict the oil exploration activities in Niger Delta states in Nigeria. It also revealed interesting ways these activities have been conceptualized and talked about in these eco-poems. Consequently, the following Conceptual Metaphors, amongst others were realized: 'NIGER DELTA OIL WEALTH AS DEATH/DEATH BED'; 'AS PAIN'; 'NIGER DELTA OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES AS WAR' and 'AS TOTAL ENSTRANGEMENT OF HUMAN BEINGS FROM THE ECOSYSTEM THAT SUPPORT THEM'. It discovered that the poet's linguistic choices evoked these concepts in our cognitive systems with which we interpreted the level of environmental degradation in the area. From these findings, the study concludes that language has being effectively used in such eco-poems to create awareness and call for redress in the unguarded oil exploration activities in the Niger Delta, which constitute stories that Nigerians will always live by.

### KEYWORDS

Ecolinguistics, Conceptual Metaphor, Critical Metaphor, Environmental Degradation, Niger Delta Poem and Oil exploration.



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## 1.1 Introduction

First and foremost, it is significant to inform our readers that part of our title is an adaptation from two works: Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, and ArranStibbe's *Ecolinguistics, Language, Ecology and the Stories We Live By*. Our reason is that the focal point of this paper is on the Niger Delta story, which is synonymous with environmental degradation. The story constitutes part of those stories which the 'Niger Deltans' and Nigerians in general would always live by. Stibbe encouraged ecology linguists to judge ecological discourses/stories, promote those which contribute to environmental sustainability, and refute those inimical to it. This paper thus is poised to judge the Niger Delta stories, presented in powerful poetic renditions, accordingly. The language use in documenting these stories especially as witnessed in the Niger Delta eco-literature is replete with metaphorical expressions. These expressions when analysed evoke powerful concepts in our cognitive system leading to the realization of conceptual metaphors which constitute the 'metaphors we live by' just as proposed by Lakoff and Johnson.

The issue of environmental degradation especially as witnessed in unethical oil exploration in Nigeria is one that would always be topical in academic discourses. Since the 1956 discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, the aftermath of oil exploration as it cuts across other Niger Delta States has caused environmental degradation as well as ecosystem destruction. Such has caused agitations and violence in the areas, as community dwellers are unhappy with the events. Besides this war with sword, there is also war with pen by the elite in their society which has given rise to literatures and academic postulation that seek to uncover those activities inimical to the call to protect nature as well as the environment, and defend them from unethical practices by humans. At the front burner of the academic discourse is the creative writers' use of pen to expose and wage war against these unbecoming practices which historically have cursed the goose that lays the golden egg.

Creative writing in its principle projects stories which mirror the society with the aim of exposing ills in the society and finding justice for the down trodden and marginalized. Through these works, readers as well as critics are able to read the society and contribute towards its sustainability. An examination of selected poetic renditions on the Niger Delta (henceforth ND) reveals the telling of stories which portray the agonies of the people as a result of the dehumanization of the environment orchestrated by oil exploration. Inherent in these poems are lamentations over the truncation of the peaceful and meaningful existence of human life and other aquatic / terrestrial habitats. The lexical choices of these poets which often evoke sense and sensibilities of ecological disaster in our cognitive system contribute significantly to studies in ecolinguistics.

Ecolinguistics, from ArranStibbe's perspective has the objective of encouraging those stories which ensure that lives as well as the ecosystem which life depends on are protected from further destruction. It supports those stories which uncover environmental injustices with a view to seeking a redress, while it condemns those that support and lead to the destruction of the environment. Ecolinguistics examines how language / linguistic choices have contributed to the movement to protect the environment. Stories on such subjects, Stibbe posits, can be examined from the perspective of any of these eight forms: metaphor, framing, ideology, salience, erasure, evaluation, identity and conviction, (2015: 17). Ecolinguistic researches focus on how ecological discourses, through these forms, have succeeded in influencing, sustaining or destroying the relationship amongst human beings, other forms of life and the environment (Alexander &Stibbe, 2014).

Just as Stibbe (2015: 5) rightly asserted, "the stories we live by are embedded deeply in the minds of individuals across a society and appear only indirectly between the lines of the texts that circulate in that society". In this, this paper posits that the ND story, which is synonymous with environmental degradation through unethical oil exploration, is pervasive in the minds of this group of people. They have been and are being indirectly uncovered and circulated in forms of creative writing. Such creative writing includes poetry, drama or prose genre of literature. The poetic renditions which uncover the ND environmental degradation are the focal point of this study. Poems on ND environmental degradation contribute significantly to ecolinguistic studies, for they uncover stories which expose environmental exploitation through oil exploration. A reading of them reveals the use of metaphor which operates at the level of our cognition to document such historic disaster as well as the traumatizing memories and experiences of the inhabitants. It is pertinent to then state here that, the notion of metaphor here excludes the traditional perspective to metaphor studies, and includes the cognitive linguistics view.

One very interesting approach to ecolinguistic analysis of these stories is in judging various discourses on ecology through the lens of cognitive linguistics. Cognitive linguistics examines “the impact of the mind in structuring human language... and how the mind processes information located in particular social contexts” (Ezeifeke, 2013: 177). Cognitive linguistics sees language as an integral part of our conceptual system, the human mind, where the interpretation of language use relies on the deconstruction of the concepts which such use evoke in our mind. In this, we situate the notion of conceptual metaphor which involves the analysis of metaphorical usage from the cognitive linguistics perspective. Therefore, it is from this angle that this paper seeks to analyze the selected poems of TanureOjaide and Sophia Obi. It judges the poems through the ecolinguistic framework of Stibbe as well as the cognitive linguistics approach to ecolinguistic analysis of texts about the environment. Poetry is chosen over other genres because the nature of it is that, in a condensed language, it pours out emotions, and metaphors are usually apt in evoking sensory images and communicating much in few words.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The call for environmental protection is such that would be beneficial to ecosystem and in no small way to human beings whose healthy living depend on the ecosystem support. This call searches for sustainability in the peaceful co-existence of human being, other organism and the environment; such a relationship is supposed to be symbiotic. However, the historic damages of oil exploration carried out by human beings in ND is one that has produced a two edged sword, where one end destroys the environment and the other destroys the human being. This injustice is one that should be spoken against and is already being spoken against. If human beings have long life expectancy as well as healthy living, then they should conscientiously take this call with every measure of seriousness. Biologists and environmentalist have already keyed in to this. Literary artists are also involved. Linguistics, therefore through ecolinguistics has joined this trend in contribution to inter-disciplinary studies. To this end, ecolinguistics scholars investigate how any of Stibbe’s stipulated “eight forms that stories take” (Stibbe, 2015: 17), has manifested as technique in the language use in texts about ecology. Metaphor, which is one of them has been studied in literary works, but from the traditional perspective. Studying metaphor as used in literary texts from the cognitive linguistics perspective becomes the problem of this research. Analyzing how such language technique has been deployed in the poems by TanureOjaide to uncover these destructive activities with a view to seeking redress forms the major part of the problem which the paper sets out to address.

## 1.3 Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

- a) To identify the metaphorical linguistic expressions encoded in the selected poems.
- b) To realize the conceptual metaphors evoked by these expressions.
- c) To analyze their contributions as beneficial or otherwise ecological discourse and the implication on ND environment.
- d) To ascertain their contributions in questioning the ND indiscriminate oil exploration.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study would contribute to the literature on ecolinguistics and also justify the benefits on trans-disciplinary researches. It would also contribute to the quest for environmental protection as it would expose the impact of language on the environment. Michael Halliday in the lecture at Thessaloniki encouraged researches that would impact the protection of environment; this study therefore would be significant as it set out to do so.

## 2.0 Review of Relevant Literature

### 2.1 Conceptual Review

#### 2.1.1 Ecolinguistics and its Approaches: An Overview

Ecolinguistics is an academic discipline which sees the fusion of ecology and linguistics. While ecology refers to the environment, linguistics refers to language. Taken together; we have the study of language as it is

used in the environment. In a narrow sense, ecolinguistics refers to critiquing the various forms of language which contribute to the destruction or to the protection of the environment. It is an emerging discipline of language; thus the issue of its definition has not been standardized. The definition is usually dependent on the perspective which linguists want to look at their data from, that is, the linguists' ecosophy. Ecolinguistics as related to the ecosophy of this research would be defined as the analysis of how language is used in literary texts to promote environmental sustainability as well as fight injustices against environmental degradation. Be that as it may, every definition supports the fact that it deals with language and the environment. It supports those which aid the preservation of nature and opposes and rewrites those that destroy it (Stibbe, 2014, 2015; Stibbe and Alex, 2014; Steffenson & Fill, 2014). The above hinges on Stibbe's assertion that studies in ecolinguistics is about "critiquing forms of language that contribute to ecological destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world" (2015:1).

For this paper, just as Stibbe postulated, ecolinguistics researchers question stories that support ecological destruction and social injustices, and support those that expose the activities that are detrimental to ecosystem and the life it supports. Just as defined by Alexander and Stibbe (2014:104), ecolinguistics is "the study of the influence of language on the life support relationship between human being, other organisms and the physical environment". As stated earlier, every ecolinguistics researcher has an ecosophy. One of Stibbe's ecosophy deals with environmental limits and thus is similar to the perspective of this research. Environmental limits according to the above state that "if human consumption exceeds the ability of natural resources to replenish themselves then this damages the ability of ecological system to support life (and living) into the future. Equally, if consumption leads to more waste than can be absorbed by ecosystems, the excess waste will prevent beings from living or living with high wellbeing" (2015:14). In the bid to explicate the concept of ecolinguistics, the above author asserts that it investigates "the stories we live by - mental models that influence behaviour and lie at the heart of the ecological challenges we are facing", (2). Ecolinguistics searches for new stories or uncover existing stories through the analysis of nature / environmental writing captured by journalists and creative writers.

In conducting ecolinguistics researches, frameworks from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Cognitive frames and Cognitive Linguistics are applied to these texts about the environment (see Stibbe, 2015:9), with the aim of commenting on the effectiveness of language use towards sustaining or destroying the environment. Hence, Mazid (2021:14) has it that "Ecolinguistics often have practical goals such as protecting nature and the environment from human harm, fighting human behaviour that destroys them and ultimately destroys human life, and promoting diversity, equity and inclusion which involve giving value to every human and non-human being as well as to the natural world". Stibbe informed researchers about the cognitive approach to ecolinguistics studies where he listed metaphor as one of the eight forms of stories to look out for in ecolinguistics analysis of selected data. The others are: framing, ideology, salience, erasure, evaluation, identity and conviction. The author states that "when ecolinguists examine ideologies, metaphors, frames and a variety of other cognitive and linguistic phenomena, what they are doing is revealing and uncovering the stories that shape people's lives and shape the society in which they live" (2015:5). Metaphor as he postulated can be studied from the cognitive linguistics approach just as suggested above.

Stibbe's publication is very remarkable in current ecolinguistics studies. It vividly presents the interdependence of language and the environment and the need to promote discourses which ensure harmonious existence between the two. On the one hand, the ones that promote the destruction of the environment are termed "destructive discourses" (2015:24), while on the other hand, "beneficial discourses" (2015: 30) promote stories which ensure ecologically beneficial activities. In other words, those discourses which expose the destruction of nature with the view to putting a stop to it are beneficial to the environment. They raise awareness of environmental degradation and exploitation by human beings. In analysing ecolinguistic texts from the view point of any of the eight forms of stories, analysts are required to make reference to the benefits or other-wise of such to the environment. It is very important to note here, that there is yet to be a specific theoretical prescription for ecolinguistic studies. However, researchers are encouraged to choose theoretical frameworks which best suit any of the above eight approaches to analyze their linguistic data. This is why Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Cognitive Linguistics would be important to our analysis here.

### 2.1.2 Metaphor Studies in Cognitive Linguistics

Metaphor has an age long definition which is the direct comparison of dissimilar entities that are seen to share certain similarities. The above refers to the traditional conception of metaphor; metaphor in the literary sense, otherwise known as figure of speech. However, the contemporary notion of metaphor especially from the cognitive science refers to metaphor and its cognitive connotation. It refers to the understanding of one concept in terms of another. It equally denotes using concepts from a particular source to talk about or understand concepts in another source. The concepts are understood beyond the linguistic level to what mental models they evoke in the mind of the reader. Lakoff and Johnson (1999:58) assert that metaphor from the cognitive linguistics perspective refers to “a mapping from a source domain to a target domain”, where the target domain is the area being talked about, the source refers to the domain from which inferences are drawn. Lakoff and Johnson’s metaphorical conceptualization of TIME here illumines our discourse. Time is a valuable commodity, hence, we make constructions as – ‘You’re *wasting my time*’, ‘I’ve *investeda lot of time* in her’, ‘How do you *spend your time* these days?’, ‘That flat tire *cost me an hour*’ (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:3). In the above, concepts from the source domain of money/financial resources such as ‘invest’, ‘cost’ and ‘waste’ have been used to talk about ‘time’, the target domain. From the cognitive perspective, the audience requires an imaginative leap to understand how the two dissimilar concepts (time/money) are structured.

Most researches especially in cognitive linguistics “no longer view metaphor as a matter of literary style but believe that it has become a ubiquitous feature of everyday language and thought”, (Chukwu&Agwuocha, unpublished). Ungerer and Schmid (2006:114), as it is, also view metaphor as “powerful cognitive tools for our conceptualization of the world”. From this perspective, metaphor is basically about conceptual metaphor. Conceptual metaphor (henceforth CM/s) involves adapting concepts from a domain that is concrete to explore and explain concepts in a different domain that is abstract. For instance, ‘Time’ in the above given illustration is an ‘abstract’ concept while ‘money’ is concrete. Such helps in conceptualizing events and activities in the world and reasoning about them. The contemporary study of metaphor thus refers to CM which gives the realization that metaphor is a part of the human cognition. The linguistic metaphors inherent in our language clearly evoke images in the minds of readers from which we derive conceptual metaphors. From the above examples, those linguistic expressions yielded the CM ‘TIME IS MONEY’.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980:14) classified CMs into structural, ontological and orientational. Structural metaphors present us with instances where an abstract concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another concrete concept. The authors’ popular CM example – ‘ARGUMENT ARE BUILDINGS’- was realized from these linguistic metaphors: ‘the argument is *shaky*’, ‘we need to *construct a strong* argument’, ‘we need some more facts or the *argument will fall apart*’. Here, the discourse on argument (abstract) is structured as if it is a building (concrete). We talk about argument being ‘shaky’ or ‘falling apart’ as if it is a building. It is conceptualized as a building and thus structured and talked about as one.

Ontological metaphors otherwise regarded as entity and substance metaphors present us with the situation where we understand our experiences and talk about them as if they are distinct entities or substances. The understanding of our experiences in life helps us quantify them and thus represent them as distinct entities bounded by a surface. These illustrations from Lakoff and Johnson clearly explain this: ‘my mind isn’t *operating* today’, ‘we’ve been working on this problem all day, and now we’re *running out of steam*’, (1980:17). In these linguistic expressions, the mind has been conceptualized as a distinct entity. Even though it is a nonphysical phenomenon, however, it has been viewed and talked about as if it were a concrete object. We have a mental experience of its level of efficiency and operating condition as if it were a machine. Consequently, the conceptual metaphor – THE MIND IS A MACHINE- is realized from these expressions. Ontological metaphors give us direct understanding of events, actions, activities and states in terms of objects, substances and containers. They are conceptualized and reasoned as such. More so, the above authors example – ‘he *fell into* a depression’ - aptly illustrates the ‘state of being’ being conceptualized as containers. Here ‘depression’ becomes a bounded space, an enclosure, a container which he fell into.

In addition, ontological metaphors lead us to the description and understanding of physical objects as human beings. Events and experiences which are non-human entities are talked about as if they are humans. For



instance, the expressions ‘inflation has *outwitted* the best economic minds in the country’ and ‘inflation has *robbed* me of my savings’ lead to the comprehension of INFLATION as a person, a human being capable of undertaking animate activity of ‘robbing’ and ‘outwitting’. ‘Inflation’ is personalized here. Hence, we have the conceptual metaphor ‘INFLATION IS AN ENTITY’. The crucial point here is that personification is an extension of ontological metaphors which helps us to conceptualize certain abstract phenomena as animate beings.

Oriental metaphors are known to ‘organize a whole system of concepts in terms of another and such is based on our physical, social or cultural experience of such concepts. They are noted to give us a spatial orientation of things. For example, the expressions – “I *fell into* a depression’, ‘you’re in *high* spirits’ - are given as examples of orientational metaphors. From the physical basis, when one is elated, the posture is usually erect, and when he/she is sad or depressed, we see a drooping posture. More so, to see one with heads down or shoulders drooped is culturally interpreted that such a person is sad or depressed. The CMs - ‘SAD IS DOWN’ and ‘HAPPY IS UP’ are realized from these expressions respectively. Orientation metaphors thus give a concept a spatial orientation.

From the foregoing, metaphorical conceptualization of events leads readers to the mapping of a concept unto another in terms of their correspondences. Such usage aids language users to derive concepts which aptly paint the real picture of the message they want to put across. From the cognitive perspective, ecolinguists are required to look beyond the literary level to arrive at the models which such usage evokes in the mind.

### 2.1.3 Stories We Live By: Poetry of the Niger Delta

In the words of Mazid, “the stories we live by, no matter how short-lived they are, are birth tools and indexes – indexes to our ways of thinking and behaving and believing our world views including the ways we regard our environments, and tools for shaping the world around us and talking about it”, (2021:15). These stories we live by are propagated using language. In ecolinguistics, language is analysed in relation to the way it is used to tell stories which mirror nature as well as environmental issues. Literature, judging from its function, provides the media where nature related events in the society are mirrored. Poetry as a genre of literature is apt in recreating events which hold a mirror to the environmental issues in society. Some poems recreate ecological stories, and certainly therefore, poetry on the ND oil exploration and exploitation contains these forms of stories which are both tools and indexes in exposing the degradation of the environment and calling for a redress.

The ND region comprises states from the south-south part of Nigeria. They are notable for the fortune of rich oil and gas deposits in their environment. However, instead of being a blessing, such has brought untold hardship to the people. The unguarded oil exploration in some parts of these areas have led to environmental degradation. From deforestation to water/land/air pollution and erosion, there has been enormous damage which these activities have caused in the land. The height of it is that the multinational companies who explore the ‘gold’ do not give commensurate compensation and care to the inhabitants of the region. Consequently, such has resulted in violence in the region. Just as Onyema opined, “the lack of gainful employment, especially among the youths is not only an economic issue, but has become a major security concern and an underlying cause of conflict and violence in the region, especially as restive youths have become fishers of men”, (2021:25-26). All these activities and events constitute the ND oil exploration/exploitation stories which poets like TanureOjaide, Sophia Obi, OgagaIwodo, Onyema, and others have captured in their poetic renditions. This study hence is interested in how language has been used as tools and indexes in evoking powerful mental imageries which aptly portray the ND experience. Its focal point would be on the conceptual metaphors inherent in the linguistic metaphorical expressions used by these poets. These poets have succeeded in using special form of language to tell their poetic stories. From their language use, this study would derive its ecosophy and make significant contribution to ecolinguistics.

## 2.2 Empirical Studies

The growing concerns on environmental protection have necessitated the call for scholars in the humanities to empirically study how language has contributed to ecological sustainability. To this end, we bring some researches and their contributions to this call. Since the large corpora of our data would be from poetry,

we thus deem it ideal to study researches whose analyses are also on eco poetry. In their research on selected poems in TanureOjande's "Delta Blues and Homesongs", Abba and Onyemachi (2020) looked at the poems from eco-alienation perspective where human's hyper-capitalist greed has resulted in the destruction of the ecosystem. They postulated that in the poems studied, through the poet persona, the ND's feelings against oil exploration activities were portrayed. They feel a disconnection between them and the oil deposit in their community, and as such, they no longer see the oil deposit as a source of living but as a metaphor of death. Hence, they are alienated from their environment. There is a separation between them and nature. In their findings, they postulated that eco poetry in these works emerge "as imaginative counter-discourse, not only for exposing the corporate greed that characterizes hyper capitalists activities in the 'ND' region, but also for exploring the pains and sense of eco-human alienation it engenders", (2020:14).

Similarly, Oguntuase (2019) studied Ojaide's poems through the lens of ecocriticism which sees the connection between literature, human beings and the environment. In their postulation, they asserted that literature via poetry is highly relevant in confronting the injustice meted out on the ND environment through unguarded oil exploration activities. Just as it is researched above, Nwagbara (2010) through the lens of ecocriticism discovered and commended the poet's boldness and form of fight against ecological imperialism in ND. Suffice it to say that these researches through eco-literary criticism brought to fore voices from the humanities field fighting against ecological destruction as well as human degradation, this research would then analyze some of these ND eco poetry through ecolinguistics perspective where the conceptual metaphor theory as well as critical metaphor analysis would aid the interpretation of the various linguistic metaphors inherent in the poems. It is thus, in this area that we would wish to contribute to scholarship.

### 2.3 Theoretical Framework: Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Metaphor Analysis Framework

The CMT is a theory put forth by Lakoff and Johnson in their 1980 publication- '*Metaphors We Live By*'. Its principles hinge on cognitive linguistics; hence, it talks about metaphor which operates at the level of our cognition first, before being manifested in our language use. The CMT claim is that the metaphoricity of language use operates beyond the linguistic level, therefore, any comprehension and interpretation of its use should go beyond this level to the cognitive connotations where users adopt inferences in a given domain to explore concepts in another domain.

In this, we locate the principle of TARGET DOMAIN and SOURCE DOMAIN in CMT which is represented as TARGET DOMAIN is SOURCE DOMAIN or DOMAIN A is DOMAIN B. The target domain is the concept being talked about which is usually abstract, while the source domain is that which provides inferences with which to explore and talk about target domain. The source domain evokes a concrete sense in our cognition. For the target domain to be talked about in terms of a source domain there must be corresponding factors among the two, thus yielding the principle of mapping correspondences in CMT. For instance, if 'Argument' is discussed as if it is a building in these sentences – 'The argument *collapsed*', 'We need to *construct a strong* argument for that' (Lakoff& Johnson 1980:30), and then the conceptual structure ARGUMENT is BUILDING is realized. While 'Argument' is the target domain, 'Building' is the source domain. The notion of 'collapse' and 'construct' used in building corresponds to that of argument and as such mapped onto it.

The linguistics expressions above are regarded as conventional metaphors through which the CM, ARGUMENT is BUILDING is realized. It is different from creative or novel metaphors which is the traditional notion of metaphor. Going by this, another principle of CMT states that through conventional metaphor, one realizes conceptual metaphors. Conventional metaphors are pervasive in our daily language use that they seldom escape a critical eye. Their interpretations are based on our cognitive structure existent in our conceptual systems. The cognitive structures are mental models which exist in our mind. Their interpretations are most times culture specific. They determine how people reason about certain phenomenon especially how they regard their environment. It is against this knowledge that conventional metaphors as appeared in poetic lines of ND eco-poets are chosen for this study and would be analysed through the lens of CMT.

Furthermore, Charteris-Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis (Henceforth CMA) illumines our discourse especially with regard to the underlying message inherent in the poets' eco - discourse. Propounded in 2004,

CMA takes metaphor analysis beyond mere interpretation of conceptual metaphors. Besides portraying the need to engage in a corpus-based approach, that is, studying real textual data, it equally looks at the pragmatic import of such use of conceptual metaphors. CMA involves three approaches to metaphor studies, (Charteris-Black, 2004:21). The first is the linguistic approach that involves metaphor identification through the establishment of existing semantic tension in a given linguistic expression. The tension is looked out for in words or phrases in the poetic lines, through reification, personification and de - personification. Such can occur at the linguistic, cognitive or pragmatic level of a given expression. The next approach is the cognitive approach which enables researchers to deduce when concepts in a given domain have been used to structure those of a different domain through a transfer of meaning, thus realizing conceptual metaphors. This approach is similar to Lakoff and Johnson's source and target domain principle in CMT. While the third approach which is the pragmatic dimension to metaphor analysis, refers to, the underlying motive as well as message inherent in the users' choice of language. This is just as Ezeifeka (2013:179) stated, the pragmatic dimension to metaphor studies in CMA includes "the motivations of these metaphors and how they can predispose the interlocutors to certain interpretations or misinterpretations". This implies understanding the pragmatic implications, hitherto what the metaphors have been used to achieve in a given communication.

### 3.0 Research Methodology

Being a corpus - based research, our data is delimited to 27 excerpts from two purposively selected poems on ND oil exploration activities written by TanureOjaide. The poems are: 'Delta Blues' and 'When green was the lingua franca'. Ecolinguistics, just as Stibbe (2015:2) postulates, is about critiquing forms of language use in "a wide range of texts from different areas of life" questioning the unsustainable environmental habits and activities. This informs our choice of poetry of literary discipline for our data. Charteris -Black's Critical Metaphor Analysis, Lakoff and Johnson's CMT as well as Purposive Sampling Technique guided the selection and qualitative analysis of the data.

### 4.0 Analysis and Discussion of Findings

In this section, the purposively selected data from the studied poems were analyzed. We were constrained by time and space to brevity in our discussion, however, the ecosophy of this paper was aptly captured. TanureOjaide's poetry collection titled 'Delta Blues and Home Songs' presents us with poems which reveal the harrowing experiences on oil exploitation in ND. The poems- 'Delta blues' and 'When green was the lingua franca' - are our focal point here. 'Delta blues' presents us with eco-poetic lamentations about the fortunes of ND turned misfortune. We encounter here allusion to the Ogoni nine environmental activists who met their gruesome death in the hands of the then Abacha-led administration. The poem reels with imageries of death used to talk about the oil wealth.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. This share of <i>paradise</i> , the delta of my birth. | 28. I live in the <i>deathbed</i>                   |
| 2. reels from <i>immeasurable wound</i> ...               | 29. Prepared by a cabal of brokers...               |
| 6. The <i>inheritance</i> I sat for centuries             | 34. How many aborigines have been <i>killed</i> ?   |
| 7. <i>now crushes my body and soul</i> ...                | 35. as their sacred soil was <i>debauched</i>       |
| 25. My <i>nativity</i> gives <i>immortal pain</i>         | 72. The <i>inheritance</i> I have been blessed with |
| 26. <i>masked in barrels of oil</i>                       | 73. Now <i>crushes my body and soul</i>             |
| 27. I stew in the womb of fortune(pages 21-23).           |   |

The poet persona above laments that the ND which he perceived as a paradise and a home of fortune due to the rich oil deposits has become source of pain and death due to the oil exploration activities of the multinational companies (cabal of brokers). The indiscriminate oil explorations have resulted in immeasurable wound (line 2). The inheritance (line 6) (oil wealth) crushes the body and soul of the inhabitants. When death strikes, it kills body and soul, and causes unending pain. Thus the ND oil wealth which is supposed to sustain



and preserve human existence has robbed the indigenes of the very essence of existence. Death, the end of human existence, could be analyzed here as giving immortal pain especially when likened to the biblical account of heaven and hell. When a mortal's destination after death is 'hell', there is bound to be immortal pain. More so, it is only death that is capable of destroying both body and soul (line 73). Lines 27 and 28 vividly explore the juxtaposition of life and death. The 'womb of fortune' (oil wealth) which the indigenes found themselves in has been turned to a 'death bed and a source of pain' (line 34).

The analysis above revealed that certain metaphoric conceptualizations have become instruments in conveying lucidly the ND experience. On the one hand, concepts such as 'inheritance', 'paradise', 'womb of fortune' are referents to oil wealth in ND. On the other hand, concepts as 'killed', 'crushes body and soul', 'death bed', 'immeasurable wound', and immortal pain; all referents to death have been deployed to experience and talk about the ND oil wealth. In this, one finds out that the ND oil wealth has been metaphorically conceptualized as a source of pain and of death. Concepts from the source domain of death and pain have been used to talk about oil wealth, a target domain leading to the realization of the CMs -NIGER DELTA OIL WEALTH AS DEATH/DEATH BED/ as well as NIGER DELTA OIL WEALTH AS PAIN.

'When green was the lingua franca' is another of Ojaide's eco-poem which mirrors the environmental right challenges as well as ecological destruction in ND. Similar to 'Delta blues', the poet vividly captured the ND narrame in powerful linguistic terms which evokes images in the readers' cognitive system. Evidenced in the poetic lines are direct humanization of the fauna and flora of the ND region.

- |     |  |     |  |
|-----|--|-----|--|
| 20. | Snails and <i>kotolured</i> me         | 64. | The Ethiope water front                        |
| 24. | Urhurhu grapes <i>coloured</i>         | 65. | <i>wiped out</i> by prospectors                |
| 25. | <i>my tongue scarlet...</i>            | 66. | so many trees <i>beheaded</i>                  |
| 29. | The cotton tree <i>made me</i>         | 67. | and streams mortally <i>poisoned</i>           |
| 30. | <i>fly</i> for tossed out fluffs       | 69. | in the name of jobs and wealth                 |
| 31. | <i>the gum free took finger prints</i> | 75. | I left the majority to be                      |
| 32. | <i>before invisible policemen...</i>   | 76. | <i>massacred, atreeful carnage</i> (pp 12-14). |

The poet adopted concepts used in discourse about human beings to talk about the pre-oil as well a post-oil era in ND. In post-oil era, there is the destruction of the environment. The atrocities were represented in powerful imageries. Trees have heads and thus are 'beheaded' (line 66). Ethiope (a local government in Delta State) water front 'wiped out' (line 64- 65), while the streams get poisoned (line 67). More so, trees are humans and thus were left massacred (cut down) in a large quantity (treeful carnage). The flora of ND has been humanized in these poetic lines. Animate characteristics as well as terminologies peculiar to humans have been bestowed on such inanimate objects by the poet persona.

In the pre-oil era, the poet reminiscences the greenery of nature, when nature has not been robbed of its virginity. Green here symbolizes nurtured vegetation, image of life and thus the poet refers to the flora and Fauna using vivid imageries specific to humans. Snails, urhurhu grapes, cotton, gum tree are bestowed with human qualities of luring, colouring, taking finger prints, etc. They are conceptualized as human beings and talked about as such. Nature in ND is thus understood as a human being leading to the realization of the CM – NIGER DELTA FAUNA and FLORA (NATURE) AS HUMAN BEING.

Besides the above realized CMs, oil exploration in ND could also be deduced as war in the above poetic lines. Just as Lakoff and Johnson posits, two conceptual metaphors can be realized from same expressions. In lines 64, 65, 66, 67, 76, such lexis as 'wiped out', 'beheaded', 'massacred', 'poisoned', 'victims' (I see victims of arson) and 'carnage' are found in war discourse and thus cause semantic tension in their usage above. Their usage trigger off a level of understanding that is beyond the surface linguistic level to their

cognitive connotation. They evoke a sense of war events in the readers mind, however, they have been used here to discuss deforestation in ND. The poet structured the act of clearing the vegetation and water front for oil rigging in terms of war where the trees are beheaded instead of cut down. By implications, there is equally the CM – NIGER DELTA OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITY AS WAR an NIGER DELTA OIL EXPLORATION ACTIVITY AS TOTAL ESTRANGEMENT OF HUMANS FROM THE ECOSYSTEM THAT SUPPORTS THEM, where concepts from the source domain of war have been used to talk about the target domain of oil exploration. There is ecological destruction in ND, just as there is human destruction in war. The foregoing discourse presented the stories of the ND told by these poets. It portrayed the tragic irony of being blessed with natural resources which has constantly reminded them of death, pain, sorrow and total estrangement of human beings from the ecosystem that sustain them. Familiar concepts from the above listed different domains have been adopted to x-ray the traumatic experiences of both humans and natural environment in ND story, and are presented here.

## 5.0 Conclusion

Niger Delta poetry is notable for its major thematic preoccupation which centres on the unethical practices in oil exploration in ND and the devastating effect such has on the environment. Ojaide is a notable eco-poets whose poetic renditions explicate first-hand experience of the war against ecology and the ecosystems in this region. Their significance to ArranStibbe's ideology in ecolinguistics is remarkable for these poets uncovered and told stories, in poetic lines, which exposed the environmental injustices against nature and the Niger Deltans. It is also Stibbe's utmost desire for ecolinguists to seek these stories and analyze how language has been used in them to promote or oppose ecological destruction; highlight those promoting ecological sustainability and oppose and rewrite those inimical to it. It is in this light that we researched one of Stibbe's eight forms of approaches to the stories; the metaphor, from the cognitive linguistics perspectives which provided us with the theoretical lens with which we empirically demonstrated our findings. Armed with the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) we looked at the conceptual metaphors in the poetic lines of chosen poems. We discovered that in the poets' artistic use of language, they made linguistic choices which reveal certain metaphorical connotations that evoke familiar and concrete concepts in the cognitive systems of the audience, especially the ecolinguists. From the identified metaphorical expressions, the paper deduced the following CMs inherent in the poems- **NIGER DELTA OIL WEALTH AS DEATH/DEATH BED; NIGER DELTA OIL WEALTH AS PAIN; NIGER DELTA FAUNA AND FLORA (ECOLOGY) AS HUMAN BEING; NIGER DELTA OIL EXPLORATION AS WAR and NIGER DELTA OIL EXPLORATION AS TOTAL ESTRANGEMENT OF HUMAN BEINGS FROM THE ECOSYSTEM THAT SUPPORT THEM.** In these CMs, the poet was able to capture succinctly the ecological challenges, anxieties, agitations and violence that characterize the ND communities. The poems exposed and spoke against the environmental protection anti-practices, and consequently, the discourses are adjudged beneficial in line with Stibbe's stipulation.

From the above, we make revelations which illumine our ecosophy here. On the one hand, these stories contribute significantly towards revealing the beneficial harmonious co-existence between human beings and nature in the pre-oil era. The ND is portrayed here, as a region richly and naturally endowed with green ecology from which flora and fauna, water, land, air and human beings enjoyed mutual relationship. The peaceful co-existence x-rayed in 'when green was the lingua franca' vividly captured the pre-oil era. On the other hand, the poems criticized the dehumanization of the environment by unethical practices by the oil explorers. The poet conveyed these stories in emotion laden tones which saw the conceptualization of ND oil wealth as source of DEATH, PAIN, SORROW and her oil exploration as WAR, DEALTH BED and TOTAL ESTRANGEMENT OF HUMANS FROM THE ECOSYSTEM THAT SUSTAINS THEM. The adoption of war terminologies in the poems aptly conveys the destruction of the environment. The study postulates that the poets persona in these poems, express bitter criticism against ecological devastation, environmental destruction and brutalization of ancestral owners of the region who opposed the rabid desires of the cabal of brokers and the Nigeria Government. Therefore, as a beneficial discourse, the poet, through the metaphoric conceptualization of the Niger Delta oil exploration activities, has exposed the environmental degradation and imprinted powerful imageries, ideologies typical of the Niger Delta stories which the nation, the Niger Deltans specifically, will always live by.

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