

## METAPHORICAL MAPPINGS OF “PARENTS” AS KINSHIP CATEGORIES IN HAUSA LANGUAGE

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### Abstract

This study investigates the metaphorical mappings of parental kinship categories: *father*, *mother*, and *grandparents* in the Hausa language, using the Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) as framework. The study collected data from 200 Hausa Native Speakers using Semantic Elicitation Task from naturally-occurring situations. The research reveals that these kinship terms extend far beyond their literal family references. The '*father*' *Uba* is metaphorically conceptualized as a 'shelter', 'wall', and 'pillar', showing roles of strength, protection, and stability. The '*mother*' *Uwa* is framed as 'shade', 'coolness', and 'emotional centrality', embodying care, nurturance, and moral significance. '*Grandparents*' *Kaka* for both male and female are depicted as 'friends', 'indulgent figures', and 'repositories of history', signifying their roles in intergenerational bonding and cultural continuity. These metaphorical mappings show the cognitive and cultural dimensions of Hausa kinship expressions which illustrate how language encodes complex social values, emotional relationships, and communal identities. The study affirms that Hausa kinship metaphors are not arbitrary but culturally grounded cognitive tools that shape social interaction and cultural worldview. It contributes to African linguistics and cognitive semantics by offering deeper insights into the interplay between metaphor, language, and culture in an indigenous African context.

**Keywords:** Conceptual Metaphor, Extension, Metaphorical Mapping, Kinship Terms, Parental Metaphors, Semantic and Hausa.

### Introduction

The intricate relationship between language and culture has long been acknowledged in linguistic and anthropological scholarship. Scholars have consistently emphasized that language both reflects and reinforces cultural patterns, serving as a cognitive tool for organizing and interpreting human experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Sharifian, 2011; Barsalou, 2012; Casasanto, 2016). This interdependence is particularly evident in how metaphors operate within language not merely as rhetorical ornaments but as fundamental cognitive mechanisms that shape how speakers understand abstract concepts through familiar experiences. Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), developed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), provides a robust framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to CMT, metaphor involves the systematic mapping of knowledge from a concrete

or well-understood source domain onto an abstract or less familiar target domain. These mappings are deeply entrenched in our conceptual system and guide how we think, speak, and act.

Metaphorical mappings are thus cognitive projections where conceptual structure from one domain is transferred to another, allowing speakers to reason about complex social, emotional, or moral realities through simpler, embodied experiences (Lakoff, 1987; Kövecses, 2005). In many languages, including Hausa, kinship terms form a rich source domain for metaphorical reasoning. Kinship expressions like *father*, *mother*, and *grandparent* are frequently extended metaphorically to articulate ideas about leadership, authority, nurturance, and intergenerational knowledge. These metaphorical extensions are not random but are grounded in the cultural values, social structures, and interpersonal norms of the community (Sharifian et al., 2008; Kraska-Szlenk,

2014a, 2014b).

In Hausa, kinship terms carry significant semantic and cultural weight. While terms such as *Uba* (father), *Uwa* (mother), and *Kaka* (grandparent) denote biological relationships, they are also employed metaphorically in a variety of social contexts to express respect, hierarchy, emotional closeness, protection, and communal identity. For instance, a community leader may be called *Uban Kasa* ("father of the land") to invoke an image of guidance, authority, and provision, while *Uwa* may metaphorically refer to any nurturing or protective figure regardless of gender or biological connection. These metaphorical usages reflect key cultural principles such as age hierarchy, communal responsibility, and reverence for elders (Newman, 2000; Usman, 2015). The metaphorical mapping of kinship terms in Hausa illustrates how linguistic expressions are rooted in cultural cognition and play a critical role in social organization. This underscores the broader claim in cultural linguistics that metaphor is both a reflection of and a vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge (Sharifian, 2011).

Despite the cultural richness of such metaphorical expressions, much of the existing scholarship on Hausa has focused on its phonological, grammatical, and syntactic structures, with limited attention paid to how metaphor functions in everyday language use (Newman, 2000). There remains a notable gap in understanding how Hausa speakers metaphorically map kinship categories onto broader social and cognitive domains. This study addresses this gap by exploring the metaphorical extensions of parental kinship terms *father*, *mother*, *grandfather*, and *grandmother* in Hausa, using the theoretical lens of Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Frame Semantics. The aim is to uncover how these metaphors not only enrich linguistic expression but also reflect deep-seated cultural beliefs, values, and interpersonal dynamics within Hausa-speaking communities.

Hausa is a Chadic language widely spoken in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. It is spoken predominantly in Northern Nigeria and parts of West Africa. It is a major lingua franca with rich oral and written traditions. Hausa reflects

a strong Islamic influence, and its language practices are deeply intertwined with social hierarchies, gender roles, and cultural values (Newman, 2000; Jaggar, 2020).

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Conceptual Review

**Semantics:** This review examines seminal contributions to the definition of semantics, highlighting key theoretical frameworks and their implications for understanding the complexities of linguistic meaning. Fillmore (1985: 225), an influential linguist, defined semantics as "the study of meaning in language." His work emphasized the role of meaning in relation to linguistic structures and usage. Lyons (1999) described semantics as the field that examines meaning within language, emphasizing how meanings are organized, conveyed, and interpreted in linguistic communication. Similarly, Hurford and Heasley (1983: 70) viewed semantics as the study of meaning expressed through linguistic forms such as words, phrases, sentences, and texts in human communication. Saeed (1997) also considered semantics as the analysis of meaning in language, encompassing various linguistic units from words to larger discourse structures.

**Semantic Extension:** Semantic extension is the process by which a word acquires additional meanings beyond its original or literal sense. In cognitive linguistics, this often occurs through metaphor or metonymy, allowing terms to apply in new conceptual or social domains (Geeraerts, 2018; Traugott & Dasher, 2020). In many African languages, semantic extension of kinship terms is a key mechanism for expressing social relationships and community structure.

**Kinship Terms:** Kinship terms are lexical items used to denote family relationships such as father, mother, sibling, or grandparent. However, in many languages, these terms are often extended metaphorically to describe non-familial roles, responsibilities, and social hierarchies (Parkin, 2022; Evans-Pritchard, 2020). Kinship terminology is essential in anthropological linguistics for understanding how language reflects social organization.

**Metaphorical Mapping:** Metaphorical mapping refers to the cognitive process by which features or

structures from a well-understood source domain are systematically projected onto a less familiar target domain. This mapping allows people to reason about abstract concepts through more concrete experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2020). It is a foundational mechanism within Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), which posits that such metaphorical structures are not merely linguistic, but deeply embedded in cognition.

**Parental Metaphors:** Parental metaphors are metaphorical uses of the roles of father, mother, or grandparents to describe non-biological relationships or attributes. These metaphors typically draw on culturally salient ideas of protection, authority, guidance, and care (Kövecses, 2020; Yu & Jia, 2023). Such metaphors are prevalent in politics, religion, education, and traditional leadership, especially in collectivist societies.

### Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, introduced by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), posits that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but reflections of underlying conceptual structures. According to CMT, abstract concepts are understood through metaphorical projections from more tangible or embodied domains (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Kövecses, 2020). This theory provides a cognitive framework for analyzing how metaphors shape language and thought. The study of metaphorical language, particularly within the field of cognitive linguistics, has been significantly shaped by Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), first proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980). CMT maintains that metaphors are not just stylistic devices used in language but are foundational to human cognition. They enable speakers to understand abstract, complex, or unfamiliar concepts by mapping them onto more concrete, familiar domains. In this cognitive framework, linguistic expressions involving metaphors reveal deep insights into how individuals conceptualize their experiences and realities.

Within the context of kinship categories, particularly parental roles such as *father*, *mother*, *grandfather*, and *grandmother*, metaphorical expressions serve as cognitive and cultural tools

through which social hierarchies, moral expectations, and relational dynamics are represented. These metaphorical mappings often extend beyond biological relationships and are employed in socio-cultural contexts to denote authority, wisdom, nurturance, leadership, or moral guidance.

### Empirical Review

A number of studies have been conducted on metaphorical mapping of kinship terms both within and outside the Nigerian and African context. Some of these studies are reviewed as they relate to metaphorical mapping of parental metaphors. Zhang and Zhuang(2018) examined kinship terms as metaphors in Mandarin: Cognitive and cultural analysis. The study analyzed how kinship terms in Mandarin Chinese are used metaphorically, drawing on cognitive linguistic and cultural analysis. It examined the metaphorical extensions of "father" (*fu*) and "mother" (*mu*), finding concluding that "mother" is more conventionally used metaphorically than "father". In Mandarin Chinese, kinship terms like *shūshu* (uncle) and *jiějie* (elder sister) are widely used in non-familial contexts to signal social closeness, hierarchy, or endearment. The study suggests that the degree of metaphoricity for these terms is influenced by both universal biological experiences and cultural factors, particularly Confucianism.

In a study titled “Kinship metaphors and social interaction in Mandarin Chinese: A cognitive approach”, Zhang & Zhuang (2018) examined metaphorical mappings across English and Mandarin political speeches. The focus was to identify how cognitive mappings influenced conceptualizations of leadership and authority. Using a corpus-based approach and qualitative analysis grounded in CMT, they found that metaphors such as "nation as family" or "leader as father" were recurrent. These mappings provided insight into how authority is constructed and legitimized culturally. Alshammari (2019) examined the metaphorical extension of kinship terms in Arabic: A cognitive linguistic perspective. This study explored how kinship terms in Arabic are used metaphorically, drawing on cognitive linguistics principles. It investigated how the

meanings of kinship terms, which typically denote family relationships, were extended to other domains, creating metaphorical extensions. The study revealed that, in Arabic, terms such as *umm* (mother) and *ab* (father) are metaphorically extended to describe respected leaders, religious figures, or protectors, showing entrenched cultural values about family, responsibility, and social order.

In their study "Kinship Terms and Social Hierarchies in Yoruba and Zulu", Chikere and Moyo, (2021) investigated the metaphorical and literal applications of kinship terms in African communities. Using ethnolinguistic interviews and narrative analysis, they found that kinship terms were frequently used to express social distance, politeness, and respect. For instance, older community members were often addressed as "father" or "mother," regardless of actual familial ties, revealing a socially embedded metaphor system. A parallel study by Dlamini (2021) titled "From Kinship to Leadership: Semantic Shift in Swazi Cultural Discourse" showed how the term for "father" (*baba*) shifted semantically to refer to chiefs and religious leaders. Through discourse analysis of royal speeches and church sermons, the study demonstrated how semantic extension aligns with community ideals of care and protection. These findings support the view that metaphor and semantic extension are deeply linked in expressing parental roles metaphorically.

In "Cultural Semantics in Hausa Proverbs: A Study of Kinship and Social Order", Aliyu and Sulaiman (2021) explored how proverbs use metaphorical kinship terms to communicate moral lessons and social norms. Analyzing over 150 proverbs, they identified frequent references to "mother" and "father" as symbols of care, authority, and historical continuity. Their methodology combined ethnographic interviews and text analysis, revealing the metaphorical richness of parental terms. Another relevant study is "Language, Identity, and Metaphor in Hausa Public Discourse" where Mohammed and Idris (2022) using discourse analysis of media and political speech found that metaphorical references to *Uba* (father) and *Uwa* (mother) were central in

reinforcing community leadership and social solidarity. These studies demonstrate that Hausa provides a culturally grounded and linguistically fertile terrain for studying metaphorical mappings of kinship.

Cross-linguistic studies support the prevalence and importance of metaphorical kinship mappings in diverse linguistic communities. While Hausa has received less attention in this regard, some studies have begun to highlight the metaphorical use of parental terms in traditional and modern communication contexts particularly in political rhetoric, religious sermons, and proverbs (Usman, 2015; Ibrahim, 2020). In the African context, these researches have shown that languages employ parental metaphors extensively in political and spiritual discourse, often to invoke familiarity, loyalty, and moral obligation. These metaphorical extensions serve pragmatic and rhetorical purposes, reinforcing societal values such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, and divine providence. However, few studies have specifically focused on the metaphorical mappings of *parents* and *grandparents* in Hausa from a CMT perspective. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how core kinship terms are metaphorically structured and what this reveals about the cognitive and cultural schemas of Hausa speakers.

### Theoretical Framework

The current study is anchored on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), complemented by Fillmore's Frame Semantics (1976). According to CMT, metaphor operates through a process of conceptual mapping, whereby a *source domain* (e.g., family relationships) is projected onto a *target domain* (e.g., political leadership or moral authority). In this way, parental metaphors provide cognitive scaffolding for understanding abstract social roles. Frame Semantics, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of background knowledge and culturally embedded frames in meaning-making. Parental kinship terms evoke frames of nurturance, guidance, authority, and continuity, which are activated even in non-literal uses. When a Hausa speaker refers to a community leader as "ubangiji" (a revered paternal figure, sometimes used for

God), they activate a culturally specific frame that blends familial intimacy with divine or moral authority.

Together, these theories provide a robust foundation for analyzing the metaphorical extensions of kinship categories in Hausa. They guide the study in identifying the source-target mappings, cultural frames, and socio-cognitive functions of parental metaphors within Hausa discourse.

### Research Methodology

The research design for this study is a qualitative research design. The type of qualitative analysis employed is Merriam's (2008) descriptive interpretive method of data analysis. This study was conducted in the Northwestern part of Nigeria,

Jigawa (Dutse metropolis). The population for this study comprises more than 2 million people of ages from 25-45 years from where the sample of respondents was obtained. This research employed two main methods of data collection: Ethnographic Fieldwork and the use of Semantic Elicitation Task (SET) on 200 Hausa native speakers of diverse social status who served as subjects for the study. A qualitative analysis was employed by the researcher to code and tabulate the data obtained from the observation and SET. The findings were interpreted to gain insights into the metaphorical conceptualizations of kinship terms using Lakoff and Johnson's CMT as a framework for both the theory and analysis.

### Data Presentation And Analysis

Identification of Hausa Kinship Categories

#### Kinship Terms of Parents

- i. Baba, Uba, Mahaifi
- ii. Mama, Uwa, Mahaifiya
- iii. Kaka

#### Translation

'Father;  
'Mother'  
'Grandmother, Grandfather'

#### 1. Father

- i. *uba ai rumfa ne*  
father.SBJ, EMPH shelter.COP  
'The father is indeed a shelter'

In this metaphor, the 'father' is conceptualized as a protective structure or shelter, implying that fathers provide protection, support, and a safe space, similar to how a shelter protects from external threats.

- ii. *uba bango ne*  
father.SBJ wall.COP  
'The father is a wall'

Here, the father is metaphorically understood as a wall, representing strength, stability, and impenetrable protection. A wall symbolizes something that shields and supports, which reflects the role of a father in the family.

- iii. *uba ai jigo ne*  
Father.EMPH pillar.COP  
'The father is a pillar'

A father is metaphorically described as a pillar, symbolizing strength, support, and the foundation of the family. Just as a pillar holds up a structure, a father is seen as holding up the family.

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
Father as a shelter	Shelter - Refuge	Emotional refuge	Shelter	Reflects the father's role as a safe haven in difficult times.
Father as a wall	Protection -	Physical and	Protector	Highlights the father's role in



Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
	Safety	emotional safety		shielding the family from harm.
<b>Father as a pillar of support</b>	Support-Stability	Emotional and financial care	Pillar	Emphasizes the father's foundational role in providing strength and support to the family.

## 2. Mother

- i. *uwa inuwar gabas*  
mother shade east  
'A mother is the shade of the East (sun rising from the East)'.

The metaphor here highlights the mother's role as a source of protection and comfort, similar to the soothing shade in the morning sun.

- ii. *uwa mafi uba koda uban sarki ne*  
Mother surpasses father even king's father.**COP**  
'A mother surpasses the father, even if he is the father of a king'

The metaphor also reflects the belief in the mother's unparalleled role in nurturing and emotional support, even when compared to a father of high status.

- iii. *uwa sanyin rai*  
mother coolness life  
'A mother is the coolness of life'.

The metaphor emphasizes the mother's role in bringing peace, solace, and emotional balance.

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
<b>Mother as protective shade</b>	Shade – Protection	Emotional and physical care	Shade	Highlights the mother's role in providing comfort and safety.
<b>Mother as a superior parent</b>	Importance – Centrality	Family dynamics	Priority	Reflects the centrality of the mother in all life aspects.
<b>Mother as a life necessity</b>	Support – Vitality	Essential familial care	Necessity	Underscores the indispensable role of mothers.

## 3. Grandparent

- i. *kaka abokin yara*  
grandparent friend children  
'A grandparent is a friend to children'

The metaphor highlights the playful and nurturing relationship between grandparents and children.

- ii. *kaka mai bata jika*

grandparent who spoils grandchild  
'A grandparent who spoils the grandchild'

The metaphor reflects the tendency of grandparents to pamper and indulge their grandchildren.

iii. *kaka uwar tarihi a biki a gano tushe*

grandparent mother history in ceremony.3PL find roots

'A grandparent is the source of history, and in ceremonies, the roots are traced through them'.

Conceptual Metaphor	Mapping	Target Domain	Source Domain	Interpretation
Grandparent as a companion	Friendship – Playfulness	Relationship with children	Companion	Highlights the nurturing and playful bond between grandparents and their grandchildren.
Grandparent as a history archive	Knowledge – Remembrance	Knowledge	Resources	Reflects the grandparent's role as a steadfast figure in keeping family lineage
Grandparent as an indulgent figure	Indulgence – Pampering	Relationship with grandchildren	Indulgence	Highlights the tendency of grandparents to spoil their grandchildren.

## Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal rich and culturally grounded metaphorical mappings of the parental kinship categories in Hausa specifically *father (uba)*, *mother (uwa)*, and *grandparent (kaka)*. These metaphorical constructions not only represent family relationships but also function as cultural tools for framing authority, identity, nurturance, and intergenerational continuity.

The metaphorical mappings of *father* in Hausa indicate a conceptualization rooted in strength, stability, and protection. Metaphors such as “*uba ai rumfa ne*” (‘The father is a shelter’), “*uba bango ne*” (‘The father is a wall’), and “*uba ai jigo ne*” (‘The father is a pillar’) illustrate the multifaceted role of the father as a refuge, a defender, and a foundation of the family structure. These metaphors align with the **Conceptual Metaphor: “FATHER IS A STRUCTURAL SUPPORT”**, reinforcing values such as reliability, provision, and leadership. Beyond literal meaning, the term “father” is extended metaphorically in sociopolitical,

spiritual, and professional domains. This is similar findings that appear in Agyekum’s (2006) study of Akan kinship metaphors, where the father is framed as a “protector” and “support beam.” Expressions like *uban kasa* (father of the nation) or *uban sana’a* (pioneer of a profession) elevate individuals to roles of foundational authority and expertise, reinforcing hierarchical structures within Hausa society. The metaphor reflects both emotional closeness and hierarchical respect, contributing to communal bonding and value transmission. This aligns with Strauss’ (2006) findings that in many societies, the father metaphor indexes hierarchy, leadership, and moral authority. In African societies, especially Hausa, such extensions also reflect a communal worldview where authority figures assume moral guardianship (Musa 2014; Dangana 2018).

The metaphors associated with *mother* emphasize emotional nurturing, protection, and centrality. For example, “*uwa inuwar gabas*” (‘A mother is the shade of the east’) projects the image of early morning shade, symbolic of comfort and

gentle care. This aligns with what Kövecses (2015) identified as the universal metaphor “MOTHER IS COMFORT/WARMTH,” which appears in cultures from the Arab world to East Asia. “*Uwa mafi uba koda uban sarki ne*” (‘A mother surpasses the father, even if he is the king’) underscores the perceived emotional supremacy and irreplaceable value of mothers in familial and moral development. Similarly, “*uwa sanyin rai*” (‘A mother is the coolness of life’) metaphorically captures emotional balance, peace, and the soothing essence of maternal care. It also aligns with Sharifian’s (2011) argument that in African and Middle Eastern societies, mothers are metaphorically linked to “coolness” a symbol of emotional balance, healing, and softness.

These metaphors position the mother as the emotional and psychological cornerstone of the household. The **Conceptual Metaphor: “MOTHER IS COMFORT AND CENTRALITY”** shows that mothers are not just caregivers but symbolic figures of emotional stability, peace, and life-affirming support. In a culture where respect and gratitude for maternal care are deeply embedded, such metaphorical expressions validate the indispensable role of mothers.

The metaphorical mappings for *grandparents* reflect themes of intergenerational continuity, indulgence, and ancestral wisdom. In “*kaka abokin yara*” (‘A grandparent is a friend to children’), the grandparent is depicted as a playful companion, emphasizing their less disciplinary and more emotionally accessible role. In “*kaka mai bata jika*” (‘A grandparent who spoils the grandchild’), the metaphor portrays indulgence and unconditional affection. Perhaps most culturally profound is “*kaka uwar tarihi a biki a gano tushe*” (‘A grandparent is the mother of history; in ceremonies, the roots are traced through them’), which conceptualizes the grandparent as a living archive, a symbol of cultural origin and lineage. This aligns with the **Conceptual Metaphor: “GRANDPARENTS ARE CULTURAL ROOTS”**, illustrating their role in preserving family history, values, and

identity. This aligns with De León’s (2012) findings on Zapotec metaphors, where grandparents are framed as “play-mates” and emotional softeners in the household.

Across these metaphors, grandparents serve as bridges between past and present, between heritage and continuity. Their metaphorical representation conveys reverence, memory, and the foundational wisdom required for cultural survival.

## Conclusion

This study examined the metaphorical mappings of parental kinship categories: *father*, *mother*, and *grandparent* in the Hausa language, revealing how these kinship terms surpass biological reference and function as vital cognitive and cultural constructs. The analysis demonstrates that Hausa speakers conceptualize the *father* as a source of strength and protection, the *mother* as a symbol of emotional stability and centrality, and the *grandparent* as both a nurturing companion and a custodian of lineage and cultural memory.

These metaphorical mappings are deeply embedded in Hausa social discourse and reflect core cultural values such as hierarchy, nurturance, respect for elders, and the importance of family continuity. The metaphors are not random or decorative; they are systematically patterned and culturally motivated, supporting the Conceptual Metaphor Theory as a valid framework for understanding the interplay between language, thought, and culture. The study contributes significantly to the field of cognitive linguistics and African cultural semantics by highlighting how metaphor operates in an indigenous African language to express nuanced social meanings. It confirms that kinship terms in Hausa are not merely labels for biological relations but are dynamic, symbolic tools used to encode social, spiritual, and moral realities. Future research may extend this work by exploring metaphorical mappings in other kinship roles such as siblings (*brother*, *sister*), in-laws, or extended family terms, and by conducting comparative studies across Nigerian or West African languages to uncover broader cultural metaphor systems.



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