

HIDING AS A CONCEPTUAL OPERATION IN HAUSA X IS Y METAPHOR: A COGNITIVE SEMANTICS PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper examines the aspects of hiding in selected Hausa conceptual metaphors. The study explores how abstract concepts in Hausa are cognitively structured through embodied and culturally grounded source domains focusing on the hidden aspects of the latter. The study adopts the intepretivism research paradigm, hence, it is a qualitative study and the data were purposely selected from the Corpus of Hausa Structural Metaphors developed by Ibrahim (2024). Using the conceptual metaphor theory of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), the study reveals that Hausa metaphors are deeply rooted in bodily experience, environmental interaction, and socio-cultural knowledge. They selectively foreground relevant experiential features such as healing, blindness, flow, illumination, facial recognition, and temporariness, while *suppressing irrelevant aspects of the source domains*. The study further demonstrates that metaphor in Hausa functions not merely as a stylistic device but as a cognitive mechanism for organizing thought, interpreting experience, and transmitting cultural values. The paper provides significant insight into the relationship between language, cognition, embodiment, and culture. It contributes to broader scholarship in cognitive semantics, African linguistics, and metaphor studies by showing how indigenous African metaphors embody culturally grounded systems of thought

Keywords: Hiding, Conceptual Operation, Hausa X is Y metaphor, Cognitive, Semantics

1.0 Introduction

This study examines the aspects of hiding in selected Hausa X is Y metaphors. In cognitive semantics, meaning is not treated as a fixed property of words but as a dynamic product of human experience, embodiment, and conceptual structuring (Evans & Green, 2006). One of the most subtle yet powerful mechanisms in this process is *hiding*. While often overlooked in casual discussions of meaning, hiding plays a central role in shaping how individuals understand, communicate, and even experience reality. Within Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), associated with the work of Lakoff & Johnson (1980), hiding is not an accidental feature of language but a necessary consequence of how metaphor structures thought. At its core, hiding refers to the selective backgrounding or obscuring of certain aspects of a concept when others are brought into focus. Human cognition does not process all available information simultaneously; instead, it organizes experience by highlighting what seems most relevant while leaving other elements in the background. This is not a flaw but a functional necessity. Without such selectivity, meaning itself would become unmanageable (Evans & Green, 2006; Tendahl, 2009).

The notion of hiding also resonates with insights from frame semantics, particularly the work of Charles Fillmore (1982). Frames are structured networks of knowledge that are activated by linguistic expressions. When a frame is invoked, certain roles and relations become central, while others recede into the background. For instance, the concept of “buying” foregrounds the interaction between buyer, seller, and goods, but typically hides the labor conditions or production processes behind those goods. Here again, meaning is shaped as much by what is left unsaid as by what is explicitly stated (Fillmore, 1982). Importantly, hiding is not limited to individual cognition; it also operates at cultural and ideological levels. Metaphors can reinforce particular worldviews by foregrounding some interpretations of reality while concealing others. For example, framing a nation as a family may emphasize unity, care, and hierarchy, but it can simultaneously obscure structural inequalities or legitimate dissent. In this way, hiding becomes a powerful tool

not only of cognition but also of social organization and discourse (Lakoff, 1996).

What makes hiding especially significant is its largely unconscious nature. Speakers are rarely aware of the aspects of meaning they are suppressing when they use everyday language. Yet these hidden dimensions can have profound consequences. They influence how problems are framed, how decisions are made, and how realities are constructed. Recognizing hiding, therefore, is not merely an academic exercise; it is a critical tool for reflective thinking. It allows individuals to question taken-for-granted assumptions and to explore alternative ways of conceptualizing experience (Gibbs, 1994). Conceptual Metaphor Theory provides a particularly illuminating framework for understanding this phenomenon. According to CMT, abstract domains of experience—such as time, love, or argument (the target domains)—are structured through mappings from more concrete, embodied domains. The abstract domains are known as the target domains (X) and the concrete or embodied domains are known as the source domains (Y) (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This give rise to the emergence of the so-called structural metaphor which is a metaphor that is made up two conceptual domains, namely, the source (Y) and the target domain (X) such that that the conceptualization of the target domain (X) is guided through the highlighted characteristics of the source domain (Y).

This paper examines the mapping process of selected Hausa X is Y metaphors and then discuss the hidden aspects of the source domains that are unconsciously left behind. The hidden aspects of the source domains emphasize that, to study meaning, is not only to examine what language reveals but also to attend carefully to what it conceals.

2.1 Methodology

Methodologically, this study adopted an interpretivism research paradigm. This paradigm “believes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences— meanings directed toward certain objects or things” (Creswell, 2014:9). The hidden aspects of the domains are considered as the meanings of the datum to be examined subjectively. The paradigm is largely used in qualitative research where the focus is on interpretation, explanation,

elaborating, describing and so on with the data collected mostly from text or any form of discourse (Creswell, 2014). The data were purposely selected from the corpus of Hausa Structural Metaphors developed by Ibrahim (2024). The corpora contained not less than 400 Hausa X is Y and XYZ metaphors. It was developed from a sampling frame comprising the structural metaphors identified in the following literature: Jaagooran Nazàrin Karìn Màgànaà, by Gwammaja (2018), Hausa Mâi Dubun Hikimàa, by Danhausa (2013), Kaamuusùn Karìn Màgànaà Hausa by Malumfashi (2013), Hausa A Dunkulèe, by Yunusa (1989), Appendix of Hausa Structural Metaphors by Almajir (2014), and finally, speech observation of Hausa people (Ibrahim, 2024).

The study adopted the Conceptual Metaphor Theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in the analysis. Central to this theory is the assumption that metaphor is part of our everyday language and that mapping is the basic operation of its comprehension. The mapping is an unconscious mental operation of anticipating/projecting the features of the source domain onto their corresponding features of the target domain. According to the theory, there are two main rules for the conceptual domain: on the one hand, we have the source domain and the target domains. On the other hand, the conceptual structures of the former are mapped onto the corresponding structures of the latter asymmetrically (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). During the mapping process, not all the features of the source domain are mapped onto the target, rather, it is only those that are needed for the present conceptualization. Hence, certain information is hidden. The study will, after, the mapping process examine the hidden aspects of the source domain.

3.1 Data and Data Analysis

This section presents and analyses the collected data of the study. The data are numbered from 1 to 7. The main focus in the analysis is to provide the mapping process of the individual datum. By doing this, the study highlights the aspects of the source domain that guide our conceptualization. After that, the hidden aspects of the source domain will be examined accordingly.

1. Duuniyàa Makarantaa Cèe
The world is a school cee

Source Domain: SCHOOL Target Domain: WORLD/LIFE

Students	Human beings
Teachers	Elders, parents,
Lessons	Life experiences
Examinations	Challenges
Discipline	Moral correction
Graduation	Maturity, achievement, or death
Learning process	Human growth
Bad result	failure in life
School rules	Social norms

The metaphor works because schooling is a familiar embodied experience in Hausa society. People understand that schools are places of instruction, correction, patience, and gradual development. These features are projected onto the broader and more abstract concept of life itself. From a cognitive semantic perspective, this metaphor is not merely decorative language; it structures thought itself. It shapes how people conceptualize: suffering, social relationships, aging, morality, and personal growth. The metaphor encourages an epistemological view of life in which human existence is understood as a process of continuous education.

According to CMT, every metaphor simultaneously **highlights and hides**. While the metaphor “World is a school” foregrounds learning and growth, it also conceals several aspects of the SCHOOL domain. For example, we know that real schools are bounded institutions with fixed schedules, classrooms, formal curricula and administrative system. These institutional limitations were hidden from this metaphor because the world is far less structured and predictable than an actual school. Therefore, the metaphor creates an illusion of coherence in life that may not always exist. Also, Schools primarily emphasize rational and intellectual development, but human life also involves: emotions, spirituality, desire, trauma, and irrational experiences. These

dimensions are backgrounded when life is reduced to “learning.” In addition, schools typically operate through obedience and institutional authority. The metaphor therefore hides forms of: resistance, individuality, and alternative ways of living. It subtly encourages conformity by implying that people must always “learn the lesson” rather than challenge the system itself. In addition, schools ideally provide equal opportunities for students. However, life does not distribute opportunities equally. The metaphor hides: poverty, social inequality, political oppression, and structural disadvantages. Not everyone “learns” under the same conditions in the world.

2. Hàkurii Maagàni Nèe

Patience is remedy/medicine

Source Domain: MEDICINE/REMEDY	Target Domain: PATIENCE
heals illness	resolves problems
reduces pain	eases emotional suffering
requires time to work	requires endurance over time
restores balance	restores social/emotional stability
prevents worsening conditions	prevents conflict and destruction
A patient follows treatment carefully	A person practices self-control
Bitter medicine may still heal	Difficult patience may still produce good outcomes

This metaphor reveals how the cultural understanding of patience is structured using knowledge about how medicine functions in human life. Despite the above mapping process, the metaphor conceals several aspects of the medicine/remedy domain. For example, actual medicine contains: chemicals, herbs, dosage formulas, and physical substances. These material properties are hidden because patience is not a physical object. Thus, it does not imply that patience has molecular or biological composition. Also, medicine is often: bought, sold, prescribed commercially, and produced industrially. These

economic dimensions are unnecessary in conceptualizing patience and are therefore excluded from the mapping.

In addition, medicine may involve: hospitals, injections, machines, surgeries, laboratory testing. These institutional and technological elements are hidden because patience functions psychologically and socially rather than clinically. Moreover, real medicine may produce: allergies, complications, overdose, or harmful reactions. These negative properties are usually hidden because culturally, patience is idealized as morally positive and beneficial. The metaphor selectively suppresses the possibility that excessive patience might enable oppression or suffering. In conclusion, we can say that, in Hausa culture, *hakurii* (patience/endurance) is a highly valued moral principle associated with: wisdom, maturity, peaceful coexistence, and religious devotion. The metaphor “*Hàkurii Maagàni Nèè*” reflects a worldview in which emotional restraint and perseverance are seen as powerful solutions to life’s difficulties. The metaphor is also influenced by Islamic ethical teachings, where patience (*sabr*) is regarded as a virtue that brings spiritual reward and inner peace. Thus, the metaphor does more than describe patience—it morally elevates it.

3. Soo makaahoo ne
Love is blind

Source Domain:
BLINDNESS

Target Domain: LOVE

Blind person cannot see clearly	Lover cannot judge objectively
Lack of visual perception	Lack of rational evaluation
Dependence on emotion	Dependence on emotional attachment
Inability to notice danger	Failure to see flaws in a loved one
Misjudgment of surroundings	Poor emotional decisions
Restricted perception	Selective emotional awareness

Source Domain:
BLINDNESS

Target Domain: LOVE

Vulnerability

Emotional susceptibility

The metaphor draws on the embodied importance of vision in human cognition. Since sight is culturally and cognitively associated with: knowledge, judgment, awareness, rationality, and perception, the absence of sight becomes a powerful way of understanding irrational emotional attachment. Despite the above mapping process, many features of the source domain are hidden because they are irrelevant to the conceptualization of love. Actual blindness involves: damaged eyesight, medical conditions, neurological impairment, and physical disability. These biological and clinical aspects are hidden because the metaphor concerns emotional cognition rather than literal visual impairment.

Also, Blind individuals may use: walking sticks, Braille, guide dogs (especially in Europe), or assistive technologies. These practical realities are irrelevant to the conceptualization of love and are therefore excluded from the mapping. In addition, Blind people often develop heightened: hearing, touch, or spatial awareness. These adaptive abilities are hidden because the metaphor specifically emphasizes impaired judgment rather than enhanced alternative perception. Finally, Blindness may be permanent, whereas emotional irrationality in love is usually viewed as temporary or situational. This permanence is hidden because the metaphor only needs the idea of impaired perception, not lifelong disability.

4. Iliimii Kòogi Nèe
Knowledge is a river

Source Domain: RIVER

Target Domain: KNOWLEDGE

flows continuously

Knowledge develops continuously

has depth

Knowledge has complexity/depth

River can expand or overflow

Knowledge can increase endlessly

Source Domain: RIVER

Target Domain: KNOWLEDGE

River nourishes life

Knowledge benefits human life

connects places

Knowledge connects people and ideas

People draw water from rivers

People acquire knowledge from learning

difficult to cross

Knowledge may be difficult to master

Small streams join larger rivers

Small pieces of learning build greater knowledge

This metaphor suggests that knowledge possesses qualities associated with rivers such as: movement, depth, continuity, expansion, and life-giving potential. Because rivers are highly significant in human experience—especially in African ecological and cultural settings—they provide a rich experiential basis for conceptualizing intellectual growth and learning. The following aspects of the RIVER domain are suppressed because they are unnecessary for conceptualizing knowledge. Actual rivers contain: water molecules, mud, sand, fish, and aquatic vegetation. These material and biological properties are hidden because knowledge is abstract rather than physical. Also, rivers may contain: crocodiles, hippos, or parasites. These dangerous ecological elements are excluded because they are irrelevant to understanding knowledge as intellectual growth.

In addition, rivers can cause: floods, erosion, destruction of farmland, and displacement of people. These destructive properties are generally hidden because the metaphor culturally idealizes knowledge as beneficial and constructive. Moreover, Real rivers may become: polluted, dirty, stagnant, or contaminated. These unpleasant physical conditions are not projected because they would weaken the positive conceptualization of knowledge. Finally, In Hausa culture, *ilimi* (knowledge) is highly valued both socially and spiritually. The metaphor “*Ilimii koogi ne*” reflects a worldview in which: learning is endless, wisdom grows gradually, and intellectual pursuit enriches life. The metaphor also aligns with Islamic intellectual traditions in Northern Nigeria, where knowledge is regarded as a continuous and sacred pursuit.

5. Ilimii Hàskee Nèe
Knowledge is light

Source Domain: LIGHT	Target Domain: KNOWLEDGE
Light makes things visible	Knowledge makes ideas understandable
Light removes darkness	Knowledge removes ignorance
Light guides movement	Knowledge guides decisions and behavior
Light reveals hidden objects	Knowledge reveals truth and reality
Brightness improves perception	Knowledge improves understanding
Light provides safety	Knowledge protects people from error
A lamp can illuminate others	A knowledgeable person can educate others
Light spreads outward	Knowledge spreads through teaching

This conceptualization is widespread across many cultures because human beings naturally associate light with: visibility, clarity, guidance, awareness, and safety. Consequently, knowledge is understood as something that illuminates the mind just as light illuminates the physical environment. Despite this, many aspects of LIGHT are suppressed in the metaphor. For example, actual light involves: electromagnetic radiation, wavelengths, photons, refraction, and energy transfer. These scientific properties are hidden because the metaphor concerns with cognitive understanding rather than physics. Also, light may require: electricity, bulbs, wiring, generators, or fuel. These technological aspects are irrelevant to understanding knowledge and are therefore omitted from the mapping. In addition, some forms of light produce heat and can burn or damage objects. This destructive thermal aspect is excluded because knowledge is culturally conceptualized as beneficial rather than harmful.

Moreover, artificial light sources may flicker, fail, or go out suddenly. These unstable properties are hidden because knowledge is generally conceptualized

as enduring and reliable. Furthermore, very strong light can damage vision, create discomfort, or blind temporarily. This excessive intensity is suppressed because the metaphor idealizes knowledge as clarity rather than danger. Finally, light travels in measurable physical directions and speeds. Knowledge, however, is abstract and not spatially constrained in the same way. Therefore, these spatial mechanics are hidden.

6. Fàhimtàa Fuskàa Cèe
Understanding is a face

Source Domain: FACE	Target Domain: UNDERSTANDING
Face reveals emotions	Understanding reveals mental awareness
Face enables recognition	Understanding enables comprehension
Facial expressions communicate meaning	Understanding communicates insight
A clear face is easy to recognize	Clear understanding is easy to grasp
Faces distinguish individuals	Understanding distinguishes ideas
One “faces” another person directly	involves confronting meaning directly
Facial reactions show awareness	shows cognitive responsiveness

This metaphor is grounded in the human experience of the face as: the center of identity, recognition, expression, orientation, and interpersonal communication. Because people interpret emotions, intentions, and reactions through faces, the face becomes a powerful conceptual source for understanding mental awareness and comprehension. Despite this, many aspects of the FACE domain are suppressed because they are unnecessary for conceptualizing understanding. For example, actual faces contain: skin, muscles, bones, nerves, eyes, lips, and blood vessels. These anatomical details are hidden because understanding is cognitive rather than biological. The

metaphor does not imply that understanding literally possesses physical facial organs.

Also, faces may be judged according to: beauty, complexion, symmetry, age, or attractiveness. These aesthetic properties are irrelevant to conceptualizing understanding and are therefore excluded from the mapping. In addition, faces may experience: scars, infections, paralysis, or deformities. These medical realities are hidden because they do not contribute to the conceptual structure of comprehension. Moreover, faces can involve: makeup, facial marks, hairstyles, cosmetics, or ornaments. These socio-cultural embellishments are unnecessary for understanding the abstract cognitive process. Furthermore, faces participate in: eating, breathing, smelling, and speaking. These physiological functions are not mapped because the metaphor focuses specifically on recognition and expression rather than bodily survival functions. Finally, faces may indicate: ethnicity, family resemblance, gender, or genetic inheritance. These identity markers are hidden because the metaphor concerns cognitive understanding rather than biological identity.

7. Lokàcìi Bàakoo Nèe
Time is a visitor

Source Domain: VISITOR	Target Domain: TIME
A visitor arrives	Time comes unexpectedly or gradually
A visitor stays temporarily	Moments of time are temporary
A visitor eventually leaves	Time passes away
Visitors influence household activity	Time affects human behavior and events
Visitors may be welcomed or feared	Certain times may be pleasant or difficult
A visitor cannot stay forever	No moment lasts permanently
People prepare for visitors	Humans prepare for future

Source Domain: VISITOR

Target Domain: TIME

times/events

Missing a visitor causes regret

Wasting time causes regret

This conceptualization emerges from embodied and cultural experiences surrounding hospitality, arrival, departure, temporary presence, and social interaction. The metaphor structures time as an entity that: comes, stays temporarily, influences human activity, and eventually departs. The following aspects of the VISITOR domain are hidden because they are unnecessary for conceptualizing time. Actual visitors possess: gender, clothing, facial appearance, height, and bodily features. These physical characteristics are hidden because time is abstract and non-physical. The metaphor does not imply that time literally has a human body. Also, visitors may: eat food, sleep, rest, or use household facilities. These biological activities are irrelevant to understanding time and are therefore excluded from the mapping.

In addition, Visitors may belong to: particular families, ethnic groups, professions, or social classes. These identity markers are hidden because the metaphor focuses on temporariness rather than personal identity. Moreover, visitors may arrive by: car, horse, bicycle, or walking. These physical travel mechanisms are unnecessary for conceptualizing temporal movement. Furthermore, hosting visitors may involve: expenses, gifts, accommodation, and economic responsibilities. These economic dimensions are hidden because they do not contribute to the conceptual understanding of time. Finally, real visitors may be: honest, rude, generous, or dangerous. These personality traits are generally suppressed because time itself is not conceptualized as morally accountable.

4.1 Summary of the Mapping Processes

The analysis of the selected Hausa metaphors demonstrates that metaphorical understanding is achieved through systematic cross-domain mappings between concrete source domains and abstract target domains. In the metaphor *Duuniyaa makarantaa cee* (“world is a school”), the source domain of SCHOOL is mapped onto World. The metaphor suggests that life in the world resembles the experience of being in a school where individuals

continuously learn through experience, hardship, interaction, and moral instruction. The metaphor *Hàkurii Maagàni Nèe* (“Patience is a remedy”), the source domain of MEDICINE is mapped onto PATIENCE. The metaphor conceptualizes patience as a healing force capable of resolving emotional suffering and social conflict. Features such as healing, endurance, prevention, and restoration are highlighted, while aspects relating to chemical composition, medical technology, and commercial medicine are hidden. The metaphor *Soo makaahoo nee* (“Love is blind”) maps BLINDNESS onto LOVE. Here, emotional attachment is conceptualized as impaired perception and weakened rational judgment. The metaphor highlights vulnerability, selective perception, and emotional irrationality while suppressing the medical, biological, and social realities of literal blindness.

In *Ilimii koogi nee* (“Knowledge is a river”), the source domain of RIVER structures the concept of KNOWLEDGE. Knowledge is understood as flowing, deep, expanding, and life-giving. The metaphor foregrounds continuity and intellectual growth while hiding physical and ecological aspects of rivers such as aquatic life, pollution, and flooding. The metaphor *Ilimii haskee nee* (“Knowledge is light”) conceptualizes KNOWLEDGE through the source domain of LIGHT. Knowledge is viewed as illumination that removes ignorance and guides human understanding. The metaphor highlights clarity, revelation, and guidance while concealing the scientific and physical properties of light such as electromagnetic radiation and heat production.

In *Fahimtaa fuskaa cee* (“Understanding is a face”), the source domain FACE is mapped onto UNDERSTANDING. The metaphor conceptualizes comprehension as visible, recognizable, and expressive. Visibility, recognition, and direct engagement are highlighted, whereas anatomy, biological functions, and physical appearance are hidden. Finally, *Lookaci baako nee* (“Time is a visitor”) maps VISITOR onto TIME. Time is conceptualized as temporary, mobile, and socially influential. The metaphor foregrounds arrival, departure, and transience while suppressing irrelevant aspects of visitors such as bodily features, transportation, and economic obligations. Across all the metaphors, the mappings reveal the cognitive principle that human beings understand abstract experiences through concrete embodied realities.

5.1 Results and Conclusion

The analysis reveals several important findings regarding metaphorical conceptualization in Hausa within Conceptual Metaphor Theory. First, the metaphors demonstrate that Hausa conceptualization is strongly embodied. The source domains used in the metaphors are derived from everyday human experience, including: bodily perception, environmental interaction, social relations, health, movement, and sensory experience. This confirms the cognitive semantic claim that abstract thought is grounded in embodied human cognition (see Croft & Cruse, 2004; Evans & Green, 2006, Evans, 2007).

Second, findings show that Hausa metaphors are culturally motivated. The metaphors reflect important Hausa socio-cultural values such as: patience, wisdom, hospitality, moral discipline, communal interaction, and respect for knowledge. For example, conceptualizing time as a visitor reflects the cultural significance of hospitality, while conceptualizing knowledge as light reflects the moral and spiritual prestige attached to learning in Hausa society.

Third, the study demonstrates the operation of the highlighting–hiding principle in metaphorical thought. In every metaphor analyzed, certain features of the source domain are selectively projected onto the target domain while other features are suppressed. This selective projection ensures conceptual coherence and cognitive efficiency. The hidden aspects are not random omissions; rather, they are cognitively unnecessary for the intended conceptualization. This means that metaphorical mappings are partial rather than complete. No metaphor transfers all characteristics of the source domain onto the target domain. Instead, only culturally and cognitively relevant features are activated.

Furthermore, findings indicate that Hausa metaphors function epistemologically. They are not merely ornamental linguistic expressions but cognitive models through which speakers interpret reality, organize experience, and communicate cultural wisdom. The study therefore contributes to broader scholarship in cognitive semantics, African linguistics, and metaphor studies by showing how indigenous African metaphors embody culturally grounded systems of thought.

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