Dynamic Forces and Contained Energies:

An Image Schematic Analysis of Kenyan Gen Zs

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Abstract

There is a growing need to describe Kenyan Generation Zs (Gen Zs). As a result, various terms have been devised to describe them. Some of these descriptions are metaphorical. Since metaphors pervade human language, these metaphorical descriptions offer unique insights but may also present challenges in interpretation due to the multiple meanings they can convey. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyze the metaphors used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs. Image Schema Theory was employed to interpret data within Cognitive Linguistics paradigm. Data was collected through an interview schedule administered to 24 respondents purposively sampled on the basis of gender. The respondents provided terms that are commonly used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs. Conceptual Metaphor Theory was employed to identify the Kenyan Gen Z metaphors from the collected terms by mapping abstract concepts to concrete experiences. Eight metaphors were identified. The identified metaphors were subjected to the CONTAINER and the FORCE image schemas for analysis. The study reveals that image schemas are powerful tools for highlighting Gen Zs' activism as a dynamic energy seeking expression and change. The research concludes that metaphors are integral in understanding the dynamics of Kenyan Gen Zs.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics; Metaphor,; Image schema; Conceptual Metaphor Theory; Kenyan Gen Zs

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1. Introduction

Technological advancement often influence the way different generations engage with it. According to Thaariq (2023), each individual is born into a unique phase of technological progress which leads to generational differences shaped by evolving technological trends. These differences result in varying life patterns based on the era of birth. One's generation, according to Thaariq (2023), greatly influences how knowledge and technology are constructed and absorbed throughout one's lifetime. It is, therefore, clear that each era has its people who comprise of a generation. Campbell et al. (2015) define a generation as a group of people born within a specific time frame, typically spanning 15-20 years. Such cohorts, according to Campbell et al. (2015), often experience similar technological, cultural, economic, and social events during their formative years. These shared experiences normally shape a generation's collective attitudes, behaviors, and values.

Putra (2016) asserts that key generations in contemporary discussions include the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), Generation Z (Gen Z), and Generation Alpha (Gen Alpha). Each of these generations has been shaped by the unique technological advancements, economic conditions, and cultural milestones of their respective eras (Thaariq, 2023). Each of these generational cohorts also exhibit distinct characteristics and perspectives that influence their behavior, values, and societal impact. The Silent Generation, for example, was shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, leading to a strong sense of duty and discipline (Putra, 2016). Baby Boomers, on the other hand, were born during a period of post-war prosperity, and are often associated with optimism and a focus on personal success (Thaariq, 2023). According to Putra (2016), Generation X grew up during a time of economic uncertainty and the rise of personal computing. They, therefore, tend to value independence and skepticism. Thaariq (2023) also notes that Millennials are shaped by the digital revolution and the 2008 financial crisis. They are, thus, known for their adaptability and tech-savviness.

This study focuses on Generation Z (Gen Z). Gen Z is a cohort born approximately between the mid-1990s and early 2010 (Żarczyńska & Chomątowska, 2014). Gen Zs are the first generation to grow up in a fully digital world, with smartphones, social media, and instant access to information being integral to their daily lives. While there is considerable research on the defining characteristics of Generation Z, there remains a significant gap in understanding how people perceive this generation, particularly in terms of their approach to work, political engagement, and social interactions. Misconceptions and stereotypes often shape perceptions of Gen Z. This study seeks to explore these perceptions with an aim of providing a clearer understanding of how Gen Z is viewed by society and how these views may influence interactions across different generations.

Kenyan Gen Z, born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, has emerged as a vocal and active group, particularly in the political landscape. This generation, characterized by their digital fluency and social media engagement, played a significant role in the recent political demonstrations against the Finance Bill 2024 in Kenya. Their opposition to the bill, which they perceived as burdensome and unjust, highlights their growing concern for economic fairness and accountability in governance. In addition, Kenyan Gen Zs are increasingly questioning political morality. They boldly challenge leaders on pertinent issues such as corruption, transparency, and the equitable distribution of resources. Their activism reflects a broader desire for change and a demand for leaders who uphold ethical standards in politics. This signals a significant shift in how young Kenyans engage with and influence the political process.

World views on Gen Z, particularly in Kenya, have increasingly recognized this cohort as a force for change. This is due to their activism and vocal stance on social, economic and political issues. Kenyan Gen Zs have gained attention for their boldness in challenging the status quo. They often use digital platforms to amplify their demands for justice, transparency, and reform. However, many of the terms used to describe this generation, such as "digital warriors" or "woke generation," are metaphorical. A metaphor, according to Ndung'u and Ntabo (2023), is a figure of speech that describes one thing by asserting that it is another, thus, highlighting similarities between the two. This comparison often allows complex ideas to be understood through more familiar and concrete terms. For instance, the term "digital warriors" metaphorically captures their tech-savvy nature and ability to mobilize online for causes they believe in. According to Charteris-Black (2004), interpreting metaphors can be challenging because they rely on figurative language and cultural context. This suggests that metaphor use involves meaning beyond the literal and, thus, requires an understanding of the context in which it is used to grasp the intended message accurately. Moreover, comprehension of metaphors often requires an understanding of both the literal and implied meanings to fully grasp the intended message. It is against this backdrop that this study employed image schemas to interpret the metaphorical terms used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs.

Image schemas, which are employed to analyse data in this study, are cognitive structures that emerge from repeated sensory and perceptual experiences, forming the foundational patterns of human thought and language (Hedblom, Kutz & Neuhaus, 2015). They represent fundamental concepts such as containers, paths, and forces, which shape how we understand and interpret abstract ideas. In metaphor interpretation, image schemas are unique because they provide a concrete, embodied basis for abstract reasoning (Gathigia, 2014). This allows metaphors to be grounded in physical and spatial experiences. For example, the "journey" metaphor, where life is likened to a trip with various stages and obstacles, relies on the image schema of a path. The path image in this case aids in making abstract concepts like personal growth and challenges more tangible and relatable. This grounding in sensory experience helps to reveal the underlying cognitive processes that influence metaphorical thinking.

Analysis of the Kenyan Gen Z metaphors in this study was anchored within Cognitive Linguistics (CL) paradigm. CL is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding language. According to Faber (2002), CL emphasizes that linguistic structures are deeply rooted in human cognition and shaped by our experiences. Janda (2000) also notes that unlike traditional views that see language as a formal system separate from thought, CL asserts that language reflects the way we think, perceive, and interact with the world. In metaphor analysis, CL plays a crucial role by revealing how metaphors are not merely linguistic decorations but fundamental to human thought. On this basis, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide that metaphors are cognitive tools that allow us to understand and communicate complex concepts through more familiar, concrete experiences. For instance, in the metaphor "time is money," CL shows how we conceptualize time as a valuable resource by drawing from our experience with money. CL also emphasizes that metaphors are grounded in everyday experiences and that our ability to interpret them relies on cognitive models, such as image schemas and conceptual mappings, that link abstract ideas to tangible realities (Faber, 2002). Thus, CL provides a framework for understanding how metaphors shape our thoughts and how they reflect the mental processes underlying language use.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study employed Image Schema Theory (IST) to analyse the Kenyan Gen Z metaphors. IST was first propounded by Johnson (1987) in his seminal work titled *The Body in the Mind*. Johnson (1987) argued that image schemas are abstract structures originating from preconceptual experiences that shape our conceptual understanding. Hedblom, Kutz, and Neuhaus (2015) also explain that an image schema is a recurring dynamic pattern derived from our perceptual and motor experiences, which organizes and structures our understanding of abstract ideas. This means that image schemas are mental representations which are based on our bodily interactions. They form part of our cognitive abstractions of learned spatial relationships.

The central principle of IST is that image schemas facilitate the mapping of spatial experiences from our embodied interactions onto a conceptual framework that helps us understand abstract concepts. Gathigia (2014) notes that image schemas function as "distillers of spatial and temporal experiences" (p. 50), enabling us to apply spatial information to conceptual structures. This allows us to interpret abstract ideas, such as metaphors, by using image schemas as the source domain (SD) to clarify the target domain (TD). For example, in the conceptual metaphor LIFE IS A RACE," LIFE (the TD) can be understood through the PATH image schema, which serves as the SD. Our experiences of moving along a path help us grasp the concept of life in this metaphor. For instance, using the PATH schema, LIFE is conceptualized as a competitive event with a clear start and finish line, where progress is measured by overcoming obstacles and reaching milestones

Hampe (2003) argues that there exists a variety of image schemas that can be used to interpret abstract concepts within Cognitive Linguistics. This has led various scholars, such as Clausner and Croft (1999), and Peña (2003) among others, to develop different classification systems for these schemas. Despite the diversity in classification, there is broad agreement that image schemas can be categorized into major schemas and subsidiary ones. Subsidiary image schemas (gestalts) stem from the major ones. This study focuses on the CONTAINER and the FORCE image schema for analyzing the Kenyan Gen Z metaphors. This was motivated by Otieno (2019) who notes that the CONTAINER schema is crucial for understanding humans as vessels of power, emotions, and status. Santibanez (2002) also provides that the CONTAINER schema triggers subsidiary schemas such as IN-OUT, FULL-EMPTY, and EXCESS, which are essential for explaining various abstract phenomena related to containers. Otieno (2019) also observes that the FORCE image schema sheds light on how societal views about people relate to notions of influence, pressure, and control. It reflects the dynamics of how some people are perceived to handle power and resistance within their social contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This study used descriptive research design to reveal the value of the CONTAINER and the PATH image schemas in the conceptualization of the Kenyan Gen Z metaphors. Manjunatha (2019) describes a descriptive research as one that can be explained as a statement of affairs as they are at present. It focuses on casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables the researcher to accurately and systematically describe a population, situation or a phenomenon. The study purposively sampled 24 respondents based on gender to reveal the terms commonly used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs through an interview schedule. The gender variable was deemed significant, as Huma (2010) notes that individuals tend to form different impressions of abstract concepts depending on their gender. Similarly, Koller and

Semino (2009) argue that gender serves as a lens through which societal issues are perceived. Consequently, the study collected comprehensive data that captured the impressions, thoughts, and views of both genders regarding the descriptions used for Kenyan Gen Zs.

Nine terms commonly used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs were identified through an interview schedule with the research respondents. These terms were then analyzed using Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) to determine their metaphoricity. In CMT, a term recognized as a metaphor involves two conceptual domains: the concrete source domain (SD) and the abstract target domain (TD). Thus, any term containing conceptual correspondences between the SD and TD was marked as a metaphor. The process of identifying metaphors from the data began with carefully reading and reviewing the terms, scrutinizing instances where abstract characteristics of Kenyan Gen Zs, such as behavior, attitudes, or identity, were described using more concrete concepts like energy or force.

Once these figurative uses were identified, the terms were mapped to their respective conceptual metaphors by linking the concrete SD, such as force, to the abstract TD, like youth identity. This mapping revealed how respondents metaphorically conceptualized Kenyan Gen Z traits by associating dynamic and powerful elements with the generation. Of the nine terms, eight were marked as metaphors based on the presence of conceptual correspondences between the SD and TD. The use of CMT was valuable for understanding how individuals conceptualize complex ideas through metaphor, which, according to Kövecses (2005), is essential not only for identifying but also for analyzing how metaphors shape perceptions in various contexts. The identified metaphors were subsequently subjected to the CONTAINER and FORCE image schemas for interpretation.

4. Research Findings and Discussions

The identified eight Gen Z metaphors were subjected to the CONTAINER and the FORCE schemas and their subsidiary image schemas for analysis. The study notes that both the CONTAINER and the FORCE image schemas, along with their subsidiary schemas are pervasive in everyday conceptualization and reasoning. Table 1.1 below presents the eight Kenyan Gen Z metaphors which were identified in this study and the image schemas used to interpret them.

Table 1. 1: Kenyan Gen Z Metaphors

NO	Metaphor	Image Schema	Subsidiary Image Schema
1	Bottled Tempest	CONTAINER	IN-OUT
2	Thinking outside the box	CONTAINER	IN-OUT
3	Drowning in social media	CONTAINER	EXCESS
4	Saturated with information	CONTAINER	EXCESS
5	Voices in a Storm	FORCE	COMPULSION
6	Shields against Bad Governance	FORCE	BLOCKAGE
7	Combatants	FORCE	COUNTER FORCE
8	Titans Uprooting the Status Quo.	FORCE	COUNTER FORCE

The CONTAINER image schema was employed to interpret metaphor (1) in this study. According to Johnson (1987), the CONTAINER image schema is a cognitive framework that conceptualizes human beings, concepts, or entities as having boundaries that separate an inside from an outside.

For example, the Gen Zs who are described using metaphor (1) below are regarded as possessing volatile emotions or energies that are contained within them. Thus:

(1) Kenyan Gen Zs are bottled tempest.

The IN-OUT gestalt which stems from the CONTAINER image schema was specifically used to give an account of metaphor (1) above. According to Otieno (2019), the IN-OUT gestalt is a cognitive framework within the CONTAINER image schema that organizes and interprets spatial and conceptual relationships by focusing on the dynamics between an interior and an exterior. Peña (1999) also provides that the IN-OUT gestalt alludes to entities within a bounded space that can also be emitted. This gestalt, therefore, involves understanding how entities or concepts are contained within a boundary (the inside) and how they interact with or are separated from the surrounding environment (the outside). For metaphor (1), the *bottled* part represents the internal boundary or space where intense emotions, frustrations, and energies are held within the Kenyan Gen Zs. This means that Kenyan Gen Zs have a reservoir of intense emotions, frustrations, and energies contained within themselves. Their internal experiences are, therefore, tightly held and managed within themselves.

The OUT aspect comes into play when this containment is challenged or breached. For instance, if the internal pressure exceeds the capacity of the *bottle*, these emotions might overflow or manifest in visible ways such as through heightened activism. In regards to this interpretation, Kenyan Gen Zs have recently demonstrated heightened activism through their quest for good governance and integrity by political leaders. This is evidenced by large-scale Gen Z protests in several towns of Kenya. Driven by a desire for transparency and accountability, this generation has used social media and street protests to voice their demands for cleaner politics and reforms. Their activism highlights a commitment to challenging corruption and advocating for a more equitable political system. This has showcased the Gen Zs' outflow of intense emotions, frustrations, and energies by pushing for significant societal changes and greater integrity in governance.

Metaphor (2) in this study also makes reference to entities in containment. In (2) below, "the box" is positioned as a metaphorical boundary that restricts conventional thinking or standard approaches. The IN-OUT gestalt was also used to interpret metaphor (2) below. Thus:

(2) Kenyan Gen Zs think outside the box.

Otieno (2019) notes that the IN-OUT orientation of the CONTAINER image schema takes into account the senses of IN, OUT, INTO and OUT OF. In this study, the IN-OUT gestalt is employed to conceptualize the Kenyan Gen Zs as entities with borders that one can get "into" and "out of." The IN orientation is, for instance, substantiated by "the box" in metaphor (2) above. "The box" in this case metaphorically instantiates entities that are held within a container hence the IN notion in the IN-OUT subsidiary image schema. Gathigia (2014) argues that the IN notion in the IN-OUT subsidiary image schema represents a state of containment or being enclosed within boundaries, whether physical, conceptual, or metaphorical, signifying limitation, confinement, or adherence to established structures. In consequence, the IN orientation (the box) represents Kenyan Gen Zs initially being contained within rigid societal structures such as entrenched political systems and traditional norms. These structures often emphasize obedience, respect for authority, and the preservation of the status quo. Such structures normally limit the ability of the Kenyan Gen Zs to express dissent or challenge the

prevailing order. Worthwhile to note is that Kenyan Gen Zs initially exhibited general tolerance for the political status quo. They seemingly accepted the longstanding systems of governance and authority without significant opposition. However, as disillusionment grew with issues like corruption and lack of transparency, this passive acceptance gave way to widespread activism and calls for change.

The OUT orientation in metaphor (2) above signifies the move of entities OUT OF A BOX. 'Thinking out of the box,' therefore, illustrates Kenyan Gen Zs' courage to defy entrenched norms and Kenyan political status quo and explore uncharted paths toward more equitable and accountable leadership. Fueled by frustration over issues like corruption and a lack of transparency, most Kenyan Gen Zs recently 'got/thought out of the box' by mobilizing through social media and grassroots movements to demand for political change. Through violent protests in major towns in Kenya, the Gen Zs challenged traditional power structures by advocating for inclusive policies that reflect their vision for a better future. Their bold actions signal a shift in political engagement, where they are willing to explore uncharted paths and push for reforms that prioritize the needs and voices of all citizens, rather than maintaining the status quo.

As indicated in metaphor (3) below, most Kenyans associate Gen Zs with overuse of social media. This proposition is buttressed by Putra (2016) who posits that Gen Z is a group characterized by their deep integration with social media. They often use social media as a primary means of communication. Social media use has not only influenced their social interactions but also peoples' perception about them as illustrated in metaphor (3) below. Hence:

(3) Kenyan Gen Zs are drowning in social media.

The EXCESS image schema which stems from the CONTAINER image schema was used to interpret metaphor (3) above. According to Peña (2000), the EXCESS gestalt is activated by all those expressions which convey that something is in a larger amount than would be desirable. Otieno (2019) also argues that the EXCESS gestalt refers to the conceptual framework where an abundance or overflow of elements exists within a defined space. The overflow often leads to feelings of overwhelm or surplus. The EXCESS subsidiary schema can, therefore, be used to illustrate how an overflow of an entity can influence peoples' behavior or responses.

Use of social media by Gen Zs is acceptable because, according to Putra (2016), Gen Zs are often characterized by their constant engagement with social media platforms. They often utilize social media not just for connection but also as a powerful tool for activism and self-expression. Reference to the Gen Zs as drowning in social media, however, suggests the notion of overuse of the social media platforms. This overwhelming digital landscape can be understood through the lens of the EXCESS subsidiary image schema. In this case, the abundance of social media content creates both a sense of connectivity and a potential for emotional and cognitive overload. While they leverage these platforms for self-expression and community engagement, the sheer volume of information can lead to feelings of anxiety and detachment. Important to note is that overuse of social media by Kenyan Gen Zs can lead to heightened feelings of anxiety and depression. This is because constant comparison with curated online personas can foster low self-esteem. Additionally, excessive screen time can hinder real-life social interactions, thus, contributing to a decline in interpersonal skills and emotional well-being.

Metaphor (4) below draws a comparison between a state of being saturated with information and Kenyan Gen Zs. Kenyan Gen Zs are exposed to an endless stream of digital content and social

media updates. This can be seen as containers that are constantly filled to the brim with information. The EXCESS subsidiary image schema was used to explain metaphor (4) below. Thus:

(4) Kenyan Gen Zs are saturated with information.

On the basis of this study, being saturated with information can be viewed as a container that is filled beyond its capacity. The mind, like a container, overflows when too much information is poured in. This assertion is authenticated by Rundell and Fox (2007) who provide that being saturated with information refers to an overwhelming exposure to excessive amounts of information. Having exposure to an overwhelming amount of information invokes the EXCESS subsidiary image schema that is used to make sense of Kenyan Gen Zs on the basis of accumulation of more content than they can hold. Kenyan Gen Zs are, in this case, like containers filled beyond capacity struggling to hold the constant flood of information they receive. This excess leads to an overflow which symbolizes their inability to process or manage the overwhelming content they encounter daily. Being overwhelmed with information can also lead to cognitive overload, where individuals struggle to make informed decisions due to conflicting or redundant information.

It is important to note that Kenyan Gen Zs have exhibited a state of being overwhelmed with vast amounts of information. They encounter much of the information from social media, news outlets, and digital platforms. This constant exposure to political updates, corruption scandals, governance issues, and economic challenges often leaves them saturated with data they struggle to process effectively. The recent protests in Kenya reflect this information overload, where the frustration and disillusionment of Gen Zs, fueled by their heightened awareness of poor governance and social injustice boil over. With so much knowledge at their fingertips, ranging from personal details about political leaders to government failures, Gen Zs find it difficult to navigate solutions. This has led to a sense of helplessness and prompting activism as an outlet for their frustrations. The sheer volume of information amplifies their anxieties making it harder to separate facts from fiction and further intensifying their calls for reform.

Metaphor (5) below instantiates Kenyan Gen Zs as voices in a storm. The term *voices in a storm* metaphorically refers to opinions that emerge during times of crisis. It symbolizes the diverse expressions of dissent by a group of people particularly in the face of injustice. Just as a storm can amplify sounds and create chaos, the phrase *voices in the storm* captures the fervor of Kenyan Gen Zs advocating for change. It also emphasizes the Gen Zs' collective strength and determination amidst turbulent circumstances. Thus:

(5) Kenyan Gen Zs are voices in a storm.

The COMPULSION gestalt which stems from the FORCE image schema was used to interpret metaphor (5). According Diez (2001), Compulsion refers to a scenario in which a force arises from a source with significant intensity and follows a specific trajectory. Ntabo (2022) also notes that compulsion represents a powerful urge to act, particularly one that feels uncontrollable. This suggests that the COMPULSION gestalt develops from the human experience of feeling overwhelmed. Krzeszowski (1993) also argues that the COMPULSION subsidiary image schema emerges when a person acts under compulsion from an external or internal force. For instance, Kenyan Gen Zs have recently expressed their strong opinions amidst political turmoil. Their

political activism has highlighted their resilience to bring about change despite challenging circumstances.

Worthwhile to note is that Kenyan Gen Zs have recently been compelled to undertake activism through protests in major towns in Kenya as a response to both internal and external drives for political sanity. This has earned them the tag of *voices in a storm.* Internally, this generation is compelled by a growing sense of frustration with persistent issues such as: corruption, unemployment, and lack of accountability from their leaders. This has led to a desire for transformative change. Externally, the influence of digital platforms such as space X have empowered them to organize and amplify their voices. The advent of social media has facilitated real-time communication, thus, enabling Gen Zs to mobilize quickly. Consequently, these factors converge to fuel a wave of protests aimed at demanding better governance, transparency, and respect for human rights. The Gen Zs have, therefore, expressed a compulsion to shape a more equitable and just society.

In metaphor (6) below, Kenyan Gen Zs are marked as shields against bad governance. Many developing countries are characterized with cases of bad governance. Instances of corruption, lack of transparency, and disregard for the rule of law that cause economic stagnation have been reported in many developing countries. In response, the youth have played a crucial role in resisting bad governance by engaging in activism. It is, therefore, acceptable to associate Kenyan Gen Zs with shields against bad governance. Therefore:

(6) Kenyan Gen Zs are shields against bad governance.

The BLOCKAGE subsidiary image schema which is activated by the FORCE image schema was employed to interpret metaphor (6) above. Johnson (1987 provides that a blockage is commonly depicted as a force vector that meets a barrier. The barrier forces the vector to divert in one of several possible directions. Gathigia (2014) also explains that the BLOCKAGE subsidiary image schema arises when a moving entity faces an obstacle that hinders it from achieving its intended goal. Figure 1 below illustrates a schematic representation of the BLOCKAGE subsidiary image schema.

Figure 1: A Schematic Structure of the BLOCKAGE Subsidiary Image Schema
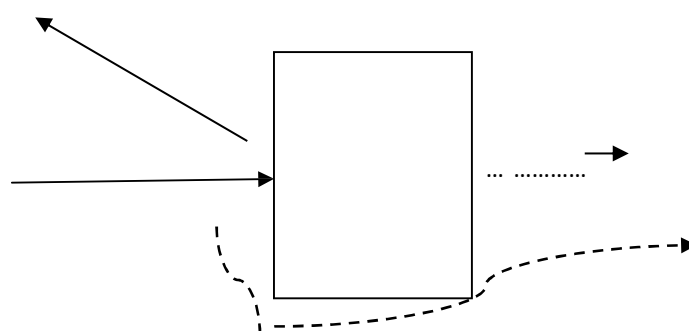
Source: Otieno (2019)

The arrow in Figure 1 above represents a force which facilitates a moving entity while the rectangular shape denotes a blockage that hinders an entity from movement to its intended destination. This means that the barrier exerts a force on a moving entity that prompts it to change its direction as indicated in Figure 1 above. The Kenyan Gen Zs who are marked as

shields against bad governance in metaphor (6) above are regarded as barriers to the government's continued perpetuation of bad governance.

Worthwhile noting is that Kenyan Gen Zs have recently emerged as powerful shields against bad governance. They have used their activism and digital fluency to challenge corrupt leadership and demand accountability. This generation, equipped with social media platforms, has raised awareness about issues like corruption, poor governance, and political injustice. Through wide spread protests and grassroots mobilization, the Kenya Gen Zs have actively opposed leaders who fail to uphold transparency and integrity. In retaliation, security agencies in Kenya have harshly cracked down on Gen Z protesters opposing bad governance through brutal force. Many young activists have faced physical assaults during protests, while others have mysteriously disappeared after being detained or taken into custody. There have also been reports of targeted assassinations of youth leaders involved in organizing or leading anti-government demonstrations.

The terms *combatants* and *titans uprooting the status quo* are used to describe Kenyan Gen Zs as indicated in metaphor (7) ad (8) below. According to Rundell and Fox (2007), combatants are individuals or groups actively engaged in challenging the established order often using direct action. Combatants are often on the frontlines of change. Titans, on the other hand, are influential figures or movements with immense power that are capable of shaping public opinion and pushing large-scale reforms that uproot entrenched systems. Describing Kenyan Gen Zs as combatants and titans suggest that they are a dynamic force for societal transformation. Thus:

(7) Kenyan Gen Zs are combatants,

(8) Kenyan Gen Zs are titans uprooting status quo.

The COUNTERFORCE subsidiary image schema (gestalt) which stems from the FORCE image schema was used to explain metaphors (7) and (8) above. According to (Otieno, 2019), the COUNTERFORCE gestalt highlights a head-on encounter between two forces. In this case, two strong, determined and nasty forces collide head-on. Gathigia (2014) points out that both the COUNTERFORCE and the BLOCKAGE subsidiary image schemas share many of their structural elements. Gathigia further notes that the main difference between the two is that whereas the BLOCKAGE gestalt involves a kinetic or a stationary entity, the COUNTERFORCE one invokes two moving entities. The COUNTERFORCE gestalt is diagrammatically represented as shown in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: A Schematic Structure of the COUNTERFORCE Subsidiary Image Schema

Source: Gathigia (2014)

Figure 2 above reveals that the forces which encounter each other collide face to face. In this study, the Kenyan Gen Zs who are described as combatants and titans as indicated in metaphors (7) and (8) above are involved in a head-on collision. Kenyan Gen Zs have recently engaged in a face-off with the Kenyan political establishment as they challenge the entrenched systems of bad governance, corruption, and inequality. Through protests, online activism, and grassroot movements, the Gen Zs have confronted the older generation of leaders who have long maintained the status quo. This confrontation, which is accounted for by the COUNTERFORCE gestalt, is

often marked by clashes between security agencies and Kenyan Gen Zs. The showdown has been intense, with young activists protesting against corruption and bad governance, facing aggressive crackdowns from the authorities. Security agents have used excessive force to suppress these protesters. This has led to numerous injuries, deaths, and heightened fear among demonstrators. Additionally, it has intensified public outrage and galvanized more youth activism. It has also drawn international attention to issues of human rights violations and governance in Kenya.

5. Conclusions

The following conclusions were made based on the findings for this research: To begin with, metaphors are powerful tools of communicating the role of Generation Z in advocating for good governance. They allow complex social phenomena to be understood through relatable imagery. Kenyan Gen Zs' political activism, often framed through metaphors, such as *thinking outside the box* emphasizes their drive to dismantle barriers to transparency and justice. These metaphors not only illustrate their collective determination but also resonate emotionally with a wider audience, hence, fostering solidarity and inspiring action for systemic change.

Moreover, the use of image schemas in metaphor analysis enhances the understanding of how such metaphors convey meaning particularly through spatial and bodily experiences. In the case of Kenyan Gen Zs, metaphors grounded in the CONTAINER and the FORCE image schemas highlight the tension between oppressive systems and the desire for freedom and ethical leadership. In this case, image schemas give structure to abstract concepts, thus, making metaphors more effective in shaping public discourse and emphasizing the collective power and energy of Gen Z as a transformative force.

6. Recommendations

The study recommends the use of the CONTAINER and the FORCE image schemas in metaphor research. The CONTAINER image schema is pervasive in everyday reasoning and offers a clear framework for analyzing metaphors that describe restrictive or liberating forces. Similarly, the FORCE schema captures the dynamics of compulsion, blockage, and counterforce, hence, making it ideal for examining metaphors related to activism, struggle, and the quest for change. By studying metaphors through these schemas, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how abstract concepts are structured and communicated. This will help make social and political activism more relatable and impactful.

Furthermore, the research emphasizes the importance of employing Cognitive Linguistics as a paradigm in metaphor analysis. Cognitive Linguistics provides robust cognitive models that explain how metaphors shape thought, perception, and communication. Since metaphors are not just rhetorical devices but integral to how individuals conceptualize the world, this framework enables a comprehensive understanding of how language reflects underlying mental processes.

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