

## THE SEMANTICS AND METAPHORS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA AND CHALLENGES OF THE KNOWLEDGE SOCIETY

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### **Abstract**

*The paper employs a cognitive semantics framework in examining the meaning of “higher education” (HE) in Nigeria. This is approached by analysing some conceptual domains and metaphors normally associated with “higher education” in the country (and elsewhere). The last section of the paper provides a few suggestions as to how we might “reframe” the notion of “higher education” in a knowledge society. The analysis reveals that HE is polysemous and that the various meanings of HE are as a result of constraining it in different (though not unrelated) conceptual domains. In addition, the linguistic expressions and discourse used to describe and talk about “higher education” are highly metaphorical. Together, the conceptual domains and the metaphors for higher education create a complex semantic structure for the phrase “higher education”. The constructs also allows the meaning of HE to evolve and expand (with older meanings for the concept becoming outdated as new meanings come into existence as a result of metaphorical extensions and conceptual domain). Accordingly, new ways of talking about various meanings and understanding of “higher education” could help us face and overcome the challenges of the knowledge society and knowledge economy.*

### **Background of the Study**

Currently, there is a growing concern over the complaints, and reports that most Nigerian University graduates are unable to construct simple letters, business proposals or express themselves with correct English. The issue is said to be a national dilemma which the parents, teachers/lecturers, students and government are collectively contributing. These days, it is the decision of most parents to give their children university education as academic qualifications are believed to serve as a means of survival or meal ticket. In the process, the national stake holders maximise their position to influence the admission of their children in higher institutions, particularly the federal universities. Most well to do parents mobilize any amount to buy jamb admission slots even if their children fail. They

even start by sponsoring the students for expo or O-level papers and even approach lecturers to buy marks just to make sure that their children are graduates. On the part of university authorities, the selling of Jamb admission slots have become a source of revenue making. Lecturers nowadays sell marks to students to pass and make money. On the part of students reading is a mere waste of time since they can sort their ways out to pass examinations (Taylor 2005).

Thus, today's youth are born and raised in a culture of institutionalized corruption in every facet of national life and are psychologically sedated to imbibe the life style of fraud, examination malpractice, get rich quick at all cost, mental disrespect for law and order, gangsterism, cultism and drug abuse. Furthermore, there are proven significant shortfalls in available educational infrastructure to provide access to a functional and qualitative (vocational-oriented education) for Nigerian university under graduates. Worst still, the curriculum content and delivery of our school system are hardly consistent with graduate employment requirements. This persistent trend has accounted largely for Nigeria's education woes and has justifiably agitated the citizenry. The Implication has been over dependence on expatriates who dominate and man our industry to the detriment of our nationals (Talmy 2006).

Despite enormous progress made in educational sector, there are still many Nigerian graduates who lack basic skills needed to support their post school life. Thus poor education quality mean that many pass out from higher institutions poorly prepared and ill equipped for work and life. Thus this paper examines the nature and meaning of "higher education" (henceforth HE) through a cognitive semantics analysis. The cognitive semantics approach provides us with constructs such as conceptual domains or knowledge domain and extension through conceptual metaphors to describe meaning.

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria, education in general and higher education in particular, has always been seen as a critical instrument for nation building, national development, economic growth, social mobility and reengineering. Education has been viewed as a total process of developing human ability and behaviour and also regarded as a social process of achieving social competence and individual growth carried on in a selected and controlled setting which can be institutionalised as a school or college (Schibatani and Thompson 1996). According to United Nations Education and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), it is an organised and sustained instruction designed to communicate a combination of knowledge, skills and understanding valuable for all the activities of life (Taylor 2005). In the early years of independence, with agriculture based economy, the main thrust of higher education was a teacher training and training the core of future administrators in the public and private sectors (Scolt 2000). In the late 80s and early 90s, higher education provided the country with the necessary skilled labour and man power especially in engineering and sciences to

cater for the needs of an industrial, manufacturing, production based economy (ibid). At the turn of the millennium, advances in ICT, globalization as well as changing economic, political and social trends led to different ways of doing business and the need for nations to maintain a competitive edge as well as to generate knowledge as an engine for economic growth. Currently, more people are involved in the services and knowledge sectors which are globally servicing the entire world community. The question is how are these changes reflecting (or to be reflected) in the discourse and semantics of higher education? A better understanding of the challenges will no doubt be crucial in drawing up policies, strategic planning and directions of higher education (HE). In other words, the redefinition or a semantic re-engineering of higher education (HE). This paper does not pretend to be exhaustive in its analysis as it addresses only a few issues in the hope that the analysis will be useful towards mapping out the new frontiers of “higher education” in Nigeria. The paper is structured as follows. Firstly, a brief description of the cognitive semantics framework for linguistic description, paying particular attention to the construct of conceptual metaphors. This is followed by an analysis of some conceptual domains and metaphors normally associated with “higher education” in Nigeria (and elsewhere). The last section of the paper provides a few suggestion as to how we might “reframe” the notions of “higher education” in a knowledge society.

### **Method of Research**

The present study employs a Cognitive Semantics Framework in examining the meaning of “higher education”. Two aspects of cognitive semantics are particularly relevant to the present study. First, the cognitive semantics approach considers the meaning of a linguistic form (be it a word, a phrase, a sentence, an utterance) as encyclopedia and which can only be characterised against specific cultural norms or practices. In other words, meanings are cognitive structures, embedded in patterns of knowledge and belief. (Taylor, 2005:83). Thus in the characterization of the meaning of an expression (such as “higher education”) knowledge domain and conceptual domain of various sorts must be incorporated in order for us to understand the meaning of the linguistic form. A conceptual domain is any coherent organization of experience or cognitive structures (Lakoff 1987). Thus where the meaning of an expression needs to be elaborated, then a conceptual or knowledge domain (some linguists use the term 'frame') needs to be invoked in order to properly describe the meaning of a word. For instance, Lakoff (1987:74) illustrates the various possibilities of meaning of “mother” according to the different models (read “knowledge domains”) by which we can understand the term mother. Some of the relevant meanings in the different domain or model includes:

- a. The genetic meaning
- b. The birth meaning
- c. The nurturance meaning
- d. The genealogical meaning
- e. The marital meaning

The present paper applies the principles of cognitive semantics to the explications of the meaning of HE. Specifically, the semantic structure or the meanings of the expression 'higher education' is explicated, in the first instance, with respect of some knowledge or conceptual domain.

The second aspect of cognitive semantics relevant to our analysis of HE is the notion of conceptual metaphor. Our knowledge and our understanding of the world (and various phenomena and concepts) are constituted through and by these conceptual metaphors. A conceptual metaphor in cognitive linguistics is a cognitive configuration that structures our understanding of one concept in terms of another more basic and concrete (or more salient) conceptual domains. Lakoff (1987) and other cognitive linguists (Fauconnier 1997; Sweetser 1990; Lakoff and Turner 1989) have argued how our understanding of events and concepts are shaped (consciously and/or unconsciously) by metaphorical thinking or conceptual metaphorical images. For instance, the CONTROL IS UP metaphor underlies expression such as "I am on top situation", 'I have control over him': He is under my spell; I have it all under control' (<http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/metaphors/control-is-up.html>) Similarly the ANGER IS HEAT AND THE BODY IS A CONTAINER FOR EMOTIONS metaphors can explain linguistic expressions such as "You make my blood boil": He's just blowing off steam" He boiled over' He blew his top' 'I can't keep my anger bottled up anymore.' (<http://cogsci.berkeley.edu/metaphors/Anger is Heat.html>).

Using the cognitive semantics framework in analyzing the meanings of HE will allow us to uncover the various reflection of the general conceptual organization, categorization principles, processing mechanisms, and experiential and environmental influences with respects to "higher education". The semantics of "higher education" drawn out using such a framework is dependent on the notion of conceptual metaphors and the identification of the source domains. Fundamentally, the framework accepts with some conventional metaphors being the "default" or the "preferred" metaphor. To this extent, how someone defines "higher education" is dependent on the organizing metaphor or the "framing" of the discourse. Such "framing" can place a portion of coherent referent situation into the foreground of how we understand "higher education" might vary depending on what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded.

### **The Conceptual Domains and Metaphors of Higher Education**

This examines how the term "higher education" has been construed and given meaning in different domains. For instance, Scott (2000), proposes five meanings of HE, namely legal, political, social, economic and cultural aspects, that corresponds to the legal, the political, the social, the economic and the cultural knowledge domains.

To him, several domains may be activated at the same time in construal of meaning of HE. These domains provide us with the means of scaffolding and explaining "higher

education". In some ways, the domains are reflective of the reality of the "higher education" or the component which forms part and parcel of HE. At the same time, the domains shape how we understand "higher education" – a process of mental construal. This will be followed by an examination of some of the conceptual metaphors used in discussion of the concept of higher education. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, these metaphors are not only a source of literal descriptions of "reality" but are significant metaphors by which we make sense of "higher education" in our concrete experience of the world. In the words of Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) "Metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language, but in thorough and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature." Our understandings of expressions relating to higher education and of higher education itself are the outcome of a complex interaction between the information given, the context in which this take place and the pre-existing knowledge of the interlocutors.

### **The Legal Meaning of Higher Education**

Higher education has a legal domain. Institutions of higher leaning and universities in most countries are established by Act of Parliament or Statute of some sort. These statutes always provide a legal definition for higher education. For instance, Clause 38 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992 (as amended by Education (Scotland) Act 1996 provides very specific definition of "higher education" provided by means of courses such as

- A) a course at a higher level in preparation for a higher diploma or certificate
- B) a first degree course'
- C) a course for education and training of teachers;
- D) a course of post graduate studies (including a higher degree course)'
- E) a course at a higher level in preparation for a qualification form a professional body;

In the case of Scotland, the Act also further specifies that the course should be higher than the standard of courses in preparation for examinations for the Scottish Certificate of Education at higher grade; or the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies; or the General Certificate of Education of England and Wales or Northern Ireland at advanced level; or the Scottish Qualifications Authority national certificate.

In the United States of America, there is also a Higher Education Act which regulate, provide governance and define what is and what is not higher education. Such legal definitions are necessary as they decide who gets funding and who does not. Similarly, in Malaysia, the legal meaning of higher education is governed by Acts such as

- Universities and University Colleges Act 1971
- New Education Act (1996)
- Universities and University Colleges Act (1996)
- National Council on Higher Education Act (1996)

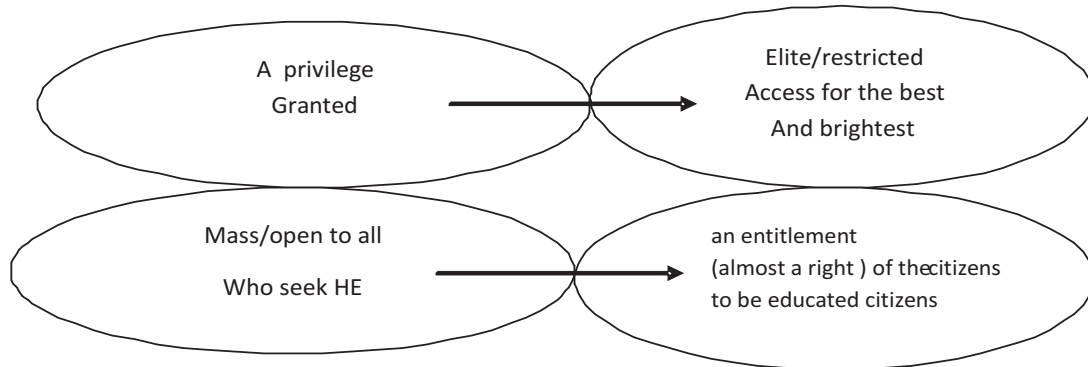
- Private Higher Education Institution Act (1996)
- National Accreditation Board Act (1996)
- National Higher Education Fund Board Act (1997)

It is interesting to note that the legal framework and provisions for higher education in Malaysia make a distinction between “public” and “private” higher education. What is more significant is that the legislation on “private” higher education is a fairly recent piece of legislation (1996) which means that until recently, HE in Malaysia has mainly been the responsibility and under the purview of the government, i.e., a purely public sector understanding. The legal meaning of higher education also determines to a large degree as to what kind of HE qualifies for funding (or loan) of higher education under the National Higher Education Funds. The legal dimension of higher education provides for precise definition (funding formulae and propose appropriation bill, scope of duty and powers) and more importantly, the legitimacy for “higher education” either through the various institutions set up by Parliament/Legislature.

### **The Political Meaning of Higher Education**

The political conceptual domain of higher education and the legal meaning of higher education varies from nation to nation. While the legal meaning provides the legitimacy for the existence of HE, the political meaning determines how HE is to be “partaken” by society at large. For instance, whether access to HE is to be considered a privilege or a right; whether the funding of HE should be the responsibility of the state or to be borne by the individuals are all elements in the definition of HE which are political in nature. One can also make out a case for the distinction between public and private higher education being a political dimension of HE (apart from an economic one). Scott (2000) observes that higher education in Britain is a culmination of a wider education revolution that has been gathering force for at least 130 years, since the introduction of compulsory elementary education in 1870. Higher education has ceased to be a privilege and right of the social elites or the best and the brightest. Today, the right to a higher education can no longer be confined by such elitist and ability (whether to pay or to learn) but instead open to as many who seek for it.

In Nigeria, the political definition of higher education seems to be moving in a similar direction. HE has become more accessible with the increase in the number of public institutions of higher learning. This is in line with the democratization and classification of HE such that HE is accessible to anyone (or everyone) who wish to undertake higher education. In effect, this political meaning of HE (as in the matter of access to HE) re-define the semantics of HE in the following ways (see Figure 1); HE as a privilege and elitist or “restricted access” concept is now a right and open to all.



**Figure 1.** Changes in the Political Meaning of Higher Education

With the shifts in the political meaning of HE, the character of and nature of HE will surely change as well. Just as primary (and also secondary) education is considered to be “universal”, “higher education could become “universal” in that everybody should attend some form of higher education on completion of their secondary education. Perhaps Scott is right in arguing that HE may even become redundant just as the narrower category of “university education” was displaced by the broader category of “higher education” in the 60s (because higher education was more than just universities). “Higher education” is in danger of being replaced by some new term, some of which like “tertiary education” have been around for some time, others like “lifelong learning” are comparatively new.

This semantic shift in HE also has other implications, especially for institutes of higher learning such as universities. Politically, universities (that constitute the pinnacle of HE) are no longer seen as the bastion of knowledge, with academic impunity and freedom. Universities, teachers training colleges, technical colleges and polytechnics are lumped as “higher education” (whether enforced through a legal meaning of HE) and with further differentiations of universities (college universities, research universities, private universities, open universities, branch campuses) and the increase in the number of such institutions (thus diluting their uniqueness and elite position as provider of HE). In other words, politically, HE in the sense of university education has been silently abandoned and politically. “higher” education might one day be equivalent to “education for older people” or “lifelong learning”.

Another political meaning of higher education is the linkage of knowledge, creativity and technology to economic wealth and development and hence to national (political) survival. In Scott's words “nations and blocs of nations, no longer compete by building fleets and bombs. Instead their comparative success is calibrated in terms of Nobel Prizes, of citation indices, of marketable patents.” HE provides the nation with the professional and skilled work force needed to steer the nation. This particular “definition” of HE is

firmly ingrained during the industrial and manufacturing expansions of the 80s. HE enhances the value of the nations' human capital. In the knowledge economy, the political conceptual domain of HE will be even more important due to the competitive nature of the knowledge economy. National economic survival based on what the HE (as the knowledge generators) is capable of producing and generating will become a crucial political dimension of universities and other institutes of higher learning. The survival theme in the knowledge society will be crucial not only in terms of knowledge generation, innovation and creativity but also in terms of training other researchers or generations of researchers, technologists and scientists needed in a knowledge economy. Accordingly, expressions such as technological innovation, commercialization, university industry relationship, technology parks, venture capitalist, research enterprise cluster have all come into the vocabulary of the politics of higher education through minister and administrators of HE only in the last 10 years or so.

Thus, HE gains an added semantic dimension of being the cornerstone of a nation's human knowledge capital and the knowledge institutions are 'redefined and expected to contribute to the economic growth and the technological capital/idea for the national growth. In some ways, this political meaning of HE has taken on significance in globalised and connected world. As we become more aware and have better access to information around the world, it is all easy to be compared and be aware of the imbalances and gaps in access to knowledge and the likes. While in the past we focus on the wealth division between the rich countries of the North (G8) and the poor Nations of the South; Scott (2000), suggest that the new divisions are between the knowledge rich and the knowledge poor. As a result, universities as key knowledge institutions, are being sucked into centre of politics. They are implicated in these imbalances that threaten the stability of our society.

### **The Social Meaning of Higher Education**

In most modern demographic census, educational attainment or educational level of the population has become an important social/demographic variable and indicator. This socially defines HE as primary social institutions (apart from any other thing). HE serves to identify and allocate social role via the delivery of education. HE thus can define social status and become the determinant of social stratification. Scott observes in UK that once it was possible to be a secured and proud middle-class without being a graduate. But that changed over night; instead, being a graduate has become a signifier of middle class status. Thus HE attaches social meaning to those that have it or define social class with reference to it. {The inverse could also be true where everybody you meet has an MBA from the banker to the taxi driver right down to the rubbish collector. In such case, the social meaning of HE might very well be totally absent}.

A second social meaning of HE is social re-engineering, as it can correct social



inequality by providing access to those who traditionally do not have access or have little access to it. Thus, HE correlated with change in social status and economic mobility (as well as individual self-realisation). Recently, the Ministry of Higher Education (MHE) in UK proposed that “ethnic relations” be part of curriculum (and hence responsibilities of HE to promote social unity).

The social meanings of HE have taken a new significance with its association with better access and opportunities of catering for the entire nation. Mass system of higher education will become an active agent in producing social change. Not only can HE confer more direct social advantages on graduates, the penalties suffered by non graduates can also increase correspondingly. However, as mentioned earlier, the social meaning of HE is connected directly to the economic meaning. Traditionally, HE provides access to economic opportunities such as better jobs and better pay. In a knowledge society, the social economic link might take on greater significance in that HE provides the primary “commodity” or services (i.e. knowledge, technology, innovation, services, know-how) for trade instead of manufactured goods or agriculture produce.

In terms of the traditional concept of HE, the social role of preparing and training the workforce is a linear or sequential relationship. With the knowledge society, learning might no longer be sequential but rather modularized and lifelong learning. Work and education are all jumbled up – we learn on the job”, and “are retooled”. There are ‘in house programmes” and we send employees on “skills upgrading programmes”. The pattern in HE is that an initial experience of education is followed by a period of work, we then go back to study (study leave) before rejoining the workforce again. Such trends in HE and work are likely to become the norm as people upgrade their skills and knowledge, shift jobs, change careers and require frequent updating and refreshment. In this respect, HE becomes an integral part of work and as Scott observes HE to a surprising degree has become a substitute for work-literally so, in the sense that it has encroached on the span of working life. Secondly, HE also comments unemployment or under-employed; figuratively so, in the sense that very many people now get much more personal satisfaction from their involvement in education than they do from their jobs. It is through higher education that they realize their potential and reshape their identities not through their careers.

### **The Economic Meaning of Higher Education**

The economic dimension or meaning of HE is perhaps the one that we are most familiar with. The (semantic) features of HE in this domain is that of HE as a means or as a tool towards economic mobility either in terms of a career or profession. Scott uses the term “instrumental” where “the purposes of a university education are, first to confer material benefits on the individual in the shape of higher salaries and better job prospects” The economic dimension is the utilitarian cast of HE so that one may even define HE not as

courses (cf. the legal meaning) but as “something that will enable us to get a better paying job.” Since, HE enables an individual to economic benefits, it is “reasonable to expect individuals to pay for HE”. Metaphors of private HE and HE as a commodity are a consequence of the economic meaning of HE. This meaning is the one that universities today have to contend with. Academic programmes can only be approved if there is a market survey – both in terms of whether there is a market for the programme and also the “marketability or employability” of graduates of such programmes. Students too have many choices of programmes to enroll in and can “shop around” for the HE of their choice in “educational fair” reminiscence of the “market fair”.

From a national perspective, there is also a transnational (international) economic dimension of HE. Mentioned earlier is the fact that HE adds to the human capital of the nation and a high educated workforce provides the nation with a competitive advantage. In some countries, HE has been for decades seen as a sector of the economy that generates foreign exchange for the nation. Similarly, a country like Malaysia vowed to become a regional hubs for higher education in Southeast Asia (reminiscence of the airport hub in the travel industry) and strategized to make HE a significant revenue generating sector (The Sun, Malaysia, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2014).

### **The Intellectual and Cultural Meaning of Higher Education**

HE is an experience; a cultural and life experience. HE provides participants with not just a personal individual experience but also the high level intellectual company and association, with the unique traditions of lecture, tutelage, supervision, discussion, group work, presentation, lab reporting, industrial training along with the massive library, electronic search, inter-loan, (photocopy culture, the late nights coffee).

HE in itself perpetuate and preserve culture and traditions of their own via the academic senate, the structure of the institutions (with Deans, Provost, Vice Chancellors, Rectors-all peculiar to HE). HE can thus be defined as the systematic promotion of a common culture. HE as an intellectual cultural concept, is basically the transmission of a corpus of knowledge and by doing so encodes what is regarded as of value and important to be imparted into the young minds of society. Academia and those associated with the university (the professors and academics) as well as the graduates have cultural significance. HE itself is a producer's symbolism while ritual is a preservation of the decorum and solemnity of HE and admission into that sanctum or space of HE. With the classification of HE and coming of age of the knowledge society, whether this cultural meaning of HE will be eroded and the role of HE as producer of social significance will become less important remains unknown. After all, in the knowledge society, one can purchase an MBA and also contributes or make an entry into an encyclopaedia; all online. The romantic, intellectual or cultural definition of HE in the academic sense of pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; or the altruistic quest for the truth seems to have taken a back

seat. Nonetheless, that the intellectual cultural benefits or outcome of HE would be that of a more civilized society (with corresponding changes in the style and conduct of politics, ethics and values) as a larger percentage of the population receive higher education. It would seem that even in the knowledge society, knowledge might still take a back seat to economics. Universities are ranked by the comparative success of their graduates in getting jobs – because graduates who do not get jobs are seen as “failures”, investments that have not paid off, however much their lives might have been enriched by their experience as students.

### **Some Metaphors of Higher Education**

Various metaphors relating to the meaning of HE are as a result of particular conceptual domain of HE discussed above. In particular, the higher education as a key, up is better, higher education is a business, and higher education is autonomous metaphors will be examined in this section.

#### **Higher Education as a Key**

A key can be viewed as a specific kind of tool one uses for opening door and gaining access. Expression such as “university education is the key to a better future” utilizes this conceptual metaphor. As an extension to the tool metaphor, the key metaphor is also the rationale as to why government provides higher education to the people and why the people aspire to participate in higher education. Employment and professional career opportunities are only accessible with the appropriate higher education. In a knowledge society, this particular metaphor may not be too apt for HE. The reason is because part of the conceptual network associated with the functions of a “key” is that there is a lock that keeps the gates and doors closed to those without the key. Hence, the “key” characterises an elitist concept of “higher education” -one where HE is the gatekeeper. This is the anti-thesis of the knowledge society where education empowerment and the mass enrolment become the norm. Governments everywhere are striving to provide HE to as many of their secondary school leavers as possible. Nonetheless, the gate keeper's notion of “higher education” will continue in that many employers provide different schemes to employee with or without tertiary or HE. Such policy and regulations are related to the metaphor of Higher Education as a key. A set back of course is that this metaphor can also create a false impression that HE degree opens certain doors when this might no longer be true. The current graduate unemployment data is a clear reminder to us. This might breed resentment and dissatisfaction among graduates and as a result “higher education” loses some of its statutes and appeal. Thus, it is perhaps best to avoid this metaphor. Possible replacement metaphors that emphasis character building, entrepreneurial spirit and enterprise, creativity, might be more appropriate (Fauconnier 1997).

#### **Up Is Better**

Another metaphor inherent in “higher education” is the UP IS BETTER metaphor. In

essence, there are alternatives to “higher education” such as 'tertiary education'. The UP IS BETTER metaphor is a common metaphor and central to human experience. In this case, the “more one is educated” the higher is the person's education level. And since entry or participation in higher education is restricted or based on entrance exams (A Levels or Matriculation), it is a case of selected students only (not so much elitist but rather selective). Also, one could legitimately ask what is the comparison for “higher” in the case of “higher education.” The use of the vertical order schema, especially in relation to a comparative in the case of “higher education” is perhaps to show the importance of the education and since 'up is better', higher must be better. This metaphor conceptualizes HE as desirable and leads to a better life. Will this metaphor still be apt for HE in a knowledge society, and with the classification of HE. Perhaps, in due time the concept might revert back to the notion of tertiary education (which uses a tier schema rather than the 'up is better' metaphor). Also with the trend of compounding or combining foundation/matriculation year with the undergraduate programmes in some university, the distinction between secondary school education and higher education might not be so clear cut any more.

#### **“Higher Education” is Business**

In recent times, the business metaphor permeates also every aspect of human society. This commercialization of “things” is also very noticeable in the discourse on “higher education”. In particular expression such as “clients” concern with “quality, “market survey”, “marketing programmes” “Competition among universities”, “programme packaging”, auditing” are quite typical in the everyday discussion of HE. More directly, the economics of HE as being to generate “income”, “earn foreign exchange” “prevent outflow of money” and the likes. As a result the most persuasive (if not pervasive) image of HE, we are presented with that of business entities. In other words, “higher education” in Nigeria might no longer be viewed as a public and social responsibility enterprise. Distinction between private and public perhaps salvage some of the social dimension of HE (Lakof 1997).

#### **Higher Education is Autonomous**

One key issue in defining HE is the governance of HE. The language of HE such as “academic freedom” “ivory tower” 'pursuit of truth' manifest a particular metaphor of HE, namely “higher education” is autonomous. In the English language, we talk of “HE” and “autonomy” as being a singular concept. While the governance of HE has taken many forms and shape, essentially HE which is paid for by public funding must be accountable. This metaphor is perhaps best conceived of as a continuum, with varying degree of autonomy on different matters. Hence, while the academics are free to pursue the research of their choice, the funding agency have the right to decide what kind of research they might want to fund. The faculty and the senate might have freedom in deliberation of programmes to offer but the Ministry of education decides whether to endorse the programme. This autonomous metaphor of HE will be the key in the knowledge society.

Scott (2000) observes that in the knowledge society, clear boundaries around and between institutions might no longer exist. A University is no longer an autonomous space, insulated from political or market pressures. It has invaded, and been invaded by, other institutions (and sub systems). “It can no longer steer an independent course”. This is perhaps an inherent characteristics of mass higher education and a highly efficient knowledge society. To carry the metaphor further, boundaries of knowledge have already been shown to be drastically shortened (especially in ICT). Life long is no longer a buzz word and is reflective of a kind of autonomy – the autonomy of the learner in deciding what he wants to learn and what he expects from HE.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

In this paper, we have attempted to explore the various and multiple meanings (or domains) which frames our discussion on “higher education” in countries and Nigeria. In particular, HE has meaning in the legal, political, social, economic and cultural conceptual domains. We have shown that the meanings in each of these domains are not mutually exclusive but are very much related to each other, as the meaning of a particular domain have implication for another domain. Various metaphors, for instance, the “higher education” is key, up is better, higher education is a business, higher education is autonomous also shapes the semantic of higher education. Many expressions pertaining to HE reflect these metaphors in action.

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