

When romantic love in Gĩkũyũ becomes a human body part

A cognitive approach

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Studies in Cognitive Linguistics show that metaphors are fundamental to the structuring of people's thought and language (Sweetser 1990; Kövecses 2009). It is against this backdrop that this study discusses human body parts as metaphors of conceptualizing love in Gĩkũyũ.¹ To achieve this objective, an interview schedule was administered to 48 respondents of different gender by the researcher assisted by four research assistants. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and the main principles of the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU) (see Steen et al. 2010) were used in this study. The principles of the MIPVU were employed to find out whether the lexical items collected were metaphorical or not. Using three annotators and the researcher, the study identified 100 Metaphor Related Words (MRWs) as per the annotation guidelines adapted from the MIPVU procedures and three lexical units which were annotated as Discard From Metaphor Analysis (DFMA). From the MRWs, the study identified eight metaphors of human body parts which play an indispensable role in the conceptualization of love in Gĩkũyũ. Further, the study noted that gender is a vital variable that provides people with the prism through which they view love since males registered more lexical frequencies for LOVE IS A HUMAN BODY PART than females. The study concludes that metaphor in Cognitive Linguistics is not only a creative device, but an important mental facility and cognitive instrument.

Keywords: Love, metaphor, body part, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, MIPVU

1. Gĩkũyũ is a language in the Central Bantu branch of the Niger — Congo family spoken primarily by the Agĩkũyũ of Kenya (Mbaabu 1996: 1). In the classification system of Guthrie (1967), Gĩkũyũ is part of Zone E and is labelled E51

1. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics (CL) is not only a scientific approach to the study of language, but one of the most rapidly growing perspectives of linguistics today (Geeraerts 2006).² As a dynamic framework within theoretical and descriptive linguistics, CL has proved to be one of the most exciting and reliable areas of research within the interdisciplinary project of cognitive science (Geeraerts 2006). This is because CL aims at an integrated model of language and thought that reflects the human construal of external reality that takes into account the way in which human beings experience reality, both culturally and psychologically (Geeraerts 2006). In the paradigm of Cognitive Linguistics, metaphors are “devices that allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980: 117). Until the late seventies, metaphor was commonly viewed as a matter of language and rhetoric (Steen 2011). Aristotle is perhaps one of the earliest scholars to have dealt with metaphors and according to him; metaphors are basically signs or symbols that express a thought about a thing (O’Callaghan 1997). However, this changed with Ortony’s (1979) publication, *Metaphor and thought*, which marked a shift that has been labeled as “the cognitive turn” (Steen 2011: 26) in which metaphor started to be viewed as a matter of thought. Ortony’s publication was followed an year later by Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) seminal work on metaphor analysis with its emphasis on embodiment,³ *Metaphors we live by*, which has revolutionized the fields of literary, linguistic, and — more generally — cognitive studies (Gibbs 2008, 2011). Although the publication did not provide a method of analysis, it explained how metaphors can be grouped into metaphorical concepts which are important for any method of analysis of metaphorical terms. When a second and revised edition of *Metaphor and thought* was published fourteen years later (Ortony 1993), it included a chapter by Lakoff (1993), “The contemporary theory of metaphor”, in which he elaborates how the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) explains the way metaphor

2. For comprehensive information about Cognitive Linguistics, see, for instance, Croft and Cruse (2004), Evans and Green (2006), Radden and Dirven (2007) and Langacker (2009). For the various aspects involved in Cognitive Linguistics see, for example, Casad (1996) who deals with issues such as what is cognitive about Cognitive Linguistics and Gibbs (1996) who looks at the way Cognitive Linguistics relates to other disciplines.

3. Embodiment or the philosophy of embodied realism holds that a human being and the external entities and forces are two parts of an inseparable whole or totality of experience (Rakova 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1999). That is, there is a link between human cognition, comprehension and environmental factors.

works in a Cognitive-Linguistic perspective.⁴ These developments have given rise to a great amount of research into metaphor (Steen 2011) as a conceptual device.⁵

The conceptualization of the body is an important issue in Cognitive Linguistics (Smith, Pollio and Pitts 1981). Studies on body parts, for example, are common in linguistics, notably in research on cognitive metaphors (Smith, Pollio and Pitts 1981). Smith, Pollio and Pitts add that the human body has consistently been a frequent source of metaphors. In addition, most body part metaphors are explained by the fact that functions of body part can be directly observed and that it is easy to interpret names of body parts allegorically, and that their system of figurative meanings is complex (Dolgoplov 1973). This is because the richness of body-part metaphors derives from the combination of the universal, cultural, and individual dimensions of our figurative thought. Aitchison (1994: 153) puts it clearly that:

body metaphors are partly based on genuine physical features, partly on convention, partly on imagination, and that universal and cultural aspects of metaphors are intertwined Any language selects one portion of the universal picture, and elaborates it.

The above quotation parallels Lakoff and Johnson's (1999) argument on the embodiment hypothesis that our conceptual structure and linguistic structures are shaped by the peculiarities of our perceptual structures. However, despite these welcoming forays concerning body parts (Hsieh 2009; Lin 2003; Tsao, Tsai and Liu 2001; Heine 1997; Tsai 1994), research on body part metaphors from a Cognitive Linguistics perspective has received little attention. This is in spite of the human body being a potentially "universal source domain for expressions structuring abstract concepts" (Yu 2003: 13). This paper aims to fill this lacuna and specifically the obvious need to study the linkage of metaphors of body parts with the way the Agikūyū conceptualize the emotion of love.

2. Theoretical background

The study adopted the fundamental principles of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). This is because the CMT has become a reliable framework in the studies of Cognitive Linguistics and cognitive semiotics (Lakoff and Turner 1989; Gibbs

4. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gibbs 1994; Kövecses 2000, 2002, 2005; Dirven and Ruiz de Mendoza 2010) is the axis around which this study revolves.

5. See Gibbs (1994) for a discussion of this.

1994; Kövecses 2000, 2002).⁶ Second, the theory highlights a trajectory within the general epistemological development of cognitive science as it moves from cognitivism to connectionism and embodiment⁷ to embracing a fully dynamic, socially-situated perspective on cognitive processes (Fusaroli and Paolucci 2011; Menary 2010). One of the basic tenets of the CMT is the postulation that there are two conceptual domains, that is, the source domain and the target domain.⁸ The source domain is the conceptual domain from which the metaphor is drawn, and the target domain is the conceptual domain to which the metaphor is applied (Knowles and Rosamund 2006). Another important tenet of the CMT is the existence of conceptual mappings⁹ between the conceptual domains. The relationship between these domains is “unidirectional” since a domain is usually conceived in terms of another and not the other way round (Lakoff 1993: 245). The conceptual mappings are supposed to obey the invariance hypothesis.¹⁰ The scientific significance that the CMT, with embodiment theory as a branch, gains in accounting for human conceptualisation of different types of experiences, places it as a suitable technique to provide the link between the literal and figurative meaning of love metaphors in Gikūyū.

3. Methodology

The present study is a qualitative analysis of responses which a purposive sample of 48 speakers of Gikūyū (24 men and 24 women) gave to the following interview question: “How is love conceptualized in Gikūyū? (Give at least 5 words /

6. Janssen and Redeker (1999) is another collection of papers that discuss the foundations, scope and methodology of the CMT (see Fauconnier 1997; Langacker 1999).

7. The notion of embodiment posits that meaning itself originates in experience of our bodies as they interact with spatial environments rather than in disembodied minds (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Similarly, Richards (1936: 125) notes in the *Philosophy of rhetoric*: “The mind is a connecting organ, it works only by connecting and it can connect any two things in an indefinitely large number of different ways”.

8. In terms of composition, metaphors are traditionally said to be made up of two parts: the ‘tenor’ and the ‘vehicle’ (Richards 1936). These terms correspond to Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) “target” and “source.” However, Lakoff and Johnson’s terms are commonly used in Cognitive Linguistics.

9. A conceptual mapping is the systematic set of correspondences that exist between constituent elements of the source and the target domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

10. Lakoff (1990: 54) formulates the invariance hypothesis which states that “metaphorical mappings preserve the cognitive topology of the source domain”.

expressions / metaphors you would use to refer to love). The respondents were instructed to use the frame, “Love is.....” The metaphors collected were subjected to inter-rater agreement reliability check in which three annotators and the researcher carried out the Metaphor Identification Procedure *Vrije Universiteit* (MIPVU).¹¹ MIPVU (VU stands for Amsterdam’s *Vrije Universiteit*, where the research was first carried out by ten analysts)¹² is a refined and extended version of MIP (Metaphor Identification Procedure). MIPVU was employed by this study since critics of the CMT have argued that although it is theoretically powerful; the framework lacks an empirical basis (Cameron 2003; Deignan 2005). Second, according to Schmitt (2005), researchers must strive to provide accuracy and credibility of using any metaphor analysis.

For validity and reliability of the study, the inter-coder reliability rate was considered to be acceptable if three annotators out of four in this study came to an agreement that a lexical unit is a metaphorically-used word. The annotators identified eight body part metaphors which play an indispensable role in the understanding of love in Gikūyū in the human conceptual system (cf. Table 2). Further, the mnemonics “TARGET DOMAIN IS SOURCE DOMAIN” as posited by the Conceptual Metaphor Theory by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) (quoted in Charteris-Black 2004: 13) and which suggests meanings are achieved through a mapping from the source domain to the target domain in the conceptual system were used in the analysis of the metaphors.¹³ For each lexical unit provided for love, the frequency count or the lexical frequency was noted against the demographic variable of gender. The lexical frequencies for each lexical item for the conceptual domain of LOVE IS BODY PART were then added to get the total lexical frequencies for the gender variable (cf. Table 1). The total lexical frequencies for each gender were then computed for percentages (cf. Table 2).

11. According to MIPVU, a lexical unit is annotated as a metaphor-related word if its contextual meaning contrasts with its basic meaning (by the basis of *concreteness*, *body-relatedness* and *preciseness*- as opposed to vagueness). When the annotators find disagreement with the metaphors, they make an attempt to negotiate its meaning and the word is categorized once an agreement is agreed upon (Steen et al. 2010).

12. Peter Crisp, Ray Gibbs, Alan Cienki, Graham Low, Gerard Steen, Lynne Cameron, Elena Semino, Joe Grady, Alice Deignan, Zoltán Kövecses (Steen et al. 2010).

13. In the Cognitive Metaphor Theory, it is a common practice to use capital letters to indicate that these particular wordings are not a matter of language, but of concepts, belonging to the realm of human thought. These concepts are underlying the very nature of our daily metaphorical expressions (linguistic or otherwise) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980).

4. Metaphors of LOVE IS A BODY PART in Gikūyū identified by this study

The human body, so close to us and tangible, is an obvious source domain for metaphorically understanding abstract targets such as love (Kövecses 2002: 128). Yu (2003) notes that the human body is a potentially universal source domain for metaphors structuring abstract concepts. This study identifies prototypical body parts used in the conceptualization of love in Gikūyū (cf. Table 2). The metaphors in this conceptual equation follow the cognitive process of highlighting some portions of a specific event-frame or what Taylor (1989: 90) has termed as perspectivization. Table 1 displays the ontological correspondences of the metaphors of LOVE AS A BODY PART.

Table 1. Mappings of LOVE IS A BODY PART

NO	Target Domain (LOVE)	Source Domain (BODY PART)
1	Love	Anatomy (body part)
2	Longing for one's partner	Longing to touch / caress the body part (obsession with a part of the anatomy)
3	Harmony in the relationship	Healthy body parts
4	Disharmony in the relationship	Injury or sickness to the body part

The conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A BODY PART accounts for eight metaphors of love in Gikūyū as indicated in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Metaphors of LOVE IS A BODY PART

NO	Gikūyū	Gloss	Gender	
			M (lf)	F (lf)
1	<i>Wendo nī ūthaka</i>	Love is beauty	14	7
2	<i>Wendo nī thakame</i>	Love is blood	17	12
3	<i>Wendo nī ngoro</i>	Love is heart	16	8
4	<i>Wendo nī nda</i>	Love is stomach	11	7
5	<i>Wendo nī maitho</i>	Love is eyes	10	7
6	<i>Wendo ūkīrite gīthithi</i>	Love is more than the forehead	8	7
7	<i>Wendo nī nyondo</i>	Love is breasts	13	6
8	<i>Wendo nī matū</i>	Love is ears	12	5
<i>Total Lexical Frequency</i>			101	59
<i>Percentages</i>			63.12%	36.88%

This conceptual metaphor has the human body as the source domain. According to Kövecses (2002), the human body is a common source domain for metaphorical mappings. Although, we mostly conceptualize abstract phenomena through concrete notions (Kövecses 2009), some target domains like love have abstract source domains like beauty as in metaphor (1) below. Thus:

- (1) *Wendo nī ūthaka* — love is beauty.

Beauty in this study has been understood as an aspect of the human body and, therefore, fitting in this conceptual domain. According to Rhodes (2006), beauty is a characteristic of a person that provides a perceptual experience of pleasure or satisfaction. A person experiencing romantic love is uninterruptedly occupied with the image or beauty of the beloved. Evidence from data in this study shows that the Agikūyū women would go to great depths to make sure that they looked beautiful by putting on ornaments and other embellishments so that men would be attracted to their appearance. This is why metaphor (1) above is germane for conceptualizing love. This study shows that more men than women conceptualize love as beauty. This is consistent with Li and Kenrick (2006) finding that men normally put a great premium on physical attractiveness. In addition, Buss (1994) finds that men tend to be more attracted to a partner's physical appearance and particularly signs of youth and beauty than women.

Another metaphor closely related to metaphor (1) above is (2) below. The eyes are not only important external body parts, but what they express is also used in Gikūyū as metaphors for love. Therefore:

- (2) *Wendo nī maitho* — love is eyes.

According to Barcelona (1995), there is a strong belief that a woman's eyes are an aspect of her beauty that functions as a weapon of entrapment for men. Barcelona (1995: 679) also suggests that the "eyes are containers for superficial love", which seems to be a development of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) argument that eyes are containers for emotions. On the other hand, eyes are also closely related to *maithori* 'tears'. Tears have a cause-effect metonymic relationship with pain or emotional distress. Tears are the effect, and pain is metaphorically related to love. That is, the general metonymic principle THE PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF AN EMOTION STAND FOR THE EMOTION appears as the central principle of metaphor (2) above for love.

Metaphor (3) below is also aptly used to conceptualize love. Blood is a part of a human body, which supplies nutrition to the entire body and defends it against diseases. Thus, metaphor (3) below is based upon the body metaphor. Therefore:

- (3) *Wendo nī thakame* — love is blood.

Apart from having a meaning of consanguinity, metaphor (3) above is also inter-linked with the heart metaphor when it is said that *wendo wa thakame ndũthiraga ngoroinĩ*, literally translated to, “the love of the blood does not end in the heart.” This also invokes the CONTAINER image schema¹⁴ because of the morpheme *inĩ* which denotes the preposition “in”. Another variant from the blood metaphor is when it is said that love is ‘when the blood has gone up’, that is, *thakame gũthĩĩ igũrũ*, a metaphor that utilizes the PATH image schema¹⁵ to create exhilaration and passion that is naturally created by love. Passion denotes excitement and physiological arousal which is, associated with the experience of the intense emotions that are often observed in people experiencing the thrall of romantic love.

Metaphor (4) below underscores the importance of sexual intercourse in a person’s life. Gathigia and Ndung’u (2011) note that eating and food are common sources for naming sex organs and sex related actions in Gikũyũ. The same conclusion can be made of love. For example:

(4) *Wendo nĩ nda* — love is stomach.

Maalej (2004) claims, then the role of culture in the conceptualisation of emotion concepts should not be underestimated. Evidence from the data collected shows that the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach. Gikũyũ girls were, therefore, trained before marriage on the art of cooking good food as a way of making their future husbands happy (Kenyatta 1938).

A lot of our metaphorical understandings are derived from our experience on our own body (Kövecses 2009). Since the head is the highest part of the human body, it is, therefore, well mapped to love. The metaphor of the forehead below thus fits the conceptualization of love:

(5) *Wendo ũkĩrĩte gĩthithi* — love is more than the forehead.

The relevance of the head is based on the fact that a human being performs some very important functions with the head such as thinking, making decisions and so on. When it is said that, “love is more than the forehead,” it, therefore, implies that

14. An image schema is a “recurring pattern of experience which is abstract and topological in nature” (Peña 2003: 42) and which arises as a result of our interaction with our environment. The CONTAINER image schema results from our recurrent and ubiquitous experiences with containers (Lakoff 1987). The CONTAINER image schema is guided by the Invariance Principle which guarantees that, for CONTAINER schemas, interiors will be mapped onto interiors, exteriors onto exteriors, and boundaries onto boundaries.

15. The PATH image-schema consists of a *source* (starting point), a *path* (a series of intermediate points), a *direction* (from starting point to end point) and a *destination* (end point) (Johnson 1987; Lakoff 1987; Peña 2000).

love entails more than prudent reasoning. Metaphor (5) above also points to the fact that love calls for more than the art of logic normally associated with the head. The heart as employed in metaphor (6) below and being the place where feelings are located figuratively may be argued to oppose the “head”, the place where the reason is conventionally placed. Love may require other things like money, happiness etcetera for the love relationship to be successful. Metaphor (5) above also cues the EXCESS image schema,¹⁶ a subsidiary the CONTAINER image schema because of the lexeme *ūkirite* “more than.”

In metaphor (6), the heart metaphor is employed for love. The heart is normally considered the most essential body part for a human being because if it stops working, the whole body loses functioning (Barcelona 1995). “Heart” is, therefore, a prototypical body part for the conceptualization of emotions and other related abstract entities. The heart also conceptualizes other emotions such as compassion, courage, kindness, etcetera (Pérez 2008; Kövecses 1990). Lv and Zhang (2012) argue that since the heart is the most important internal organ, it is always used to express love and love-related emotions. Thus:

(6) *Wendo nī ngoro* — love is heart.

Love is also said to “make the heart beat fast”. That is, *wendo ūtūmaga ūhūre ngoro*. This is in consonance with Kövecses’ (1986) argument that one of the physiological effects that accompanies love is an increased heart rate. According to Lakoff (1987) too, emotion concepts in human languages, are known to make use of metaphors and metonymies relating to physiological effects and behavioural reactions. The same point is shared by Safara and Bhatia (2009), who argue that romantic love, being intense longing, is often accompanied by physiological arousal like a rapid heart rate.

Another metaphor of love identified in this study is the breast metaphor. First, breasts play a key role in sexual arousal during foreplay. Nipple stimulation enhances sexual arousal in majority of women, and it activates the same brain areas as vaginal and clitoral stimulation (Young and Alexander 2012). According to Levin and Meston (2006: 450), manipulation of the nipples / breasts causes or enhances sexual arousal in “approximately 82% of young women and 52% of young men with only 7–8% reporting that it decreased their arousal”. This is one of the reasons that make this metaphor relevant for conceptualizing love in Gikūyū. That is:

(7) *Wendo nī nyondo* — love is breasts.

Second, the relevance of the metaphor (7) above is based on humans’ experience with the source domain. According to Young and Alexander (2012), men are

16. The EXCESS schema is a subsidiary of the CONTAINER image-schema (Peña 2003).

the only male mammals fascinated by breasts, and women are the only female mammals whose breasts remain enlarged, even when they are not nursing. In the Agikūyū community, voluptuous breasts are a sign of beauty and fertility.

Sensory experiences have a significant influence on humans' relationships with their physical world. The ear, with its strong sensory reference, is also used as a metaphor of love. The ear has the ability to break a heart, or destroy one's emotional well being because it has the ability to hear devastating things capable of hurting someone. Thus:

(8) *Wendo ndūrī matū* — love does not have ears.

The ear, besides being a body part, is significant because it is like the messenger to the heart in terms of the things that one hears. The metaphor above implies that love does not listen to logic. The metaphor basically means that one does not listen to the advice of others where love is concerned. This mind-body link employed by this metaphor is also called embodied cognition (Lakoff 1987). This study, therefore, subsumes the expression under the conceptual metaphor LOVE IS A BODY PART.

5. Discussion and conclusions

First, the study identified eight metaphors of LOVE IS A BODY PART confirming the fact that a single idea [like love] can be explained by a number of metaphorical expressions (Charteris-Black 2004; Gibbs 1994). This finding is consonant with Lakoff and Johnson's (1980: 4) postulation that, "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action". Similarly, this study affirms Ungerer and Schmid's (2001) view that metaphor provides a way to "piggyback" our understanding of abstract concepts on the structure of concrete concepts.

Second, the study noted that body part metaphors play an essential role in the emergence of metaphorical meaning in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory. This concurs with various studies on metaphor (Yu 2004; Smith, Pollio and Pitts 1981) which have noted that the phenomenon of body metaphors underpins the ubiquity of embodied experience. Smith, Pollio and Pitts (1981) also claim that the human body has consistently been a frequent source of metaphors and the richness of body-part metaphors derives from the combination of the universal, cultural, and individual dimensions of our figurative thought. Other past studies on metaphor have proved that the CMT is an effective framework for metaphor analysis (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff and Turner 1989; Crespo-Fernández 2013). According to the CMT, we find that not only do the metaphors of body part map one mental

image onto another, they also transfer cultural connotations associated with their source domains onto the target domain

Third, the study found that the MIPVU is an effective framework of identifying metaphors of love in Gikūyū. This finding resonates with Krennmayr's (2008) view that the MIPVU provides not only explicit and analytical steps for researchers to follow when identifying metaphor, but also a consistent criterion of identification which annotators used in reliability checking metaphors instead of relying on intuition. Thus, the inter-rater reliability check helped reduce the bias or inconsistencies which may have been produced by having one single researcher doing the analysis.

Lastly, the research noted that males have higher lexical frequencies for LOVE IS A BODY PART than females. That is, males have 63.12 % while females have 36.88 % of the total sum of lexical frequencies (cf. Table 2). First, this finding is consistent with past researches (for example, Buss 1994; Galperin and Haselton 2010; Li and Kenrick 2006), who note that males have preference for youth and highly value physical attractiveness (in this case, they place premium on the body and its parts) in potential partners. Buss (1994) adds that this serves an intuitively evolutionary beneficial purpose since attractive women in their reproductive prime are assumed to be fertile and have good genes. Thus, this may predispose males to conceptualize LOVE IS A BODY PART more than females. Second, this finding is consistent with past literature which has shown that although the capacity for love is likely to be universal (Buss 1994), love manifests differently across individuals. Gender, therefore, comes out as a dominant variable that provides people with the prism through which they view love (Galperin and Haselton 2010; Oliver and Hyde 1993).

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Appendix A. Interview schedule

Introduction

The purpose of this interview schedule is to get your views on metaphors of love in Gikūyū. Any information that you give will be treated with confidence and will only be used for the success of this academic research.

SECTION A

Your name (optional)

Your sex

(Tick the appropriate box)

Male

Female

SECTION B

1. How is love conceptualized in Gikūyū? (Give at least 5 such words / expressions / metaphors you would use to refer to Love). For example, “Love is.....”

i. _____

Why is the word /expression / metaphor used?

ii. _____

Why is the word /expression / metaphor used?

iii. _____

Why is the word /expression / metaphor used?

iv. _____

Why is the word /expression / metaphor used?

v. _____

Why is the word /expression / metaphor used?

(Is / are there other word (s) / expression (s) / metaphor(s) for love in Gikūyū?) ____

Why is / are the word (s) / expression (s) /metaphor (s) used?

Thank you for your participation