



A Semantic Analysis of Conceptual Metaphor Expressions Drawn from Kisukuma Spatial Prepositions

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Abstract: *This paper analyzes the conceptual metaphors derived from Kisukuma spatial prepositions. Image schema theory and conceptual metaphor theory were employed to characterise various figurative expressions and conceptual metaphors used in conversations among the Sukuma people. This qualitative study utilised a self-data generation method for data collection, as the researcher is a native speaker of the language under study. Lakoff's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory was used to characterise various conceptual metaphors as used in Kisukuma. The analysis focused on the Kimunasukuma dialect that is regarded as standard. It was established that Kisukuma prepositions are used metaphorically to express various senses in social conversations. Prepositions such as hi-kwi-gulya, mu-ku-mwi-, hasilili, ha-/ku-bhutongi, and hanuma are used as conceptual metaphors. However, not all prepositions can be used in this way. Furthermore, the study confirmed that metaphors are constructed from two inputs: the preposition and the noun phrase, although a single preposition can also stand as a conceptual metaphor. Features of the source domain (Landmark, LM) are mapped onto the target domain (Trajectory, TR) to derive the meaning of the metaphor. These concepts were adopted from Image Schema theory to characterise conceptual metaphors drawn from Kisukuma prepositions.*

Keywords: *Metaphors, Kisukuma, prepositions, landmark (LM), and trajectory (TR)*

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1. Introduction

Metaphorical expressions are commonly used in various addresses in different societies. Various studies have attempted to analyse figurative use of language in different angles of their interest. For example, Agyekum (2015) addresses the semantic shifts, extensions, semantic patterns, and pragmatic nature of the metaphor of anger and its usage in different contexts in Akan language. This study focuses on a semantic analysis conceptual

metaphors drawn from Kisukuma spatial prepositions, a component of cognitive semantics.

This article uses spatial prepositions as a fascinating area in cognitive semantics due to the complexity of conceptual representations in the human mind. Spatial prepositions, which describe where things are located, have been studied across many languages, showing that they do more than just map physical space—they also help express abstract ideas through metaphors. Research, like Cox et al. (1981) on children's understanding in Bengali-English and Hindi, and Vandoulouse (1991) on French,

suggests these prepositions are key to how we think about space and beyond. Studies in languages such as German (Meex, 2001), English (Evans and Tyler, 2003), Slavic (Šarić, 2008), Nilotic (Mietzner, 2010), and Dholuo (Achola, 2011) highlight that spatial prepositions often extend to non-spatial meanings, like time or emotions, through conceptual metaphors. For example, a preposition meaning "in" might describe both a physical location and an emotional state, like being "in love." Jackson (2013) as well studied a semantic analysis of Kisukuma spatial prepositions using image schema theory in which different prepositions and image schemas drawn from spatial prepositions were established.

This article, therefore, explores the use of Kisukuma spatial prepositions figuratively through conceptual metaphors. It offers a more detailed analysis of Kisukuma conceptual metaphors. It clearly explains how prepositions in Kisukuma, a Bantu language, can be used to communicate figurative meaning in daily life conversations. Further, the study communicates how these prepositions combine with other lexical items to form conceptual metaphors.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Metaphors

Metaphor is a fundamental aspect of semantic and grammatical structure in cognitive semantics (Langacker, 1987:100), contrasting with the traditional view of metaphor as a special feature of imaginative or artistic language rather than everyday speech. In the traditional view, metaphors are assumed not to reveal anything fundamental about meaning (Riemer, 2010). A conceptual metaphor offers understanding of one domain of experience (that is typically abstract) in terms of another (that is typically concrete). A metaphor describes X as Y, even though X is not literally Y (Agyekum, 2015). Using metaphors to express thoughts and ideas is often considered the highest form of linguistic creativity (see Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Semino 2008; Agyekum 2013).

The concepts expressed in metaphors correspond to our natural experiences and basic domains of human life, including bodily perception and movement, basic objects, the environment, culture, and social interactions. According to Lakoff (1987), "conceptual embodiment is the idea that the properties of certain categories are a consequence of the nature of the human biological capacities and of the experience of functioning in physical and social environment." Our bodies form the basis of our social life, through which we perceive and socialize the world (see Dzokoto 2010; Dzokoto & Okazaki 2006).

Bonvillain (1993) insightfully notes that the frequent use of bodily metaphors likely stems from the profound significance humans place on their own bodies. We apply

body-related imagery to inanimate objects and to describe actions, reflecting a process of perceiving and understanding the world through human perspectives and by relating it to human form.

2.2 General Background to Kisukuma Language

Kisukuma is a Bantu language spoken in northern Tanzania, in an area known as Busukuma, extending from the south of Lake Victoria to the Wembere plains in central Tanzania and from the western side of the Speke Gulf to the Serengeti plains in the east (Batibo, 2007:2). As a Western Tanzania Bantu language, Kisukuma belongs to the Niger-Congo language family. It is the largest language in terms of the number of speakers among Tanzania's 150 ethnic groups (Languages of Tanzania Project, 2009:2). Batibo (2007:2) asserts that Kisukuma is spoken by more than 5 million people, although Matondo (2010) suggests the number exceeds 7 million, representing 12.6% of the population in the south and southeast of Lake Nyanza (Victoria) in the United Republic of Tanzania. Kisukuma is primarily spoken in regions such as Mwanza, Mara, Simiyu, Shinyanga, Kagera, Tabora, and parts of Mbeya and Rukwa.

According to Guthrie's (1967) classification of Bantu languages, Sukuma (F.21) belongs to group 20 of zone F, alongside Nyamwezi (F.22), Sumbwa (F.23), Kimbu (F.24), and Bungu (F.25). This classification is based more on geography than linguistic relatedness. Linguistically, Kisukuma has 84% lexical similarity with Nyamwezi, 59% with Sumbwa and Nyaturu, 57% with Kimbu, 55% with Nilamba, and 49% with Langi (Matondo, 2010:1). Batibo (1985), as cited in Matondo (2010:1), notes that some scholars treat Kisukuma as a dialect of Kinyamwezi, but the two are regarded as separate languages. Kisukuma has four major dialects, named according to their geographical orientations: Kimunasukuma (Northern dialect), Kimunangweeli (Western dialect), Kimunakiiya (Eastern dialect), and Kimunadakama (Southern dialect). These dialects are mutually intelligible, and each has minor sub dialects. The Kimunasukuma dialect, spoken primarily in the Mwanza region and considered the standard dialect, is the focus of this study's analysis of spatial prepositions and their role in forming complex image schemas and conceptual metaphors.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

This article employs Lakoff's (1980) Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) in their book *Metaphors We Live By* (1980). According to Semino (2008: 5) conceptual metaphors are systematic connections or mappings between two conceptual domains, where the structure of a "target" domain is partially shaped by a distinct "source" domain. Within the framework of conceptual metaphor theory, the senses of linguistic expressions stem from

human cognitive experiences. (see Yu 2004: 664; Sweetser 1990). A cognitively-based theory of language takes human perception, parts of the body, and understanding of the world as the basis for the structure of human language. The traditional view of metaphors is adopted to analyze the figurative and metaphorical use of Kisukuma spatial prepositions, alongside Lakoff's (1980) CMT, which rests on three propositions:

1. Metaphors are cognitive phenomena, not purely lexical.
2. Metaphors involve mappings between two domains.
3. Linguistic semantics is experientially grounded.

Further, the study adopted the use of trajectory (TR) and landmark (LM) when analysing the features associated with conceptual metaphors. Landmark is a term in cognitive grammar that is used to explain how prepositions are conceptualized. A landmark is a location or an entity which acts as a figure of reference. Trajectory is a term in cognitive grammar that is used to explain how prepositions are conceptualized. It is an entity that undergoes motion from one position to another within or outside the landmark (Jackson 2013). The two concepts were adopted from Lakoff & Johnson (1980), cognitive semantics scholars, who posed an important question that asked: "From where does the complexity linked to our conceptual representation originate?" To answer this question the two concepts above emerged.

The cognitive nature of metaphor suggests it is a deep-seated conceptual phenomenon that shapes thought, not just language. Conceptual metaphor theory provides evidence for the conceptual nature of metaphors, which transcend individual lexical items (Geeraerts, 2010:204–205). Metaphoric patterns are open-ended, encompassing both conventionalized and novel expressions. Metaphors conceptualize a target domain in terms of a source domain, with mappings aligning aspects of both domains. These metaphors are grounded in human experience, shaping language accordingly (Geeraerts, 2010:204–205).

3. Methodology

This study employed a self-data generation method, justified by the researcher's status as a native speaker of Kisukuma. As Achola (2011) cites Horrocks (1987:11), a linguist who is a native speaker can independently ask and answer questions about linguistic information. The collected data were reviewed by ten competent Kisukuma native speakers aged 35 and above to verify and clarify the findings. This age range was selected based on their linguistic competence and experience in daily language use. The purposeful selection of these speakers ensured the reliability of the data and helped avoid errors during collection.

4. Results and Discussion

This study revealed conceptual metaphors statements in Kisukuma are constructed from two inputs: a preposition and a noun phrase (e.g., *higulya ya sheria* 'above the law') or a preposition alone. The noun phrase provides conceptual entries about the trajectory (TR), with features of the landmark (LM) mapped onto the TR. For example, in *higulya ya sheria*, the LM 'law' provides features associated with authority and power, which are transferred to the metaphors and figurative statement's interpretation. Additionally, single prepositions can function as conceptual metaphors. The experiential grounding of metaphors enables speakers to use them to communicate diverse senses, easily understood due to shared human experiences (see Jackson 2013). The following analysis illustrates how Kisukuma spatial prepositions form conceptual metaphors.

Kwi- Hi-gulya – 'above'

The preposition *higulya* is used figuratively in various senses, rooted in the notion of embodiment, which gives rise to image schemas. Consider examples 1,2, and 3.

1. Lubango a-li-**higulya**/kwigulya ehaha
Lubango 3PS-PRES-PREP now *Lubango is above now*

The term 'above' suggests that Lubango has advanced in life achievements (e.g., economic, political, cultural, educational). These achievements act as an abstract LM, with features mapped onto the TR (Lubango). Alternatively, 'above' may be used satirically to criticize or express disappointment about someone's behavior, mapping LM features onto the TR. Image schemas remain constant, but meanings shift (Geeraerts, 2010:206). This is as well in line Lakoff's (1987) conceptual metaphor theory which asserts that linguistic semantics is experientially grounded. It is from the experience one is capable of mapping the landmark features onto the trajectory.

2. Waziri a-ti-**higulya** ya sheria
Waziri 3PS-PRES-NEG-PREP the law
The minister is not above the law

Literally, the law is a tangible LM onto which the minister (TR) does not land. Figuratively, it implies the minister lacks the power to change or violate the law. Features such as power and authority from the source domain 'above the law' are mapped onto the TR. These features are critical in conceptualising figurative meaning of the given example.

3. Ephraim a-li-**higulya** ya mawe
Ephraim 3PS-PRES-PREP stones
Ephraim is broke.

Literally, Ephraim (TR) is in physical contact with stones (LM). Figuratively, *higulya ya mawe* ('on top of the

stones’) may as well indicate Ephraim’s deteriorating economic situation, with LM features (hardness, destructiveness) mapped onto the TR. It is apparent that hardship is always accompanied by destitutions which are a source of discomfort to the TR. In interpreting the figurative meaning of sentence 3, embodiment plays a crucial role in enabling interlocutors to reach an intellectual conclusion of the given statement. This is supported by Maalej (2004: 56) who asserts that “embodiment is also a function of cultural correlation between a given emotion and its cultural bearing.” Therefore, our external experiences are linked to our internal emotional and mental states.

Mu-/ha-/ku- ‘in’ ‘at’

These prepositions *mu-*, *ha-*, and *ku-* convey figurative senses without spatial orientations. The three prepositions permit to be used interchangeably without distracting the senses intended to be conveyed by the interlocutors. Consider the following example:

1. Rachel a-tali mu-giti
Rachel 3PS-PRES-PREP- darkness

Rachel is
still in
darkness

Literally, Rachel is contained in the LM (darkness). Figuratively, it means Rachel lacks understanding or awareness, with LM features (e.g., restricted visibility) mapped onto the TR. This communicates the inability of Rachel to understand certain issue under discussion which are either introduced to her or not.

2. Veronica wa-kulela **mu-/ha-**mbeho
Veronica 3PS-PST-grow PREP-shadow
Veronica grew up in the shadow

Literally, the shadow is a container for Veronica (TR). Figuratively, it suggests that Veronica grew up in a luxurious, stable environment, with LM features (protection, comfort) mapped onto the TR. Shadow always provides comfort especially when one is faced with violent sunlight or any unfavorable situation. Based on our case here, Veronica as our trajectory grew up in a comfortable life. For further clarification, let us have the following example:

3. A-le--mhola **mu-/ku** Yesu
3PS-PRES-safe PREP Jesus
He/she is safe in Jesus.

Figuratively, *mu-/ku* indicates safety under Jesus’ mercy or power, with containment implying protection. Features associated with Jesus (LM) such as mercy, power, everlasting life, happiness, protection etc. are mapped onto the TR to arrive to the figurative sense already established.

Hasilili ‘down’ and mwi- ‘in’

These prepositions may appear in the same sentence, but only *hasilili* is used figuratively. The preposition *mwi-* plays a locative role in example 1 below:

1. Wande a-li-hasilili u-mwi-
darasa
Wande 3PS-PRES- down PREP-
class
Wande is down in the class

Literally, Wande (TR) is positioned down in the class (LM). Figuratively, it means Wande performs poorly, with LM features mapped onto the TR. The features such as low, poor, and unable are figurative meanings associated with sentence 1 in characterising the trajectory as required. The preposition *mwi-*, however, is used as a locative preposition in a sentence than figurative one.

Ha-/ ku- numa ‘behind’

The preposition *ha-ku-numa* functions as a conceptual metaphor in specific contexts. The sentences contexts are very crucial in determining the figurative senses intended to be conveyed by the interlocutors. The following example offers further explication of the above prepositions:

1. Happy a-li-**ha-/ku-** numa
2. Happy 3PS-PRES-PREP them
Happy is behind them

Literally, Happy (TR) is behind the landmark (LM). Metaphorically, it suggests Happy lags behind in aspects like education, economic, with LM features mapped onto the TR. The analysis entails a comparison in some aspects between Trajectory and the landmark. The features associated with Happy are used metaphorically to characterise her as a weak person in the stated parameters. This is supported by Lakoff and Johnson (1980:5) who assert that “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (see also Semino 2008, 1; Agyekum 2013:3). This means that features from the landmark are suitably used to characterise the trajectory which gives a clear understanding of the discussion under question. The hearer is able to decipher the information based on the inputs associated with the landmark.

Ha-/ku- bhutongi ‘ahead’

Similar to *ha-/ku- numa*, and *ha-/ku-bhutongi* convey metaphorical senses based on context. Let us navigate through the following example:

1. Anifa a-li-**ha-/ku- bhutongi** yise
Anifa 3PS-PRES-PREP us
Anifa is ahead of us.

Literally, Anifa (TR) is in front of the landmark (us). Metaphorically, it indicates Anifa's progress in life aspects, with LM features such as economic and social progresses are mapped onto the TR. Example 1 indicates a sense of comparison between the landmark and the trajectory in terms of their wellbeing. The features such as prosper and success drawn from the landmark, through the use of preposition 'ha-/ku-bhutongi', are used to characterise the metaphorical meaning of the expression under question.

Ha- 'at'

The preposition *ha-* combines with a noun to a figurative meaning as presented in the following example:

1. Odina a-li-**ha-**nzila maka
Odina 3PS-PRES-PREP-way cross
Odina is at the cross-road

Literally, Odina (TR) is at the LM (crossroad). Figuratively, it suggests Odina is in a dilemma, with LM features (confusion, indecision) mapped onto the TR. The abstract ideas that are mapped to trajectory are vital in reaching a conclusive meaning of statement 1. This is in line with Johnson (2005:24) who notes that image schemas which facilitate the interpretation of abstract ideas, as notes, enabling sensory and motor structures to inform abstract concepts.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This analysis demonstrates how Kisukuma spatial prepositions are used figuratively and metaphorically. Metaphors are, therefore, formed by a preposition and noun phrase or a preposition alone. Image schemas remain constant, but meanings shift to metaphorical interpretations. The unidirectional mapping of features from the source domain to the target domain enables the interpretation of metaphors. Embodiment plays a crucial role in filling gaps when the LM is absent. This is enabled by the experience interlocutors have in relation to the conversation happening at the moment. I would recommend other scholars to undertake studies on image schemas drawn from spatial prepositions in their respective mother tongues.

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