

**The Polysemy of the Gikūyū Body Part Terms Kīongo ‘Head’ and Gūtū ‘Ear’:
a Cognitive Linguistic Approach**

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ABSTRACT

Polysemy is defined as a phenomenon where a single linguistic unit has several yet related meanings (Evans and Green 2006). Using the Cognitive Linguistics Approach, this paper analyses the polysemy of two Gikũyũ body part terms namely kĩongo 'head' and gũtũ 'ear'. Cognitive Linguistics interprets the meanings of polysemous words based on their cognition as the identification of polysemy involves the conceptualization of everyday life.

The body part terms are often used to talk about other things than body parts and show a great variety of meanings. This paper also shows that these body part terms have enormous potential for semantic extensions into other semantic domains. These semantic extensions have a clear motivation through either metaphor or metonymy which are central to Cognitive Linguistics.

Key words: Polysemy, Cognitive linguistics, Body part terms, Semantic extension, Metaphor, Metonymy

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of body part terms is one of the most popular areas in linguistics. Their enormous potential for extension into other semantic domains as well as their development into grammatical forms has attracted the attention of researchers from different domains. According to Hein et' al (1991) body part terms have been identified as a source of figurative meanings as well as grammatical meanings; Bilkova (2000) argues that body part terms offer a good, varied and rich laboratory for polysemy and conceptualization. The body part terms in Gĩkũyũ are no exception to this.

Wei (2010) claims that human body terms are those earliest things which were used by human beings to recognize and experience other abstract material. Wei further says that people apply their body part terms to perceive the outside world in terms of their similarities, position, structure and shape or function of the concrete object. According to Chen (2005), the words which express, human body terms are easily mapped onto other semantic domains by metaphor.

Several people have tried to define the term body. Oladipo (1992) argues that the body is a collective term for all the material component of a person. Gbadegesin (2003) defines the body as a physico- material part of the human being. According to him, it includes the external parts, for example, the head, forehead, eyes and ears and the internal components like the heart, stomach, soul, liver e.t.c

In Gĩkũyũ, the general term for the body is *mwĩrĩ*. However this term is extended to the external and internal components as illustrated in the following sentences:

1.

- a) *Mwĩrĩ wake ti mwegu*
Body his/her is not good
His/her body is not good
- b) *Ndiraturwo ni mwĩrĩ*
My aching/ paining is body
My body is aching /paining

In the above sentences, it does not necessarily mean the physical body but it is also extended to mean that one of the components or a number of them are aching or are in pain.

The body consists of external parts, for example, *kĩongo* 'head', *matũ* 'ears', *maitho* 'eyes', *iniũrũ* 'nose', *moko* 'hands', e.t.c and the internal components like *ngoro* 'heart', *ini* 'liver', *mara* 'intestines', *higo* 'kidneys', e.t.c.

1.1 THE CONCEPT OF POLYSEMY

Natural languages are polysemous in nature and any language contains terms that refer to more than one meaning. Polysemy has been defined in various ways by various linguists. Among these linguists are Evans and Green (2006) who define polysemy as the phenomenon where a single linguistic unit exhibits multiple yet related meaning.

Antuñano (1999) observes that polysemy is a term used in semantic analysis to describe a situation in which a word has two or more related meanings.

Taylor (1995) defines polysemy as the association of two or more related meanings with a linguistic form. He further says that Polysemy is both ubiquitous and abundant in human language. From the above definitions, we can conclude that a polysemous word has more than one meaning and semantic connections exist between these meanings. This paper is primarily based on this conclusion.

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Before establishing the analysis of the given body parts, it is important to give a brief analysis overview of the theoretical frame that is used in the study.

2.1 COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

The history of cognitive linguistics is traced back to the appearance of modern cognitive science in the 1960s and 1970s, especially work related to human categorization and earlier research field such as gestalt psychology. It is a sub field of linguistics that is concerned with the exploration of the relationship that exists between our language, mind and experience of the world.

Ungerer and Schmid (1996) observe that the Cognitive linguistic Approach to language is based on how human beings experience, conceptualize and perceive the world.

2.2 APPLICATION OF COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS TO THE STUDY OF POLYSEMY

The advent of cognitive linguistics brought a new approach to polysemy (Lakoff, 1987 & Evans 2007). Cognitive linguistics places central importance on the role of meaning, conceptual processes and embodied experience in the study of language and the human mind and the way in which they intersect. Cognitive linguistics posits that a word is composed of various related meanings; among these are the prototype or the literal meanings and the peripheral or extended meanings. These meanings of the polysemous words are related in a systematic and natural way and they are related to each other by means of general cognitive principles such as metaphor, metonymy, generalization and specialization.

This paper explores how the peripheral meanings or extended meanings of the given body part terms are related or linked to the literal meaning through the cognitive mechanisms of metaphor and metonymy. . . Metaphor and metonymy are regarded as the most vital mechanisms underlying meaning extensions in cognitive linguistics (Tragott & Dasher, 2002). Metonymy is regarded as a cognitive process where there is intra-domain mapping in which the source acts as a vehicle that provides mental access to the target, with the part – whole as a typical relation between the source and the target (Radden and Kovesces, 1999). From the aspect of cognitive linguistics, metaphor is an across domain mapping where conceptual domain referred to as the target domain is systematically structured in terms of another, the source domain.

3.0 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this paper the analysis consists of the following steps:

Categorization of the meanings of the body part terms into literal and extended meanings. Analysis of the meanings of the extended in terms of how they are related to the literal meanings via metaphor and metonymy.

3.1 THE PROTOTYPICAL OR LITERAL MEANING OF KĪONGO HEAD

The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 3rd edition defines the head as the body part above the neck that is composed of the eyes; nose, mouth, ears and the brain .In order to illustrate the literal meanings of kīongo consider the following sentences:

2.
 - a. Ena kīongo kīnene
He/she head big
He/she has a big head
 - b. Inainia kīongo gīaku
Nod/shake head your
Nod/shake your head
 - c. Inamia kīongo
Lower head
Lower the head
 - d. Ambararia kīongo
Raise head
Raise the head

In 2a the size of the head is referred to while in b-d, the head has its own particular activities, directions and physical functions such as nodding, shaking, lowering or raising. In Gikuyu culture one generally employs the motions of the head to express agreement or disagreement as indicated in 2b, where a person nods his/her head to show agreement. However, when one shakes the head that signifies disagreement. Using the head also one employs various angles of view as in 2c-d. All the above examples indicate the literal meaning of kiongo.

3.2 THE METAPHORIC AND METONYMIC MEANINGS OF KĪONGO 'HEAD'

This section discusses how the cognitive processes of metaphor and metonymy motivate the polysemy of kiongo.

3.

- a. Canūra kiongo
Comb head.
Comb your hair.
- b. Enja kiongo
Shave head
Shave your hair.
- c. Thambia kiongo
Wash head
Wash your hair.
- d. Tuma kiongo
Plait head.
Plait your hair.

In Gikuyu, kiongo is used to refer to hair as indicated in the above examples. Here the metonymic relationship PART FOR WHOLE is expressed with the head being the whole and the hair, the part.

4. Hũthĩra kiongo gĩaku

- Use head your
- Use your head.
- Use your brain/mind.

In 4, the mental function of the head is highlighted. Here kiongo refers to the head and brain implying the notion of the mind thus it has the function of thinking. The head is also considered a storage place for the brain. For this reason it is conceptualized as a container the head. with the

mind/brain inside. The notion of brain/ mind is established through the metonymic relationship COINTAINER FOR CONTENTS whereby the head is the container and the brain the contents.

5. Mũthuri nĩkĩongo kĩa mucĩ

Man is head of the home /family

The man is the head of the family

In Gikuyu culture, the man is regarded as the head of the institution of the family with all the other members of the family being subordinate to him. In the above sentence, therefore, kiongo is used to denote a person who holds a position of leadership or authority in an institution. With the head as part of the body a metonymic relationship PART FOR WHOLE is indicated. In this relationship the head is the part and the man is the whole. A metaphoric relationship is also expressed via the TOP-BOTTOM metaphor where the high status and position of man is regarded to be conceptually similar to the top position of the head and the subordinate position of the other members of the family is conceptualized to be at the bottom. To emphasize these positions, kiongo 'head' is always contrasted with Ngingo 'neck' as in the following saying

Ngingo ndĩrĩ yahĩtũka kiongo

Neck has never passed head

The neck has never passed the head

The neck here refers to the woman. Since the neck is below the head, the woman is also considered to be subordinate to the man who is regarded to be the head.

6. a. E kiongo kihiu

He/she has a hot head

He/she is hot tempered

Head is conceptualized as having high temperature by the use of the Adjective hot. In the above sentence the perception expressed is that the head feels hot when the owner is extremely angry and cannot control his/her emotions and out of control.

b. E kiongo kĩega

He/she head good

He/she has a good head

This sentence implies that the person referred to is rational, thinks very fast and does things extremely well.

c. E kiongo kĩuru

He/she head bad

He/she has a bad head

In this sentence, various notions are expressed. It may refer to an evil minded person and also to a person who has some mental illness. In the literal sense, it refers to the shape of the head meaning that the person has an ugly head.

- d. E kīongo kīumu
 He/ she head hard
 He/she has a hard head

This sentence implies that the person being referred to is difficult to deal with. He or she is uncontrollable and does not listen to others.

In 6a-d depending on the adjective that is used to modify the noun head, different behavioural patterns are indicated through the metonymic relationship BODY PART FOR BEHAVIOUR.

7. Kīongo kīa ithomo rīakwa
 Head of sermon my
 The head of my sermon
 The theme of my sermon

Head, here indicates the notion of position by means of conceptual mapping metaphor. The theme which is the main subject of the sermon comes at the beginning, just like the ‘head’ comes at the beginning of the body. In this case, therefore, the ‘head’ which is a concrete object is mapped on to the theme which is an abstract object.

8. Kīongo kīa rūi rūrū
 Head of river this
 Ni kīrīma gia kīrīnyaga
 Is mountain of kirinyaga
 The head of this river is the mountain of kirinyaga
 The head of this river is Mount Kenya

The source of the river is the beginning of that river just like the ‘head comes at the beginning of the body. Just like in sentence 7, the head here indicates the notion of position by means of a conceptual metaphor whereby the ‘head’ which is a concrete object is mapped onto the source of the river which is an abstract object

9.
 a. Kīongo kīa mūgwi wa kībiriti
 Head of stick of matchbox
 Nī kiunīku
 Is broken
 The head of the match stick is broken
 b. Īkīra kīongo wega niguo ngathi yume
 Put head well so that gas comes out

Fix the regulator well so that gas comes out

In 9a, *kĩongo* refers to the red end of a match which is on top of the stick while in 9b *kĩongo* refers to the regulator which is fixed on the gas cylinder in order to release the gas to the cooker. These two resemble the head in shape since they are round and also in position, since they are at the top. Thus, there is a metaphoric relationship which is established on the basis of similarity in shape and position.

10. Therukia *kĩongo*

Boil head

Boil the head

The head being boiled is that of an animal. In *Gĩkũyũ* the heads of animals like cows, goats are regarded as meat and they are eaten. Here, the head as part of the body is used to stand for meat via the metonymic relationship WHOLE FOR PART with the head being the whole and the meat the part.

According to Klein and Murphy (2001), the object – substance relation is found when the same word is used to refer to an object and the substance that makes it up, often becoming a mass noun in the second case. In the above sentence, the head is the object from which the meat, the substance is derived. The head is therefore used to stand for meat via the metonymic relationship OBJECT FOR SUBSTANCE. The object head is a count noun whereas the substance meat is a mass noun.

3.3 THE PROTOTYPICAL OR LITERAL MEANING OF *GŪTŪ* ‘EAR’

The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 3rd edition defines the ear as a body part which means either of the two organs on each side of the head, by which people or animals hear sounds, or the piece of skin and tissue outside the head connected to this organ.

In *Gĩkũyũ*, *gũtũ* ‘ear’ is regarded as a body organ that is used for hearing by animals and people and also for listening by people.

To indicate the literal meaning of *gũtũ* ‘ear’ consider the following sentences;

- a. *Ndĩraigua na gũtũ kũmwe*
I cannot hear with ear one
I cannot hear with one ear
- b. *Ena gũtũ Kũnene*
He/she has ear big
He/she has a big ear
- c. *Ena gũtũ kũnini*
He/she has ear small
He/she has a small ear

- d. Matũ (plural) make ni mbage
Ears are his/her folded
His/her ears are folded

In the above sentences, the literal meaning of gũtũ 'ear' is indicated in terms of the function of the ears as in 11a, the different sizes in 11b-c and the shape in 11d.

3.4 THE METONYMIC AND METAPHORIC MEANINGS OF GŪTŪ EAR

In Gĩkũyũ the meaning of the phraseological expressions, involving the word gũtũ 'ear' refer to listening or hearing as in the following sentences:

11.

- a. He gũtũ
Give me ear
Give me your ear
Listen to me

- b. Tega gũtũ
Trap ear
Pay attention

In 12a, ear is mapped onto listening through the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION METONYMY whereas in 12b, ear stands for the concept of paying attention when used with the verb tega 'trap'. Here, ear is also mapped on to paying attention through the INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION METONYMY. In both cases, the metonymic transfer is from the concrete domain of the body to the more abstract domain of the intellect.

12.

- a. Gũtũ kwa gĩkombe.
Ear of cup
The handle of a cup
- b. Gũtũ kwa nyũngũ
Ear of pot
The handle of the pot
- c. Gũtũ kwa gikabu
Ear of basket
The handle of a basket

In 13 a-c, ear stands for the handles of cup, pot and basket. Ear is mapped onto the handles through the PART FOR WHOLE METONYMY with the ear being the part and the cup, pot and basket being the whole. The above expressions also indicate the metaphoric meaning of gũtũ 'ear'. The handles of the cup, pot and basket resemble the ear in shape and in position. They are placed on both sides of the objects just like the ears are placed on both sides of the head. Thus the metaphoric relationship expressed here is based on similarity and position.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This paper from a cognitive linguistic approach has examined the internal relationships of Gikũyũ body-part terms namely kĩongo ‘head’ and gũtũ ‘ear’. Based on the analysis of the data, the two body-part terms have multiple meanings which are related in a systematic way. The formation of meanings of the body part terms is a process of meaning extension. Metaphor and metonymy are the two important cognitive mechanisms that motivate this extension. This is because there are eight extended meanings of kĩongo head and two of gũtũ ear that are achieved on the basis of the literal meaning through metonymy and seven extended meanings of kĩongo head and three of gũtũ ear that are achieved through metaphor.

From the data analysis also the following types of metonymy emerged:

WHOLE FOR PART (HEAD FOR HAIR)

PART FOR WHOLE (HEAD FOR PERSON)

CONTAINER FOR CONTENT (HEAD FOR MIND/ BRAIN)

INSTRUMENT FOR ACTION (EAR FOR LISTENING /PAYING ATTENTION)

OBJECT FOR SUBSTANCE (HEAD FOR MEAT)

There are two types of metaphor that are realized through similarity in shape or position between the body part and the object referred to by the extended meaning.

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